

Southern Regional Federation

Dialogue Workshop

23rd and 24th February, 2018

At

Indian Social Institute, Bangalore



A Report

By



Best Practices Foundation

Context

The flagship programme of Mahila Samakhya (MS), has built strong women federations across many states in India, creating a platform for women to demand their rights to a dignified, respectful and better life in the family, community and in society. In a journey that has spanned over two decades, today these women are more empowered and better prepared to continue their efforts towards building a space for their interventions and for support systems that address various social issues and challenges faced by women in rural India.

The MS programme was supported by the Government of India for a major part of its functioning years. But with the withdrawal of the central government's support to the programme in some states, the institutional building and strengthening processes have been stalled. In states and districts where the MS programme has been phased out, federations and their allies are in dialogues on rethinking the process of rebuilding federations, and the way forward. The federations need strengthening and facilitation to build its systems so that they can work independently as a self-reliant entity for the long term sustainability and for their members to continue to act as change agents in their communities.

Over the last year, numerous dialogues have been conducted between the federations and supporting partner organisations, namely Bhoomika, Nirantar, Best Practices Foundation, Center for Budget and Policy Studies, MS Kerala, MS Karnataka as well as other allied organisations, along with a few individual allies.

The discussions and observations from these dialogues resulted in a sequence of thought that defines an actionable agenda for the federations. Such an agenda aims at building an institutional structure in the future, defines their objectives and functions and design a sustainable operational framework model.

Women federation members from Karnataka, Telangana and Kerala participated in the Southern Regional Dialogue Workshop, which was held in Bangalore on the 23rd and 24th of February, 2018, at the Indian Social Institute. The agenda of the workshop was to envision the way forward collectively by federations from three states by building on their strengths, identifying challenges and defining for themselves their future. (See *Annexure 1 for the workshop agenda*)

Specific Objectives of the Workshop

The federations from three states were engaged in a process of dialogue towards two objectives:

- To dialogue and review the current status, challenges and emerging trends among federations in three states, in today's environment and analyse implications for mobilisation of women and the sustainability of women's institutions like the sanghas and federations.
- To plan for the next phase of federation building and institution-strengthening at district, state and national levels, and arrive at a larger understanding of the institutional framework.

Participants

Participants included federation members from the three states (Karnataka, Telangana and Kerala), staff from partner organisations, and key resource persons. Further, organisations interested in partnering with the federations such as Women's Education Project - India, Agastya Foundation and Samvada, also presented their work and discussed possible alliances. (See *Annexure II for the list of participants*)



The key persons facilitating the workshop were Kameshwari Jandhyala, Vandana Mahajan, Sangeetha Purushothaman and Lakshmi Krishnamurthy, all of whom are MS associates since the onset of the programme. They led the workshop by guiding the federation representatives to express their thoughts and views through different interactive activities that took place over two days.

Flow of the Workshop

1. Introduction to the workshop
2. Reviewing the current status of federations, achievement and challenges – Group Exercise
3. Sharing of experiences by the federation members
4. Introduction to viable programmes for future federation action plan
5. Building vision for the future: Main Action Points for the next five years
6. Consolidating the learnings and outcome from the workshop

1 Introduction



Telangana Federation women,

The workshop began with songs sung by the participants from Karnataka, Telangana and Karnataka. The song from Telangana was an old composition created in 1994, to mobilise the women towards movement building (See Annexure 3). It was the first song of Mahila Samakhya, which has gradually become the prayer anthem, sung at the beginning of every sangha meeting.

The workshop commenced with an introduction by Kameshwari, the ex-State Programme Director of Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha Society. In her introduction, she emphasised the relevance of the dialogue processes which were being held over the past few months in all the MS operational states. Kameshwari shared that Assam, Bihar and Jharkhand federations participated in the Northern Regional Dialogue Workshop held in Patna in November, 2017, where members presented their

achievements, experiences and expectations for the future. She explained that the purpose of the meeting was:

- a) To share what is happening in our federations, what had been achieved, what the gaps were and what needs to be done going ahead
- b) To discuss where we want to go from here and if federations want to become a more inclusive, if they want linkages with other women groups and how we together can strengthen our federations.

2 Reviewing current federation status, achievement and challenges

The participants were divided into groups by their states. They were asked to discuss and chalk out the current status of their federations at all levels, the activities being implemented, their achievements and continued challenges in addressing the various issues. Also, identify which areas needed more inputs and support and the new challenges which have become common concern areas with the changing times. The questions posed to them were:

- a. What are the achievements of federations in the last three years?

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Kameshwari, ex-State
Programme Director of MS



- b. What are the challenges/barriers/problems faced?
- c. How did you deal with them and what would be the best processes to be followed ahead?
- d. What kind of problems still pertain at the federation level?

Status of Telangana Federations

Their major success stories revolved around the women and child programmes. The federation members shared that they had faced huge difficulties when handling child marriage, dowry, alcoholism and education. They addressed all these through campaigns and interventions at different levels.

Children's Education: Federation members met with parents, children, village elders and caste leaders to mobilise children to attend schools. They reached out to adolescent girls and boys in schools and colleges to

“ Caste issues was the root cause for sanghas formation. There is a lot of untouchability in my village. Under the midday meal scheme, the Sarpanch asked us, the sangha women, to do the cooking. We asked if they would eat what we cooked since nobody touches anything made by us. The Sarpanch and elders ate the food cooked by us first, after which the children ate. Dalits were not allowed inside temples but now it has changed. This was a major achievement for the sangha at the time **”**
Bhagya, Federation leader, Telangana

address their concerns. Gender issues were talked about on a common platform while health, sexuality and other related issues were addressed separately for boys and girls. These discourses helped in getting girls who had dropped out of school, to rejoin and complete their education.

Mobilisation and Creating Awareness: Kala Jathas were conducted to raise awareness. This included rallies, celebration of international girl child day, etc. The women said that they needed more financial assistance for mobilisation activities.

Violence against Women (VAW): Para legal volunteers were trained and certified to give counseling in

households. The federations also worked with the police department to resolve conflicts amicably. They also took their support to file cases against the perpetrators, on issues related to violence against women and children.

Women shared that at the sangha level, they had taken a pledge to not take or give dowry. Hence, matters related to dowry were non-existent for marriages within their villages. But this was not the case for those marrying outside the sangha. The women said that they wanted to form protection committees (child) to stop child marriages.

Adolescents: Adolescent girls have been organised into sanghas with a current membership of around 44,000. This needs to be strengthened to build second generation leaders. Currently, federations are engaging with the youth only in their villages, but they want to increase their outreach to youth outside their villages. The women said that children and youth must be collectivised into groups at the college and school levels.



Strengthening of Federation: There is a steep decline in membership with less inflow of members, which poses a challenge for sustainability. The sangha meetings need to be regularised and strengthened. The Executive



Committee has to take responsibility by being prompt when taking action and decisions. They want to establish themselves as resource persons for mobilisation and want recognition from the government. To establish as an independent entity, information about the federation and its capacities should be disseminated in all the key government and non-government centers. The women expressed an interest in running a helpline for which they needed training and support.

Counselling: The federation members want to negotiate a space within the police and district administration for providing counseling services.

Economic Self-Reliance and Livelihood Options: There is a demand for inputs on livelihood options as people have financial constraints which can be addressed only if appropriate economic activities are implemented.

Status of Kerala Federations

The MS was formed in 1998 and started work in 2000. The lack of adequate organic farm land and livelihood options are a major challenge in the current political and economic scenario. Leasing land for farming is difficult and the constant menace of wild boars, deters people from taking up farming activity.

Violence against Women (VAW): The federation women from Kerala said that building linkages and having a good relationship with police departments is important. These partnerships helps create a women friendly, safe space for filing and resolving complaints related to fights within the family and bringing to book abusive and alcoholic husbands. The federation women said cases of sexual violence were addressed by the sangha members, which was why there was a reduction in incidences of domestic violence. In addition, the Social Justice Department have hired some of the sangha members to act as messengers. These messengers are strengthened to continue the stand against violence and support the movement. Para legal volunteers along with security officers and caretakers of the Nirbhaya homes (where abused girls are provided shelter and support) are recruited, from the federations. There are currently eight homes while five are in the process of being set up.

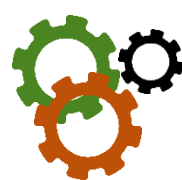
The women said that in Kerala, three federations have been formed exclusively for Muslim women, who face problems like desertion, child marriage, dowry and trafficking for 'Mysore Marriages' (where bridegrooms from Mysore take brides from Kerala into false marriages and then desert them). Among the tribal populations, alcoholism has reduced and this has benefited the families economically by improving savings.

Adolescents: The federation members said that they are trying to explain the merits and demerits of mobile phones on adolescents.

Strengthening of Federation: Women have become stronger, more confident, and politically and socially active by taking up leadership positions in the *panchayats* and at the Block levels. They now have a standing and are respected within their communities. Engaging with other government departments is a continuous challenge and is being addressed by trying to influence support to the MS. The unity and bond among the women, has kept them strong and motivated to face all adversities head on. In the tribal regions, the MS members are also shouldering the Kudumbshree programmes, but their efforts are not recognised.

Usha, SPD of MS Kerala with
federation leaders





Economic Self Reliance and Livelihood Options: They want to identify economically viable programmes to address the financial resource requirement.

Status of Karnataka Federations

In Karnataka there are total 18 districts where 53 federations have been registered. The MS programme has been withdrawn from 9 districts. There is a total membership of 70,000 women in 5500 sanghas. They have mobilised and brought 45,000 boys and 88,000 girls under the federation to address adolescence issues.

Women's rights: In their fight for their entitlements, federation members have been able to get 500 women to register their names on property documents. In the past three years, 300 women have leased out their land for farming purposes. Around 50 women in Bellary district have availed housing under the Ashraya programme.

Violence against Women (VAW): There have been continuous protests against alcoholism where women have sacrificed their lives for the movement. The Nari Adalat's initiative on this problem, led to people from 15 villages who sell alcohol, being sent to jail. There has been a build-up of linkages with the police department and Santhwanas (Women and Child Department), who are involved with the Nari Adalat. In Bellary they were able to stop 15 child marriages and they continue to talk with parents on the subject. Divorce cases are addressed by the Nari Adalat where the concerned parties are counseled and cases are resolved.

Children's Education: Children have been encouraged and mobilised to get enrolled in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs). Working with the Women and Child Department and the legal aid cell, the federation members have been able to create awareness on trafficking and even successfully brought children back home. They campaigned against trafficking and ensured the suspension of an ANM who sold baby girls from the hospitals.

Economic Self Reliance and Livelihood Options: To mobilise resources for the functioning of the federation the women suggested activities like toilet construction under government programmes, partnering with KGBVs to do grocery shopping for them and receiving a small fee for the federation from the concerned parties for this and for para legal services. This would include the cost for travel and facilitation fee towards solving a case. The Executive Committee

Federation leaders from MS Karnataka



"If I go back 50 years in time, the memories brings tears to my eyes. The circumstances were different from what it is now. Today we are stronger women who come out to discuss our problems and try to solve them at our own level. If we would go to court for these cases, it would cost us a lot."
Shantamma Federation Leader Karnataka

members do the audit for sanghas to fulfill government requirements for loan approval and charge a fee, which is paid to the federation.

Adolescents: Activities have been conducted for the training and skill development of adolescent girls and boys by linking them with government departments for scholarships, for creating awareness on apprehensions amongst adolescent girls and boys and providing them with appropriate support to face challenges with moving into adulthood.

Strengthening of federation: There is a need to strengthen the federations to manage the challenges posed due to lack of support from PDO, community, parents and relatives. For example, when the federation women apply



for government tenders, they do not get it because government officials do not think the women are capable enough. Hence, there is a desire to establish an entity with recognition and trust. The women want to have their own premises for a federation office because once their present lease is over, they have to change the building (of the 53 federations 6 have their own buildings). This poses a problem to conduct meetings or trainings.

Summary of the Discussion

Kameshwari Jandhyala,
summarising the discussion



Kameshwari concluded the presentations by summarising the highlights presented by the respective state teams. She emphasised that it was important to think together as one MS rather than as separate states. In hindsight, we need to identify how MS is making an impact and build better institutions on its strengths. The common discussion areas among all the teams were:

- To support and enhance education of girls
- To stop abuse and violence against girls and women by strengthening the support system
- To help children beyond Mahila Shikshan Kendra, schools and colleges to pursue higher education
- To ascertain assets and land are given as legacy to both girls and boys, instead of only to boys

3 Sharing of experiences by the sangha members

Lakshmi Krishnamurthy asked, "What is the common change you see among each of you and all women?"

The women were keen to share their experiences on how MS has impacted their life in a positive way:

- a. They now feel confident to face challenges in the community and in society, and to support one another.
- b. They said that they had changed and become fearless. Today they encourage others to also come forward.
- c. Sabeena shared, "As a Muslim woman I come from a conservative background. But after becoming an MS member I have acquired the maturity to speak out with confidence."
- d. MS has provided women a platform to come together (like this workshop), where they realise their self-worth, the potential within each of them, and the place that women have in society.
- e. The support from the MS has given them courage and the strength to face challenges in times of despair
- f. The women felt proud to be role models for their community through their actions





- g. Kameshwari asserted, “I am happy to see that the MS members are good communicators. What MS has shown is that woman want to build a different kind of world where they want to make meaningful changes in their life and money is not the prime unifying factor but a cause definitely is.”
- h. Lakshmi concluded, “MS has given me the energy and the courage to face problems and solve them with a strength of conviction. I understood that feminism was about establishing women’s causes and not about putting men down. The *sahyoginis* of sangha mostly return home late. They can go home on their own but they call their husband to make him feel happy and in control. *You may not claim the power but you may have the power.*”

4 Introduction of other organisation programs to federations

Agastya Foundation’s Operation Vasantha Programme: Mr. Nagraj from Agastya Foundation explained the Operation Vasantha model where youth volunteers from the village, especially girls, teach other children at a community learning center. This center is a hub where academics is made into a fun component where children play and learn. These volunteers are trained by Agastya Foundation teachers on subjects in the syllabus, so they can more effectively teach their peers. The volunteers are paid a small stipend.



Nagesh. Agastva Foundation.

Women’s Education Project - India (WEP): WEP was invited to make a presentation about their work, to understand the possibility of a collaboration between WEP and the federations, to operationalise and run centers for 30 adolescent girls.

The WEP - India Director, Shruti Dinker shared her organisation’s objective and programmes on promoting and supporting girl children to complete their education and be skilled and prepared when they enter the professional world. The center provides tuition, counseling, nutrition, scholarships, life skills, computer learning support. It also offers the *I Am a Leader* programme, where each girl can define her aspirations, which the programme works towards, to enable her to live her dream.

The federation members were excited and interested to know how the model would work in terms of who the eligible students were, who will run the center, how will the financial management be done, what support can be expected from WEP and what were the benefits for the federation from this programme. Shruti explained that the students are selected based on referrals from schools and colleges. Besides, an aptitude test is conducted to know the students’ interests and their capabilities to pursue higher studies. Regarding the identification of a functioning study center, a federation building can be used for the purpose of running the center. The entire programme will be funded by WEP.

Samvada: Kirana from Samvada was associated with MS for a long time in the past. She shared her experiences of her time with MS and how the learning curve in terms of life skills and confidence had helped her move ahead in life. She further explained that Samvada worked to provide a platform for youth to talk, share their problems and resolve their issues in a mature manner, with the support of a trained team of experts. The programme emphasised on youth and their current challenges in terms of how to deal with social media, relationships and careers.



Federation women were interested to know about the organisation's engagement with young girls and boys. They were keen to learn more and initiate a similar model within their villages, to help their children manage and overcome problems, and transition into adulthood with maturity. (See annexure 4, 5 and 6 for more information on Samvada, Agastya and WEP)

5 Way Ahead: Building Vision

Discussions held over the first day led to an envisioning exercise for federations to implement a five year action plan. Federations highlighted the importance of continuing to overcome their challenges with solutions based on their local circumstances and possibilities. This was expressed through a game facilitated by Gauri (MS Karnataka). On the second day of the workshop, members presented their vision and ideas on how they want their federation to grow towards becoming stronger and independent.

Kirana from Samvada



Plan and Vision of Karnataka Federations

Strengthening of federations: Federations should plan more programmes at a larger scale like MS, and streamline functioning of sanghas. There is a common understanding that each federation should strive to have their own building to allow for all women to come under one umbrella. This will also ensure freedom and ease when implementing programmes. The women said that Block federations must work like a forum, a collective unit where issues like child marriage and violence can be addressed.

Resource Center: Federation should become an independent resource center providing information and services for women and girls who need help and support on any issue.

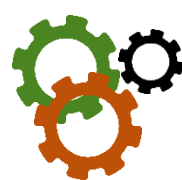
Shantamma, Federation president, Karnataka



“ We want the federations to run like MS, a fully organised and systematic functioning organisation. We have attained land for building federation office and would like to construct a home for senior citizens adjacent to the office building. I want programs for the widows to become entrepreneurs like taking up making school uniforms, etc. We would like to develop kitchen garden for farming vegetables at the back of our homes. I would like to build residential schools for adolescent girls in the village as they are not allowed to go outside for higher education. Above all the Nari Adalats should be strengthened which gives credibility and recognition in the community.”

Shantamma. Federation Leader

VAW and Fight against Evil Practices: The women want to continue the fight against *Devadasi* dedications, dowry, child marriage and all such evil practices which continue to denigrate women. They also want to actively stop sex selective abortion and protect girl children and bring about positive mindsets within the community. Every child should complete their schooling and must pursue higher studies.



Livelihood Support: Income generation activities for the federation must be explored and linkages must be built with government departments, to leverage resources. This will help in exploring financial resources to improve household incomes as well as bring in resources for strengthening federations. The women suggested activities like the management of stock of groceries, vegetables, etc. for the KGBVs directly by the federation instead of through middle men.

Women Support Systems: A shelter home for destitute and abandoned women, or women facing any kind of crisis.

Education: Share the concept of the three programmes presented at the workshop), with the rest of the federation women and get them interested, especially on the WEP model, where girls are able to come to a center and get support to complete their studies. The federation women envisioned every child pursuing and completing their higher education towards a more decent life.

Adolescents: Women felt the need for gender sensitisation of boys and girls in schools and colleges. They want to focus on adolescents and reach out to boys and girls to continue education and also protect themselves from HIV AIDS.

Federation members, MS Kerala



Plan and Vision of Kerala Federations

Strengthening of Federations: The federation should function as a space that enables all women and girls to come together. It should create an environment where they are able to share and discuss their problems. The federation should take up *Gram Sabha* activities.

VAW and Fight against Evil Practices: Awareness campaigns need to be conducted to stop and reduce child marriage and firmly establish the right to education. There is a need to rescue children from drug addiction through proper counseling and talking to parents, counselors and de-addiction centers. We need to prevent all kinds of abuse against children and protect them by providing shelter and rehabilitation support. MS Kerala runs Nirbhaya homes, which is funded by the Department of Social Justice. These homes provides shelter to victims of sexual abuse.

Education: Improve academic standards through school management committees, to share and discuss various strategies to ensure that children attend and learn at school.

I want to share a practice we stopped during my 15 years with the MS program. During menstruation, there was a practice in my tribal community to give tablets to the girls, which was readily available at pan shops. When menstruating, there was a space allotted for the girls to stay confined in called "valaimapuzha". The village heads were very rigid about these customs. MS intervened and we fought against these practices and stopped the consumption of tablets and confining girls to valaimapuzhas. Now these same spaces are used for conducting federation meetings.

Alcoholism led to domestic violence against women including the brewing of illicit liquor. Earlier, we had to hear taunts from the community, which has now stopped because of the power of us women. I want the continued support from MS to empower my community, to develop and mainstream our needs and aspirations in the right direction.

Ramani, Federation Leader, Kerala



Adolescents: Disseminate information on adolescence and gender sensitivity to girls, boys, parents and teachers through activities like competitions. The women want to create networks of adolescent boys and girls within the federation, from in and around the area, and connect them for peer learning and support.

Tribal rights: For tribal people who need special assistance, the women want to facilitate their exercising their rights.

Livelihood support: They want to market and sell homemade organic products with appropriate pricing

Women support systems: They envision women being strengthened politically with more awareness in governance. The federation women said that they realised that they needed to raise their voices for their rights by intervening at the *Gram Sabha*. They also want to build linkages with government departments and promote women friendly spaces for communication and services.

The MS programme in Kerala is sometimes sidelined in favour of the Kudumbshree programme, even when there is credibility and recognition of the services and work done by MS across the state.

Plan and Vision of Telangana Federations

“ I want the federation to act a support base and increase reach at the block level. My community should be able to resolve land issues and get entitlements to all government amenities like roads, electricity, welfare hostels, etc. I want my federation to grow up, up and upwards. In the sky just like there is one sun during the day and in the night it's the moon that shines, everyone should know that women too have their own place and value under the bright moonlit sky, happy and peaceful

Bhagya, Federation Leader, Telangana

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After tea break the Telangana team presented a song on the changing times where there are laws to protect women's rights and no domestic violence can put them down and they will not stay silent.

Strengthening of Federations: The federation women from Telangana want to register all their federations at the district level to streamline functions from the sangha to the federation. They also want to establish their identity at the state level and develop coordination with like-minded organisations to ensure recognition and relevance.

VAW and Fight against Evil Practices: The women want to work towards a society free of violence, end child marriages,

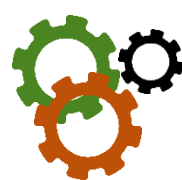
support girls to continue their higher education, and stop the *Jogini* practice.

Education: Mainstream school dropouts by getting them back to school, especially children from sangha members' families, so they can complete higher education through support from youth centers. Establish and run hostels at mandal level to support children who want to pursue higher education. Identify girl children engaged in labour in cotton seed farms and bring them back into schools. The women shared that they had stopped cotton seed agriculture in 45 villages and sent the children back to school around 18-20 years ago. This turn around was triggered by an incident where a daughter of a member died after inhaling the spray used in cotton agriculture.

Adolescents: Form *bala sanghas* (boys and girls) and strengthen them on gender sensitisation. Develop and support second line leadership to work with girls and boys on adolescent issues.

Federation members, Telangana





Women support systems: The overall goal is to work towards an environment where women have respect, dignity and recognition.

Summary of the Discussions

The resource persons shared their perspective and suggestions to complement the vision shared by the federation members and build a strong and empowered organisation.

Sangeetha shared the fact, that the challenges mentioned are faced by women leaders globally. There is a support mechanism needed especially by women leaders who are lonely at the top. Each one of us need these groups to support and manage these challenges; a platform where women leaders share their problems and try to resolve problems with each other's support.

Vandana reiterated that women led programmes are often not taken seriously. The federation should be positioned as a technical organisation for government programmes and not just as an implementing organisation. Position federations as independent strong allies and make them stronger.

Kameshwari reminisced instances from the year 2000 when policy papers were written on how to reposition MS. Today we are on a consensus from the discussions that repositioning needs to be done, but not as a government run programme but, independently. The objective of phasing out from the government was to strengthen the federations to become independent.



State Level Action Points

To have a clear idea about the activities that will be taken up by the women when they return to their respective states, the teams were asked to state five action points that they felt were critical to begin the federation strengthening process.

Karnataka Federation Action Points

1. Regular functioning of the sanghas and federation
2. Higher education support as center of all three models (WEP, Agastya and Samvada) for girls
3. Raise voice against gender based violence, sexual violence, form a strategy to stop it
4. Fight to ensure women realise equal property rights not only for a house and land but also assets including gold, etc. All assets must be in joint names (member name first and then husband or child's name)
5. They want to have their own women's market as now it is dominated by men

Telangana Federation Action Points

1. Strengthen weak sanghas and conduct regular meetings of sanghas and federation
2. Establish linkages with government and non-government to do the activities which need to be done by them like kala jatha, etc.
3. As a counselor, a member should be present at the police station along with the complainant
4. Conduct training for members on strengthening and functioning of federation
5. Strengthen our bala sanghas and create new ones and link them with the federations



Kerala Federation Action Points

1. Conduct SWOT analysis and exposure visits to the three models presented at the workshop
2. A person at each level made responsible for strengthening and must report every month on it
3. Convergence with external organisations and movements
4. Women's groups sharing platform from across India as an exposure visit including exchange visits among younger and older federations
5. Link existing adolescent groups to federations and form a formal structure to accommodate this network

6 Consolidating the lessons from the southern regional federation dialogues

The two day workshop provided a platform for open discussions for the federation women to highlight their strengths, achievements, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities that would be defining our future course of action for them. Vandana summarised the critical discussion points which needs to be considered in all planning processes to ensure strengthening and sustainability of the federations. The universal message that came out was that it was time to institutionalise and formalise the identity of federations. Making them self-reliant and systematically stronger will ensure that the federations gain recognition, respect and dignity.

The common themes identified, that needed to be addressed immediately, was child sexual abuse, violence against women, alcoholism, women's issues, tribal issues and adolescent issues.

Federations want to establish as a stronger and bigger identity at all levels. Assess the status and take stock of sanghas with respect to how many are active and inactive. District level registration of Okutta (federation) is the primary step stated by all the members, towards attaining this objective. The processes from the sangha, the root of the entire system, to the *Mahasangha* level has to be streamlined and regularised.

1. To attain this recognition and identity there is a need to have a vibrant federation office for which continued work has to be done at the block level with more activities planned at the district level.
2. Federations to develop as gender resource hubs for providing information, creating awareness, and build services like shelter homes as safe spaces for women in need, with the introduction of a helpline and counseling support. The Nari Adalats need to be strengthened to effectively address VAW. Tackling core issues like alcoholism, persistent gender issues, child marriage, VAW, etc. will be the main objective for the next five years.



3. There is a need to be economically self-reliant and strong entities, where information can be disseminated on livelihoods and the members can be developed as entrepreneurs.
4. There should be more engaged and sustained work with the PRIs which will help in getting recognition locally.
5. Continue to building linkages and partnerships with adolescents/youth

"I would like to share 2 positive stories, wherein there was a program for adolescent girls managed by MS with good funding and freedom to run it. Now it is taken over as a successful program by the tribal department. Secondly, the remuneration for us is better and we achieved it by tabling the minimum wage document to the Secretary and got it sanctioned with the correct increments."

Usha PE, PD, MS Kerala



- a. Reach out to boys and girls in high schools and colleges to sensitise them on gender
- b. Encourage them to complete their education
- c. Create networks of adolescent youth to build a strong support system
- d. Address adolescence issues like violence, trafficking, love marriage, elopement by providing information and counseling
- e. Build hostels at block level
6. Mobilise resources for federation
 - a. Identify source for resource mobilisation
 - b. The federations have to take over the reins and work like an MS organisation
 - c. Explore internal and external resources
7. Support from each other
 - a. Need to build support systems for interstate sharing and networking. It is a huge support system and solidarity among the sisters needs to be strengthened.
 - b. Support as individuals and organisations
 - c. To be conscious that even though federations are in different states diplomatic relations have to be maintained amongst state teams to avoid conflict and crisis.

The current status of the federation without the MS support can be defined as an organisation with the *Mahasanghas* being registered at the district level and each member envisioning not just limiting scope within their respective homes or villages but look at the picture at a national level. We are looking to create a world for women, free from violence and be able to command respect, dignity and recognition.

