



**INTERIM NARRATIVE REPORT  
(DECEMBER 2007-SEPTEMBER 2008)**

***BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN INDIA:  
PROMOTING THE RIGHTS TO HEALTH AND EMPLOYMENT***

RI and SMRC have successfully implemented the first phases of the project entitled “*Building the Capacity of Women with Disabilities in India: Promoting the Rights to Health and Employment*”. We greatly appreciate the support of the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs for this rights-based project which promotes the economic empowerment, right to health and inclusion of women with disabilities in four rural/indigenous Indian States: Orissa, Chhatisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.

This two-year project promotes greater rights and inclusion by 1) providing advocacy and leadership training to women with disabilities; 2) conducting needs assessments and skills training in the area of information and communications technology (ICT); 3) assisting women with disabilities in obtaining loans and implementing initiatives under a Government micro-credit program that includes health micro-insurance; 4) integrating women with disabilities into community structures through their participation in village self-help groups; 5) creating an interactive website to raise awareness of health issues among women with disabilities; and 6) promoting access to the Government’s Reproductive Health Care program.



➤ **Progress on Project Implementation (as of October 1, 2008)**

***Phase I***

Throughout the first phases of the project, RI and SMRC have maintained regular communication and worked in partnership in implementing the work plan. RI is delighted to report that SMRC has partnered with disabled persons' organizations in the four implementation states (Orissa, Chhatisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal), who have agreed to work collaboratively on this project and have assigned a focal point from each organization. These organizations have reached out to over 250 women with disabilities who will benefit from this initiative, and have grouped them on the basis of the skills they will be learning. The project partners also met with local government employees in all 4 States who will assist the self-help groups and briefed them about their work on this project. SMRC also recruited the personnel to undertake this project, including a computer programmer, video programmer and village volunteers.

The local DPO partners in each State conducted surveys of about 50 local government employees (Angadwadi workers), government liaisons (such as community development officers, social welfare officers, and child services officers) and SHG members, to determine their attitudes toward women with disabilities. Most of the individuals surveyed responded that women with disabilities should be protected,

need special attention, and not 'forced' to work. They commented that their families could look after them, especially since they were always sick and immobile. Some community workers replied that women with disabilities would be a burden on SHGs and had low expectations for the quality of work that these women could do. Many had no knowledge about disability issues and did not show any interest



in the issue. However, some of the people surveyed indicated a more positive attitude toward women with disabilities, viewing women as having equal capabilities as men. The general feeling was that women with disabilities lack access to mobility devices, education, appropriate vocational training, opportunity for gainful employment, health care services, and an accessible physical environment. Many SHG members indicated that they were not aware of any disability laws or policies, but they did know that there was special concession for persons with disabilities for transportation and assistive devices. Some felt that women with disabilities found it difficult to access their rights especially since most of them lacked knowledge and encouragement. The surveys also found that the social attitude toward women with disabilities is very discriminatory and many women face various forms of abuse. Many people also mentioned the superstitions and myths related to disability, for example, that women with disabilities are bad luck so such women could not be invited to social functions such as marriage or the birth of a child.

***Phase II***

During Phase II of this initiative, 253 women with disabilities across the 4 States have undergone training on disability rights, leadership, advocacy and confidence building, which has been an important step forward in promoting their inclusion in the community. The Leadership Training program was conducted by the resource persons invited by the DPOs in all the four states. SMRC had carefully prepared the



modules of the program in different languages, as in the State of Andhra Pradesh, the identified women with disabilities cannot understand Hindi and in Chhatisgarh they cannot understand English. The training was highly participatory in nature, drawing on the experiences of the group. There were group discussions, presentations, role plays and sharing of experiences. The training focused on the concepts and importance of leadership, advocacy, communication and networking, which will help them to work more efficiently and in a more organized manner. The participants had the opportunity to share experiences and learned from each other and also learned about their rights and how to access them.



The women who participated in the training have completed surveys to assess what they learned. The majority of participants commented that the information received was new and they did not believe they even had rights, particularly in the areas of employment and health.

Few women knew about national laws and policies, or how to access these rights. During the training, many women raised questions on practical matters, such as how to get a certificate of disability which is required in order to be eligible for disability services such as accessible transport, etc.

In group discussions, participants emphasized the lack of education and work opportunities, desertion and second marriages, difficulties in carrying out house work, negative societal attitudes and sexual abuse. Most women said that they have never visited a bank, however, those women who were already involved in SHGs disclosed that the attitude of bank employees had changed for the better after they had joined an SHG.

In questionnaires completed after the training, many women responded that the training program has led to their empowerment and greater awareness of their rights. The women replied that they gained confidence, had a rare opportunity to discuss about their problems openly, learn about the success stories of other women with disabilities, and were motivated to work with their sisters with solidarity.

“After attending this training program (leadership), my knowledge about the facilities available for disabled women has increased. I think this will help me to avail these facilities from the government in the near future.”

- *Rita Kumari Sabu*

“Previously I was told that the married people could only get a disability pension. After receiving the leadership training program, I learned that I am also eligible to get a pension.”

- *Nutan Sabu*

“I have not been given a proper disability certificate. After going through the training program, I came to know about the various facilities for persons with disabilities. Now I am planning to join the Single Window Camp going to be held at Chhatisgarh. There I will raise my voice for a disability certificate, transportation reservation certificates, tricycle, wheelchair etc.”

- *Kunti Devangi*



### ***Phase III***

As part of Phase III of the project, SMRC and the 3 other DPO partners began individual counseling to determine the interests and skills of the women. In this process, they learned that the participants in some States had a preference to learn different skills, which were more marketable in their area. For example, as a result of the outreach to local agencies, the project partners determined that mobile phone rental was not the most effective local enterprise since many people in the villages already had mobile phones. However, mobile phone repair was identified during community interactions as a viable skill for low literate women in that community, and SMRC quickly responded by providing training in this area. This enterprise also requires less capital. In addition, women in all the 4 States expressed their interest in learning jewelry making as well as henna artistry, and therefore, the project partners are conducting the skills training in these areas, for the low literate women in the 4 states. Henna artistry & doormat making was also identified as possible enterprises in West Bengal, where 24 women have undergone the training.

The women have completed their skills training in some States: In Orissa, the computer training has been completed – and the other trainings are underway. In West Bengal, training has been conducted in video, doormat making and henna artistry. In Andhra Pradesh, training in computer skills, video and hair dressing has been carried out. In Chattisgarh, the computer training is ongoing and will be completed in the first week of November. Training in enterprise management such as financial literacy, bookkeeping, and strategic planning is being conducted in the month of October. Participants in the trainings also completed evaluations, and overall, felt that it will help them to lead a life independently and not depend on others. Many women expressed that the training was too short, and requested that future trainings last for three months.



The project partners have begun networking with local agencies, government officials, in order to facilitate the next phase of this project. They have also been in touch with bank and local officials dealing with the micro-credit scheme (SGSY). SMRC will assist women with disabilities in joining existing SHGs, developing their ideas for ICT enterprises and obtaining loans under the Government micro-credit program. RI and SMRC have made a commitment to support the women with disabilities for the first year of their livelihood initiatives and will meet with bankers to assist them in the loan process. Furthermore, SMRC is preparing the content for a blog on women's health issues, to be part of the RI and SMRC websites.

### **➤ Key Outcomes and Achievements**

In the development phase this project, RI and SMRC already began realizing some key achievements which have contributed to the success of the overall project to date. First, SMRC established relationships with several self-help groups (SHGs), including some run by SMRC in the State of Orissa which are part of micro-credit scheme, which has facilitated acceptance. In addition, SMRC Vice President Asha Hans was invited as a guest speaker at the World Bank, to present her findings on micro-credit programs for women with disabilities to the Bank's Disability and Development Section. This was an opportunity to raise awareness about the project and develop a dialogue with the World Bank on the issues of disability, development and economic livelihoods.



Once the project was underway, in December 2007, we have made significant progress in achieving our goals, despite a broad range of challenges faced.

- First, the leadership and advocacy trainings has led to greater knowledge of disability rights, particularly under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, among women with disabilities, local government workers and SHG members.
- In addition, over 160 women with disabilities (40 per state) have benefited from the skills trainings in computer skills, video making, henna artistry, mobile phone repair and jewelry making.
- The participation of local government officials and SHG members in the leadership training has contributed to the greater inclusion of women with disabilities in the community and in the development of micro-credit enterprises. All participants in the training were asked to share information from the training with others in the villages in which they live, thereby increasing the spread of knowledge on disability rights.
- As a result of this project, SMRC has strengthened its relationships with DPOs in the region, as well as with local government officials.
- Furthermore, the project has created networking opportunities for women with disabilities, which provides a forum for support, advice and exchange of information and ideas.
- This project is also contributing to the mainstreaming of disability issues in the women's movement. For example, SMRC facilitated that a woman with a disability was invited to attend the National Conference on Women's Studies, which is organized every three years by the Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS). This was the first time disability was part of the agenda.
- The Disability Commissioner of Andra Pradesh State attended a conference on Disability & Disaster Preparedness, organized by SMRC in January 2008, at which she expressed an interest in the outcomes of this project.
- SMRC Vice President Asha Hans was invited to participate in the 21<sup>st</sup> RI World Congress in Quebec (August 2008) and shared her expertise on the issue of gender and disability, and shared information and good practices from this project with the participants of a Global Summit of Women with Disabilities (held in conjunction with the World Congress).
- RI has also disseminated information about this project, including the BMSK logo through updates in our membership newsletters and as a featured project on the RI website (<http://www.riglobal.org/advocacy/featuredprojects.html>)
- In addition to these tangible outcomes, the project has fostered certain qualitative results such as an increase in confidence among the women in the program and a decrease in a feeling of isolation and despair. The project has had a positive impact on over 250 women with disabilities in 4 States in India, as demonstrated by the feedback below.

***Here are some comments from participants in the leadership and skills training:***

“Before I joined this program, I was not known to anyone in my village. But after I attended the RI leadership training program, village elderly women are appreciating my talents.”

“I was staying at home and was always being neglected but now, after I joined this program, my family members are giving me importance.”



“I was just a SHG member but after this training in computer [skills], my importance in the SHG Group has improved. The other members are now giving me respect and including me in all decision making of the group.”

“After this training my outlook has changed and now I feel I can earn for my family and become self-dependent.”

“After my father’s death, I was feeling that I would be a burden on my sisters but now, after this training, I will become independent and will look after my mother.”

### ➤ **Challenges in Implementation**

SMRC and RI have made every effort to address the obstacles to implementation of the project, as they arose. However, the challenges described below have led to some delays in project implementation:

- Breakdown in communication connectivity in rural areas
- Natural disasters and conflict (including flooding and riots), which has resulted in limited or no transportation between the project sites
- Illness among the SMRC staff and consultants, including the unexpected death of the Executive Director of SMRC
- High number of illiterate or semi-literate who participated in the training, so the sections on rights and advocacy had to take longer in order for them to understand
- Women with developmental disabilities also had difficulty with comprehending the training, so modifications had to be made.
- Language barriers. For example, the Project Officer and local DPO partners in Andhra Pradesh have been communicating through translation (from Hindi to Telegu, the local language)
- Lack of other funding, which has led to a modified budget and fewer equipment purchases.

Despite these hurdles, the project is moving forward with implementation of Phase IV. RI and SMRC will continue to address any challenges responsibly and effectively.

### ➤ **Financial Report**

Most of the funding has been used for direct expenses and services to support the project in India, and has reached the 253 direct beneficiaries of this project, in addition to the over 300 community members who have also received training in disability rights and policies.

As the attached budget expenditure reflects, the project partners have maintained within the budget allocations for each section. As explained earlier, Section 2 of the budget has been slightly modified because of the skills training preferences identified by the participants as more marketable in their communities. However, the grant from the Austrian Ministry for Social Affairs does not include this section of the budget and this does not reflect an increase in this section of the budget.

RI is still seeking the additional resources to ensure full implementation of this innovative initiative and is pursuing several possible options. To address this, RI and SMRC have modified the budget to reflect the current funding.



## ➤ Conclusion and Next Steps

Taking a unique multi-disciplinary approach to capacity building, the project aims to leverage existing resources and provide additional training to promote the economic self-sufficiency of women with disabilities, their access to health care services and their ability to advocate for their rights and inclusion. This project is especially timely given the fact that India ratified the new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in September 2007 and is now working on implementation of this international treaty.

RI and its project partners are now working on Phase IV of the project, assisting the women with disabilities in joining existing SHGs, developing their ideas for small enterprises and facilitating their loans under the Government micro-credit program. As the women will soon launch their enterprises, we respectfully request the second installment of funds to allow us to continue implementation of this worthwhile project.



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