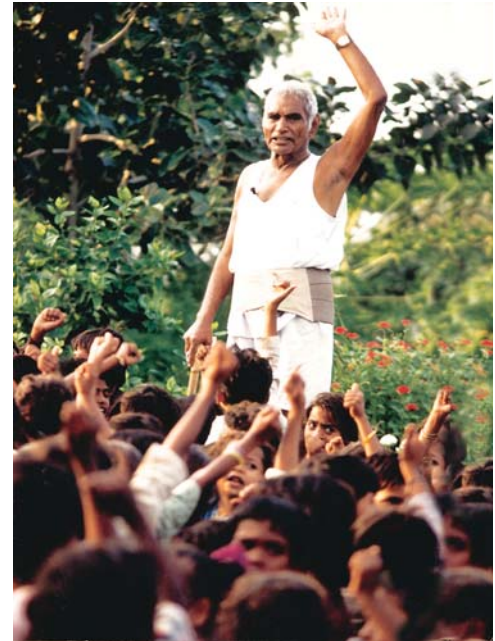




SAMAJ PRAGATI SAHAYOG

Over the last two decades, Samaj Pragati Sahayog (SPS) has grown to be one of India's largest grass-roots initiatives for water and livelihood security, working with its partners on a million acres of land across 72 of India's most backward districts, mainly in the central Indian Adivasi belt. We take inspiration from the life and work of Baba Amte (our *Pramukh Sahayogi*) who rejected charity and successfully empowered even the most challenged. SPS is headquartered in a drought-prone, tribal area in the Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh, which typifies the most difficult problems of the country. We concentrate all our direct interventions in about 220 villages and towns of this area. This work is not so much a model as a *living laboratory of learning* for others to adapt to their own areas. To facilitate this mutual learning, in 1998 we set up the Baba Amte Centre for People's Empowerment in tribal village Neemkheda, where our watershed work began in the early 1990s.

SPS believes that location-specific watershed development combined with low-cost, low-risk agriculture, other nature-based livelihoods and women-led microfinance, can dramatically raise rural incomes, providing an enduring panacea to India's suicide-ridden drylands. This approach arrests distress migration towards the metros and liberates the rural poor from the clutches of usurious moneylender-traders. Our central mandate is the empowerment of India's most disadvantaged people – women, Adivasis, Dalits and the poor, which we believe contributes to strengthening our fragile democracy at the grass-roots.





WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT



SPS has taken up 45,000 acres for direct implementation of watershed programmes spread over 34 villages, spending Rs. 60 million. This has generated nearly a million person-days of employment. The total storage capacity of the water harvesting structures created by SPS is over 1 million cubic

metres. This has had the primary impact of ensuring drinking water security to all households in these villages. Rabi irrigation has shown a rise of 300% and the overall irrigation ratio has more than doubled. A significant impact of the work has been drought-proofing of the kharif crop. As in any typical dryland region, rainfall in our area is low, highly erratic and characterized by long dry spells between rainy days. Water harvesting structures help farmers tide over this crisis by providing crucial “life-saving” protective irrigation. We see the watershed programme as crucial public investment to incentivise private investments by even the poorest farmers on their own lands.

The value of agricultural output has gone up mainly due to expansion in irrigated area and higher per hectare yields. The yield of kharif (mostly rainfed) crops has shown a rise in the range of 10-20% and that of rabi (mostly irrigated) crops has shown a rise of 50-60%. Overall, the value of production of kharif and rabi crops together has gone up in the range of



80-160%. The Benefit-Cost Ratio ranges from 1.49 to 1.96 and Internal Rate of Return on investments from 30% to 49%. An 80% reduction in external migration has been observed during the years of ongoing watershed implementation. With significant expansion in irrigated area and crop



productivity, high labour absorption in agriculture is visible even after the watershed programme closes. It is this “sedimented employment” which reduces external migration from the area in the long run. Hundreds of tribal farmers who have grown a single rainfed crop all their lives are now cultivating 2-3

crops. Many have returned home after years to reclaim land they had virtually given up for good.

Our work has broken with conventional wisdom by recognising that watershed development is not just about harvesting rainwater; it is also about sharing it equitably and managing it collectively. Whenever our dams are built, written agreements are forged about water sharing, hours of pumping, sequence of irrigation, cropping patterns and watering intensities. In many cases, all households irrespective of their size of land holding are entitled to an equal share of the water. Our emphasis on equity and transparency has often met with severe resistance from vested interests. Our response has been non-violent, collective *satyagraha*, always aimed at building common ground with those opposed to us.

SPS Core Team members Rangu Rao, Murlidhar Kharadia and Milind Pandit lead the watershed team.



SHG-BANK LINKAGE



We believe that the full potential of our watershed work can only be realised if it is supplemented by a microfinance programme. This is essential if we are to ensure long-term livelihood security to the poor. We are also convinced that no microfinance programme can be successful until it is tied up with livelihood programmes such as agriculture, dairying, marketing etc. Thus,

microfinance and livelihood programmes are complementary to each other and their simultaneous implementation is the key to poverty alleviation. Incomes raised through livelihood initiatives need to be saved. Of these women are the best custodians. These savings must be reinvested in livelihood options that in turn raise incomes, setting up a virtuous cycle.

Our microfinance programme is based on the Self Help Group-Bank Linkage (SBL) model. Over the last four years, we have formed about 900 women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with around 14,000 members. Most members of these SHGs belong to marginalised sections, such as the poor, Adivasis, Dalits, landless and displaced people. Our SHGs offer their members a range of financial products including interest on savings, recurring deposits, fixed deposits, loans against fixed deposits, loans for genuine needs and emergencies (the veracity of each of which is judged by



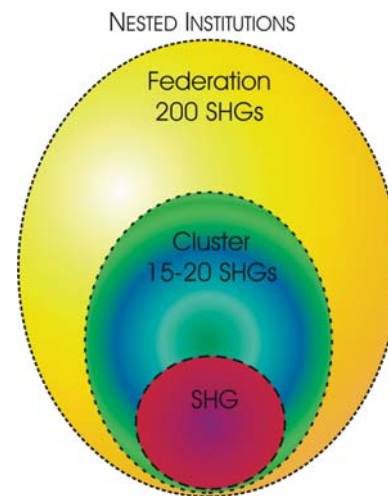
the members themselves), loans for cattle and well construction, cattle insurance, life insurance etc. So far SPS SHGs have saved a total of Rs. 20 million and provided loans worth Rs.100 million to their members. Individual loans range from Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 30,000.

But the central goal of our SBL model goes beyond finance. It is the empowerment of these disadvantaged women who learn to run their own series of nested institutions – SHGs, Cluster Development Associations (of 15-20 SHGs) and Federations (of around 200 SHGs).

The persistence of endemic poverty and hunger six decades after independence points to the glaring lack of good governance in rural areas. It is our vision that Federations of these women's SHGs will emerge as a key building block for effective empowerment of the poor in the tribal drylands of India, giving these regions the necessary voice in the development process. The members of these Federations will also be able to provide effective and capable leadership to Panchayat Raj Institutions, which we see as the centerpiece of governance in rural India. The unique strength of our SHG programme is financial and procedural discipline and transparency. It is mandatory for each group to go through an external audit every year, conducted by reputed chartered accountants. Thus, running SHGs is a great learning experience and allows these women a space to become powerful articulators of their perceptions and interests. They carry forward this strength into the panchayat arena.

In this extremely important task of nation building through people's empowerment, public sector banks have a critical role to play. India has the largest banking network in the world. SHG Federations and banks in remote rural areas are complementary entities, whose existence depends on each other. Today, when the very existence of some of these public sector banks is under threat, Federations of SHGs can be a massive support to them. The credit extended by banks to SHGs is their lifeline. The repayment rate of SHGs is unprecedented. Therefore, if public sector banks become partners of Federations on a large scale, the financial situation of banks can also improve.

SPS Core Team members Rangu Rao and Animesh Mondal lead the SHG team.





SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

Based on the building blocks of watershed and microfinance, we are developing a series of sustainable livelihoods for the poor.

Dryland Agriculture

We have worked out a package of agricultural practices finely tuned to the resource endowments of the watershed, which is accessible to the poor (*low-cost*) and sustainable (*low-risk*). We have experimented with 36 improved varieties based on indigenous seeds of 9 crops — sorghum, maize, pigeonpea, cotton, soyabean, gram, pearl millet, groundnut and wheat — which give good yields even with low external inputs. These varieties have been developed from the local germplasm by scientists working on-location across India's drylands and are, therefore, well adapted to this challenging environment. Of these we have shortlisted 15 varieties of sorghum, maize, pigeon pea, cotton, soyabean, gram and wheat. Under our agricultural extension programme we encourage a few carefully selected farmers to set up seed production plots of some of these varieties. SPS buys back seeds from these farmers and then distributes them to farmers in the area. With an increasing number of these farmers the SPS team is encouraging the adoption of No Pesticide Management (NPM) agriculture.



Along with 7 other partner NGOs, in 2008, we initiated an All-India Consortium on NPM Agriculture. The NPM idea came up as a response to the difficulties faced in Organic Certification, which is both expensive and inaccessible to small farmers. The idea of the NPM movement is to encourage farmers to grow crops without any chemical pesticides, create an identity

for their produce and link these small producers to markets. The need to use small doses of chemical fertilizers arises on account of the poor soil health in these areas. Unless soil health is built up over time, a move to full organic agriculture will be impossible. Hence, NPM agriculture stresses building up soil fertility through appropriate management practices (such as composting and recycling of agricultural residues, use of farm yard manure, green manuring crops and bio-pesticides) with a gradual phasing out of chemical fertilizers.

SPS Core Team members Dr. Debashis Banerji and P.S. Vijay Shankar guide the agriculture programme.



Crop Aggregation and Marketing

To make farming viable in India, we need to ensure remunerative prices for small and marginal farmers who sell off most of their produce in local markets at very low prices immediately after the harvest. Through our SHGs, over the last 2 years, we have facilitated an initiative to help farmers aggregate their produce and collectively sell in bigger markets at a time when they can get a better price. A striking feature of this initiative is that funds have been almost entirely mobilised by the SHGs from mainstream banks on the strength of their own corpus. This is an initiative by the people based on their own institutions and capital. This has a significant impact on the empowerment of women, who play a crucial role in the whole aggregation process, be it in fixing the price, ascertaining quality or in making payments through banks. The programme has extended to pigeon pea, soyabean, gram and wheat growers.



SPS Core Team member Rangu Rao directs the crop aggregation and marketing programme

Livestock Support

Over the last two years, we have started a livestock support programme for small and marginal farmers. While people have large stocks of cattle in our area, milk yields have been poor due to lack of health, water, fodder, affordable credit and a market. Our watershed programme had already ensured water and fodder. We have now introduced quality preventive and curative veterinary care. Our painstaking efforts have ensured that the Indore Milk Union includes our area in their milk collection route. And SHGs have extended credit to their members (at low rates of interest with long repayment periods) to purchase quality indigenous breeds. These animals have all been insured through a tie-up with the Oriental Insurance Company.





Having first minimized risk, the programme now emphasises building up systems to ensure transparency and provide incentives to the farmer to increase production. On the procurement side, activities focus on building up a fair and efficient milk collection and payment system. On the production side, various programmes like pregnant cow care, fodder production, regular deworming and

vaccination, support in selection of good animals and improved breeding services have tried to raise productivity of farm animals. In these efforts, it has been our endeavour to strike a balance between getting better yields from the present stock as well as induction of indigenous and crossbred animals. A dedicated cadre of paravets and milk cooperative society secretaries provides feet to the programme by making available these services in far-flung villages.



SPS Core Team members Rangu Rao and G. Reghu lead the livestock support team.

Kumbaya

Kumbaya, our garment fabrication centre, has empowered women by creating a new skill and employment opportunity in the area. We have trained over 500 women from 45 villages in ready-to-wear garments and patchwork products. In the absence of a traditional marketable craft, by designing products that compete with mainstream fabrication units, Kumbaya guarantees work and a market to women producers for 300 days a year. Most of these tribal women had never stitched a garment before and had no options other than manual labour. Kumbaya makes a range



of Indian and western casual wear, duvets, patchwork cushion covers, table and bed linen, curtains, wall hangings and different types of bags and rucksacks.

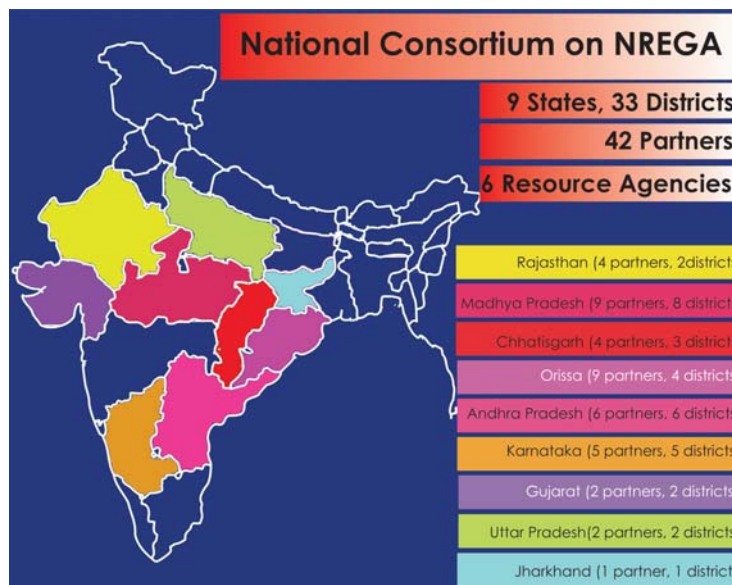


The accomplishment of Kumbaya has been that the product by itself instantly leaves a brand imprint leading to an ever-growing demand from customers, retailers and exporters in Delhi, Bangalore, Pondicherry, Bombay and Indore. The compelling pressure from hundreds of women in the area demanding fair livelihood opportunities and the ever-increasing demand for its products has enabled Kumbaya to now open 3 training and production centres in the area. Kumbaya is also hope for many differently-abled people, particularly women, whose inability to contribute manual labour in an agricultural area leads to their abandonment. The Kumbaya centres are supervised by a team of skilled and trained local people, who manage training, production, and accounts.

SPS Core Team member Nivedita Banerji guides Kumbaya

NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) promises the largest ever employment programme in human history. Entitlements under NREGA are demand-driven and constitutionally protected. Even so there is a real danger that lack of awareness among



intended beneficiaries and absence of implementation capability among Gram Panchayats (GPs, the chief implementing agency), will mean that the full potential of NREGA is not realised. To meet this challenge SPS set up the National Consortium of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) for NREGA in 2007. The Consortium includes 42 partners across 33 districts

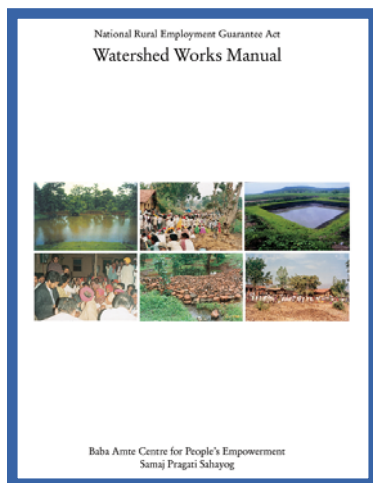
in 9 states of India who are working to make NREGA a success. Our role is the technical and social empowerment of these partners.

The Consortium seeks to move beyond the more traditional civil society role of acting as a watchdog for NREGA. The idea is to actively participate in making NREGA effective and its implementation true to the spirit of the objectives of the Act. This, of course, incorporates the vigilance role but focuses on an integrated approach to planning, implementation and social audit of NREGA works. Our vision is that work done under NREGA would create the necessary water infrastructure on whose basis a whole range of nature-based livelihood opportunities could be created for the disadvantaged. Planning for this convergence needs also to be done co-terminus with NREGA work. We also believe that NREGA affords an unprecedented opportunity for governance reform at the grass roots. Even while recognising the great difficulties CSOs and PRIs have faced in working together, a key element of the Consortium's strategy is to facilitate partnerships between grass-roots CSOs and PRIs, given the crucial role assigned to PRIs under NREGA.

SPS Core Team member Pramathesh Ambasta is National Coordinator of the NREGA Consortium

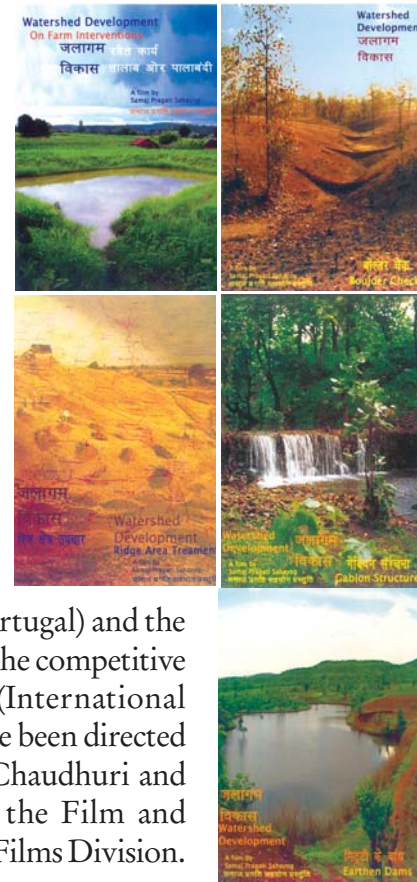
Training Material on NREGA

We are also working closely with the Government of India and a number of state governments on NREGA. At the request of the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India, SPS has prepared watershed works manuals in the NREGA context (300 pages+ in both English and Hindi). The Governments of Chhattisgarh and Bihar have decided to distribute our manual to all their Gram Panchayats and concerned officers. For the MoRD we have converted each of the 16 chapters of these manuals into stand-alone booklets. Design and typesetting of all SPS publications has been a labour of love of Pramathesh Ambasta over the last two decades.





We have also made 5 training films (in both Hindi and English) based on these manuals. One of the films “Earthen Dams” won the Magna Mater Award at the 25th International Agrofilm Festival in Slovakia in October 2008. This is the highest award given to the best film of the festival across all categories. In addition, the film “Earthen Dams” was also nominated in the competitive section of Eko Films (34th International Film Festival on the Environment and Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Czech Republic), the film “Ridge Area Treatment” was nominated in the competitive section of CineEco (14th International Environmental Film Festival, Portugal) and the film “On Farm Interventions” is nominated in the competitive section of upcoming Wildlife Vaasa 2008 (International Nature Film Festival, Finland). These films have been directed by SPS Core Team members Pinky Brahma Chaudhuri and Shobhit Jain who are both graduates from the Film and Television Institute of India. They lead the SPS Films Division.



RIGHT TO FOOD



A key area of governance reform in India needs to be the many schemes related to the Right to Food, such as the mid-day meal scheme, the ICDS and the Public Distribution System. We are working hard to generate awareness among the people about these schemes and also build pressure on the government to reform the

way they are run and increase the resources allotted to them. Our work has provided extensive relief to people living in malnutrition hotspots of Madhya Pradesh and also ensured greater transparency and accountability in the functioning of the administration.

SPS Core Team members Dr. Mridula Banerji and Jyotsna Jain guide the right to food programme.



BABA AMTE CENTRE FOR PEOPLE'S EMPOWERMENT



Rather than directly expanding our own operations (and risk bureaucratisation), we have opted to remain a lean, learning organisation that builds on partnerships. In this way, we are able to retain quality while achieving scale, thus overcoming the *oasis syndrome* that most NGO work suffers from. Thus, our direct interventions are

concentrated in the tribal pocket around Bagli. But we upscale the impact of this work through the Baba Amte Centre for People's Empowerment. The Centre has been set up to carefully select, train and hand-hold genuine grassroots partners for a few years, after which we believe they can do this work potentially better than SPS could have. The Centre also builds close partnerships with a wide range of government departments and non-government research institutions. Some of these centres are doing excellent but largely unrecognised work. We help bring this research out of ivory towers by linking lab to land and securing invaluable feedback for scientists from farmers. This beta-tested technology is then transmitted to our partners through the Baba Amte Centre. Through this "creative, organic churning" R & D inputs are finalised. These are then disseminated not only to the people of our area but also to people throughout India via our network of partner organisations and governments.

Currently, we support watershed programmes of 122 partners on a million acres in 72 districts of 12 states, including MP, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Orissa. We conduct a variety of training courses at the Centre, including a 2-month Basic Training Course on Watershed Development covering surveying and mapping, earthen and masonry engineering, hydrogeology, nursery and plantation, dryland agriculture, double entry accounting, attitude behaviour change, PRA and conflict management.

The two campuses (Administrative and Training) of the Baba Amte Centre for



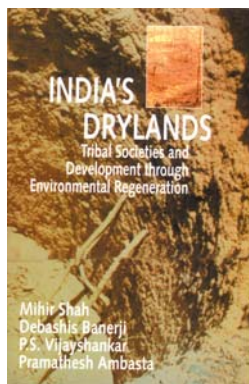


People's Empowerment nestle in villages on the edge of the forest at the foothills of the Vindhyan range. The architecture of these campuses was imagined to harmonize with the magnificence of the landscape whose colours dissolve from rugged ochre to verdant green through the seasons. The domes, vaults, and arches reflect the undulations of nature. The pyramids and corbels echo the starkness of basalt. The exposed brickwork and stone are homage to the rough dignity of rural life. Embedded in these walls is the intricate effort of skilled artisans because of whom the structures minimize the use of cement and steel.



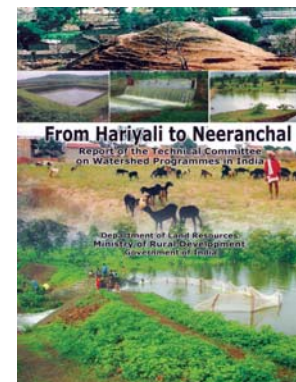
SPS Core Team member Nivedita Banerji guides the innovative building construction work at the Centre

RESEARCH AND POLICY ADVOCACY



In 1998 *India's Drylands*, a study we carried out for the Ministry of Finance, GoI and the UNDP on the macro-economic significance of watershed programmes for food security, employment guarantee and sustainable development, was published and released world-wide by the Oxford University Press. In 2005-06, SPS Secretary (1993-2008) Dr. Mihir Shah served as Honorary Adviser to the Parthasarathy Committee set up by the Government of India to review India's watershed programmes. He was responsible for drafting the report

of the committee that suggests path-breaking reforms in this sector. Dr. Shah is also Adviser to the Commissioner appointed by the Supreme Court in the Right to Food case. His responsibilities include monitoring the functioning of all food-related schemes in Madhya Pradesh and suggesting reforms to make them work better. Dr. Shah jointly co-ordinated a Research Project (along with Prof. Jean Dreze and Dr. N.C. Saxena) for the Indian Council for Social Science





Research on the Right to Food in India in 2004-06. He was also a member of 3 Working Groups for the 11th Five Year Plan.

Dr. Debashis Banerji is one of a handful of distinguished Indian scientists to have published original research in *Nature*. He is currently engaged in bioinformatic research on improvements in

genetic engineering technology to make it relevant for poor farmers. His recent papers include *Strategies for Gene Stacking and Gene Containment in Transgenic Crops – The Major Challenges in Engineering Plant Transformation* for the International Conference on Molecular Biology and Biotechnology, Banasthali University, Rajasthan, *Transplastomic Plants as Biosafe Bioreactors – Some Highlights* for the International Conference on Photosynthesis in the Global Perspective, Indore University and *Strategies for Gene Containment and Gene Stacking in Transplastomic Engineering* for the All-India Botanical Conference & International Symposium on Plant Biology and Environment, Allahabad University.

P.S. Vijay Shankar is conducting a wide-ranging study commissioned by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva on the history of education and health policy in independent India. A highlight of our research was the publication in April 2004 of the paper *Groundwater Demand Management at Local Scale in Rural Areas of India: A Strategy to ensure Water Well Sustainability based on Aquifer Diffusivity and Community Participation* in the *Hydrogeology Journal* (official journal of

the International Association of Hydrogeologists). A paper on *Rural Credit in 20th Century India* by Mihir Shah, Rangu Rao and P.S. Vijay Shankar in the **Economic and Political Weekly** (April 14th 2007) has been included as part of the prescribed syllabus for the Development Theory paper for BA (Hons) Economics final year students at Delhi University. Our recent work on NREGA reforms has attracted national attention (*Two Years of NREGA: The Road Ahead* by Pramathesh Ambasta, Mihir Shah and P.S. Vijay Shankar, **Economic and Political Weekly**, 23rd February, 2008).



ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND PRINCIPLES

SPS is an organisation registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. As per the Act, the Executive Committee (EC) is the highest decision-making body and executive powers are vested in the Secretary.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF SAMAJ PRAGATI SAHAYOG

- 1 Smt. Vidyaben Shah, Veteran Gandhian Social Worker, President
- 2 Ms. Nivedita Banerji, Founder Member, SPS, Secretary
- 3 Shri Pramathesh Ambasta, Founder Member, SPS, Treasurer
- 4 Dr. Shankar Mukherji, Retired Professor, Department of Physics, Banaras Hindu University, Member
- 5 Dr. Mary John, Director, Centre for Women's Development Studies, Member
- 6 Dr. Ramachandra Guha, Historian, Member
- 7 Dr. Rammanohar Reddy, Editor, Economic and Political Weekly, Member
- 8 Dr. Sriram Ramaswamy, Professor, Department of Physics, Indian Institute of Science, Member
- 9 Shri Arvind Sardana, Coordinator, Academic Council, Eklavya Foundation, Member

The role of the EC is to provide broad guidance and oversight to SPS work. Day-to-day responsibility rests with the 25-member Core Team of experienced professionals who work full-time at headquarters, leading the team of 225 SPS activists.

SPS is a learning organisation, highly self-critical of its own functioning, both in terms of processes and performance. We regard every endeavour of ours as a drop in the vast ocean of strife. But that there must be a pure aspiration for perfection within the striving to be this drop. We believe that the inherent and fundamental limitation of bureaucracy derives from its foundation in the specification of offices — that people are responsible only for their own jobs. We have sought to move towards an organization whose master concept is that “everyone contributes their best for the success of the whole”. This is a deeply interactive, consultational organization where consensus is created through institutionalized dialogue. Our metro educated, local educated and village professionals all have such unique insights that they can greatly benefit by being open to learning from the other, quite irrespective of position in the hierarchy. We see the maintenance of tension within healthy bounds as the key to any creative and dynamic system. Greater emphasis is placed on principles rather than rules. This encourages flexibility and creativity in response to challenges. The regular interface of people across teams, facilitated by the Core Team, acts as a corrective to possible abuse of flexibility. The fluidity of such an organizational structure also demands that decision-making processes are frequently reconstructed — they cannot simply be “read” from an organogram.

SPS CORE VALUES

Compassion: the central motivation for doing hard work in fairly difficult circumstances

Forgiveness: the key attitude towards those who choose to stand against us in our attempted movement towards greater social and economic equity

Humility: the enduring sense of wonder of a true scientist, always a student, ever-learning, working as a team, building partnerships within SPS and beyond

Balance: the aspiration for greater balance in nature and society and in our own striving

The challenges posed by the context where we work and our goals bear an intimate relationship with the organizational structure deployed by SPS.

Challenges of SPS Context and Endeavor	Imperative for Organizational Structure and Quality of SPS Team
Extremely tough conditions of work	Passionate commitment to the cause and great endurance
India's most disadvantaged have suffered for too long	Ability to innovate new ideas and design creative solutions for an old problem
Enormity of the challenge	Recognizing the need for partnerships both within and beyond SPS.
Complexity of the challenge requiring diverse knowledges	Need to use the knowledge of all irrespective of hierarchy. Overcoming waste of intelligence in bureaucracies.
Rapidly changing context	Non-dogmatic, nimble-footed ability to continuously adapt to fresh challenges.
Deep interconnections between different aspects of the challenge	Need for team-work based on an understanding of various ramifications of this interconnectedness

SUMMARY OF SPS AUDITED ACCOUNTS 1999-2008

<i>Sources of Funds</i>		<i>Pattern of Expenditure</i>	
Ford Foundation	17%	Watershed Development	32%
Sir Dorabji Tata Trust	17%	Training and Support	27%
Own Sources (Interest on corpus, training fees etc)	15%	Sustainable Livelihoods	10%
Indians for Collective Action	10%	SHG-Bank Linkage	5%
Central and State Governments	9%	Other Programmes	10%
Arghyam Trust	8%	Administration	15%
Mumbai Group of Friends	5%	Total	100%
American India Foundation	4%		
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	3%		
Others	12%		
Total	100%		

“No respect, no money” is our firm policy on funding. We view donors as partners and like to work with those who both value our work and feel part of it. The SPS annual budget is Rs. 50 million. Our goal is to increasingly rely on our own sources of income. We have reached a figure of Rs. 80 million for our Corpus Fund. We are not happy with the 15% figure on administration over the last decade. This reflects the high initial establishment costs of being headquartered in a remote part of rural India, where everything from telephone and electricity connections, roads and water supply as also the training centre itself had to be set up from scratch. However, the good news is that this percentage has been rapidly coming down in recent years, reaching 7% in 2007-08.

SPS Core Team members Murtiram Dabral and Joby Thomas lead the administration and accounts team.

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