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### **Project Report April 2009**

*Tackling injustice, violence and exploitation, rural Maharashtra, India*

#### **A Women's Empowerment Project**



Women coming together at Padalshingi village

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### ***Tackling injustice, violence and exploitation, rural Maharashtra, India***

#### **A Women's Empowerment Project**

##### **Summary**

The project set out to improve the lives of low caste (Dalit) women in the Beed district of Maharashtra, India, who have been subject to caste discrimination, exploitation, sexual harassment and often, domestic violence.

The past twelve months has seen the project deliver to plan, extend their reach to more beneficiaries and help improve the welfare, livelihoods and social engagement of existing beneficiaries.

With ambitious targets (200 Self Help Groups), a wide geographical area (10,000 sq. Km) and large number of villages (100), this project has delivered exceptionally well by assuring the continuity of village meetings, stability of community level teams and high standards of community engagement.

The project has exceeded its target of creating 200 Self Help Groups, by increasing the groups from 175 at the start of the year to 216. As a result 750 women are now directly benefiting from the scheme.

With the help of specific training, peer encouragement and affordable financial loans, 110 of these women have started their own small scale businesses.

The project has maintained and invested in the development of 30 women leaders, all of whom have benefited from on going training and awareness building of *domestic violence, human rights, and leadership skills*. A further 200 women have benefited in training at grass root level on *how to build and maintain Self Help Groups, the Panchayat Raj* (village government system) and *how to climb out of poverty*.

With the efforts of the Flying Squad, perpetrators of violent acts against Dalits have been brought to trial and police and local authorities have been held to account. At the same time, victims and their families have been supported and atrocities have been brought to the public eye through press releases, peaceful demonstrations and public meetings.

Karuna remains confident that this project will continue to deliver to plan over the next twelve months of the project.

## About our Project Partner – SPMM

### ***Manisha Tokale – Secretary SPMM***

Manisha Tokale is the secretary and driving force behind SPMM, Karuna Trust's project partner delivering this project. Manisha's basic nature of raising a voice against any sort of injustice from an early age gained added volume when she perfected her public speaking skills through the college debating society. Manisha Tokale is now one of Maharashtra's most influential and vocal advocates of women's rights and Dalit rights.

As an active member of the Campaign for Human Rights, Manisha has lobbied hard against atrocities committed against women and scheduled caste communities.



**Manisha Tokale**

Manisha is an active participant of 'Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal', a governing body of Maharashtra working on the issues of 'Women and Economic development'. She is also an active participant of the 'Land Rights Movement', Maharashtra and recently presented a paper on "Women and Land Rights/Land ownership rights" at the World Social Forum.



**Meeting at Padalshingi village**

As recognition of Manisha's expertise and achievements in the field of women's rights, Manisha has recently been appointed a member of the 'District Implementation Committee' of the 'Domestic Violence Act 2005.' As a result of this appointment SPMM have the authority to implement the Act with the support of the state government.

Manisha sees her role at SPMM as one in which to mobilise and inspire women to come forward, take their just place in society and to assert their rights.

## Padalshingi Village – A real success story

The transformation of attitudes and the growing confidence and empowerment of women in the village of Padalshingi is testimony to the exceptional success of the project over the past twelve months.

The village of some 3000 people now boasts 25 Women's Self Help Groups. Regular monthly village meetings include women leaders on the committee and there is a formalised system of spreading knowledge of women's and Dalit rights, the legal system, domestic violence and gender equality.



Chandrakala Shinde

Chandrakala Shinde is a mother of four and wife of a farm labourer. As a former sub-caste Hindu, Chandrakala was previously completely excluded from any involvement in village social activities. She would never go to local festivals and felt afraid to talk to others in the village for fear of reprisal. Confined to her home, she held deep rooted superstitions and had poor self esteem.

Through the project, Chandrakala has attended training programmes on women's and Dalit rights, the legal system, domestic violence and gender equality. As a result of which she now sits on the village leadership committee and is one of the project's thirty Community Leaders.



Alka Masukale's Flour Mill

Through support and training from the project, Chandrakala started the village's first Women's Self Help Group and went on to inspire the formation of 20 other such groups. She has become a driving force to over 250 women. Her enthusiasm and leadership has spurred women to save for and then start their own small businesses including flour milling, milk production and tailoring.

One such success story is that of Alka Masukale. Alka joined the Women's Self Help Group with her sister-in-law and together, with the support of the group, they started their own little business selling flour and milk. "Before we started our little business I worked full time as a labourer in the fields. For that I earned 10,000 rupees a year (£134).





Alka's cow purchased through SHG loan

We purchased machinery for milling flour and we also bought a cow. Buying the machinery for the mill was a big investment, but we had a lot of help from the group. We paid 40,000 rupees for the machinery, which was part paid by a loan from the group of 20,000 rupees. We are now receiving an income of 3,000 rupees a month and because the loan interest was so low, we have already paid back half of the 20,000 rupees. It would

not have been possible for me to do this otherwise because the money lenders' rates are so high. Thank fully there are no longer any of these money lenders operating in our village."

### **Sisters in violent attack supported by Flying Squad**

On 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009 Diksha Ashruba Shinde (20 years) and her sister Panchshila Shinde (18 years) of Shindi village, Beed District were verbally abused along Caste lines and then violently assaulted by a group of nine men in an unprovoked attack. Both Diksha and Panchshila were punched in the face and chest and beaten with sticks and iron rods.



Diksha Ashruba Shinde after unprovoked attack

Panchshila managed to escape her attackers; however, Diksha, was further beaten and needed treatment in hospital. As is too often the case, medical treatment and police support did not come easily. Diksha was at first refused admission to hospital and the police did not initially allow the attack to be registered.

Thankfully both girls have now recovered from their injuries; however, they are still very traumatized by the event and live in fear of further attacks.

With the intervention of the Flying Squad, the incident was reported to the police on the same evening of the attack. Representatives from the Flying Squad helped with legal support, counselling and medical treatment.

The squad went on to put pressure on the police and government to take action against those accused as well as applying pressure on the political leaders and guardian minister of Beed District.



The case was publicized at district, state, national and international level through electronic and print media as well as networking and collaboration of all Dalit organisations and political parties.

***Thanks to the support of the flying squad:***

- ◆ Diksha and Panchashila have gained psychological and legal support.
- ◆ All the accused have been arrested.
- ◆ The Court has rejected the anticipatory bail of the accused.
- ◆ Dr. Pritam Raut, who refused to admit the sisters to the Kaij Rural Hospital has been suspended according section (4) of Prevention of Atrocity Act.
- ◆ An appeal in the high court for anticipatory bail was rejected.
- ◆ Five police constables and one police inspector have been suspended according to section (4) of prevention of Atrocities Act.

## Report from the Project Partner (Results against Activities)

*November 2008*

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Results</b>
Monthly Village Meeting	Meetings were held regularly in each village, during which the Self Help Group, issue in the villages and the process of organisation building was discussed. At village level, women leaders have taken the initiative for conducting meetings. In the course of the meetings women leaders raised grass root issues and tried to solve those issues with the help of the project's block level animator.
Monthly Staff Meeting	Staff meetings were held regularly each month and through these meetings each month's activities were planned, reviewed and evaluated. Activists also shared their experiences whilst handling the cases and how they progressed in the course of time. These meetings became an essential part of learning from the experiences of various activists.
Self Help Group Formation	At the start of the period 175 SHGs were formed which the project has continued to work with. In the last six months the project was successful in forming 41 new Self Help Groups. In total there are now 216 SHGs. This process has continued in each village, which is essential for communicating with women at village level. Through these 216 SHGs around 750 women benefited with internal loans from SHGs. Out of these 110 women started their own small scale businesses and have been able to explore their sustainable livelihood options. Due to this success all SHGs members are now participating in the village level meetings and activities.
Advocacy	<p>1) Various workshops were organised for the women leaders on the following subjects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Atrocities on Dalit women (specifically relating to the Prevention of Atrocities Act-1989).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Police / law and order system.</li> <li>◆ Entitlement to women spouse's name being included on the PTR and 7/12 (Land registration document).</li> <li>◆ Women Domestic Violence Act.</li> <li>◆ Gender Equality.</li> </ul> <p>2) All women leaders met at village level to discuss and continue the fight against violence on Dalit Women. The groups also motivated each other to participate in the village level programmes. In addition to this they raised their issues in the Gram Panchayat in order to solve those issues.</p> <p>3) All women leaders addressed the issues of the dowry system in the village and together they fought against the system whilst engaging with both women and men.</p>
<p>Training for animators</p>	<p>Training has been completed for the animators on the following subjects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Atrocity Act - conducted by the Adv. Devadatta Shinde.</li> <li>◆ Domestic Violence Act -2005 conducted by the Adv. Asunta Paradhe.</li> <li>◆ Gender Equality - conducted by Dr. Ramesh Awashti.</li> <li>◆ Support to the grass root activist and village women – conducted by project leaders.</li> </ul>



<p>Capacity building and women leader training.</p> <p>(30 Women Leaders)</p>	<p>SPMM organised 30 women leaders training during every month as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Prevention of Atrocity Act 1989.</li> <li>◆ Domestic violence act 2005.</li> <li>◆ Police structure.</li> <li>◆ Leadership building of women.</li> <li>◆ Other acts related to women.</li> </ul> <p>The project identified new block level women leaders and SPMM's animators conducted interviews with each individual. Profiles and history of each new leader has been documented and existing leader details have been updated.</p>
<p>Community leaders in village level decision making process.</p> <p>(200 village level women training)</p>	<p>Training was organised for 200 village level women at grass root level. The programme covered the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The basic concept of the SHG</li> <li>◆ The Panchayat Raj system</li> <li>◆ How to develop economic status</li> <li>◆ The concept of Gram Sabha (village meetings)</li> <li>◆ How to raise local issues through the Gram Sabha.</li> </ul> <p>Through the skills and knowledge women gained from the training they have started taking action individually as well as collectively.</p>
<p>Flying Squad - Addressing the issue of violence</p>	<p>The Flying Squad has handled numerous cases. In those cases the squad helped with registering the cases at the police station and giving emotional support as well as psychological and legal support to the victims' families. Subsequently, women victims themselves have started filing cases, and demanding justice.</p>

<p>Internal Review Meeting</p>	<p>Internal review meetings were held for two days at Telgaon. During the meetings Mr. D.R. Jadhav (Founder member of CHR (Campaign for Human Rights) and Gauri Jagdale from Tata Institute Of Social Sciences , Mumbai, reviewed and discussed project planning, project work, achievements and remaining work in the project. Through the discussion and visits the project found the following major points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Increased participation in social programmes of village and raised local issues by women.</li> <li>◆ Removal of money lenders system in the village.</li> <li>◆ Government systems implemented.</li> <li>◆ Villages broke down their traditional practices and came up with their new ideology to solve their own problems.</li> <li>◆ Beneficiaries realised their rights and are fighting violence against women.</li> <li>◆ Women are coming together for a common cause.</li> </ul>
<p>Outsources Training</p>	<p>Manisha Tokale and Ashok Tangade attended a national level seminar on caste issues at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2008 as guest speakers on the issue of Atrocity against Dalit Women.</p> <p>A workshop at which NGOs shared experiences of working with Dalit Women and Campaign for Human Rights was held at the Manuski centre, Pune between 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008.</p> <p>Four SPMM delegates participated in Maharashtra level network for implementation of Domestic Violence Act 2005 from 11<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> October 2008.</p>