

# ***Mahiti Manthana ~ A Platform for New Information and Communication Processes***

**Presentation by  
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# What does an 'empowered' woman look like to you?

- In contrast to a '**disempowered**' woman, who was conceptualised along these characteristics:
  - She is very poor
  - She is not aware of many issues
  - She does not send her children to school
  - She has many children
  - She does not get involved in sanghas and ridicules women who are in sanghas
  - She lets her husband beat her and does not complain/ her husband does not look after her or support her
  - She fears a lot of things/ she doesn't have courage
  - She lives within a lot of restrictions
  - She does not have freedom of mobility

# What does an 'empowered' woman look like to you?

... an **'empowered' woman** was seen to possess the following qualities:

- She is brave
- She is a sangha member
- She knows how to get loans
- She knows about legal and health issues and guides others
- She has information and shares information
- She knows the importance of education, and educates her daughters
- She does not discriminate on the basis of caste and treats everyone well
- She attends Panchayat meetings and actively participates in politics
- She has freedom of mobility to learn and do things
- The men in the family support her
- She is not poor

# Situating Mahila Samakhya

- Mahila Samakhya is situated in an Information and Communication (I&C) context, where:
  - Rural, poor, *dalit* women have been historically discriminated on caste, class and gender basis
  - No access, or limited access, to literacy
  - Deprived of sources of information
  - Lack access to private and community assets and resources

# Situating Mahila Samakhya

- Mahila Samakhya situates its processes on this context
- Women are organised into sanghas (Self-Help Groups) built over the objective of challenging patriarchal social systems
- Sanghas are the vehicle for:
  - knowledge development and sharing
  - developing women's personal and collective identities
  - increasing political awareness and mobilisation around gender inequality issues
  - enabling women to take up community leadership roles

# The “Sangha Woman” in Mahila Samakhya

A sangha woman	A non-sangha woman
We get information - so we are happier!	She does not have access to information
We know about financial transactions, loans and are aware of health, education and legal issues	She does not know many things
We are brave and can speak to anybody - even the anganwadi teacher or Panchayat representatives	She is limited to household affairs. She is afraid of others & does not know how to communicate with others
We share our problems in the sangha	She can not share her problems
We have our own money and are <b>“We do not let anyone address us in ‘singular’. We get respect.”</b>	She does not have money to save
We are confident and have been to many places for meetings and training	She desires to become a sangha member

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# Where does Mahiti Manthana fit in?

- Mahila Samakhya's I&C strategy faces two challenges:
  - The targeted women are **non-literate** and so, the dominant media thus far – print – is ineffective with this group of women
  - MSK must therefore rely on oral processes and this calls for highly **intensive human resource effort** to meet the I&C needs of women in 100s of villages – which places demands on their scarce human and material resources

# Mahiti Manthana ~ An Integrated ICT strategy

- Addresses the challenges faced by Mahila Samakhya through the use of **appropriate technologies** to:
  - strengthen their existing strategies
  - help them **reach their goal of women's empowerment** more effectively
- Involves radio, video and telecentre-based innovations
- Prioritises a bottoms-up approach while pushing for new paths and linkages



# Mahiti Manthana ~ Radio Strategy

- “Kelu Sakhi”, a weekly half hour programme that serves as:
  - \_ A message board for Mahila Samakhya’s activities **as well as a** platform to articulate collective identities
  - \_ A space for peer learning **as well as** expert guidance
  - \_ A showcase for talent **as well as** a container of information
- Content:
  - \_ Sangha women generate ideas relevant to their lives
  - \_ Mahila Samakhya’s “must know” topics
  - \_ Mahiti Manthana team on broader development issues
- Listenership:
  - \_ Radios distributed to sanghas through Mahila Samakhya
  - \_ Listener groups are being created at the sangha level

# Mahiti Manthana ~ Video Strategy

- Creating inexpensive, locally-made, relevant videos
- Content:
  - Mapping of MSK and sangha women's I&C processes
  - A range of formats to cover thematic areas
    - Stand alone training tools
    - Medium of self-expression
    - Mechanism for identity building
    - Peer-to-peer communication platform
    - Record of organisational processes
- The production cycle: ideation → format → script → identifying experts, sangha women, location → shoot → log → digitise → edit → screen → incorporate feedback

# Video Strategy ~ As a tool for peer-to-peer sharing/ motivation

# **Video Strategy ~ As a tool to facilitate discussion**

# Mahiti Manthana ~ Namma Mahiti Kendras

- Addresses the information needs of sangha women and facilitates linkages with public institutions
- Meets the I&C needs of the community:
  - Through pay services: email, DTP, video conferencing and non-pay services: information on health, legal redress, job opportunities, government schemes, etc
  - As a space for video screening
  - Bottoms-up community involvement through database collection
  - As a platform to facilitate the Right To Information
- Sangha women's ownership and control is a critical part of the process

# Mahiti Manthana ~ Convergence of ICT Strategies

- Building ownership: Mahila Samakhya, sangha women and the broader community
- Building sustainability: Mahila Samakhya's resource centre strategy
- *Sangha Shale* – SHG classroom to facilitate self-driven, independent learning and linkages

# Impact?

- Insights are emerging...
  - Mahila Samakhya organisational change (staff and sangha women): new linkages and structures, building capacities, autonomy
  - Empowerment of sangha women: access, agency and perception of status
  - Social change: I&C processes in the community, gender-based debates
  - ICTD debates and practices