

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

## **Astha Sansthan 2005-2006**

### **The Constitution of India - Preamble**

"We the People of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens.

Justice social, economic and political.

Liberty of thought ,expression, belief, faith and worship;

Equality of status and of opportunity;

And to promote among them all:

Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation"

The "Fundamental Duties "detailed in the Constitution are equally as uplifting as the Fundamental Rights, noted above.

"It shall be the duty of every citizen of India- ....

- to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle for freedom;
- to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious ,linguistic and regional or sectional diversities;
- to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;
- to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;
- to protect and improve the natural environment.... and to have compassion of living creatures;
- to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reforms; to safeguard public property and to abjure violence;
- to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective so that the nation constantly rises to higher levels of endeavour and achievement"

The Preamble, the Fundamental Rights, and Fundamental Duties have inspired and motivated the Astha Team for the last 20 years. Astha works with The People to claim their rights, and perform their duties as citizens. The document guides the Astha Team , and gives legitimacy to the struggles taken up with The People.

### **ABOUT ASTHA**

Astha is an organization with deep faith in the people, strongly believes in people, and works to bring out their inherent strength and ability to focus on solving the problems. Astha works with the most marginalized, poor, exploited people both men and women in the state of Rajasthan. For the last 20years the organization is actively engaged with people to claim their rights and perform their duties as citizens.

The mission of Astha is to help the People to organize, to expand their capacities and equip themselves for the struggles they must wage to overcome the various deprivations under which they live. It is a field-based resource organization, aiming to help organizations of the poor to get the research, information, knowledge, training that they require to bring about the structural changes needed in society.

## **Objectives :**

- a) To work on the economic, social problems of the poor and disadvantaged by helping to bring into existence groups and organizations of the poor and disadvantaged, particularly in rural areas.
- b) To work with groups of the rural poor on the problems they face. This work will include help with programme planning, leadership training, issue based training and linking with others with similar concerns.
- c) To undertake development projects and programmes which improve the socio-economic conditions of the poor.
- d) To conduct continuing, functional, liberating educational programmes, particularly for the underprivileged sections of society.
- e) To guide and support people's organizations – both organizations working for the poor, and organizations of the poor-through training, consultation, programme planning, and in any other way needed.
- f) To conduct participatory research projects on problems affecting the poor and disadvantaged in society, and to place the results of that research before groups, agencies, institutions, departments, etc. working in that field.
- g) To highlight problems, concerns and needs of the poor.
- h) To organize seminars, workshops, and conferences, exchange visits, study tours, etc. with the poor, and with those who work with the poor, on issues of common concern.
- i) To collaborate and maintain links with other organizations, groups and networks working with the poor
- j) To establish and maintain libraries and documentation resource centres.

## **Astha Believes ....**

- In the strength and capacities of the poor and oppressed to bring about change
- That knowledge is power
- That organization is strength
- That life is made up of many problems and crises, and that to learn how to analyze situations, strategize effectively, work collectively, and develop the leadership needed, is necessary to meet the ongoing issues and challenges of life. There is not just one problem, that when solved, or mitigated, will remove the barrier to “the kingdom of God”.
- That all people are equal as human beings, and have the same rights to a life of dignity, and the same right to survival
- That sustainable development is needed, not the consumer driven, resource hungry and capital intensive development path that is being followed today.

## **Astha Values ....**

- Working with others, networks, partnerships
- Honesty and transparency in working relationships, in all relationships
- Simple, sustainable lifestyles
- The special strength and tenacity of poor women
- Gender equality
- The Indian Constitution, and the space it gives for rights based action

In order to further the mission and to achieve the goals Astha has established six Resource Units and 8 People's Organizations. Astha receives support from international and national organizations to fulfill the ambitions of poor people.

**Resource Units :**

- Local Self Governance Resource Unit
- Livelihood Resource Unit -
- Budget Analysis Rajasthan Centre
- Globalization Resource Unit
- Peoples' Organizations Resource Unit
- The Administration Support Unit.
- Literacy Support Unit.

**Peoples Organizations (POs) :**

- Adivasi Vikas Manch (Tribal Development Forum)
- Adivasi Mahila Jagriti Samiti (Tribal Women's Awareness Society)
- Rajsmand Mahila Manch (Rajsamand Women's Forum)
- Jagra Vikas Samiti (Jarga Development Society)
- Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan (Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization)
- Godwad Adivasi Sangathan (Godwad Tribal Organization)
- Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (The Association of Strong Women Alone)
- Samarthak Samiti (The Support Society)

**Projects :**

In addition to the above there are projects like Social Mobilization and Natural Resource Management supported by UNDP.

**Support Units :**

The Udaipur office also provides Administrative and Documentation Centre support to all the Resource Units and POs. The Training Centres of Astha provide support to all the Units, and to other institutions working with the poor. A Literacy Team supports the field work through leadership training programmes.

**Networking :**

Astha networks with a number of NGOs working in Rajasthan and India for issue-based advocacy related to the poor people. This year the Right to Information has attained the status of a law as a result of a long struggle by people in Rajasthan, and in the country. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has also become law in 2005, and is being implemented since February 2006. Astha enabled several NGOs and People's Organizations to work together to raise awareness for effective implementation of the Act in their respective working areas. The networking has provided an impetuous to the pro-poor issues and influenced the state and national policies.

This report will elaborate on the progress made by the Resource Units, Support Units, and People's Organizations during the past year.

## **THE RESOURCE UNITS**

- 1. The Local Self Governance Resource Unit**
- 2. The Livelihood Resource Unit**
- 3. The Globalization Resource Unit**
- 4. The Budget Analysis Rajasthan Centre – BARC**
- 5. The Peoples' Organization Resource Unit**

## THE LOCAL SELF GOVERNANCE RESOURCE UNIT

Astha strongly believes in the people, hence it works with the people to strengthen democracy. To strengthen democracy at the local level, this Unit was established in 2001. According to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution of India, the People have the constitutional right to governance directly through the Gram Sabha (Village Assembly of voters) and the Panchayati Raj structures – elected structures at three levels make up the local-self-government system in India – the Gram Panchayat (Council of Villages), the Panchayat Samiti (Block Council), and Zila Parishad (District Council). In the Gram Sabha, the people make the plans for their development and the Gram Sabha makes the decisions for the local level village council area (Gram Panchayat). The Gram Sabha identifies the poorest of the poor for various government programmes. These people benefit from different schemes so that they can acquire a stronger status in society and thus achieve social justice through these activities. People from the lowest to the highest social status will make the village level plans and the government will provide funds in order to implement them. The funds will increase the people's participation and this in turn will cause even greater development for the people.

In order to increase the participation of women in the PRIs, Astha strengthens the abilities of the women elected representatives, and brings awareness about the importance of local self-government structures, and the way they function. The Local Self Governance Unit was created in order to empower people to control their own development at the local level, so that they might be able to participate in governance and fulfill their role of "citizens".

The Unit is also responsible for bringing awareness about the PESA Act (Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, so that the possibilities for greater autonomy in the decision-making and in control over natural resources in Schedule V tribal villages can be realized

### Objectives -

- To strengthen the process of the realization of Local Self Governance in Rajasthan; to promote and support structures for effective implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment and the PESA Act, along with activities of awareness generation and sensitization
- To enhance people's understanding about political structures, and to help them to organize themselves to monitor the working of the local self governance structures.
- To empower the Gram Sabhas (Village Assemblies) such that the people, collectively, can take their own decisions regarding local self governance in their area; to allow the people to identify the hurdles in the path of development and to find solutions
- To improve the capacities of women and marginalized sections of the rural society, and to create an environment of social acceptance towards women and *dalits* who are elected
- To develop networks with others and to motivate them for inclusion of the provision of Local Self Governance in their agendas
- To lobby for decentralization of power in order to make the provision of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment a reality for all

- To promote gender equality in governance, and to increase women's participation in PRIs

The main function of the Unit is to create awareness among elected representatives and to empower voters, elected members -- especially women members of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The field area of the Unit is 52 village gram panchayats in 12 Blocks of 3 Districts- Udaipur, Rajasamand and Dungarpur Districts. In addition to this, the Unit has network linkages with other NGOS with similar interest in Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan and in other states.

During the reporting period, the Local Self Governance Unit has undertaken an important work for the Tribal people through awareness building of PESA ( Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act). PESA is a special Act for tribal areas where tribals are in the majority in the Blocks and Districts (Scheduled V Areas) and Astha works in 23 Blocks of 5 Districts with more than 50% concentration of tribal population in the state. These districts are Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara, Chittorgarh and Sirohi.

Under PESA, the emphasis is on the formation of Village Assemblies (Gram Sabhas) *in each village*. The Village Assembly will work towards getting full control of the minor forest produce and minor minerals, indirectly insuring the rights of the tribal on their lands. The capacity building program of women leaders is another important task of Astha related to this Act. A common understanding on PESA has also been developed with other collaborating partners -- Prayas, Chittorgarh and Jan Chetna, Sirohi -- in the state, which has helped in strengthening the advocacy for tribal' rights in the state and in the country. A large number of tribal leaders have been oriented about PESA during this year.

The map indicates the coverage of fieldwork as well as networking area of this unit. (This map is found at the end of this report)

### - Highlights of the Year -

#### **Awareness Building --**

This is one of the most important and essential activities of the Local Self-Governance Unit. The voters' awareness campaign was organized last year to develop political awareness and to increase women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The advantages to the community, and the power of exercising the right to vote in our democracy, was explained to the voters so that they can exercise their franchise more intelligently and judiciously. According to available information from the village records of 52 Gram Panchayats, there has been an increase of 4.83% in the women's voting. Further there has been an increase of 3.32 % in the percentage of elected women, which was higher than the norm of "one third".

#### **Capacity Building --**

The Resource Unit organized 22 orientation training programmes and 9 exposure visits of Panchayati Raj members/groups to other Districts and States (Appendix 2). Leadership training, skill up gradation and functional literacy were the main areas of capacity building. As a result of these training programmes, the elected

members were able to perform their duties and responsibilities more efficiently. Elected members have gained confidence and are able to manage their roles and responsibilities.

### **Development of Support Systems --**

It is sometimes difficult for an individual or group of elected members to understand their roles and responsibilities in the democratic system. The Unit has formed various support groups like:

- Citizen Forums -- Panchayat Jagurak Manch, (a committee of local interested villagers who volunteer their services to bring awareness about local self government matters in their communities.)
- The Association of Women Elected Councillors and Chairpersons of PRI Institutions -- Mahila Panch-Sarpanch Sangathan to help elected members stand for what is right, and honest, and to fight against corruption.

These groups provide the necessary support to the newly elected women, or to the Gram Sabhas to achieve better results in the Gram Sabhas. This Forum also ensures the participation of enthusiastic villagers in the developmental activities of their own villages. The support structures help to prioritize the issues of the area for action. It has also been observed that in some of the villages, the support groups have mobilized financial resources to implement the priorities of the Gram Panchayat.

### **Networking with other NGOs --**

This Unit is presently working with 37 NGOs in Rajasthan on issue-based agendas. These institutions are in the process of networking, and have internalized the rights-based approach in their own programmes. Further, the networking has provided a broad based consensus in a larger geographical area of the state.(Appendix-1)

### **Advocacy --**

In order to get the support of the government in getting the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment and PESA implemented more effectively in the state, this Unit has under-taken a baseline study and worked with communities on micro level development plans. The findings of these efforts have been shared with the State Finance Commission. It was emphasised that the Panchayati Raj Institutions at all the 3 tiers should be given full rights with financial powers to execute their development plans. The advocacy efforts are instrumental in influencing the state decision/policy making for the poor and the tribal in the state. As a result of this process the panchayat structures will be empowered.

### **Agaz Academy Udaipur --**

During the reporting period there has been active collaboration with The Hunger Project. The main objective of this collaboration is to develop leadership and skills among elected women representatives. The Agaz Academy has developed a 21 day training module spread over 3 phases in one year period. Astha will implement this program in their project areas.

### **Literacy Campaign for elected women members --**

Astha has developed a 20-days course in 3 phases. The objective of the literacy campaign is to make illiterate elected women members literate. A workshop for 15 districts was organized which was attended by members of 27 institutions. A complete implementation plan has been prepared to help 1,572 elected women representatives to become literate in 2006. It is expected that after completing the crash, condensed course, the women will be able to read, write, count numbers up to 100, do simple addition, all of which will facilitate their day to day work as elected representatives.

### **Partnership --**

The Unit has systematically worked with the Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Institute, Jaipur. The training programs for elected members are jointly planned. The Training of Trainers (TOT) was conducted by Astha in 2 Districts. The training teams oriented the newly elected members of the Gram Panchayats in the state with a focus on a rights-based approach, social justice, gender equality and democratic values

### **Documentation --**

The Unit has undertaken documentation work for the benefit of others and for institutional memory. The newspaper -- Panchayat Jagurakta Samachar (News for Awareness on Panchayats), a wall-newspaper on PDS (Public Distribution System – ration shops) and material for elections to the Gram Panchayats and Ward Sabhas. In addition there are reports for each event and activity. These documents are shared with all the in-house Units of Astha, and other NGOs.

### **Review and Monitoring --**

As an integral part of the Unit, regular review and monitoring meetings are organized in-house as well as with collaborating partners and institutions. The feedback from these meetings and workshops provide valuable input for mid-course correction.

### **Preparation for the Future --**

This Unit has also initiated action to make it self-sufficient and independent in the coming years.

**Case Study**  
**No More Signatures on Blank Cheques**

*Ms. Pyari Bai, Sarpanch of Dhayla village, District Rajsamand, refused to sign the cheques in the cheque book, and asked the Secretary to get the cheques signed only in the Panchayat office and not in her residence, and also in the presence of the Gram Panchayat members. The Secretary of the Gram Sabha was shocked by the Sarpanch's new working approach! The next day, Pyari Bai called the Panchayat meeting and informed all members:*

*"From now onwards, I will sign the cheques only in the meetings, and not at my residence, and only when the cheque is presented along with the related resolution of the Panchayat."*

*The Secretary could not understand the sudden change in attitude of a woman who used to witness the Panchayat meetings as a spectator. The Sarpanch disclosed in the meeting:*

*"I have attended an orientation program organized by Astha for Sarpanchs. In the training, we were asked not to sign the blank cheques and be more vigilant." Thereafter, Pyari Bai was more active in the Panchayat work and facilitated distribution of pensions to 10 widows and included more families in the BPL list ( Below Poverty Line list). She also requested her husband not to accompany her to the Panchayat meetings, as she was now confident and would take her responsibilities single-handedly.*

*This was a successful example of a capacity building programme organized by Astha.*

**THE LIVELIHOOD RESOURCE UNIT  
WITH EMPHASIS ON LAND, WATER AND FOREST RESOURCES**

In the Present scenario of Globalization, Poor People lack basic essentials, and it is difficult for them to survive. Poor people depend on livelihoods based on natural resources -- Water, Forest, Land -- and the recent control over these resources by the State and the Market, has thrown Poor People's Livelihoods into a crisis. It is difficult to save their rights to these resources. In the present situation, people face long-standing issues of a "regular poverty situation"; they face exploitation; and now they are faced with the need to understand these globalized-privatized-economic-policy conditions.

Rajasthan suffered a continuous drought situation for the last 5 years which saw more than 85% to 95% of the Districts come under drought. The farmers of Southern Rajasthan have small land holdings, and this new competition for natural resources and threatened displacement (by State and Market) caused an increase in migration in search of employment to nearby towns, and to the towns of Gujarat, and beyond -- leaving their villages, and family members behind.

The livelihoods of the Tribal People of Rajasthan depend on traditional natural resources and they are losing their rights over these natural resources. The result of this is that the Tribal people are facing Poverty, malnutrition and sickness. In the name of Development, Tribal people are being displaced from their ancestral lands.

This Unit has been working since 2004 mainly on issues related to land, forest and water, the available natural resources for the survival of the tribal people in Southern Rajasthan.

Gradually these resources are shrinking; hence the Unit is also working on alternative livelihoods for the tribal, as now they are losing control over their traditional and ancestral resources due to state and national policies of the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

### **Major Objectives of the Unit --**

- To work on the present scenario of the crisis for poor people's livelihoods and basic needs for survival
- To establish networks in Rajasthan for land reforms for the poor people -- Tribal, Dalits -- and to work on present law implementation and on land reform policies.
- To do research on alternative livelihoods for Rajasthan, with an objective to see how these research findings can influence the policies and program of the state.
- To encourage the traditional patterns to water resource management, water use and conservation, for the permanent solution to Rajasthan's drought proofing programme.
- To establish the larger network with likeminded organizations on National Park and Game Sanctuary related issues vis a vis livelihood and the need to safeguard tribal rights.

### **-- Highlights of the year --**

#### **Awareness building --**

One of the major thrusts of the Unit was to organize events to create awareness regarding the forest policies among tribal people, and to show them the way to demand their rights within the legal framework. State, District and Block level Conventions on forest related issues have been organized in this year.

#### **Migrant Labourers --**

Because of several factors, including the globalized / privatized economic policies, labour opportunities are not available / less available in the places where people live. Migration, which had been a seasonal practice among tribal people is now becoming a regular feature of life for them. In search of employment, South Rajasthan tribal people move from a rural to a rural area in Rajasthan or in Gujarat. In order to understand this movement, and to provide a facility to migrant labourers, two Registration Centres have been opened in Kotra Block, Udaipur District, and in northern Gujarat. These centres register the migrant labourers, and issue identity cards to them. Till date, the Kotra centre has registered 150 labourers and issued identity cards to 70 people.

Recognizing that tribals will migrate for labour, and to enable them to earn more when they do, a skill up-gradation program has been taken up along with

another NGO working with migrant labourers. A group of 25 tribal youths have been provided a one month training in different trades: carpentry, welding, masonry, hotel service. These youth were educated up to class 8/9 and usually went to neighbouring areas for jobs. It is expected that this skill up gradation will help them to earn more wherever they go.

### **National Campaign for Survival and Dignity --**

A national "Campaign for Survival and Dignity" has been started, and Astha and the tribal people we work with have been involved in this Campaign. In 9 Districts of Southern Rajasthan, conventions were organized to create awareness among people. Rallies and a "jail bhadao abhiyan" (campaign to fill the jails) were taken up in these 9 Districts. We have conducted 3 meetings at the divisional level, covering the various issues of what is happening in different Blocks, and have discussed how to raise the issues from the Divisional levels with Government. We have uncovered the problems at the local level for tribals, in 9 Districts.

Block level meetings – People's Organizations and NGOs organized monthly meetings themselves. We have conducted a Block level meetings every month in 5 Blocks where People's Organizations are not working. These meetings discussed local land related issues of the areas.

Dialogue with People's Representatives -- The decision was taken at the National level forum of the Campaign for Survival with Dignity, to bring pressure from their local areas on Local MPs, MLAs and District Level People's Representatives. We have organized District level dialogues with People's Representatives in Udaipur on 21 June 2005 in which 500 people participated; in Kushalgarh, Banswara on 24 June, in which 500 people participated; and in Pratapgarh, Chittor District on 25 June, in which 400 people participated. In these meetings, Local Members of Parliament and Local MLAs and Zila Pramukhs (District Council Chairpersons) had come and gave their support to the Scheduled Tribes ( Recognition of Forest Rights ) Bill.

A combined alliance with People's Organizations and NGOs was formed around the issues of the Employment Guarantee Act, and the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill, and the issue of Indebtedness. 7 Block level Rallies were organized with People's Organizations and NGOs, and 3 District level meetings were organized at Dungarpur, Rajsamand, and Udaipur.

### **The Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill --**

The Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill -- As part of the national level Campaign for Survival and Dignity, Astha has done a lot of activities in promoting awareness and building pressure for the Bill.

- 18<sup>th</sup> May 2005 in Kherwara Block, Udaipur district, there was a Rally on land related issues and 700 people gathered at the Tehsil headquarters.
- 28-30 May 2005 there was a national level meeting in Delhi with the support of the National Campaign for Survival and Dignity, when the Recognition of Tribal Forest Rights Bill was put up in Parliament.

- 21<sup>st</sup> June 2005 there was an Udaipur District level convention and 600 people participated in this convention. Forest land right issues were discussed in this convention, and especially the participants talked about the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill.
- 22 June 2005 in Pratapgarh, Chittor District, 400 people participated in a District level convention.
- 24 June 2005 in Banswara District, 300 people participated in a District level convention.

Other grass-root Rallies were organized in Rajasthan to build public awareness and put pressure on the government by demanding that they bring into law the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill.

<b>District</b>	<b>People Participated.</b>
Sirohi	500
Alwar	350
Chittor (Pratapgarh)	300
Banswara	200
Udaipur	
• Gogunda	150
• Kherwara	250
• Udaipur	1200
Bhilwara	300
Dungarpur	300

### **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act --**

The Act was passed by UPA Central Government in the Lok Sabha on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2005. The UPA Central Government had passed the Bill in the interest of poor rural people who were facing problems of livelihoods and food security. The Act is intended to provide employment in the rural areas, and at the same time, to conserve and develop natural resources. This Act was passed to increase and develop basic amenities in rural areas of the selected Districts.

In Rajasthan, this Act will be implemented in 6 Districts (namly Udaipur, Dungarpur, Sirohi, Banswara, Jhalawar and Karoli), and all over India in 200 Districts in the First Phase. This Act provides 100 days of employment guaranteed per family residing in rural areas, to those who want to physical work.

The right implementation of this Act is a major challenge. The implementation of the Act has many steps, and a main initial step is to make the people at the village and Gram Panchayat levels aware of the various steps involved in the implementation of the Act.

- This Act guarantees employment within a 5 km. area from the village where the rural labourer lives.
- This Act guarantees timely employment. If the Govt. fails to provide employment within time limit (15 days), then the Government should give the rural labour seeking employment, an *unemployment allowance* as per the rules.

- The major threats to the proper implementation of this Act are corruption at the local levels. To stop corruption is major issue. To monitor the work, the public can use the Right to Information Act and the social audit systems to see what is actually going on at the village level.

### **Training of NGOs and People's Organization Leaders about the NREGA --**

Master District Trainer teams for NREGA were prepared in a training programme held 27-29 December 2005. NGO and People Organization worker/leader teams from Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara, Jhalawar, Sirohi and Karoli attended this state level training -- a total of 72 persons from the above districts. In addition, there were special NREGA District trainer team trainings, in two Districts, namely Karauli and Banswara in January and February 2006. There were a total of 70 senior person participants of the people organizations and NGOs of the district had attended this training.

Block level conventions held in Udaipur district. In these conventions held in 6 Blocks, NREGA awareness was spread, and 500 to 800 elected village representatives from Gram Panchayats had come, and many from Peoples' Organizations and NGOs participated actively. These conventions were also a platform to dialogue with Government officials on the present situation about the implementation of NREGA in the District.

### **Water --**

We have been working on water with Peoples' Organizations and with NGOs of Southern Rajasthan, on water conservation and policy level work. Water Policy, and the Proposed Ground Water Act and River Basin level meetings that were organized are as follows:

- 5<sup>th</sup> April meeting on Proposed Ground Water Act 2005. Suggestions were given to policy makers and this meeting was attended by 30 NGOs/Peoples' Organizations of Southern Rajasthan.
- 11<sup>th</sup> –12<sup>th</sup> June, 2005 Ground water, and water related issues with 85 people from southern Rajasthan (NGOs/People Organizations. )
- 5<sup>th</sup> August 2005 meeting on Water, especially to discuss the V.S. Vyas committee report to the state government, and to understand what are the positive things in the report. This meeting was attended by 40 people from Peoples' Organizations and NGOs of Southern Rajasthan.
- 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2005 meeting -- River Basin level discussion. (50 people from Peoples' Organizations.)

## **GLOBALIZATION RESOURCE UNIT**

Astha sees the present macro economic policies of Globalization, Privatization, Liberalization as a very major part of the root causes of poverty in India, in Rajasthan -- one could say in the world. Astha also thinks that the macro policies affect the micro situation in most cases. Therefore, in working with the People for removal of the root causes of poverty, exploitation, environmental degradation, vulnerability, it is necessary

to work at the macro policy level *as well as* at the grass roots level.

Astha knows that right laws and policies "up there" do not in themselves create justice and prosperity on the ground, and likewise, splendid action at the grass-roots will run into a blockage, if there are gaps and loopholes in laws and policies, or no law at all. Work at both levels is needed.

Astha sees the work of the World Bank, the IMF, the World Trade Organizations as part of the root causes of Poverty. With The People, we lobby the State MLAs and Parliament MPs, along with their senior bureaucrats -- for it is they, after all, who let the influences of these harmful international players into India. Astha is also involved in a South Asian network which lobbies the SAARC Secretariat and National Leaders and Bureaucrats, and works to lobby the European Union with a European NGO, Eurostep.

The present work of follow up to the SAP study conducted by Astha in 1996-98 has moved to helping to bring into existence the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication. SAAPE works in the South Asia region and the work of Astha, as a SAAPE Country Focal Point for Gender, involves work of networking, research, documentation, lobbying, training, meetings around India, and in the Region. This work would continue.

### **Major Objectives of the Unit --**

To work towards a situation in which:

- Strong networks of NGOs, People's Organizations, will be aware, and vocal, about the negative impact of reform economic policies on the poor in India.
- MPs, Cabinet Ministries, and State Government elected representatives will be aware of the negative impact of the macro economic policies on the poor in the country, and will increase "safely nets" in the short term, and will work towards new economic policies which are more in line with a "small is beautiful" economic approach, policies which are more environmentally sustainable.
- An Alternative Development Paradigm which is more sustainable for all people will become national/regional policy. It will replace the present Development Paradigm based on Competition, on "survival of the fittest", on using the environment as a commodity to be used, on heavy expenditure on defence and war. This is the long term objective, more like a goal. The practices that fit into that Alternative Development Paradigm will have begun to come together into a sustainable Development approach -- including solar lighting, heating and cooking, natural or organic farming, watershed development, decentralized decision-making, etc.
- Linkage will have been made with other South Asian Countries, in monitoring the regional trading and political configurations. Information on the negative impacts of macro policies will be shared, and collective strategies made to lobby the countries of the region, and the organizations of power.

### **-- Highlights of the Unit --**

In this financial year, Astha took part in the regional meetings and e-mail dialogues of SAAPE; facilitated the writing of the India chapter of the "People's Poverty Report" published by SAAPE; and did some of the coordination work for committees and training programmes of SAAPE. Astha is the focal organization for the Gender Thematic Group for India. And since Astha has been involved in the formation of SAAPE from the

beginning, the Astha representative is always a special invitee for the regional meetings.

### **BUDGET ANALYSIS RAJASTHAN CENTRE (BARC)**

It has been clear to NGOs and activists, working with the people on the issues they face, that the laws and policies of the country affect what is happening in the villages.

In 1991, the Government of India took the country into a new era of economic policy, by accepting World Bank and International Monetary Fund loans and policies of Structural Adjustment. The country then followed with Globalization, Liberalization and Privatization policies.

There were fears on many fronts – and NGOs who work with the Poor, feared that the Government Policies of Privatization would cause hardship when Government “pulled back” from health, education, food security, environmental protection, etc. to make way for “privatization”. Globalized economic policies, it was feared, would cause inflation, influence culture, make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Many of these fears have come true in the last 10 years!

"But the hardships that the poor are facing", say many people "would have happened anyway – how do you know they are caused by Government economic policies?" And it is at this point that Budget Analysis is important – for an analysis of the state and central budgets, (comparing them to policy decisions about budget provisions and expenditures in earlier years), sheds light on the reasons for the deteriorating social and economic condition of the Poor. Budget Analysis Data, when added to field data and case study material, makes advocacy and lobbying work stronger.

Budget Analysis by itself holds no magic power – but combined with field data about employment, food security, health facilities, and other "life and death" matters, and combined with people's voices, reaching voters and elected representatives in our democratic process – then Budget Analysis strengthens the People's Action.

Budget documents are not just numbers, but they speak about the expressed intention of the Government, its policies and its allocation of financial resources. The budget talks about the financial position of the state and expresses its intended expenditure, as well as income sources. It also declares the government's plans for generation of employment, and for providing relief to the poor, aged, women and other marginalized sections of society, through social sector spending.

The Centre consists of five staff members and is located at Jaipur. The main task of the unit is to analyse the state budget from the perspective of the Poor People, advocate with elected representatives and government officials at state, district and sub district levels and with the media. The Centre also provides resource information on budget analysis to the grassroots organization. The focus of data analysis is on social, economic and general aspects of the budget. During the reporting period, BARC has undertaken a number of activities like capacity building of MLAs and PRI elected representatives, research studies, training, and support to other institutions. The Centre helps to establish the link of policy-to-people and people-to-policy.

The budget is a main link between what is happening in the state, and the Government's economic policies.

## **Major Objectives --**

- To have a Resource Centre which will do the analysis of the Rajasthan Budgets from the point of view of the poor. Data will be pulled out to see how the Budget allocations will affect the lives of the poor. This data is about such things as: Tribal Sub Plan Budgets, Rural drinking water Budgets, Women's income generating training Budgets, Widow pension budgets, Child labour rehabilitation Budgets, Dalit welfare Budgets.
- To prepare research documents on special issues based on studies and it has done in budget data, and will show actually what has been the effect on the Public, on the poor, of the money spent.
- To interact with the NGOs and activists who are working in the field on special issues that they are working.
- To organize training programmes for People Organizations and NGOs on the state policies that affect poor people life.
- To have better informed MLAs in Rajasthan, about budget matters. The decisions made by the MLAs will be better decisions, in favour of all the people in their constituency. When the people know what is in the Budget of the state, and they approach their elected representative and discuss state finances with him/her. It is a strengthening of democracy. Even when the MLAs know more about Budget matters, it is a strengthening of democracy.
- To develop information center that relates to state legislature and Government departments and to have a strong centre which responds to requests of date from activists Organizations, NGOs and People Organizations.
- To help organize a network of NGOs that can lobby on issues based on research and documentation done by the centre.
- To provide this kind of data to those with mass base, so that advocacy work to change priorities, and make them more in line with the needs of the poor, is strengthened, and changes in-laws and policies are made in the state, and at all levels of governance in the state, bringing about a better life for the masses of the poor.

## **-- Highlights of the Year --**

### **Equipped Elected Members --**

Twenty MLAs from both the Ruling and Opposition parties participated in the orientation program conducted in December 2005. They were provided with data on various sectors, which helped them to raise questions pertinent to tribals and poor people. As a result of the orientation and data, an increase of 10 percent was recorded in questions raised related to the Poor in the current Assembly Sessions held from 28 February to March 2006. These questions were related to both economic and social sectors based on hard data with facts and figures, which have influenced the decisions policy in the state. As a result of advocacy, the state government has changed the pension policy of widows, and given an addition of 10 Kg of grains along with pension.

### **Capacity Building --**

Five training programmes on issue-based budget analysis were conducted for NGOs and social activists, preparing them to raise the issues related to the poor people in different forums -- right to information and employment, issues related to tribals and women in the state. As a result of lobbying and high level advocacy, there has been an increase in the capital expenditures in the state budget this year.

The Centre has helped NGOs to understand the terminology of the state budgets. A resource book of budget terminology has been published and widely circulated among the interested institutions, and elected members.

After 3 years of presence in the state, the Centre has established its credibility and has contributed in national, state and district level workshops and seminars. The participation as resource persons gives credibility and recognition to the work done by BARC.

### **Dissemination of Data --**

The Unit has also provided analysis of the state budget to the print media, which was published in 4 Hindi newspapers and 2 English National Newspapers -- Times of India and Hindustan Times. This has created public awareness about the social issues related to the poor and deprived people living in the remote areas of the state.

Further BARC shared budget related information with 22 NGOs and social activists who used this information for advocacy and issue-based campaigning.

### **Partnership --**

BARC has collaborated and developed networking with number of institutions like the Rajasthan Institute of Public Administration (RIPA), Institute of Development Studies (IDS), People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Dalit Manav Adhikar Sangathan (Dalit Human Rights Organization), Rajasthan Farmers' Union etc. These partnerships are valuable in terms of advocacy and dissemination of information related to pro-poor budget information in their ongoing programs.

### **Research Studies --**

The Centre has conducted 2 studies and the findings of these studies on Crop Insurance and Widow Pensions have influenced the state policies benefiting the poor people.

### **Publications --**

Two working papers have been published this year. The Newsletter is published every 3 months, and is widely distributed.

## **PEOPLES' ORGANIZATIONS RESOURCE UNIT**

The Unit has been working with the 8 Peoples' Organizations and their support societies to strengthen them and bring them to greater maturity and strength. The Unit has strengthened the leadership of the organizations, by conducting training programmes, camps and other activities. The P.O. leaders have increased their management capacities and skills of program planning and implementation of plans made. Because of these interventions, the Peoples' Organizations and support societies have moved closer to becoming independent and self-directing organizations. The Unit staff also conducts regular monthly meetings with the leaders of the 8 P.O.s and these meetings are problem solving meetings, in which the Astha staff provides guidance and facilitates the process of planning the way forward.

There are 8 Peoples' Organizations working with Astha on different issues and in various geographical areas in the state. These 8 People Organizations are:

### **1. Adivasi Vikas Manch (Tribal Development Forum) :**

In Kotra Block of Udaipur District, several issue-based struggle committees were formed to undertake rights based campaigns in the area . All these struggle committees were working in their own areas. Astha had the vision to unite the people struggling in the Block, and have a mass based organization in Kotra Block. So, all the struggle committees were integrated into one forum in 1993, as "Adivasi Vikas Manch" .The various committees which were merged at that time were:

- Van Suraksha Evam Haq Raksha Samiti (Forest Protection and Rights Committee)
- Cement Factory Sangharsh Samiti (Cement Factory Struggle Committee).
- Kalibor Bandh Sangharsh Samiti (Kalibor Dam Struggle Committee)
- Tendu Patta Sangharsh Samiti (Tendu Leaf Struggle Society)
- Jewar Mukti Andolan (Jewelry Recovery Movement)
- Khera Tala Mines Union

The support society of AVM, Kotra Adivasi Sansthan (KAS), a registered Society under the Societies Registration Act, was set up in October 1998 as the support organization for the mass-based Peoples' Organization. As a registered body, KAS raises funds and takes projects which the Adivasi Vikas Manch/Tribal Development Forum wants to implement in the area.

### **2. Adivasi Mahila Jagriti Samiti : ( The Tribal Women's Awareness Society).**

There was a government / UNIFEM project on sericulture in Jhadol and Girwa blocks of Udaipur District, being implemented 1985 - 1990. Astha became involved with the project, and built up strong and active women's groups of the women, and others, associated with the project. When the government project period was over, the tribal women didn't want to stop working on their development, and Astha was ready to carry on with these dynamic women! Astha saw scope to generate local women leadership in the area to address the social issues of the area. The women were also enthusiastic about the formation of their own Sangathan (Organization) where they could take up issues to mobilize the women of the area, and give a voice to their problems. Thus

Adivasi Mahila Jagriti Samiti (The Tribal Women's Awareness Society) was formed, with the women of Jhadol and Girwa Blocks of Udaipur District, and in 1995, the Adivasi Mahila Jagriti Sansthan was formed and registered as the support society to the Tribal Women's Awareness Society.

### **3. Rajsamand Mahila Manch –(Rajsamand Women's Forum).**

A Women's Development Project (WDP) of the Government of Rajasthan was started in Rajsamand District, and Astha took the responsibility for the District IDARA, or the District Resource Support Centre. Astha's Role was to give trainings to the women's groups, local village leaders (sathins), the Block Development Officers and other government officials, and to produce a newsletter and other educational materials to support the field work. This project went on for 5 years and in the process of awareness generation, and the women's groups formation. Strong women leaders emerged. Again, when the government programme came to an end, Astha facilitated these women's groups to come together to form their own Forum where they could share their issues and problems, and work together to solve those problems. The support society to the Rajsamand Mahila Manch is Jan Vikas Sansthan (People's Development Society) formed in 2003.

### **4. Jarga Shetriya Vikas Sansathan – ( Jarga Regional Development Society).**

This people's organization was also formed as a consequence of tribal people's movement for their forest land rights. The working area of the Jarga Society is Kumbalgarh Block of Rajsamand District.

### **5.Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan – (Vagad Labourers and Farmers Association )**

In 1995, the forest land issue was emerging in and around Udaipur District as an upcoming issue, and people from Dungarpur who wanted to be associated with the issue action around forest land, approached Astha and asked to be involved. One Astha worker was sent to Dungarpur, to work with the people in the District. The Peoples' Organization, Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan, came to being in 1995 around the issue of threatened displacement of tribals from homesteads that were situated on Forest Department lands. The support society is "Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sansthan", Vagad Labourers and Farmers Society, a registered Society.

### **6. Godwaad Adivasi Sangathan – (Godwad Tribal Association)**

GAS was formed in 1999. As the forest land rights movement strengthened in Udaipur District, its vibrations were felt in the nearby Districts, and other people's movements began. The tribal leaders of Bali and Desuri Blocks of Pali District approached Astha to take up this issue in their District. Astha entered the District in 1998 and helped the people to form a Peoples' Organization. The registered support society for GAS is Mahidhar Society.

### **7. Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan – (The Association of Strong Women Alone)**

There was a study by Marty Chen on the plight of the widowed and the separated women. The number of widows in India, at that time 33 million (1991), quoted in the study, motivated Astha to take up the issue of widowed and separated women. The

historic convention held in 1999 at Bassi, District Jaipur, where 450 widowed women from 22 Districts of Rajasthan came together, was the beginning of the Association. After 4 days of sharing their views, sorrows, successes and hardships, a follow-up committee was formed of three women from each District, and that committee went on to form the Association of Strong Women Alone. The registered support society is Ekal Nari Shakti Sansthan.

**8. Samarthak Samiti – (Literally, “Support Society”, and the full name of the Society is: The Rajasthan Forest Produce Collectors and Processors Groups Support Society)**

The tendu leaf collectors’ cooperatives came together to form the Samarthak Samiti. Cooperatives in Kotra (Udaipur District), Pratapgarh (Chittor District), Manohar Thana (Jhalawar District), and Abu Road (Sirohi District) were the founding forest produce collectors groups. The major work of this federation is to increase the economic benefit to the primary collectors of the Non Timber Forest Produce. This is done by giving financial guidance in planning, helping with market and credit linkages, doing research on NTFP, helping to get processing of forest produce established, etc. The Samarthak Samiti itself is a registered Society.

**Support Societies --**

The Peoples’ Organizations have capable Leadership and these Organizations are working on people’s issues of the poor. These Peoples’ Organizations have taken the decision to work over the long term, and they have formed registered support Societies. In this financial year, 3 support Societies had taken up project and programme implementation with the help of Astha's staff. These programmes were: a UNDP project, titled: “Social Mobilization Around Natural Resource Management for Poverty Alleviation”; a CAPART programme, of People’s Participation; and a Rajasthan Government project, titled: “Family Counselling Centre”.

**Sanchalak Mandal Manch – (Forum of P.O. Core Committees).**

Each Peoples’ Organization has its own Sanchalak Mandal (Core Committee) and members of all the Core Committees of the 8 People’s Organizations associated with Astha, meet 4 times a year or every 3 months. Astha considers these meetings as training programmes, and a time to share, strategize and plan for collective work together. In these meetings, each Core Committee presents a work report, there are discussions on current issues, and joint working policies are prepared. These meetings are chaired by the leaders of the P.O.s.

**Major Objectives of the Unit --**

- Astha is working to bring into being organizations that can stand on their own feet. Organizations of the poor whose leaders and members are aware, who are aware of the rights of citizens of India, aware of resources, aware laws and structures, and can bring about changes in their conditions of poverty and marginalization. Astha is working to strengthen such organizations of the poor and organizations working with and for the poor.

- To enable the P.O Unit workers themselves to develop patterns of learning new things so they can keep giving new and appropriate information to the people, and can continue to guide them in the process of building strong and effective associations.
- To bring into being Networks of Peoples' Organizations which will work together to solve common and shared problems.
- To help the 8 Peoples' Organizations that are presently formed, to become much more self-sufficient in leadership, decision-making, fund-raising, problem solving and strategizing.
- To guide and support the Adivasi Peoples' Organizations' leadership to be involved in raising funds for the work of their Organization.

### **-- Highlights of the Unit --**

**Leadership of Peoples' Organizations:** The Unit has conducted capacity building training programmes for leaders, and 4 training programs were organized, camps for Sanchalak Mandal (Core Committee) members, exposure visits for members of the Peoples' Organizations. Thirty leaders of 5 Organizations are now able to perform their roles in block and district level meetings. Two leaders are able to perform their responsibilities at the national level. In the different Peoples' Organizations, 10 leaders are giving leadership at the regional level, and these leaders are able to be resource persons on issues-base topics in the training programmes of other Peoples' Organizations.

### **Building the Capacity of Planning --**

To build the capacity for planning in the Peoples' Organizations, the Unit has demonstrated planning skills, and mentored the leaders in monthly meetings, quarterly and annual planning meetings.

### **Building the Capacity of Finance Management --**

The Unit has organized 2 training programmes on financial management for the Peoples' Organizations. The purpose of the these capacity building training programmes is to enable the leaders to maintain the accounts for membership and donations which they are collecting, and to record transactions on their own. Three Peoples' Organizations are independently keeping financial records of Astha's financial support to their P.O.

### **Networking and Lobbying --**

Members of the Peoples' Organizations have played a major role in several current issues at the State and National levels. Astha and members of the Peoples' Organizations have worked a lot on the Bill before Parliament, of the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill, to press for the passing of the Forest Rights Bill, and for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, to prepare the grassroots for right implementation of the NREGA. At the field level, the P.O. members and leaders have participated in the Campaign on the Right to Information. The Unit has conducted a State level workshop on the Debt issue for Poor People, indebtedness and repayment problems of both money-

lenders and banks. In this workshop, 40 people had attended from Rajasthan. The P.O.s have been linked to the National level farmers groups working on the debt issue, and the Unit has helped the P.O.s to understand the legal issues related to debt.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation --**

The Unit conducted 2 training programmes on monitoring and evaluation for the leaders of Peoples' Organizations.

### **Preparing Resource Materials --**

The Unit has prepared resource materials on issues, and problems like the BPL Family selections, the Right to Information, the Unorganized labour sector's Social Security Bill, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and other related materials.

### **Research and Survey --**

Education of children in tribal areas continues to be a concern. The Unit has conducted a survey research about alternate education systems, has done survey research on the Natural School concept, and is working on the development of an experimental project for tribal children's education in Kotra Block of Udaipur District.

### **Publications --**

**HALKARA** publication, the quarterly newsletter which raises the voices of People Organizations and shares their work is published by the Unit. The newsletter is shared among the P.O.s, and others who are working in same field.

## **THE PEOPLES' ORGANIZATIONS**

- 1. THE TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT FORUM  
(ADIVASI VIKAS MANCH)**
- 2. THE TRIBAL WOMEN'S AWARENESS SOCIETY  
(ADIVASI MAHILA JAGRITI SAMITI)**
- 3. RAJSAMAND WOMEN'S FORUM  
(RAJSAMAND MAHILA MANCH)**
- 4. JARGA AREA DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY  
(JARGA KSHETRIYA VIKAS SAMITI)**
- 5. VAGAD LABOURERS AND FARMERS ASSOCIATION  
(VAGAD MAZDOOR KISAN SANGATHAN)**
- 6. GORDWAD TRIBAL ASSOCIATION  
(GORDWAD ADIVASI SANGATHAN)**
- 7. THE ASSOCIATION OF STRONG WOMEN ALONE  
(EKAL NARI SHAKTI SANGATHAN)**
- 8. THE RAJASTHAN FOREST PRODUCE COLLECTORS  
AND PROCESSORS GROUPS SUPPORT SOCIETY  
(SAMARTHAK SAMITI)**

## **WORK OF THE PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATIONS**

### **TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT FORUM (ADIVASI VIKAS MANCH (AVM) )**

Kotra Block of Udaipur District is the place Astha started its work way back in 1986. Over the last 20 years, Astha worked with different issue-based organizations in that Block, and in 1993, Adivasi Vikas Manch, or the Tribal Development Forum was formed. Presently, Astha helps the Tribal Development Forum in formulating strategy, taking up issues and implementing the development work of the organization.

Astha aims to strengthen the Tribal Development Forum and supports the actions of the Kotra Tribal Organization (the registered body, Kotra Adivasi Sansthan). The Forum will be able to work as an independent People's Organization playing an important role in the development of the Block. We believe that the Peoples' Organization and its leadership can further the process of development in this remote part of Rajasthan.

#### **Major Objectives --**

- Development of leadership in the Organization or Sangathan.
- Formation of its Block Level and Regional Level committees.
- Help the tribal villages of this Schedule V Block understand the benefits of Tribal Self Rule, and work towards more villages proclaiming their village as a Village Republic which will bring into effect the legal provisions of the Tribal Self Rule legislation.
- Awakening the Gram Sabhas (Village Assemblies) about their capabilities and powers in promoting the Tribal Self Rule processes.

In Kotra, several issue based struggle committees were formed to undertake rights based campaigns in the area. All these struggle committees were working at their levels in their own areas, to their own capacities. Astha had a vision to cover the full area and to have a mass based representative organization which would take up the issues and problems of the people living in the villages of the Block. So all the struggle committees were integrated into one forum in 1993 as "Adivasi Vikas Manch", "The Tribal Development Forum."

The support society to AVM, Kotra Adivasi Sansthan (KAS), was set up in October 1998 as a support organization. The main mass based people's organization in the Block is Adivasi Vikas Manch, or the Tribal Development Forum. The formation of KAS is closely tied to Adivasi Vikas Manch. The Manch came to existence in the early 90s as a result of the intensive organization and collective action on local issues across Kotra Block by village and issue-based groups. As a registered body, KAS raises funds and takes up projects with and for the work of Adivasi Vikas Manch/The Tribal Development Forum and other tribal organizations in this part of Southern Rajasthan. The focus areas of AVM are education, health, women's empowerment, self-governance, minimum wage, social development, NRM, people's groups and organizations, advocacy and lobbying.

**CASE STUDY**

**Women Gained Confidence to Address Social Problems - Mamer Incident AVM**

*Burki Bai of Mamer is an Asthma patient. Her Asthma is so severe that it makes her run to the hospital every now and then. Once when she was on her routine visit to the hospital, the doctor just chased her out falsely, saying that a meeting was going on. Burki Bai took refuge of the group. The “powerful” women of AVM got together and closed down the hospital, saying that there is no use of running it, if the doctor over there does not see the poor patients! The matter was solved only after the doctor promised to see each patient without any bias*

**Demonstrate alternative approach to primary education --**

- **Educational camp:** A girl’s education camp was organized by AVM in which 105 girls of the age group 9-14 years completed the course. This Girls Education Camp (Balika Shiksha Shivir) is a bridge course in which these girls who are left out of the formal school system, or who have dropped out from school, get a chance to “catch up” and re-enter the government school system at the Class 6 level. This Girls education camp is of 7 months, from January to September. The girls of different age groups are divided into classes in the Camp depending on their educational background and abilities. After the bridge course is over, the girls will be mainstreamed into the formal education system .
- **Non-Formal Education Centres :** 10 non-formal education centres were organized which catered to 286 children of the nearby villages. Of the 286 children, 174 were boys and 112 were girls.

One of the projects taken up in this financial year, by KAS, with the Tribal Development Forum, was work under the project titled: “Social Mobilization and Empowerment Through Natural Resource Management” funded by UNDP through the central government Ministry of Rural Development.

**Major Activities Implemented in the UNDP Project --**

**Planning And Discussion For Activities With Women SHGs:**

Group meetings and Cluster level meetings

Block	Villages	No. of Clusters	No. of SHGs	Total Number of members	BPL
Kotra	21	4	29	488	220

**Capacity building for leadership in management -- financial, organizational, monitoring, conflict resolution, benefit sharing, and entrepreneurial attitudes.**

### **Literacy training --**

SHG leaders were linked to the ongoing literacy programme in Astha. **SHG management training:** 2 SHG Management Trainings were held, 2 group leader trainings in Kotra were organized. To enhance the leadership skill of women in SHG's, leadership skill development trainings have been organized, which also increased the women's understanding of matters related with income generation and local issues.

### **Educational tour --**

SHG women of Kotra were taken on an educational tour to Ahmedabad to widen the outlook of the women, and to learn from the experiences of others – visiting Gujarat SHGs enabled the women to learn from other organizations and SHGs about their success and lessons learnt in the process of growing up.

### **Women's Conference --**

On 5-6 June in Kotra Block, a women's conference was organized wherein 288 women participated. The objective of the conference was to enable the SHG members to learn from each other and to develop leadership qualities, an understanding of political, economic and social rights and duties, and to learn about the Government's plans and schemes for tribal area development.

### **Awareness Generation camp --**

Two Awareness Generation Camps were held in Kotra in this period, one at the Cluster level and one at the Block level, to develop links between the women and the government functionaries, and to make the women aware of the Government Development Schemes and Programmes.

### **Income Generation Activities of the SHG --**

- **Honey Collection and Sale:** The SHG of Kabadia Fala ( Upli Subri), Kotra block collected 275 Kg of honey at Rs. 50/- Kg. and sold it at Rs. 70/- Kg and earned a profit of Rs. 5,500
- **Blackberry (Jamun) Collection and Sale:** The SHG of Kaucha and Padalwada collected 1,000 Kg. of Jamun @ Rs. 4 per Kg and sold it locally at Rs 5/- Kg and earned a profit of Rs. 1,000.
- **Black Gram (urad) Processing and Sale :** The SHG of Kaucha collected 925 Kg. of black gram , 100 Kg was processed as Dal and sold @ Rs. 25 per Kg. and thus earned Rs. 2,700 while the remaining 825 Kg. was sold at Rs. 22/ Kg as seeds. The cost of transportation was Rs. 1,800 and thus, the group earned a net profit of Rs. 8,324.

### **Natural Resource Management --**

- **Fruit plant cultivation:** In Kotra 950 plants were give to 492 women (200 Mango, 150 guava, 200 Lemon and 200 Papaya). In Jhadol-Girwa, 9 plants (2 Mango, 1 Papaya, 2 Lemon, 2 Amla, 1 Neem, 1 Karanj ) each was given to 614 women ie 5576 plants

- **2 wells were recharged** in Kotra
- **6 Anicuts** were built by KAS: This work addresses the issues of soil conservation and water recharging. These anicuts will include both drinking water and irrigation water leading to a higher productivity and thus economic regeneration.
- **2,659 Loose Stone Check Dams** were made in Kotra
- **30 Earthen Embankments (nadi) in 21 villages** of Kotra Block were made.
- **1 water harvesting structure** was made in a village of Kotra Block.
- **Concrete micro plans for the villages:** The villagers, with the facilitation and help of Astha, have made micro plans for their villages.

**Health camp --**

Block	Village	Date	No. Of patients Registered
Kotra	Nichli Subri	27.07.05	105
Kotra	Gura	06.08.05	102
Kotra	Palawada	13.08.05	112

**Dai training –**

A Dai training was organized in Kotra to train Mid-wives about safe delivery, and the hygiene that needs to be maintained at the time of the delivery of a baby.

**THE TRIBAL WOMEN’S AWARENESS SOCIETY  
(ADIVASI MAHILA JAGRITI SAMITI (AMJS) )**

The Tribal Women’s Awareness Society (Adivasi Mahila Jagriti Samiti) is working with 106 women’s groups in Jhadol, Girwa, and Kherwara Blocks of Udaipur District. A worker from Astha regularly provides necessary assistance and guidance to the Society.

During the years 2002-2003, there was considerable expansion in the Society’s work in Kherwara Block. Different committees, like the Alcohol Prohibition Committee, the Social Reform Committee, the Income Generation Committee, the Women’s Cases Committee, the Drought Committee, and the Forest Land Struggle Committee carried out the work of the Society in all 3 Blocks.

Training Programmes and other activities were organized by the Society with the help of Astha, in order to develop awareness and leadership capacity in the key members, and to equip the leaders and members to check atrocities against women. The major events organized were:

- training for women group leaders,
- seminars of Tribal Self Rule Village Assemblies (Gram Sabhas) to increase understanding about the process of Village Republics,
- training about the functioning of women’s savings and loan groups,
- dialogues with the police,
- training for adolescent girls,

- training of a puppetry team for public education about atrocities against women and the need to stop them,
- exposure trips,
- a 'padyatra' or walking tour through the villages to spread awareness and make new members

### **Major Objectives of the Tribal Women's Awareness Society --**

- Development of women's leadership in the Society (Sangathan)
- Women's Empowerment
- To campaign for Voter Awareness and Communal Harmony
- To increase the participation of women in local self government Panchayati Raj Institutions
- To support Widows, Elderly, Separated and Single Women
- To Check the Violence and Atrocities Against women
- To work for Development of the region
- To increase the Education for Children

There was a government project on sericulture in Jhadol and Girwa blocks of Udaipur district, in the early '80's. Astha started working with the project, first to form women's groups, and later, when the government project, (which had been supported by UNIFEM) closed down, to help the women to form their own People's Organization, which they named the Adivasi Women's Awareness Society or Tribal Women's Awareness Society. In the beginning, there were only 12 villages associated with the work, and with the women's own energy, vision and ability, they have expanded the scope and influence of the work to over 100 villages, and into 3 Blocks of Udaipur District. There are very strong and active women, and the mass-based women's organization is an important organization for justice and development in the area. In 1995, the Adivasi Mahila Jagriti *Sansthan* was registered as the support society to the un-registered mass-based membership organization, Adivasi Mahila Jagriti *Samiti*.

### **Major activities Implemented in UNDP Project –**

The registered body associated with the Tribal Women's Awareness Society decided to take up a development project in the working area of the Society, and with the help of Astha, worked on the implementation of the UNDP supported project, "Social Mobilization for Natural Resource Management and Women's Empowerment".

#### **1. Social Mobilization**

##### **Rights based interventions:**

AMJS works on a rights based approach. The empowerment of the community and especially the women is directly linked with recognizing and claiming one's rights. Some of the rights which are promoted by AMJS in the area, sometimes using the laws which protect citizen rights, are: Right to life, Right to information, Right to collect Non-Timber Forest Produce, Right to widow pensions, old age pensions, Right to Equality, hereditary and legal land rights, and the Right to work taking advantage of the newly constituted National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. AMJS also works towards improving the local self governance

system and works for liquor prohibition. The way the Society makes the area women aware of their Rights are by holding meetings, conferences (the annual Awareness Fair or “Jagriti Mela”, Legal Literacy conference for members, or the Women and Police conference are examples), rallies, protests and distribution of pamphlets.

There was a **Right to Resource Workshop** in Makadadev on the 21st of September 2005. This was attended by 6 resource people and an 250 participants. Here the content of the information and discussion was about what our rights are and how to access them, including rights to land water and employment.

*35 women have been helped to obtain their land rights through “Antakal Namantran” or changing the names in the land records, from the name of the deceased husbands to the names of their widows. The family members of Duti Bai, Tanki Bai, Hojki Bai, Keli Bai, had kicked these widows out of their houses and denied them their property rights. Efforts were made to sensitize the family members through group pressure. Finally, they were all re-established in their houses – with the land records in their own names. .*

#### **Social Reform Forum:**

“Mahila Suraksha Kendra” (Women Protection Centre) was established in this year. It grew out of the need for such a Centre identified by the Social Reform Committee of AMJS. The Social Reform and Committee and the Case Committee are an integral part of AMJS wherein cases of domestic violence, property inheritance and exploitation are solved under the purview of customary laws of the tribals. The applications to take up the cases are filed with AMJS at the group leaders’ meetings, and in the next Social Reform meeting, the cases are taken up. Every year about 90 cases come to the Social Reform Committee, out of which almost 40 are solved within a year and only about 15 go up to the courts.

***Mahila Suraksha Kendra** this is a new intervention of the AMJS where members of the Sangathan donate one Kilo of corn or wheat each and make a corpus supply of food for the woman/ girl / family who come to AMJS for cases related to women’s rights and security. A woman victim of an atrocity who has been forced to leave her home, sometimes with her children, contacts a member of the Tribal Women’s Awareness Society. The Society member arranges for the woman and her children to stay in the home of one of the members of AMJS, and that Society member is reimbursed with grain from the corpus supply of food which has been collected, to cover the food consumed by the woman in distress. Her case is then taken up by the Case Committee. AMJS has formulated a set of guidelines for the cases which come up for resolution. This intervention has really created spaces for the women who are victims of social pressure or gendered discrimination to go forward in life.*

#### **2. Women’s Empowerment --**

AMJS works to encourage the women to come to the forefront . AMJS

undertakes a number of trainings such as the Group Leaders training, Income Generation training, Local Self Governance training, Exposure visits , Literacy Training and Adolescent Girls training – all contributing to the social, economic, political and ideological empowerment of the women and girls of Jhadol, Girwa and Kherwara Blocks. AMJS also undertakes training of the traditional health workers, midwives, and organizes health camps exclusively for women and children, who due to lack of access and attention, are deprived of medical benefits. Capacity is built in leadership, management (financial, organizational, monitoring), conflict-resolution, benefit sharing, and entrepreneurial attitude:

- **Literacy training:** SHG leaders were linked to the ongoing literacy programme in Astha
- **SHG management training :** 4 Group leader Training programmes for leaders of the Self Help Groups were held in Jhadol and Girwa Blocks
- For Income Generation activities taken up by women, 2 **capacity building training programmes** were organized on animal husbandry and agriculture based income generation activities.

### **Women’s Conference --**

Two women’s conferences were organized in this period. One was in February in Girwa Block where approximately 300 women participated. The objective of the conference was to enable the SHG members to learn from each other, to develop leadership qualities, to understand their political, economic and social rights and duties, and to learn about the Government programmes and schemes in the tribal area.

***JAGRITI MELA**” is the name of the women’s conference organized by AMJS. The Jagriti Mela this year was the 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> December. There were exhibitions for agriculture development and income generation activities. The main programme started by 5:00 p.m. in the evening, with the annual report presentation of AMJS. The Chief Guest was ,Mr. K.C. Sharma and the Special Guests were the BDO, Jhadol; the Project Officer SGSY, Dr. Pankaj Audichya; Bhanwar Singhji, Chandan Jain and R.D.Vyas from Astha, elected Sarpanchs and other Block and Panchayat level functionaries. The whole night there were cultural events and the closing session was on the 15<sup>th</sup> morning.*

### **3.Towards Sustainable Livelihoods –**

**Self Help Groups:** AMJS has organized the women of the area into 42 SHGs. These self help groups are not only credit and thrift groups but also the village level platform for knowledge sharing and social mobilization. The SHGs have resulted in a marked decline in the dependence on money-lenders.

**SHG Portfolio can be seen as :**

Block	Villages	No. of Clusters	No. of SHGs	Total Number of members	BPL
Jhadol & Girwa	42	4	42	614	236

## **Income Generation --**

AMJS is moving towards natural resource based micro enterprises of the women for income augmentation. The women groups have started some income generation activities such as fodder collection, NTFP (Non-Timber Forest Produce) collection, pickle making, paapd making. For most of the income generation activities, a revolving fund has been created which is used for production, and gets replenished after the production and sale of the products. Three Income Generation Trainings were organized in Jhadol-Girwa in this year.

**Agricultural seeds --** The women in Jhadol – Girwa were trained in the cluster level meetings and in the Agriculture training, and adopted the concept of mixed cropping. Three hundred women in the area were provided with **5 kg Corn, 2 Kg. Udad and 500 gms. Chamla Seeds** at a reasonable price for cultivation in their fields. Twenty eight women were given **20 Kg Wheat** seeds as demonstration units.

**Vermi-Compost** (compost made by earthworms) units have been put in the villages of Jhadol and Girwa Blocks to promote organic farming.

**Ratanjyot --** One hundred thirty-four women have planted an average of **800 ratanjyot** cuttings each, resulting in around **1,07,200 plants of ratanjyot** on the wastelands and as fencing around the fields and pasture lands of the women.

**2 well deepening** works have been undertaken by the group and 1 well deepening was sanctioned in the Ward Sabha.

**Fruit plant cultivation** was introduced in the area to increase the green cover and soil conservation, to improve the nutritional intake of the people and to increase the scope of income generation fruit plant cultivation

**Ginger production --** Two SHG's in Jhadol, (Gala and Manas) have invested in ginger production.

**Fodder collection --** One group in Undri Village (Girwa) collected 800 bundles of fodder and sold them locally. One group in Kaya Village (Girwa) is collecting and storing fodder so that it could be sold later when the fodder prices shoot up. They use the funds of the revolving fund to pay the women at the time of collection, and repay the fund after the sale of the fodder at the higher prices.

## **4. Natural Resource Management --**

AMJS works towards access to, and management and conservation of the land, water and forest resources. They have taken training in agriculture and livestock management, and in tree plantation.

Awareness among women regarding land rights was raised by the means of the "right to resources" workshops, regional meetings, networking and meetings. The women organized a dialogue with a women advocate. In the Social Reform Committee meetings, men were convinced to give property rights to their

daughters, and they were convinced about the role of women in decision making.

### **Mobilization Meeting and NRM planning --**

Before identifying and initiating any Natural Resource Management intervention, there were intensive field visits and Mobilization Meetings in the field, (village level, cluster, regional, agriculture training, and other meetings for micro planning) where PRA tools were used. On the 30th of September, in the meeting in the AMJS Pai office, agricultural issues were addressed. About 35 people, a resource person and the ex-director of the Agricultural Department attended this meeting. Information on winter crops, and how to care for them, promotion of organic methods of farming and information as to how to pursue this were all discussed in the meeting. On the 21st of October there was another meeting held in the Pai office as a follow-up to the previous meeting. This also addressed the topic of winter cropping and provided a list of potential subsidised seeds that were available.

### **Repair of water harvesting structures --**

In Kimri, an interior village of Girwa Block, the watershed development had undertaken a watershed development project which ended in 2004. Due to heavy rainfall and the fact that the structures were “*Kuchha*” (earthen structures, not cement structures), AMJS undertook the repair work in Kimri

### **Construction of water harvesting and storage structures--**

**489 field bunds** were made collectively by the group members in their agricultural fields. The objective was to retain the topsoil from being washed off the the fields during monsoon rains, and thus, the bunds would lead to soil conservation. Also, the water that would seep into the ground would enter the underground water table, and help to keep the water level high, and keep the soil moist for the winter crop sowing. Thus, the productivity of the land would increase and the nutritive soil would not run off.

## **5. Other –**

### **Health camp --**

Block	Village	Date	No. Of patients Registered
Girwa	Alsigarh	28.10.05	104

## **RAJSAMAND WOMEN'S FORUM (RAJSAMAND MAHILA MANCH (RMM) )**

The Rajsamand Women's Forum was started in Rajsamand District to work on women's issues there. The Forum was also the result of a women's government programme that was terminated. The Rajasthan Women's Development Programme (WDP) had contracted Astha to be the District Resource Centre (IDARA) for the WDP. The Rajsamand IDARA conducted training programmes for village women leaders, produced educational materials and a newsletter, and the staff was familiar with many of the women from most parts of the District. When the government wound up the programme, the women didn't want to close down their groups, but they needed some support from somewhere. Astha got several of the women leaders together, from 4 selected Blocks, and together, they formed the People's Organization, Rajsamand Women's Forum. The forum has since expanded to include Railmagra, Khamnor and Kumbalgarh Blocks as well. The Women's Forum works on issues such as women's atrocities, empowerment of women, child marriage, bringing women leaders into state and national campaigns, lobbying and advocacy for the modification of laws related to women, and arranging of legal assistance for women who need it. The support society to the Rajsamand Mahila Manch is Jan Vikas Sansthan (People's Development Organization) and was formed in 2003.

Astha prepared them for their work on women's issues and also organized various trainings for the women members and leaders, organized camps and conferences, supported them during the drought, etc.

### **Major Objectives --**

- Development of leadership in the Organization / Sangathan.
- Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality.
- Campaigning for Voter Awareness and Communal Harmony.
- Increasing the Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj processes
- Support to Widows, Separated, and Single Women.
- Stop the Violence and Atrocities committed against women and girls.

### **Highlights of the Work of Rajsamand Mahila Manch / Rajsamand Womens Forum:**

**Manch / Forum Level Meetings:** The Rajsamand Mahila Manch has organized regular monthly meetings. The purpose of these meetings is regular monitoring of the activities and follow-up of the programmes planned, and to monitor the progress in the cases of women's atrocities, and special cases that come up related to women's issues. The meetings organized are as follows :

- **Village level meetings:** 48 meetings every month in different villages of the Blocks of Rajsamand District.
- **District level meetings:** The workers of RMM, total 12 meetings were organized.
- **Case committee meetings:** 12 meetings were organized with active women of the Forum.

- **Sanchalak Mandal or Core Committee:** This meeting of the representatives of the 4 Blocks was organized 6 times in the year.
- The formation of the registered Society, **Jan Vikas Sansthan / People's Development Organization** was done to support the Mahila Manch, and there is a fixed date for the regular meetings.

#### **Campaign to stop Child Marriages from (9th April to 8th May) --**

Aside from regular campaign work around the period leading up to "Ahka Teej" RMM has selected one Gram Panchayat in each of the 4 Blocks and has had meetings with the villagers. The Rajsamand Women's Forum leaders and members talked with caste leaders, held rallies, street plays and night meetings in the villages, all on the issue of stopping the practice of child marriages.

#### **One Day Convention with Pundits --**

This unique convention of 60 Pundits (religious priests who perform marriages and conduct pujas) discussed the problems for young women and girls, and society, when girls and boys marry below the legal age, when girls and boys marry when they are still children. At the end of the convention, the Pundits took an oath that they will not conduct marriages when the boy was below the age of 21 and the girl was below the age of 18. The result of this initiative in many places in the 4 blocks is that child marriages have been stopped.

#### **Meetings with Caste Group Leaders of Communities --**

Members of the Forum talked with the local caste leaders of 3 caste communities namely, the Ahir caste, the Prajapat caste and the Sonar caste. The Forum encouraged them to play their role of problem solving cases of women-related issues and problems that come to them.

#### **Exposure Trip --**

Some women members of the Rajsamand Women's Forum made a 4 day educational exposure trip to Ahmedabad, Jamnagar, and Ganeshpur. They learned about how the working of literate women in the Ajanta factory, and they learned about the benefits of "Gomutra" (therapies with cow's urine) and for what ailments and how do people utilize the medicines.

### **JARGA AREA DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY (JARGA KSHETRIYA VIKAS SAMITI)**

In this year, the Jarga Area Development Society, based in Kumbalgarh Block of Rajsamand District, expanded its operational area to Amet Block in Rajsamand District and to the Saira tribal area in Gogunda Block, Udaipur District. The total membership of the Organization is approximately 4,000 men and women. The Core Committee of the Organization meets on the 15th of every month.

The Jarga Development Society works with adivasi people in Blocks and areas where the adivasis are not in the majority in the Blocks. The feudal and upper caste domination is a feature of all three areas where the Society works. Astha works with the leadership to help the Peoples' Organization to build up the strength of the tribal people in the area. Astha has strengthened the organizational leadership through training camps, workshops and a Women's Conference. The Organization has faced several challenges over the last year, including opposition from local influential people and conspiracies by the political parties to break the Organization. The Organization has withstood this opposition, and remained intact. The annual conference of the members of the Jarga Development helped to convey that the Society was strong, and was dealing with legitimate and important issues in the area. After this, more cooperation has been given at the administrative and political levels.

### **Major Objectives --**

- To prevent much of the exploitation and oppression that is now going on.
- To develop leadership in the Organization.
- To establish the tribal people's rights over their Forest Land homesteads, and their rights of access to natural resources.
- To work on Natural Resource Management and Income generating activities, and "value added" economic activities for Tribal poor people.
- To work on women's empowerment, and with the women, to decrease the excessive liquor consumption.
- To motivate the people of the area to be active in the local self-government processes, the Gram Panchayat and Panchayati Raj Institutions, and to access development resources through them.

Astha's role in relation to the Jarga Development Society was to support it and strengthen it. Astha organized many training programmes for the leaders and members of the Jarga Society – Group Leaders' Training, Leadership Training. Astha supported the leaders of the Society in organizing the Women's Convention and the large Annual Convention.

### **-- Major Highlights of the Year --**

Astha has helped the Society to organize regular meetings at various levels – monthly meetings of area level leaders, monthly Core Committee meetings of representatives from all 3 areas of operation. These meetings provide a platform to bring people together where they can raise their problems and plan collective efforts to solve the problems. Some of the problems the Jarga Development Society worked on in the last year were:

### **Migrant Labour --**

The macro economic policies affect local communities, and the lack of labour opportunities at the local level, and the decline in agriculture due to the fact that small marginal farmers are not a policy priority of the government, has led hundreds and thousands of men, and women too, to migrate out of the area in search of work. Many people from the area where the Jarga Society works, migrated to Gujarat for employment. The Jarga Development Society started one "Assistance Centre" for migrant labour. In addition, and with the help of one

supporting NGO partner, they provided technical trade training support, and enabled a few young men to increase their “marketable skills” so that they could earn more in the places where they go. Training was imparted for works in: light fitting, plumbing, welding, driving, and skills for cooks, waiters and room-boys in the hotel industry. Eleven young men attended the trade training and now they are working in the different places in the country, and earning more money than they would have as an unskilled labourer.

#### **Forest Land Issues --**

In this area, 891 families are residing on forest land, and have had their homesteads there for the last five decades. This Society is working with these tribal farm families on forest land rights issues, and are trying to get their land rights recognized by the government. The Jarga Development Society worked with the national level campaign trying to get the central government to pass the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill.

#### **Women’s Self Help Groups --**

The Jarga Society is running 26 women’s self-help groups. Four SHGs got themselves linked to the bank, and took a bank loan from the bank and started working on various micro-enterprise income generating activities.

#### **Right to Information Act --**

The Jarga Society members have been spreading awareness about the Right to Information Act recently passed by the government. On October the 13<sup>th</sup>, the Society started a “walking tour” or Padyatra of several days through the villages of Kumbalgarh Block, Rajsamand District. The Padyatra spread awareness of the RTI Act in 21 villages of the Block.

#### **The Debt Issue –**

The Jarga Society also decided to work on Debt issues, problems related to the debts of both money-lenders and banks, because this issue came up in the Block area, and Core Committee (Sanchalk Mandal) meetings.

### **VAGAD LABOURERS AND FARMERS ASSOCIATION (VAGAD MAZDOOR KISAN SANGATHAN)**

This Organization of the labourers and farmers in the Vagad region was formed in 1998 in order to take up the forestland rights issue and also to work on the implementation of the legislative provisions with regard to Tribal Self Rule in Dungarpur District. The Organization's efforts also aim to check displacement and solve the problems of the small marginal farm families.

In 1995 the forestland issue was emerging in and around Udaipur District as an urgent and upcoming issue. People from Dungarpur approached Astha with the request that they too should be associated with this work – “Please help us to get organized too.”

With Astha's experience in Kotra, Astha had seen the need to develop an organizing strategy of leadership development of the local people with Astha taking a low profile with few workers in the area. (In Kotra, where Astha had started its field work, with many workers, everyone knew "Astha". When Astha formed the "Tribal Development Forum", it was very difficult for the Forum adivasi leaders to establish their identity. Astha learned from this experience – the People's Organization's identity should be out front!) In 1995, Astha appointed 1 worker to Dungarpur, and he formed the Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization (Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan) which now works in the 5 Blocks of the District. Initially, the Sangathan members took up the issue of displacement from forestland homesteads, and were part of the "Jungle Jameen Jan Andolan". The registered support Society is "Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sansthan". The work has also expanded to Banswara District and the Organization works in 2 Blocks there, and has an office in Kushalgarh Block.

### **Major Objectives --**

- To make the adivasi people aware of the benefits of the Tribal Self Rule legislation, and to help them to become Village Republics with greater control over the resources of their villages, and what goes on there
- To bring into being strong Gram Sabhas of Village Republics so that they can govern their villages in the interests of the tribal citizens living there.
- To prevent displacement of the people of the area
- To stop corruption and exploitation of the poor people
- To make the government programmes and laws known to the people so that they can take advantage of the benefits of these programmes and laws
- To develop strong and aware leadership for the Organization, and to help that leadership to organize and maintain a strong structure of Block Level and District Level Committees to work with and for the poor people of the area

### **-- Major Highlights of the Year –**

Astha has helped the Organization to organize regular meetings at various levels – monthly meetings of Block Committee members, monthly Core Committee meetings of representatives from all 7 Block areas of operation. These meetings provide a platform to bring people together where they can raise their problems and plan collective efforts to solve the problems. Some of the problems the Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization has worked on in the last year were:

### **Tribal Self Rule --**

The organization is working in 2 Districts, namely, Dungarpur and Banswara. The Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization is working on Tribal Self Rule and as per the PESA Act, works with the committee and the Village Assembly (Gram Sabha) of the Village Republics of 105 villages of the Dungarpur and Banswara districts. These villages are helped to manage their villages, according to the provisions of the the PESA Act.

The committees of the Gram Sabhas of these 105 villages have been working with Astha to try to get the Government of Rajasthan to pass Rules which will

enable the provisions of the Rajasthan PESA Act to be implemented. Without Rajasthan Rules for the Rajasthan legislation, the tribal Village Republics have been relying on the central government legislation provisions. But there are contradictions at the state level – e.g. in rules and procedures in the Forest Department which auctions forest produce, in the Irrigation Department which does not yet recognize the tribal village's control over minor water bodies, etc.

Astha has also been working with the Tribal Self Rule Villages in Dungarpur, to work out the working interface between the Gram Panchayats of the PRI local self government system, and the Tribal Self Rule Villages which find themselves geographically included in the Gram Panchayat areas.

### **Forest Land Issue --**

The tribal farmers associated with the Vagad Organization have worked on the forest land issues with the national campaign for the passage by the central government of the Scheduled Tribals (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill 2005. The Organization is mobilizing people to join District, South Rajasthan region, State and National level demonstrations in favour of the Bill, to meet their M.P.s, to put pressure on the Government to pass this Bill.

### **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act --**

The Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization celebrated the launching of the NREGA on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, 2006. The Organization celebrated with MKSS and a big convention was held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February in which 600 people participated. In that convention, a decision was made to plan for a mass level social audit in Dungarpur District in the month of April 2006. It was planned that a national "walking tour" or Padayatra through the area, visiting work sites of the NREGA would be arranged. Astha's position in relation to NREGA is that we should try very hard to make it a success – it is an important "safety net" for the poor in the country in these times of crisis for survival with dignity. If the initial 200 Districts in the country are not successful in implementing this important employment guarantee scheme, the government will not expand it. Therefore, Astha, and the People's Organizations associated with Astha, are trying hard that the local rural people are aware of the formalities, procedures, and terms and conditions of the work.

### **Right to Information Act --**

In trying to get justice in labour wage payment struggles, in trying to make sure that truly poor families have been selected on the Below Poverty Line lists, in all kinds of situations, the new Right to Information Act provisions are helpful. Now, people have the right to get the information they need in order to make sure that the laws and policies are implemented as they should be. India's development problems have always centred around "implementation". Now that the People's Organization members are aware of programmes, plans, policies, laws, they are coming forward to make sure these are actually implemented! Awareness about the Act, and support to communities that tried to get information out of the government records, is a role of the P.O. In the past year, with the help of the

leaders of the Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization, information was obtained from the Gram Panchayat office records.

#### **Debt issue --**

The Vagad Organization decided to work on the Debt issue because this issue came from the village and regional meetings. It seems that the banks are “over-recovering” loans from the poor tribal farmers of Dungarpur, and are doing it knowingly. With the help of the Right to Information Act, bank records of nationalized banks and registered Cooperative Banks have to be made available. The Organization is helping members affected by this problem to save themselves from this corruption and exploitation. This problem is widespread.

#### **GORWARD TRIBAL ASSOCIATION (GORWARD ADIVASI SANGATHAN (GAS) )**

The Garasia tribals of Bali and Desuri Blocks of Pali District had been associated since 1998 with the “Jungle Jameen Jan Andolan” or the people’s campaign to fight displacement from tribal homesteads by the forest department. The people of these Blocks actively participated in the regional level meetings held on the forest land issue, and in 1999, formed their own area organization. It is primarily an adivasi organization, formed in an area where adivasis are in the minority, and the dominant feudal and upper caste attitudes create many problems for the tribal men and women. The Association is a support to its members when atrocities and hardships arise. Through the collective actions of the Association, the adivasis are trying to increase their self-confidence and strength, to take their place as citizens with full rights and duties. The support Society to GAS is “Mahidhar”.

#### **Major Objectives –**

- To fight oppression and exploitation inflicted on the members of the Association
- To improve the economic condition of the poor adivasi families of these 2 Blocks
- To build a strong Organization which can bring knowledge and analysis of socio-economic conditions to the members, and help them to plan and work together to solve problems faced.
- To develop leadership from amongst the members of the Association, both men and women leaders
- To fight attempts to displace the adivasi families from their forest land homesteads, and to try to get legal land ownership papers for their land
- To work for peace and communal harmony in the area
- To organize and empower the tribal women of the area

## **-- Major Highlights of the Year --**

### **Women's Saving and Loan Groups –**

The Association has formed 15 SHGs and the women have saved in total an amount of Rs. 71,321/-. These savings groups give the women an opportunity to get together to talk about the problems they face, and the money saved and loaned is helpful for the women's economic activities in the villages.

### **Income Generating Activities –**

In Kuran village with help of CAPART, Astha has been implementing a Scheme for rural development. The SHG there took a loan of Rs. 19,400/- and purchased grass bundles @ Rs. 2/- each bundle and sold them @ Rs.2.50 per bundle. This profit money deposited in the "Rupan Mata Women's Savings Group" account. This group had done the commercial activities purchase of the lentil, Tuwar Dal @ Rs. 1,400/- per quintal, and sold the lentils for Rs.1,500/- per quintel, and this profit was also deposited in the Rupam Mata Women's Saving Group account. A beginning has been made.

### **Income Generating Training Programme –**

The Gordwad Adivasi Association organized 1 training programme on Income generating activities for 5 members of each of the 15 women's saving and loan societies. The women were helped to see the economic potential of the activities they already do, and were encouraged to save collectively, and work collectively for mutual advantage.

### **Land Issues –**

The Association continued to work on forest land rights. Association members were part of the group from Southern Rajasthan who organized to build pressure to pass the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill. The strategy included rallies, and 40 persons from the Gordwad area took part in the rally in Jaipur in June 2005, and 82 people from Bali and Desuri Blocks also took part in the rally at the Udaipur divisional level, and were part of the "Sit-In" or "Dharna", and 72 people gone for the "Jail Bharo" or "Fill the Jails or pass the Bill" movement at Udaipur.

### **Drought Situation –**

The Gordwad Adivasi Association worked on the drought situation in the area. As a result of the pressure put on the Koilvav Gram Panchayat, the number of people taken on drought relief work in the Panchayat increased from 400 to 650.

### **Water --**

During the drought, Gordwad Adivasi Association worked on water conservation. Awareness was spread in the area about the thinking about water privatization, and how, if that policy were implemented, it would negatively affect their communities. The traditional patterns of water use were reinforced, especially in

relation to agriculture.

#### **NREGA and RTI –**

The Association worked on awareness about the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Right to Information Act. Work was started to build pressure and awareness about the need to select Pali District as one of the Rajasthan District for implementation of this employment guarantee programme.

#### **Awareness About the BPL Survey –**

In this year, the survey was going on to list the names of families who should be/would be selected as “Below Poverty Line” (BPL) families, and who would then benefit from the loans, grants, subsidies, preferences given in development programmes to BPL families. The Association worked on the BPL issue, and distributed pamphlets to create mass level awareness about the criteria, and the selection processes. The benefits for BPL families go on for at least 5 years. It is an important anti-poverty initiative.

#### **Old Age Pension Scheme –**

The Association took special interest in the implementation of the Old Age Pension scheme, and in Kuran Panchayat, 12 elderly Association members were helped to get their pensions.

#### **PDS --**

The Organization had worked on problems related to PDS – the Public Distribution System, and worked on spreading awareness about PDS provisions. The PDS is the system through which targeted families get foodgrains, sugar and kerosene at lower prices than the open market prices. It is a much-needed safety net in the present globalized/privatized economic scenario.

#### **P.C. Scheme with Support of CAPART –**

The Association implemented the “People’s Cooperation Scheme” (PC Scheme) in Kuran village. Many innovative activities to improve the income level of the women in the SHG were undertaken.

#### **Income Generating Activities --**

- **Awla (Gooseberry) Farming:** A beginning was made with 15 farmers in Kuran village who started Awla Farming with 20 saplings each. After 2 years, the farmers will get returns of about Rs. 12,000/- income annually from these trees.
- **Vegetable Growing:** The Association had started Onion farming with 15 families who showed interest in growing and marketing onions. In this first year, they were able to sell their onions for Rs. 4/- per kg. and they marketed the onions as “organically grown onions” as they had used the vermi-compost instead of chemical fertilizers.
- **Vermi-Compost:** 5 Families had made the beds of organic waste and earthworms, and used the vermin-compost produced on their fields. Their

yields increased in the maize and wheat crops.

- **Seeds Distribution:** The seeds for Corn, Urad or black lentils, Moong, Chillies and Vegetables were distributed to 75 farmers
- **Wasteland Development:** The women's groups took responsibility for the development of 18 hectares of wasteland. They constructed a boundary wall, and then planted 6000 plants of Ratan Jote (*Jatropha*, used in soap making, and also heralded as the new "bio-deisel" of India), 600 saplings of Awla, and Dhaman grass for fodder. The responsibility for the maintenance of the wasteland was taken by the women groups.

### **THE ASSOCIATION OF STRONG WOMEN ALONE (EKAL NARI SHAKTI SANGATHAN)**

In the year 2005-2006, the Association of Strong Women Alone expanded from 68 Blocks and 24 Districts to 82 Blocks and 26 Districts. Specifically,

<b>New Block</b>	<b>District Where the New Block is Located</b>
Amet Block	Rajsamand
Arai Block	Ajmer
Kishangarh Town	Ajmer
Choat ka Bardwara Block	Sawai Madhopur
Sultanpur Block	Kota
Sangod Block	Kota
Lal Soent Block	Dausa
Pipraleee Block	Siker
Sum Block	Jaisalmer
Hindoal Block	Karauli
Sapotra Block	Karauli
Mandor Block	Jodhpur
Berdi Sadri Block	Chittor
Niwai Block	Tonk

In this year, work was started in 2 New Districts – Karauli District, Jaisalmer District

The number of members of the Association by March 2006 stood at 18,169. The ongoing activities of the organization, of meetings and issue action continued at the village, town, Block, District, State levels of helping the members of the Association to solve their problems and live a life of dignity and respect. The planned Newsletters have

been published, pamphlets have been printed and distributed, Training Programmes for Block Committee members have been held, the Executive has met, the annual General Body meeting of the Organization of Strong Women Alone has met. The activities of special mention are listed below:

- a) **The follow-up to the Sangam or Convention of October 2004, Expansion to New States** – After the large (1,530 women alone from 11 states of the northern part of India) Convention of low-income widows and separated women, several of the participants from other states asked that the Rajasthan Association of Strong Women Alone (ASWA) come and help them to start work in their states with “ekal nari”. Special funds were raised, and in this past year, work has begun in Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand. In both states, there is a lead NGO of the state, which is facilitating the process. For each state, 6 Rajasthan Association women members have formed part of the teams to travel to the new states, and have held meetings with NGOs working with women, and NGOs in each state have been selected as lead NGOs for the work. In each of the 2 states, there was a convention of low-income widows and separated women from the state. 150 women attended the Himachal Pradesh convention, and 220 attended the Jharkhand convention. They each formed “follow-up” committees, which form the basis of the State Level Committee which will guide follow-up action. Jharkhand has had the follow-up meeting, and the processes for getting Block Level Committees formed in 37 Blocks of 16 Districts has begun. In Himachal Pradesh, the work will begin in 19 Blocks of 8 Districts. In Himachal, the thrust seems to be on getting Family Courts established, to deal with the problems of separated, abandoned, “thrown out” women. In Jharkhand, the women have begun to approach elected representatives about the need for a widow pension scheme for Jharkhand. The Block level structures are being formed.
- b) **The Reflection-on-Action Workshop of Land Rights Struggles Strategy, and Action on Land Issues** – After almost 2 years of work with widows on their land and property rights struggles, a meeting was held of key leaders of the Association and the NGO staff working with the Association (Astha, Udaipur and Hadoti Hast Shilp Sansthan, Kota). In this meeting, “reflection on action” was done – as a result of the various experiences, what have we learned about strategies. What is an effective strategy to work on widows land and property rights cases? Some of the findings are:
- (1) Do not go to the police stations and courts initially – the court systems are long and drawn out, expensive, and there are lots of loop holes in the law. Only as a last resort should a case be taken to the police and courts.
  - (2) When a widow approaches the Association about her case, the Block Level Committee should send a “verification and fact-finding” group of 2-3 Committee members to the village to find out about the case. Talk to neighbours, villagers, see the situation on the ground.
  - (3) If the case is genuine, then with the widow whose case it is, go to the land revenue clerk at the local level, and get a map of the disputed land clearly showing who is the owner on the records. If the owner was the husband or his father, then the widow has legal land rights.
  - (4) Then the Committee members, with the widow, will go to meet the Collector (the most senior administrative officer in the District) and ask him to come to the land on a fixed date, when the widow will publicly take possession of her land. From experience, we have seen that the Collector deposes another

officer to take his place. Then the Superintendent of Police is met, and he is asked to send police to the site at the date and time, to make sure no “law and order” problem breaks out. He deposes local police to the site. The senior land revenue officials are contacted (Tehsildar) and he is asked to come. The local revenue clerk is contacted, and he comes with his records. The local government elected leaders are invited, other women’s groups both government and non-government, and of course, the members of the Association of Strong Women Alone. Everyone shows up, and officially, it is affirmed that the widow is the owner of the land, and can have possession. In all of the cases, the illegal occupier of the land has not had the courage to attend. With political, administrative and people’s organizational support, the land possession for the widow has taken place. There is usually no problem for her in the future.

After this strategy has been worked out, based on experience, it has been disseminated to the Block Committees throughout the state.

Land Cases – Out of the 103 cases that were in the courts going into 2005, *all of the cases* have been solved. All but 17 cases were solved in favour of the widow members of ASWA – 86 cases successful for the women. Those that were unsuccessful were due to the fact that the women had given wrong information to the Association, and there was no strategy of an “investigation team” to go first to check out the ground realities of the case. There are now 43 more cases that have come to the Association during the year.

- c) **Advocacy Work During the Budget Session of the Rajasthan Legislature** – The Budget Session of the Rajasthan Assembly took place in April 2005. At that time, it was planned that about 100 members of the Association, who live not far from the state capital, would come to Jaipur to meet with the Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and the with the Ministers and Chief Minister, and ask them –
- to make financial provision to increase the widow and separated women’s pension from Rs. 200 per month to Rs. 1,000 per month,
  - to issue Health Cards to all low-income widows and separated women,
  - to pass an order that low-income widows and separated women would get priority on drought relief works,
  - to provide free education of sons and daughters of low-income widows and separated women up to the end of Class 12.

All on their own expense, close to 400 members of ASWA came to Jaipur, and stayed for 4 days, meeting their MLAs, and related Ministers. A press conference was held to put their demands before the public.

Ultimately, the results of this advocacy work was:

- The Chief Minister said that the pension would not be increased, but that each widow and separated woman who got a pension would also be eligible for 10 kilos of foodgrain free, every month, throughout the state.
- A Government Order (GO) was circulated that priority should be given to widows and separated women on drought relief.
- An order was issued that schooling for children of low-income widows and separated women should be free, that all fees should be waived.
- The Health Card issue was to be “considered”.

Up to the end of November 2005, the free foodgrain allowances had not begun. Delegations of ASWA had gone to the state capital on 3 occasions to press for action, and find out what was the problem. They managed to get a copy of the letter

from the Finance Department, which sanctioned the amounts for the grain. They took photocopies of this letter and gave them to the Food and Civil Supplies Department (who had not seen it!), and to the Social Welfare Department (the nodal department). *In December 2005, a Government circular was issued which outlined procedures for making lists of pensioners, and making procedures for the women to be able to get their free grain, and by March 2006, all widows who receive a widow pension all over the state are now receiving 10 kilos of free wheat every month!*

- d) **Changing Caste Customs** – There are many customs designed to marginalize widows, as they are considered inauspicious. Now, many cases are being reported from all over the state, in which widows are attending marriages, and taking part in the various ceremonies. They themselves are going.

#### **Case Study**

##### **-- The Story of Kamal Patik's Son's Marriage –**

Kamal Patik of Jhalra Patan Block of Jhalawar District is one of the leaders of ASWA. A few months ago, her son was to be married, and Kamal decided that she would attend the marriage and perform all of the functions that the parents of the groom must perform. Other members of ASWA also decided that they would present her with a bright red “chundari” (large square of red cloth worn over long skirt and blouse) to wear at the wedding ceremonies! Red is not a colour for widows, traditionally.

However, during the wedding celebrations before the marriage vows were exchanged, the ASWA members took Kamal onto the stage, and covered her with the red chundari! Everyone looked in wonder. Her in-laws initially were opposed, but when they saw the reaction of others present, they softened their opposition.

The women had also put a vermilion red streak on Kamal's forehead (“tilak”). When other widows who were attending the wedding, from both sides, saw this, they too came onto the stage and asked that a “tilak” be put on their foreheads too! They also wanted to feel good about themselves, and not relegated to the sidelines, looking and feeling as inconspicuous as possible.

There was singing, dancing by the women. The local newspaper covered the event, complete with a photograph. Changing caste and community customs that are cruel is an important part of the work of ASWA, for it changes the quality of life for the low-income widows and separated women of the state.

- e) **Networking -- Participation in Nepal and Chennai Regional Meetings** – An international meeting was organized in Kathmandu, Nepal by the “Women for Human Rights – Single Women Group” between May 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. An Executive Member of ASWA and a worker from Astha attended. At that meeting, a South Asian Network for Widow's Empowerment in Development (SANWED) was formed. SANWED held its first regional meeting in Chennai, India December 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>, and a (different) member of the ASWA Executive, and a worker from the Association of Strong Women Alone attended. This is the beginning of the Association itself making network linkages around the issue of widows and separated women.

- f) **State Level Convention – “Small Sangam”** -- The Association of Strong Women Alone was formed out of a state-wide Widow Convention which was held in November 1999, to which 425 widows attended. Five years later, in October 2004, a big convention was organized by ASWA in which over 1,500 widows and separated women participated, from 11 states of India. The State Level Committee of ASWA felt that, in the years between the 5-year big events, a small state convention could be held each year. February 6-8, 2006, a state level convention was held in Jaipur, to which 350 women attended. About 5 women attended also from Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand. The objective of the convention was to give women who had not participated in the big convention a chance to feel part of a large movement, to give visibility to the Association in the state through press coverage, and to forge new linkages. One linkage was made with the National Commission for Women in this convention.
- g) **Meeting with National Commission for Women Chairperson, Dr. Girja Vyas** -- After the February convention, Dr. Girja Vyas came to meet some of the key members of the State Level Committee and Executive of ASWA on March 19th. She indicated that she would like to launch a government initiative to make people aware of government programmes, called “Chalo, Gaon ki Aur” with the Association of Strong Women Alone. The women said they were ready, and we are waiting for the Chairperson to have time to do it. Likewise, after hearing about the work ASWA had done on widows land rights, she said that she would like to have a Public Hearing on Women’s Land Rights in Rajasthan, with ASWA.
- h) **June 1, Women’s Empowerment Day Organized by ASWA** -- All over the state, in the Districts where ASWA has established at least one Block Committee, Women’s Empowerment Day was celebrated. The pattern is a Meeting, followed by a Rally, followed by the giving of a petition of demands to a senior government officer/elected representative. In most places, the event was celebrated at the Block level, with members of the Association from the Block coming together. In a few places (Ajmer and Kota), the events were at the District level. And in some places, the events were at the Gram Panchayat level. The press coverage is increasing, as the women themselves call photographers, take pictures, and give them along with Press Notes to the local press. Members participate, but also others in the villages, Blocks and Districts who think that women’s empowerment is a good idea.
- i) **Deepa Mehta, the Film “Water” and A Follow-up Film** -- Deepa Mehta, an Indian film-maker living in Canada, has made a beautiful film on widows in India, situated about 1937, with the action around women in a widow ashram in Benares/Varanasi. The film has been released in many countries, and she has been contacted from people all over the world, wanting to know what the present situation is for widows in India today. She has contacted Astha, and through Astha to ASWA, and she wants to make another film from the perspective of widows as strong women, organized and aware. She will keep in touch with us on this. There is also some correspondence about how her film shown in India could benefit ASWA.
- j) **Strengthening the Work and Taking It Forward**

Block Committee Members Training – There have been 2 training programmes in this period

- i) 25 – 28 May, 2005 for Block Committee Members in the Jodhpur Cluster – Phalodi Block, Osia Block of Jodhpur District, Sum Block of Jaisalmer District, and Sindhari and Chautan Blocks of Barmer District. Held in Balotra, Barmer District
- ii) 5-8 June, 2005 for Block Committee Members from Rajsamand and Amet Blocks, and 3 Blocks of Ajmer District. Held in Pushkar, Ajmer District
- iii) 23-26 October, 2005 in the Astha Training Centre, Bedla, Udaipur. For the Committee Members of the following Blocks: Pratapgarh (Chittor District), Gerdi and Anandpuri (both in Banswara District), Gogunda and Girwa (both in Udaipur District)
- iv.) 9 – 12 January, 2006 for the Committee Members of the urban and town areas (i.e. Kota, Tonk, Ajmer, Kishangarh town, Sawai Madhopur city) held at Pushkar, Ajmer District
- v) February 24 – 27, 2006 for rural Block areas

State Level Committee Meetings –

- i) 30-31 July, 2005 in Udaipur
- i ii) 26-27 November 2005 in Bundi
- ii iii) 4-5 March, 2006 in Jaipur

Executive Committee Meetings

- 8 June, 2005 in Pushkar, Ajmer District
- 24-25 September, 2005 in Jaipur
- 28 – 29 January, 2006 Jaipur (before the state convention)

**j) Organizational Matters**

**a) ASWA Members Take More Worker Responsibility --**

In the Executive Committee meeting held at Pushkar, June 8, 2005, it was decided that as the Association expands, the responsibility for overall responsibility for work at the Block level, should ultimately go to literate and able members of the Association. The 2 support NGOs, Astha and HHSS, should not continually expand their full-time staff to do ASWA work. As an experiment, it was decided to appoint 3 able Association workers to take responsibility for selected Blocks in each of the 2 clusters – Kota Cluster 3 women, and Udaipur Cluster 3 workers. These women have been conducting the Block Committee Members Meetings, and helping the Block Committee Members with follow-up action arising from the meetings. The experiment seems to be working well – in many cases, the Association of Strong Women Alone members are more effective than the NGO workers!

This is one way in which the NGOs supporting ASWA are trying to hand over the running of ASWA to the women.

- b) The Association **opened a regional office in Ajmer City** in this period.
- c) The **audit of the books of accounts** of the Organization of Strong Women Alone, the registered body of low-income widows and separated women, was completed in this period. The Organization has obtained a Permanent Account Number (PAN) and exemption from income tax under sections 12A(a) and 80G have been applied for.

*(The mass membership organization of the Association of Strong Women Alone, with over 19,000 members, is unregistered. The Registered Society, the Organization of Strong Women Alone, with 62 members -- 2 widows or separated women from each District associated with ASWA, plus 10 well-wishers and social workers to help the Organization with fund-raising and organizational matters.)*

k) **The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme** – All of the Districts selected in Rajasthan for implementation of the NREGA are Districts in which the Association of Strong Women Alone has work in at least one Block. The Scheme – to provide 100 days of labour per year to rural households who register and hold a Job Card, and who request work – is being publicized amongst the ASWA members. In 20 Blocks, Single Women are spreading the word, mobilizing, monitoring, working:

- in 2 Blocks in Banswara District,
- in 4 Blocks in Dungarpur District,
- in 7 Blocks in Udaipur District,
- in 2 Blocks in Sirohi District,
- in 2 Blocks in Karauli District,
- in 3 Blocks in Jhalawar District

*The Association of Strong Women Alone – an Organization of Women Alone, helping each other, to live lives of dignity, strength, and more prosperity than they had before*

### **Case Study**

#### **Rescuing the Life of Manju Joshi**

Manju Joshi, a separated woman from Mawli Block, Udaipur District, came to a meeting of the Kamnor Block Committee, Rajsamand District, and asked for help. There is no Block Committee in Mawli Block, and she had heard of the Association, and attended the meeting that was closest to her home. She recounted that her husband (a seller of milk) was such a cruel and inhuman person, that in a fit of rage in a fight with her, he had taken a huge knife and cut off both her arms from above the elbows! Manju was living in her parental home, and had to be helped with everything. She was living with her aged parents, and her mother supported her and her father by doing daily wage labouring. The Astha NGO worker brought this case to the monthly staff meeting, and a phone call was made to Jaipur to a private Trust there. The “Jaipur Foot” is famous world-wide – those who have lost a foot or a leg can have an artificial limb fitted. Great strides have been made technologically in the mobility of the ankle, foot and leg. But we did not know if they also handled cases related to arms. The Trust said they did, and they asked that Manju be sent to Jaipur on any weekday, and the work would be done free of cost. Parveen Banu, of the Astha ASWA Team, went with Manju, and arms were fitted with a plastic-rubber type material hand that can grasp and release things. Manju was instructed in how to wear and use the artificial arms, and she was also given Rs. 3,000 to start a small shop in her home – the Rs. 3,000 would be used to purchase the start-up items. She started her shop, and learned to do many things for herself while wearing her “arms”. After 6 months, she was told to return to Jaipur for a check-up, and she and Parveen again went. The Trust was so happy with her effort and her progress, that they gave her another Rs. 1,000 to expand the items in her shop! Without the Association to reach out to, this woman’s quality of life would have been tragic.

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- Facilitating financial, marketing and legal assistance and support.
- Lobbying with them for changes in existing policies, rules, laws and the introduction of new ones.
- To increase the exposure and awareness through training, workshops and study tours.
- To undertake surveys, research and documentation work around issues relating to

various forest products.

- To facilitate and promote networking and linkages among groups, societies and organizations.
- To assist in improving the organizational and financial capabilities of the existing groups and societies.
- To facilitate the formation of new groups and societies.

**-- Major Highlights of the UNDP Activities During the Year --**

S.No.	Description of Program	For whom	Beneficiaries	Sale Amount/Numbers.
1.	Collection of Minor Forest Produce.	17 SHGs	17 SHGs Members.	—
2.	Storage facility provided for MFP.	17 SHGs	17 SHGs	—
3.	Minor Forest Produce Marketed.	17 SHGs	17 SHGs	231175
4.	Sale of Ratan jote	17 SHGs	17 SHGs ,Members.	250,000
5.	Plantations	4 Clusters		103341 Numbers.
6.	Cultivation of Vegetables	4 Clusters	424 Families	
7.	Vermi Compost bed provided.	2 Clusters	20 Families	80 kg Worms
8.	Provide Revolving Loan	4 Clusters	14 SHGs	195000
9.	Training Program on leaderships record maintenance , Value addition, staff, Proper harvesting.	17 SHGs	357	11 Numbers.
10.	Organized awareness camps on Forest Reserve, MFPs, and Medicine's Value.	4 Clusters	17 SHGs Members and villagers of the clusters.	5 Camps
11.	Exposure Trip on Minor Forest Produce Process, Marketing on MFPs, SHGs functioning.	4 Clusters	69	3 Places.

**Research and Documentation --**

- Study on the production potential of Ratanjyot (*Jatropha*) and its marketing channels in the UNDP project areas of the Samarthak Samiti Udaipur
- Potentials of minor forest produce as additional livelihood options for tribal people in our project areas and market analysis of establishing an oil expeller in the project area.
- Study on the production and uses of puhar (*Cassia tora*)
- Market survey for establishing a sale outlet for minor forest produce.

## **SUPPORT UNITS**

### **THE ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT UNIT THE DOCUMENTATION SUPPORT UNIT THE TRAINING CENTRES THE LITERACY SUPPORT UNIT**

The Administrative Support Unit, the Documentation Support Unit and the Training Centres are all parts of Astha which support the Resource Units, and the People's Organizations. The Administrative Support Unit staff gave support in accounts and did financial planning with the Units and P.O.s. The Unit also managed the inflow of money and payments needed, gave financial statements to the Units and P.O.s about their balances, and gave audited documents and other statements to donors, and government when needed. The Documentation Support Unit supported the Units and P.O.s, as well as other NGOs, People's Movements and Campaigns in Rajasthan, and beyond. The 2 Training Centres of Astha, in Udaipur and in Kotra, with residential training facilities, were well used by the Astha Team, and by other NGOs and government departments working with the poor.

#### **Administrative Support Unit --**

The Administrative Support Unit covered the financial accounting support and other work for the programme staff team. The following were the activities performed by the Administrative Support Unit:

- Daily basis office management.
- Maintain the books of accounts, and handle banking and financial accounting work, payments, budgets.
- To manage the Tax Deducted at Source (TDS), Provident Fund and Gratuity Fund debits, Income Tax returns, and other official certificates and accounts reporting on behalf of the organization
- To give active support in organizing the trainings in Accounts, by being resource persons in the trainings.
- Support in purchasing, printing, publications, mail dispatch.
- Computer typing of the reports, programme plans, letters, documents and other materials needed by the programme Units and P.Os.
- Human Resource related works, prepare personnel files of staff, issuing office orders, appointments other administrative letters
- Correspondence related work including inward mail and outward despatch.  
E-mail management of letters and reports sent and received
- Management and logistical support for guests / sick people from the field who come to Udaipur for treatment / study tours
- Book rail, bus and air tickets of for the staff

- Anything else that is needed!

### **Documentation Centre Support Unit --**

Publications: The Documentation Centre published the 4 editions of Hal Kara every quarter in the year on behalf of the People's Organizations Resource Unit. This Centre published pamphlets about BPL family selection, the importance of attending Gram Sabha meetings, and others. The staff also took major responsibility for press notes after major events.

The Doc Centre supported the publication of the book which documents the 10 year history of the Forest Land People's Movement, (the Jungle Jameen Jan Andolan) titled "Aapni Dharti Ke Liye" (For Our World) and provided the resource materials to the author.

Photography support was given, for both photographs and video, to most of the programmes conducted by the programme teams of Astha.

### **The Library Support**

**Support to People Organizations conventions, Exhibitions and training programs** - Training programs of Azag Academy two phases have given the support to help in the exhibitions. In Milan Mela of Adivasi Vikas Manch Kotra provided the support in exhibitions. Adivasi Mahila Jagiriti Sansthan have given the support in the preparation of exhibition of the convention at Paliyakheda Village of Jhadol block and provided the support in the rights-based issues workshop in Tidi of Girwa block of Udaipur district.

### **Manage the Library Resource Centre -**

- Provided assistance on the Library management for The Hunger Project Rajasthan Jaipur, in its collaborative work with the Local Self Governance Resource Unit.
- Prepared materials for camps and training programs for People Organizations.
- Provided materials to more than 200 students from the MSW colleges from all parts of India in the whole year.
- Provided materials to Visitors about the work of Astha.
- Collected resource materials on current topics like NREGA, RTI, Water Resources and other topics.
- Promoted the sale of Astha's Publications

### **Library / Documentation Centre Resources:**

S.NO.	Materials	Numbers
1.	Books ( 75 new books)	3125
2.	Magazines, New letters, Journals	40 Hindi and 25 English
3.	Posters	700
4.	Video Cassettes	140
5.	Video CDs	30
6.	News Papers cuttings	1996 to 2006 Astha's works
7.	Reports of Astha's Activities	1986 to 2006

## **Training Centres --**

Astha has 2 Training Centres -- 1 in Kotra, Udaipur District, and the second one is the main Training Centre at Chotta Bedla on the outskirts of Udaipur. The Kotra Training Centre handled the training programmes and meetings of the Tribal Development Forum, and its support Society (Kotra Adivasi Sansthan) which covers leadership training, issue-base trainings, planning meetings, project implementation meetings and organizational meetings of the Core Committee (Sanchalak Mandal ). The Astha Training Centre at Chotta Bedla, Udaipur provided the training facilities for the Astha Team to organize training programmes and meetings throughout the year – often there was more than one event going on at a time! The Astha Training Centre is also available for other NGOs and organizations to hold their events, so long as the organization is working with and for the poor.

## **Literacy Support Unit –**

Astha has developed a crash, condensed, residential, literacy programme for leaders of People's Groups and Organizations. This resource continues to be made available to the People's Organizations, and to leaders of groups in the project work of other NGOs.

## **Highlights**

These 20 day literacy courses are conducted in the three phases. This course enables the participants to read and write, and as a result of the discussions and case studies woven into the course, they can also understand the socio-economic conditions of their own villages. The participants are already leaders of people's groups and organizations, and the course gives them skills to strengthen their leadership capacity.

In this financial year, there were 10 camps for phase One, and 275 participants (women and men) attended from different districts of Rajasthan. There were 6 Phase Two follow-up camps of 245 participants, and 4 Phase Three follow-up camps organized in different places.

Many NGOs contacted the Astha Literacy Team -- Vishakha, Rajasthan Lok Vikas Sansthan Salumber, BAIF Baghpura, Progress Sansthan Banswara, Lok Vikas Samiti Pai Jhadol, Gandhi Manav Kalyan Society Ogana Jhadol, Manav Ashrita Sansthan Kherwara, Seva Mandir Kotra. Astha organized the literacy camps in partnership with these organizations, for the leaders of their groups in various projects.

A "Training of Trainers" course was organized for the NGO Unnati of Jodhpur, with and for their organizations of Panchayati Raj Institutions' elected men and women. 32 Instructors for trainer teams were trained by Astha, for work in Western Rajasthan.

## **Impacts of Literacy Camps**

After the Completion of 3 phases of literacy, the training team can see the impact of the programme . Many success stories can be heard. From Kotra, two people who attended the camps, Ramjhu Bhai and Mohan Lal now teach in the Government Primary School in their village because the Teacher is not coming to school regularly, and so

they are teaching the children! Also from Kotra, Rewa Ram has taken an oath about liquor and he will not take liquor again, and he is working on a liquor free movement in the villages. One woman, Kaduli Bai, has improved her social and economic condition and now she is working as a health worker in the Swasthya Karmi Yojna, a village health project of the government. She has formed one SHG of 20 women in her village and she is keeping the accounts of the group in her village.

### **LOOKING FORWARD**

The current program cycle comes to an end in March 2007. Considerable time has been spent on developing the next 3 year programme proposal through a participatory and consultative process. The future will see the People's Organizations moving to even greater self-sufficiency and self-direction. The Resource Units which have been more recently formed, will expand their work, and deepen the scope of the work.

In view of the growing demand and need it is planned that in the coming 3 years there will be one more Resource Unit namely: The People's Education and Culture Resource Unit. The literacy work will fit in here, and also there will be educational experiments in tribal areas.

Astha will continue as a "Field Based Resource Organization" – because of the field base, the resource work with other organizations and work on new laws and policies is grounded in rich experience; because of the resource work on issues with people and organizations in other places, the field work is enriched by the workers who bring back insights, analysis, news from "the outside world", from broad contacts around the state and around the country.

In this financial year under reporting, Astha has completed 20 years of work, work with "Faith in The People". We can look back – to the first little office in Kotra, a rented room which was office, residence, kitchen, store! ...to the first Padayatra in Kotra... to the tendu leaf struggle which taught us so much. But we are looking forward, for ways that Astha can work with the people to affirm their strength and capacity, for ways that Astha can work with The People to bring in more justice and sustainability in the work we do.

Astha is working for structural change – We see structural change in 3 ways:

- (1) People's Organizations are structures, human structures. Before, when people were not organized, society didn't have to deal with "the poor", with "women", with "labourers", etc. A poor landless person, illegally occupying a piece of government land, could be easily thrown out; a woman raising her voice against unequal wage payment could be dropped from the labour gang; a labourer protesting against the absence of safety measures, could be dropped off the labour list the next time around. But organized, then the society has to listen! People's Organizations challenge existing power structures. In India, with an excellent Constitution, and a lot of good social legislation, there is a lot of scope for justice if people are organized – legal justice, natural justice, and the power of humanitarian action for what is right.
- (2) Laws are part of the structures that regulate and control society. Working for changes in laws, or for constitutional changes, is also one way to work for structural

change. Once the law has been made or amended, or there is an amendment to the Constitution, society is never the same again – the structure has been changed.

- (3) Social customs which violate the general constitutional right of “equality”, “dignity”, which are cruel, or destructive of the social fabric, but which are difficult to correct with laws, are also areas of concern and action for Astha. Patriarchy, caste-ism, customary practices towards widows, excessive liquor consumption, bigamy, religious intolerance, corruption, dereliction of duty, disregard for the law, etc. are examples. Therefore, structural change also necessitates changes in norms and customs.

And when we Look Forward, we are not pessimistic – indeed, we are optimistic!

Our “astha” or “faith” in The People is not misplaced.

With The People, Astha will Go Forward!

## **APPENDICES**

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