

Ashankur

Empowering Rural Women



Annual Report 2008-'09

The year 2008-'09 was another vibrant year for Ashankur. Our work continued in 22 villages of three Talukas, irrespective of religious bias, and with a preference for the socio-economically weaker sections. This year, 16 new SHGs were initiated in the operational villages.

At the main centre, 87 young girls completed their residential vocational training in Nurses Aid, Computer literacy, Dress designing, and Electronics.

22 NGOs (Non-governmental organizations) from Maharashtra and Gujarat were supported by the capacity building program under the EC project, and 1250 school drop-out women/youth were trained for various skills training, through partner NGOs.

The aim of our programs remains Women's Empowerment. Our focus this year was on Human Rights awareness and capacity building of staff. Accordingly, besides our regular programs, some additional activities were planned.

HIGH LIGHTS OF VILLAGE OUTREACH

Securing Basic Rights:

This year, Ashankur focused its efforts on building awareness among women of their basic human rights. To achieve this, we conducted a training for our staff and village leaders. This was followed up in the monthly meetings in the villages and the quarterly meetings with the women leaders.

A BPL (Below Poverty Level) card, provided by the Government, entitles poor families to grain and oil at concession rates. In three villages, our women who are entitled to this subsidy but not on the BPL list, got together and approached the concerned Government officers to fight their cause. After 6 months of relentless effort, the Government rechecked their survey and around 40 deserving families were issued BPL cards. Our women feel proud of their success. This has become

example to the women in the District. Women in other villages are following suit. The Government is now obliged to revise the BPL lists, if entitled families have been dropped.

In village Malwadgaon, the entitled families had the BPL cards, but were not receiving even half of the allocated quota of grains. Whatever they got, too, was of very low quality. All the 60 SHG women from Malwadgaon got together to discuss the matter. They met the Rationing agent several times, requesting him to remedy the situation. Since these efforts did not bear fruit, the women went to the Taluka headquarters and held a demonstration in front of the Tahasil office. Within a few days, the Tahasildar sent his staff to conduct an investigation, resulting in a suspension of the Rationing agent for a month. After being issued a warning to follow the Government norms, his suspension was revoked. Now the whole village receives proper rations. This has alleviated the problem of many poor families who struggle for their daily bread.

Besides the issue of the food ration, the women have also approached the local Government to remedy their village water and sanitation problems.

In village Brahmangaon, the women from the Dalit hamlet had to walk 1.5 km every day to get drinking water. Once the women learnt about the Government water supply scheme, they fought for their rights with lot of determination. Finally, a hand-pump was installed very close to their houses, easing the burden of 30 women, saving their time and energy.

Income Generation Activities:

300 women continued their income generation activity with the support of Ashankur. This year, another 160 women have taken up various income generation activities following are the details of Income Generation activities initiated in 2008-09:

Sr. No	Activity	Number of Women
1	Dairy	32
2	Grocery shops	9
3	Goat rearing	7
4	Tailoring and Rexene	17
5	Noodles machines	14
6	Meals for School children (3 SHGs)	40
7	Statue making	9
8	Snacks & Food processing	2
9	Soya processing	3
10	Poultry	2
11	Cloth shops	5
12	Incense sticks production	12
13	Rabbit rearing	8
	Total:	160

Besides the above 56 widows, who do not own any land or fit into the Government pension scheme, were given a goat each to provide support.

AT THE MAIN CENTER

The following residential Vocational trainings for school drop-out girls/women were conducted at the Center. Ongoing coping-skill sessions and seminars on personality development were part of this program.

Most of these trainees did not have a chance to complete their school education. A few have had traumatic experiences in their early marriage and had nowhere to turn to. These girls now have the skills and confidence to cope with life in society with dignity. I am happy to share with you that over 50% have already started earning a livelihood either by self-employment or by jobs in the Hospital. You have given these women and their families a new lease of life.

Nurses Aid – This year 29 girls from 5 districts of Maharashtra received training. Among these, 9 girls were deputed by two NGOs from Pune and Amravati. The Sisters of St. Luke’s Hospital graciously provided our girls with a 4-month practical training in their Hospital. We are happy to share with you that 21 of the 25 trainees in the previous batch have been employed in various hospitals.

Computer Literacy - 18 girls were trained in two batches, and 7 have already been employed.

Fashion Designing - 28 girls were trained, and 15 have already set up business at home.

Rexene work - 20 girls were trained, and were immediately able to get orders for farmers kits from the Agriculture Department.

Electronics - 10 girls were trained in Electronics and house appliance repairs. The training was conducted by St. Xavier Technical School, Shrirampur.

Ashankur Staff:

After seven years of working in the area, the Ashankur team felt the need for updating their skills. Accordingly, key areas were identified and the following workshops were organized over the year:

1. Residential Workshops:

- a. 5-day PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) training
- b. 3-day Strategic Planning
- c. 3-day Contextual Analysis
- d. 2-day Communication Skills

2. Exposure visit to NGOs in Udayapur sharing a common vision (5 days).

Workshop for capacity building of like-minded NGOs in Ahmednagar District

1. PRA training
2. Project writing
3. Contextual analysis

LIASONING WITH GOVERNMENT

- This year, the Maharashtra Government invited us to capacitate the Taluka Panchayat Samitee employees and Grampanchayat office bearers for the Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF). Accordingly, three workshops were organized for Panchayat Samitee Officers, Gramsevakas, and Sarpanchas.
- The Agriculture Department continued placing their orders for farmer's kits with us.
- Experimental seed distribution (before monsoons) for Shrirampur Taluka was done through us. The Agriculture Department provided 200 women farmers with free seeds for 1 acre plots each.
- Following up with the Tahasil office, 35 widows were sanctioned pension under the Pension Scheme.
- 33 Government and Non-Government Organizations from 12 Districts of Gujarat and Maharashtra sent their SHG groups to Ashankur for exposure visits and exchange programs.

OTHER ACTIVITIES AS PER REQUEST AND NEED

- 4 MSWs from Pune and Aurangabad Universities completed their Block placement with us.
- 35 school-going children were given note-books and uniforms.
- 3 children of HIV AIDS-affected parents were rehabilitated in a special Boarding School
- A general Health Camp was conducted in village Bhokar. 550 villagers received treatment at the Camp.
- 2 Libraries were opened in villages Bhokar and Ghumandev.

WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION

Women's day is one of the main events celebrated at Ashankur. This year, around 2500 women participated. Various SHGs and NGOs set up 22 stalls for sale of various food products, garments, jewellery and handicrafts. Now that our Women's Day celebrations are well known in the area, many NGOs and women not connected with Ashankur contact us well in advance to confirm the date of the celebration and join us on their own.

A three-hour program was inaugurated at the hands of Mrs. Sasane, the wife of the local MLA . The stalls were inaugurated by Mrs. Lagad, the Vice-President of the Big Bazar Committee of Maharashtra. The women from the villages had prepared various skits on village issues. Two groups of elderly women performed a group dance to traditional songs, which was a life-time experience for them. Besides the skits and awareness songs, there were two prominent speakers, Advocate Nisha Shirurkar and Mrs. Gadak, addressed the women's gathering. Adv. Nisha stressed that the best way to bring about gender equality in society is for a woman to recognize her own strength and potential, and become a beacon of hope to other women in the vicinity. She maintained that policies and laws are necessary, but can only play limited role. Mrs .Gadak encouraged the women to speak out and make their point of

view heard in the family and society. She also gave few business tips to market their home made products. With her presence, a linkage with the Big Bazar and our SHGs seems a real possibility.

The Cultural program concluded with the Ashankur staff song – with the message to the women that they are delicate in their looks but strong in their person, and so they must believe in their inner strength.

This was followed with the community meal for everyone. The women went home happy and enthused with hope.

Our sincere thanks to all our donors and well-wishers with ought whose support this work would not have been possible.

Ashankur Rural Women Centre

Village Bhokar, Tal. Shrirampur

Dist.Ahmednagar, Maharashtra India, 413 709

Phone:02422–245649

ashwomen@rediffmail.com

www.ashankur.org