

## PAN ASIA SIX MONTHLY REPORT

The project started in March 2004.

The first activity was village identification. We collected physical maps and data of the villages in Tuljapur Taluka to gain an understanding of the region. As we traced the villages, we realized that local NGOs had taken up work in nearly all the villages along the main roads. The far-flung villages that had very poor transport services, no opportunities for higher education, no trade or employment access were totally neglected. We marked out 5 such villages and visited them.

We then established contact with the staff of the ICDS seeking their assistance in reaching out to these villages. We were introduced to the SHG members in Savargoan and Kemwadi villages.

We had already developed a detailed basic needs survey instrument by this time, as we proposed to begin the research as early as possible.

The financial problems cropped up then. Maharashtra Foundation refused our request for advance. We then decided it would be impractical to expand activities beyond the 2 committed villages with no resources. We also decided against doing the basic needs assessment, as we were not definite about the timeline of the proposed all Women ICT Center, as stated in the proposal. We believe it is unfair to raise expectations of the women, and then fall short of delivery. Such a process will not only speak of the lack of professionalism of the organization but more importantly will have a negative impact on the initiative and confidence of the women.

We therefore decided to utilize this time to conduct offline training programs of women using different audiovisual tools. As a first step, we developed a poster exhibition on Marathmoli's mission and the relevance of ICTs to rural women's women's lives, especially the community of women we wanted to work with, namely the self employed women, elected women representatives and self help group members.

The rural poor woman has experienced that progressive technological developments have made no change to her life; at most it has threatened her only livelihood as an agricultural laborer. Computers are totally alien to the poor rural women's reality. She is mostly illiterate; at most she has done primary schooling in her childhood in her local language. She has been conditioned to believe (as) that she has neither the intellectual capacity to engage with and master this latest form of knowledge creation nor the capability to acquire the skills set to use them. Besides, she knows that computers are far too expensive; they are only for English-speaking and educated people. She only prays that her children would be able to benefit from this technology and secure a better future in the urban areas.

In this context, our challenge was three-fold. One, to create an emotional connect of the women with computers, secondly to draw the thread that touched their daily lives and last but not the least to build their confidence about mastering and using this technology for advancing their lives.

The posters spoke of Marathmoli's mission, the potential of information communication technology; its ability to transcend space & time, its ability to bring information, including government to their doorsteps, the power to use this space as their self controlled media, the ability to bring transparency and accountability in governance, its computational strength that would facilitate their working, save time and bring greater efficiency, its ability to build linkages with the outside world, including markets. This was also contextualised to our target community's specific needs. Lastly, the poster series also speaks of Marathmoli's role of facilitating access to this technology in the local language, and capacity building that is not restricted to skill building but one that seeks to empower women to use these newly learnt skills to take action to secure their entitlements.

Self-help group the process of saving is not new and you have been doing and one fine morning you realise the importance of the group and also the age old methods of savings and this newer ways where money has been

increasing manifold and the need is getting fulfilled. And this money can be used to more productive activity and this information can come through computers. The knowledge about investments options/ investments in productive occupation collectively or individually would increase this gain manifold.

And Marathmoli would give you access to this information and ICT technology would allow you to do this exploration yourself.

For Government representative women and for all women we stated that when you first came out to this social job by means of political ways it was a process and not you do not want to be behind any way because you have undergone those difficult moments. And so though e-governance is a long drawn process but you can be prepared for those changes which are going to be reality for us.

For trading community women it was more difficult because their work is so labour intensive that to learn or accepting training is not an easy process for them. To them it was just more ways of getting goods cheaper and also in bulks and also forming co-operatives of different kinds would change their situation. That needs more information and Marathmoli would you give that.

These posters turned out to be very effective tools in communicating our mission with the women. Besides, the process of making this exhibit and the response that it got from the women gave us more confidence to reach out to women. After two to three introductory meetings we started working with women from both the villages.

In all these efforts, we may not have achieved any of the short-term objectives we committed to in the proposal in the committed time frame but we are certainly proud that we have laid the foundations of building a sustainable program for the future.

**Target group**

Young girls and women from 25 SHGs from 2 villages

**Achieved Project objectives****Achieved****Output**

Identify needs of the target constituency.	Correct assessment of issues and concerns
Raised awareness of target constituency about their rights	Initiative & leadership in taking up new programs
Raised awareness of the opportunities available to target group if they were literate	Women from Kemwadi demanded an adult literacy program. 2 women from the community are running one daily session for 25 women. Another session is planned in the evenings for women who do wage labour.
Created safe space for women	Women spoke about their health status and formed committees to document health status
Raised self confidence and self esteem of women	Women decided to reclaim the community hall that was being used anti social members of the community and successfully conducted 2 meetings there
Provided forum to older women to share their knowledge and skills	They have formed a group to document oral traditions like folk songs
Promote the use of Internet as target constituency's media	Target constituency to take ownership of the virtual media
Build capacity of self employed women to secure their rights	They are now confident to meet the Collector on their own and present their case.
Build capacity of women to understand &	Women eager & willing to convene

address issues of local governance	Mahila Gram Sabha and participate in Village Gram Sabha
Develop a sense of ownership and belonging about Marathmoli	Women and young girls coming up with requests for support for programs that they are willing to lead and manage themselves. Eg library
Increase invisibility of these women and their specific problems	Participation in National Health Campaign

### **Details of Activities**

We have begun work with Self Help Groups (SHGs) from two villages in Tuljapur, namely Kemwadi and Savargoan. These two villages are 30 kms away from the Tuljapur-Sholapur road. Public transport is very irregular. Sanitation and drainage systems are totally lacking. Drinking water supply is not assured and agriculture is mostly rainfed. According to the Anganwadi (Government Play School) worker there has sudden rise in malnourished children in both the villages.

Most of the young girls and women work as farm labor. Women are not involved in community decision-making processes, although they might have been elected to the Panchayat.

### Village Savargoan

This is a large village with a population of 7600. 4500 villagers, more than 50% of these are engaged in wage labour on farms. There are twenty SHGs in this village.

We have conducted 7 meetings and two camps in Savargoan.

The women are very confident and were very open in sharing their problems. To our surprise, in the very first meeting we could get a very good picture of their needs. They stated that education, health and livelihood were the three most important issues for them. There were intense discussions in this (and

following meetings) and demanded that we work with them to improve this situation.

They also shared that they had succeeded in banning alcohol in their village last year but lamented that anti social elements still continued the activity illegally. They were very resolute in wanting to participate in gramsabhas and working for the development of their village, especially in sanitation and hygiene.

Many of the daughters in law in the village (as in other villages) are educated up to the 10<sup>th</sup> standard and some of them have even completed pre degree. But due to the prevailing culture in the rural areas, these young girls have had to drop out of school and get married in deference to their elder's wishes. A group of young women came up to us after our third meeting in the village and expressed their desire to start a library. They nominated one of the members as the librarian, and Marathmoli has loaned 10 books to this group. The young women attending these meetings are very motivated and eager to learn and participate. They make notes of issues discussed during the meeting and are quick to take responsibility for any action. They are also eagerly awaiting Marathmoli's Mass ICT Literacy Training program.

Women in Savargoan have also decided to document the traditional folk songs of women during the festivals. We propose to digitize these in the near future.

We also conducted a meeting of young girls in the village which was attended by 25 young girls from the ages of 15-22. The situation of girls is very disturbing. They are forced to drop out from school even if they are performing well due to economic reasons. Even a pre degree school passed girl works as a farm hand for wages. More issues, most of them expressed desire to learn sewing and also were interested in various skills like dancing, drawing, decoration etc. These girls also were eager to have this kind of platform and showed eagerness to come. Few of them are still struggling to get college education and are exploring the possibilities.

85 women from 12 SHGs attended the first camp. Marathmoli conducted this jointly with the ICDS and Community officer and ICDS supervisor addressed the camp. Group discussions were held on three topics, namely Education, Health and occupation. The groups also came up with a list of recommendations that will be followed up in the grassroots programs.

The second camp was also held in collaboration with ICDS and the theme was nutrition and women's health. The meeting ended with a collective feast for most nutritious food. All participants brought the food that according to them was most nutritious. Most of the food items were from local produce. The menu ranged from green leafy vegetables, cereals like Jawar and Bajra, different kinds of pulses and sprouts. Most of the food items were roasted or cooked in little oil. In this meeting, we had touched upon need of nutritious food for women of all age and for all women and in particular to lactating and pregnant mothers. It also brought forth a host of ideas on increasing the nutritious content of the food with little innovative non-expensive ways.

We also discussed the importance of rules and regulations for a platform that has been created by women for their own growth and development. It was important to have rules for disbursing loans; installments and policy to disburse loans but the SHGs were not merely mechanisms to save money. They provided a forum to these isolated and marginalized women to come together and share all aspects of their lives, discuss, debate and seek support.

Women in this village are more eager to participate in large programmes like camps or workshops, rather than meetings. We have therefore scheduled programmes in deference to their expectations.

The village panchayat members have promised to give full co-operation and support to Marathmoli in this village. We are looking at this village as prospective local information centre for women.

## Village Kemwadi

This is a comparatively small village with a population of 1859 and being even further away from the main road, more isolated from the town. Being a small village, women live very close to each other and there is greater interaction and awareness of each other's situation.

We have conducted 5 meetings and two workshops here, which have a regular attendance of 25 women. We also conducted a meeting with young girls.

The women in this village are also very eager and spirited. In fact, we get to experience this spirit very often. In one of our first few meetings, we faced our first confrontation from a trading woman. She stated that women in the village had neither the time for information gathering nor the inclination to learn computers. What we were talking about was unwarranted and would not change their lives. She then went on request us not bother the village women without reason.

In the discussion that followed we went through the issues raised in our poster exhibit, drawing the assembled women to share their experiences and their views about women's status and access to information and knowledge. The woman now is one of the most regular participants and is eagerly awaiting the Mass ICT Literacy Training.

In another meeting, we were having a discussion about importance of self-help groups and explaining the functions and rules for managing them. Suddenly, an older woman sitting in the center got up and asked her daughter to walk out with her. After many requests, she relented and shared the reason for wanting to walk out. She shared that she was the former chairperson of one of the groups, and was refused loan some time ago. She was very hurt and had resigned from the group.

We realized this was a very emotional issue, one that was hurting her long after the actual event happened. A very open and heated discussion ensued in which it became clear that although the SHGs aimed at provided support and building an emotional bond between the members, it was critical to develop professional organization with a set of rules and regulations to conduct its financial transactions. The best was yet to come, at the end of these discussions, this woman gave a twist to her actions and sought to pass off her behaviour of playing the role of 'a devils advocate' just to get this debate going.

The village level ICDS staff has started these 25 SHGs that Marathmoli works with in these two villages. Initially, we got a sense that the local staff was engage with these women only because it was part of their jobs. Gradually, we have sensed a change in their attitude and participation. Their participation now is personal, not just official. The woman was convinced and so content, that she stayed on in the meeting hall talking to us after the meeting. So much so that it was now the daughter 's turn to request the mother to go home.

Another interesting fact about this village is that a 'Sarpanch Pati' -the village governance body heads' husband is running its affairs. Marathmoli seeks to change this state of affairs and has conducted a workshop on women's political participation very recently.

Other issues we have addressed are health, self-help groups. The women have collected a daily diary of 35 women's that covers their eating patterns, their housework schedules, wage labour and time spent on any personal needs, if any. In this villages too, the issue of clean and well-maintained village is paramount.

Many women from Kemwadi, who are illiterate expressed a strong desire to learn to read and write. Two women from the community, one of who has undergone a training in the state adult literacy training program readily agreed to take the responsibility of running the classes. One class has already begun

meeting daily in the afternoons, while another class for agricultural laborers will be started shortly in the evenings. The latter has been held up as there is no electrical connection in the Anganwadi where the classes are being held. A local shopkeeper could be willing to give a line from his connection at a cost. A library has been started in Kemwadi too and Marathmoli has lent books and magazines for the same. We have tried to ensure participation and provide space for leadership to the less educated labour and motivated one from this group to assume responsibility of the library. The women have also planned to conduct reading camps and Marathmoli will organize poetry and book reading sessions with writers & poets for the libraries of both the villages in the near future.

The sessions on health, created space for women to talk of their well-being and their understanding of the causes for it. To further deepen this understanding, women from Kemwadi decided that they needed to study the health status of women and young girls in the community. They have formed committees to investigate the health status and document the nutritional patterns of young girls and women in the village. The first step towards this has been collecting 'day activity charts'. Besides, a group of older women have also organised themselves to document oral traditions like folk songs etc which are based on which are no longer sung on a daily basis. Skill building in ICTs will enable these women to digitize their work record it, package it as archival and learning material and disseminate it across the state.

Women in this village have been more responsive to our intervention and as stated above have taken leadership in all the activities.

(When we located our work in Marathwada we had decided that we would not organise new community based groups, rather we would support the growth of local leadership by building capacity of existing local CBOs & NGOs to use ICTs to advance their work in gender empowerment. We initiated our work in Marathwada region by conducting Mass ICT Training Programs for networks of regional organisations to build their capacity to use ICTs to further their goals. We conducted two, two- day long introductory sessions of the Mass

ICT Literacy Program, one for organisations from Osmanabad and Tuljapur taluka's and the other in the last week of January 2004, for networks from Latur district. A total of 40 activists from over 20 organisations participated in these programs.)

### **Project time-line for the four months**

Three activities committed in the proposal will be completed-

#### 1. Capacity building programs

Four Mass ICT Literacy training programmes will be held in each village.

The format and nature of the programmes in both the villages will differ but they will focus on the following issues—

- i. Livelihood
- ii. Health
- iii. Education
- iv. Violence

#### 2. E Governance

We will generate information on various government programmes in the four sectors

- i. Education
- ii. Health
- iii. Panchayat Raj
- iv. Water

Marathmoli will not give them the information; rather they will be involved in generating that information, presenting it in a user-friendly format and provide guidelines towards actually being able to benefit from these government programmes. And most importantly, the Mass ICT Training Programmes are targeted towards building women's capacity to 'access' these entitlements to advance their lives.

#### 3. Women's ICT Seva Kendra

The Women's ICT Center will be launched in Tuljapur at the end of the project period.

### **Project monitoring:**

Neutral third party observation

Participatory appraisal