

## **REPORT ON AN INNOVATIVE PROJECT VILLAGE LEVEL INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN A LITERACY CAMPAIGN**

### INTRODUCTION

Of all the countries of the world, it is India, which has the biggest literacy problem. About one third of the world's illiterate humanity resides in our country. At the last decennial census held in 1991, the most startling fact to emerge was that about 320 million adults in our country were illiterate. India's tryst with nation building began with the severe handicap of extremely low levels of literacy at the time of Independence. The neglect of education during colonial time combined with some social distortions had made the quest for learning a rather difficult and daunting task especially for those belonging to underprivileged social groups.

The rationale for the establishment of the National Literacy Mission (NLM) lay in the national realization that our process of nation building would never be complete without giving literacy a major thrust. It was on this account that the NLM was launched in the Mission mode with a clear time frame to achieve the objective of making 75% of the country literate by 2005. The success of the Ernakulam model (a district in the State of Kerala), which based itself on a spirit of voluntarism and complete mobilization of civil society, became the guiding principle of the Total Literacy Campaigns.

India seeks to achieve its literacy goals by imparting functional literacy to illiterates in the 15-35 age group. This age group has been selected because they are both in the productive as well as the reproductive period of life. The Total Literacy Campaign offers them a second chance, in case they had missed the earlier opportunity, or were denied access to mainstream formal education.

NLM seeks a way to bring illiterates to a level of self-reliance. It also provides them facilities for skill development to improve their economic status and well being. It enables them to imbibe values of national integration, conservation of the environment, women's equality, observance of small family norms etc. And finally, it facilitates their participation in the development process. Functional literacy, encompassing all of the above, is the real goal of NLM.

Over the last decade, literacy campaigns have reached more than 90% of India's villages and population. The district is the unit of implementation and a phase-wise coverage of all the blocks in a district is taken up under the campaign mode. Over the last five years, the campaign has expanded even to the remotest corners of most educationally deprived States Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. In every sense of the term, literacy activities in India have reached to the unreached areas. Even in very poor regions, the spirit of voluntarism has been remarkable in the literacy campaigns. Inaccessible districts such as Dumka in Bihar and Banswara in Rajasthan with extremely low female literacy rate in 1991 have generated significant social mobilization campaigns and have unleashed unprecedented enthusiasm across the country.

Recognizing the fragile nature of literacy and the need to create a learning society, NLM provides for a Post Literacy Campaign where the gains of literacy are consolidated and an effort is made to link learning skills with life skills. Similarly, in order to sustain the learning needs of the community, NLM has provided for Continuing Education Centres that provide a package of life-linked services for neo literates. Nearly 50% of the districts of this country are in their Post Literacy Phase and a number of them have already started their Continuing Education Centres.

### THE LITERACY CAMPAIGN IN JALGAON DISTRICT - SUCCESSFUL AND INNOVATIVE

One of the most successful literacy campaigns, among the many that have been launched in India over the last decade, was the one conducted in Jalgaon district of Maharashtra State in the western part of India. This campaign which was given the name 'Total Literacy Campaign' was conducted under the aegis of a District Literacy Society headed by the senior most government functionary in the district who was called Collector. The Committee consisted of a number of other members, half of them were non-

officials. The campaign kicked off in December, 1996 and concluded towards the end of 1998 which was a period of about two years. During this period, the District Literacy Society (hereinafter referred to as DLS) set itself the ambitious target of making 188,180 persons literate. After the completion of the campaign, an objective evaluation study was conducted by an established outside agency. The conclusion arrived at was that the DLS had achieved an astonishing success percentage of 86.05.

The campaign was successful because of a number of causes. Among them, it would be counted on the commitment of the Collector and the literacy workers and volunteers, the creation of a successful learning environment, the involvement of the community and the enthusiasm of the learners themselves. However, all this made possible was only because of several innovative approaches that were tried:

- Active, functional activities of Village Education Committees;
- New, improved training modalities.

This Project Report takes a close look at these two aspects and how they shaped the success of the campaign at the village level. In order to zero in on the actual field level impacts, three specific villages have been selected viz. Waki, Wagdi and Varangaon. Special stress has been laid on perceiving the innovations as new and unique attempts which have had tangible and lasting effects.

### LAUNCHING OF THE CAMPAIGN

The inhabitants of Jalgaon district first learnt that a literacy campaign would be launched in their district when the radio and other media began making announcements. The news soon spread like wildfire and created considerable excitement particularly among the unlettered and illiterate sections of the community who far outnumbered the education. Soon local governments, schools and villagers were animatedly discussing as to how the TLC (Total Literacy Campaign) would be launched and how the people themselves would actively participate in the teaching and learning process. Most of the villagers were excited and enthusiastic because they wanted to take advantage of the TLC process to become literate. They had not had the opportunity of joining schools for reasons related to poverty, time constraints, resistance from the elders etc. Very soon, the district authorities launched an information campaign asking the villagers to get ready for the literacy activities that would soon begin.

### PLANNING FOR THE INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONARIES

Jalgaon district began its literacy promotion efforts by quickly forming the Zilla Saksharatha Samithi (ZSS) or District Literacy Society (DLS). Shortly, thereafter, it took a decision for forming professional / academic committees to take care of various aspects of the campaign. These committees were constituted for the purpose of :

- creating a learning environment in the rural as well as urban areas of the district;
- conducting training programmes for literacy functionaries such as Key Resource Persons/ Master Trainers / Literacy Volunteers by involving various local governments and Municipalities;
- preparing / supplying teaching-learning materials such as literacy primers (I, II and III);
- organizing the teaching-learning process after identifying the literacy volunteers and enrolling all the illiterates of the villages and towns;
- involving Village Education Committees (VEC) in the monitoring of literacy implementation work at the micro-level;
- facilitating the evaluation of learners both internally and externally.

### DISSEMINATION OF MESSAGES /INFORMATION

The details that appeared in the Press started reaching the villages through the Block Development Offices (BDOs)/ Block Education Offices (BEOs). People started casually talking about the literacy implementation process. Local governments started seeking the cooperation and commitment of

the educator / literates / school teachers for joining the campaign as partners. This was because the TLC was being taken up under National Literacy Mission (NLM) as it was considered as People's Mission.

### INTENSE INTEREST GENERATION AMONG LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

The term Panchayat is used in India to refer to local self-governments. In the state of Maharashtra, the Panchayat system is very strong as well as deeply entrenched. Once the Panchayat accept an idea or a programme wholeheartedly, their representatives galvanize the community into appropriate action. In this particular case, the Panchayat of Jalgaon district were highly enthusiastic about the manifold opportunities that would be opened up in the wake of the launching of a Total Literacy Campaign. The Collector and his dedicated team held a number of Panchayat conventions where the objectives of the campaign were discussed in great detail. Thereby, their confidence was won over and right through the period of the campaign, it received the unequivocal and enthusiastic support of local self-governments. This helped in ensuring that community support which was forthcoming spontaneously and that literacy functionaries received warm and encouraging support.

Panchayat in turn began a series of discussions on the subject of Voluntary Literacy Action and the role that villagers were expected to play. Panchayat also held discussions at the Block or sub-district level and interacted intensively with Block-level officials. There was thus a great clarity of the roles at the Block, Panchayat and village levels.

The villagers were very early on quite clearly told that they should not expect any monetary rewards. The TLC and its implementation would be a totally voluntary effort. Once this was made clear, no apprehensions about monetary rewards remained in the minds of the villagers and they all began preparations to welcome the campaign and voluntarily donate their time and energy.

### EXPECTATIONS FROM PANCHAYAT MADE CLEAR

It was made clear that the district administration would be relying heavily on the Panchayat to carry out the following tasks:

- Conducting the Literacy Survey ;
- Identifying the Literacy Volunteers ;
- Getting all the illiterate adults enrolled;
- Organizing the Training /Re-training programmes for the Literacy Volunteers with the help of Master Trainers;
- Forming the Village Education Committees (VEC) to monitor and review the literacy implementation process.

### FORMATION OF VILLAGE EDUCATION COMMITTEES (VECS)

Right from the outset, it was decided to introduce the system of Village Education Committees as a vital, innovative measure that would provide accountability and close monitoring inputs to the campaign. Village Education Committees were duly formed with the Sarpanch or Headman presiding. The local school headmaster, selected teachers, mahila or women - representatives, youth club functionaries and micro-level health workers were also included as members of the committee.

### FUNCTIONS OF THE VILLAGE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The tasks entrusted to the VEC were in fact the most crucial ones for the success of the campaign. These included:

- Identification and selection of volunteers;
- Smooth conduct of the base-line survey;
- Distribution of teaching-learning materials;

- Ensuring adequate and timely training of volunteer teachers;
- Supervision of the work of the volunteers;
- Encouraging learners, particularly the women illiterate;
- Undertaking cultural processions etc. to help build up the environment for the propagation of literacy;
- Sustaining volunteer as well as learner interest.

### THREE VILLAGES SELECTED FOR CLOSE OBSERVATION AS TO THE IMPACT OF THE INNOVATIONS

The districts in India are further subdivided into Talukas. On an average, each district would have about 4-5 Talukas. Below the Talukas are the Panchayat and each Panchayat would have on the average about 15-20 villages. The three villages on which this study focuses were carefully chosen so as to ensure spread across the district as well as regional diversity. They were:

- Waki village in Jamner Taluka;
- Wagdi village in Chalsgaon Taluka;
- Varangaon village in Bhusawal Taluka.

### HOW THE VILLAGE EDUCATION COMMITTEES TOOK UP THE CHALLENGE

Under the supervision and guidance of the DLS, the VECs were formed in practically every village of the district. They were entrusted with the specific task of closely watching over the literacy activities and doing everything possible to ensure their success. The composition of the VECs was strictly as per the instructions given by the ZSS. They were headed in each case by the Sarpanch or President of the Panchayat and they showed a very high degree of interest in literacy and the literacy related development activities. They firmly resolved to make their villages totally literate, irrespective of the existing problems. They met on a regular basis at least once a month. In each meeting the progress achieved was thoroughly reviewed and the future plan of action chalked out. Any lacunae or weaknesses were examined in great detail and solutions worked out by mutual consensus.

### INITIAL PROBLEMS FACED

The problems faced at the beginning were of the following type:

- Initial hesitancy and shyness displayed by illiterates in joining literacy classes;
- The feeling that literacy achievement may not necessarily give them jobs and therefore may not be worth the trouble;
- The concentration of the people, in general, was on earning their daily wages for meeting their day to day expenditure and essentials such as food, clothing and shelter. They were also severely constrained for time given their many daily chores and obligations;
- Facilities for running Literacy Centers were not readily available. These had to be conducted at the residences of Literacy Volunteers who slowly began to show immense commitment and zeal;
- Constant / continuous guidance was expected from the local Primary School Teachers for the Literacy Volunteers to organize and run the literacy classes. Initially this was also a problem.

The VECs spent a considerable number of hours in taking care of these problems and enthusing volunteers as well as learners.

### INNOVATION AT WORK IN THE THREE CHOSEN VILLAGES

#### **WAKI VILLAGE VEC**

The VEC of Waki village in Jamner Taluka derived great strength from the fact that a committed School Head Master of the local High School undertook the responsibility of creating interest among the

educated person and getting them to act as volunteers. The other members of the VEC also played a very promising role. They provided a great deal of encouragement and support to the volunteer teachers and moved from house to house to motivate the illiterate women and men to come together in groups to the literacy classes. Most of all they took great care to ensure that the Literacy Volunteers were given respect by the community. The members of the VEC developed a very close rapport with the members of the teaching community and were able to enlist their full support and commitment to the programme. In turn, the advice and guidance provided by the Professional Teachers were listened to and given considerable weightage by the VEC. This very fine and mutually supportive equation served to ensure that literacy classes were regularly held and that participation in them was enthusiastic and responsive. The VEC gave full freedom to the professional teachers and the volunteers to go ahead and carry on the teaching learning process on a sound and continuing basis. This provided the bedrock upon which Waki village was able to take giant strides towards full literacy and become a role model to the neighboring villages.

### ***WAGDI VILLAGE VEC***

Wagdi village in Chalsgaon Taluka had another exceptional VEC working for total literacy. Here, the village Sarpanch heading the VEC was paying close personal attention and was prepared to make sacrifices. This resulted in the remarkable achievement that not a single illiterate person was left un-enrolled in the Literacy Centers functioning in the village. Any drop out found was first targeted, then motivated, and finally persuaded to continue his literacy learning. Many of those who were reluctant were told that they should follow the example of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar who from very humble beginnings, overcame severe forms of caste discrimination to emerge as a champion of democracy and the principal framer of the Indian constitution. For women literacy volunteers, the example held out was that of Ms. Savithri Bai Phule, who vigorously and courageously espoused the cause of female literacy during the pre-Independence days despite active societal discouragement. The Literacy Volunteers were serving in two different groups. One group was asked to concentrate on literacy teaching and the other was asked to see that all the illiterates were enrolled and made to attend the literacy classes without fail. This worked well because of the strength and the full backing provided by the VEC. The active involvement of the second Volunteer group helped in providing a unique personal touch to the total literacy campaign in the village. Substantial credit devolves upon the VEC and its management for undertaking such a successful literacy programme and for enlisting such strong community involvement.

### ***VARANGAON VILLAGE VEC***

In Varangaon village, the key to success for the VEC lay in having very good Master Trainers (MTs) who provided strong motivation to the volunteers to devote themselves selflessly to literacy work. The VEC's identification of volunteers was exceptionally good thereby ensuring a high quality of output to the teaching and learning process. Because Master Trainers were selected carefully and provided with every kind of backing, they were able to impart excellent guidance to the volunteers. One such Master Trainer, for example, was a widow who underwent great deprivation and suffering after the expiry of her husband. She acquired the necessary qualifications with a tremendous exhibition of grit and determination and achieved her ambition of becoming a school teacher. Her main wish while serving as an MT was, therefore, to see that no female should suffer from the problem of illiteracy. That way, if widowed, women would have a fall back position and would be enabled to stand on their own two feet. A determined move was launched to identify the school drop-outs in particular and have them enrolled without fail. In this way, the drawbacks plaguing the school system were also exposed to public scrutiny. One major problem that quickly got identified was the poor training imparted to school teachers because of which punishment was being frequently resorted to in the classrooms. Severe and unnecessary penal methods alienated children from schools and raised the rate of drop-outs. Hence, along with literacy, school problems were also gradually sorted out. At the same time, the VEC motivated the adult learners to find time to attend the literacy classes, even if they had had a hard day in the field working as agricultural laborers. Literacy learning was accorded the highest priority and a tremendous motivational fervor gripped the villagers as a result of the energetic and ceaseless efforts of the VEC. The infectious

enthusiasm of the VEC members also greatly enthused the normally lethargic and cynical bureaucracy. The local level government functionaries, in fact, came forward and went out of their way to fuel the literacy process and give it their fullest support.

### PERFORMANCE OF VECs LED TO EXCELLENCE

These were of the main aspects of performance in these villages, which led to excellence in literacy. The strategies adopted by them and commitment to work for the education and development of the local people made both the literate and illiterate sections of the community come together as equal partners in the Literacy Campaign. Interest was aroused and sustained among the literacy functionaries and this made them work with devotion and commitment for the education and development of the people at their native villages. Literacy policy, enunciated at the national level by the NLM, was successfully translated into result oriented action in the field through the innovative and extraordinary efforts of well-managed, well-coordinated VECs who, each in their own way, making best use of their own particular strengths, imparted to the literacy campaigns, stability and sustainability. Thus, voluntarism triumphed and the illiterate members of the community made best use of the second chance that they got to acquire literacy capabilities and open their closed windows to the world of knowledge and information.

### NEW IMPROVED TRAINING MODALITIES

The second major innovation that achieved a lasting impact and gave to the literacy campaign of Jalgaon district, which has the dimension of excellence was the rigorous, meticulous and imaginative training imparted to Master Trainers at one level and the vast mass of volunteers below them. 2 Master Trainers (MTs) per village were identified, most of them being local High or Primary school teachers. This strengthened the professional inputs and gave to the training process a level and a standard that stood it in good stead for the many challenges that were to come.

From the very beginning, what was stressed was that volunteers must not teach mechanically but must :

- Accord respect to the learner;
- Keep the pace of teaching unhurried but purposive;
- Discuss the broad issues and outcomes thrown up by each lesson;
- Make the teaching process entertaining and interactive;
- Take special care of slow learners;
- Make every effort to guard against drop-outs from the literacy classes;
- Where drop-outs do take place, they should be quickly identified and every effort made to bring them back into class;
- Reinforce the learning acquisition continuously so as to minimise transmission loss;
- Be at all times regular themselves and attempt to inculcate regularity among the learners.
- Attempt to inculcate in each learner the capacity for self-learning;
- Stress constantly the aspect of self-reliance so that from an initial literacy base learners can progress themselves to higher echelons of learning.

### TRAINING AND RE-TRAINING MEASURES

#### **WAKI VILLAGE**

##### *Innovative Training Inputs:*

In the training sessions, emphasis was placed not merely on how to teach and instruct but also on the why's and where for's of the training. Among the training inputs were inserted such concerns as :

- Why is full literacy needed in the village?

- What is the methodology to be followed in order to achieve this objective?
- Why is this methodology more potent than anything tried in the past?
- How does it differ in its essentials from earlier initiatives?
- What new ways can one work out to motivate and mobilize illiterates?
- Why is the voluntary path better than any other?
- How can one link up literacy instruction with other development issues?
- What are the best possible methods of carrying out the base line literacy survey keeping in mind local conditions and compulsions?
- Why is the identified age group of 15-35 being targeted?
- How to ensure complete enrollment of the illiterate in the literacy centres?
- Controlling the drop out problem and re-enrolling the drop outs;
- Transacting the literacy primers in the best manner possible;
- Developing literacy lessons in a manner that will hold the adult learners' interest;
- Providing inputs on important national and local issues such as women's equality, small family norm, environmental concerns, consciousness of the deeds of local and national heroes and heroines such as Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Ms. Savitri Bai Phule, Ms Indira Gandhi etc.

#### *Participation*

Participation in training was not restricted to the Literacy Volunteers only. The local VEC and Panchayat members were also there. The village as a whole got involved directly and indirectly. Women trainees interested in educating their children also attended.

#### *Training Process:*

The first phase of the training programme consisted of 4 days in which were provided teaching skills to the volunteers covering only the first of the three Literacy Primers. This was followed by another four days in which detailed instructions were provided for transacting Literacy Primers II and III. After a gap of 3 months, intensive re-training was provided. This had two beneficial effects. One, vital feedback was received from volunteers who had already begun taking lessons; and two, volunteers were re-enthused and re-invigorated. Also, their teaching skills were honed and reinforced.

#### *Training outputs:*

The training outputs were mainly motivation, mobilization and management of voluntary literacy action with commitment to serve the village and make it totally literate.

### **WAGDI VILLAGE**

#### *Training Inputs:*

Training inputs were more or less similar to those in Waki village. But additionally, in Wagdi village, the Literacy Volunteers were split into 2 different working groups and they were given special inputs of the following kind:

- Personal touch in motivational and mobilization efforts;
- Total enrollment of all the illiterates by the Literacy Volunteers;
- Minimizing the drop out rate and re-enrollment measures;
- Attractive literacy teaching to zero in on the drop out problem;
- Following Ms Phule, to work for total literacy of females;
- Developing adult learners to prepare and educate their children;
- Literacy and development measures, particularly health and family planning etc.

#### *Participants in Training:*

Volunteers, health and nutrition workers, others working in related development programmes and VEC members were the main trainees.

#### *Training Process:*

Training process was similar to that of Waki village.

#### *Training outputs:*

Training outputs were that the total participation of the VEC members and Panchayat representatives, youth as well as women was ensured. People's participation thus became highly effective.

### **VARANGAON VILLAGE**

#### *Training Inputs:*

Training inputs were extremely sound Varangaon village. Here, there was a complexity not felt either in Waki or Wagdi villages; and this was the presence of a large minority population of Muslims. Hence Primers prepared in Urdu were first mastered. Then, the socio-religious milieu in which the teaching transaction was to take place was carefully discussed and its various nuances taken into account. A considerable contribution was made by specially enlisted Master Trainers who provided professional expertise. The training curriculum also had some new and innovative features which are detailed below:

- Indoctrination that Urdu learning is not difficult. Its script is close to the Arabic script;
- Distinction between Hindi and Urdu languages in speaking and communicating;
- Self-dependence for women can be achieved through literacy learning;
- Understanding the psychology of the adult learners; family budgeting and maintaining accounts;
- National Integration, Women's equality, Social Forestry, Environmental Sanitation, Small Family Norm, democracy, Health, Immunization and Children's Education were included and these subjects were discussed as part of the process of learning and imbibing;

#### *Participants in Training:*

Participants in training were mainly volunteer, social workers, teachers, Panchayat and VEC functionaries.

#### *Training Process:*

The training duration followed 4-2-2 formation. Separate times were allocated for imparting training as to the transaction of the different primers. Apart from the professional teaching of the Literacy Primers, general components relating to people's development were also covered. Professional participation of the government's education functionaries was very good, particularly in the case of the Urdu literacy teaching process.

#### *Training outputs:*

The professional training given to the volunteers who undertook Urdu teaching was very effective as could be observed from the feedback provided by the learners. The capacity building for Urdu learners was sound and on occasions outstripped even that achieved for the Marathi language which was the local language of both the State and the district..

### **CONCLUSION**

We thus see that the two principal innovations introduced into the programme of Total Literacy Campaign, achieved astonishing success and proved immensely popular among learners and volunteer-teachers alike. The resource support extended through the training and re-training programmes under the Total Literacy Campaign at the micro-level added vigor and strength to the voluntary literacy drive. It helped in acquiring valuable feedback, in sustaining volunteer morale, in imparting a base of high quality to

the teaching-learning process and in inculcating in the learners the belief that the volunteer-teachers would stand by them and never let them down. The coordinated action by the Master Trainers and the Literacy Volunteers helped to improve the literacy percentage remarkably. At the same time, a close bond developed between the teachers and the taught. The volunteers and the learners shared their everyday problems and perceptions and helped each other in resolving many day-to-day conundrums. Very rarely were dropouts found and even when they were located, action was immediately initiated to get them re-enrolled so that they could continue their literacy learning. Volunteers quickly learnt through the innovative training processes the methodologies of sustaining learner interest and the art of enabling learners to attend classes on a regular basis. The combination of innovative and imaginative training methods and actively functioning and guiding VECs proved a potent weapon that lent to the Jalgaon literacy campaign a unique, resilient strength that became self-evident at the time of final evaluation by a designated national level agency.

The evaluation of the Literacy Campaign in Jalgaon district was carried out in October 1999. This was when the lasting and positive impacts of the innovations mentioned above were brought into full focus. The evaluation report notes repeatedly that people's participation was really good. This is a tribute to the manner in which an environment for learning and receptivity was built up. The report also noted with appreciation the manner in which women learner's participation and how the campaign instilled in them a new sense of self-awareness and self-belief. At the same time, considerable stress was laid on a host of related development issues where learners were exposed to modern ideas in environmental preservation, reproductive rights, consumer protection, legal literacy, national integration and secularism etc. The formation of small savings and thrift groups especially among women, led to the conviction that economic independence was a realizable goal and continued efforts need to be made to launch and sustain cooperative measures. On the subjects of health, hygiene and sanitation there was a great deal of emphasis and the processes of imparting literacy were used freely and effectively to discuss a whole host of issues and inculcate among the learners both awareness and better practices.

Thus the innovations brought into play in the Jalgaon literacy campaign viz. effectively functioning Village Education Committees and improved training methodologies, helped in a big way to impart tangible and lasting impacts that the community as a whole felt and nurtured.

## CASE STUDIES

### **Voluntary Services rendered by the Literacy Volunteers under Literacy Campaign in the three Villages of Waki, Wagdi and Varangaon of Jalgaon District in Maharashtra State, India**

#### INTRODUCTION

Innovative practices in the shape of imaginative training methodologies and pro-active, initiative-taking Village Education Committees, left a lasting impact on the Jalgaon literacy campaign. In the three villages of Waki, Wagdi and Varangaon, the performance of the literacy volunteers was indeed quite exceptional. A case study in each of the three villages will serve to illustrate as well as buttress this point further.

#### **WAKI VILLAGE**

##### **Ms. Usha Prakash: (Literacy Volunteer)**

Ms Usha Prakash (32 years) did not have the opportunity to pursue her studies during her childhood. She was not allowed to go to school by her traditional parents who felt that education was really not necessary for a girl child. With great difficulty she could manage to go to her maternal uncle's house and pursue her studies. By a Herculean effort, she succeeded in passing her 7th standard. When the Literacy Campaign was launched, she decided to work for women's literacy voluntarily. She felt that nobody should undergo the kind of suffering that she had experienced in her childhood. Thus she started working with commitment and zeal determined to see that the female community. Her village should not miss this last opportunity to acquire basic education. She enrolled 10 illiterate women, selected specially from the backward classes. All her learners completed Literacy Primer III. Simultaneously she started preparing to qualify herself up to the 8th class.

Not satisfied with this, she motivated 8 neo-literate women to study extra-hard and qualify themselves up to the fourth class. 2 have already done so while at the time of the external evaluation the rest were busy preparing themselves.

She somehow felt that she needed further training inputs for furtherance of knowledge and information. She also felt that teaching- learning materials needed to be made even more relevant so as to generate and sustain interest. For this reason, she got some lessons prepared with the help of local professional teachers.

The reasons for persons dropping out were oftentimes personal difficulties. When she observed drop outs at her literacy center she put before them the examples of the Queen of Jhansi, Ms Indira Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar. They were asked to remind themselves of these exalted leaders and persevere in their endeavors so that the wider world outside became accessible. Thus she was able to target drop-outs and motivate them to get back on stream so that they would not miss what clearly was their last chance.

Above all, she was modest to a fault. Her view was that nobody should give her undue importance. She was like any other common lady and should be treated as such. She loved to do her literacy teaching particularly among the women and her work was her only reward.

#### **WAGDI VILLAGE :**

##### **Ms. Sushila Dinkar: (Literacy Volunteer)**

Ms Sushila Dinkar, 45 years age, had earned a qualification up to Diploma in Education (D.Ed.).

Her husband was an agriculturist. She had always been keen to do some social service in the interest of the poor and the deprived. She was, therefore, already engaged in some socially relevant and philanthropic tasks such as:

- Taking neighborhood patients to hospital, whenever required ;
- Getting children enrolled in primary school at the right age;
- Improving the life of the villagers by actively pursuing development work.

She was extremely happy when TLC was launched in the district / village since she felt that she would now get an opportunity to do worthwhile and substantial work in the area of education and development. She took a leading role in building the environment for learning and convincing many of the reluctant women that in literacy lay the path towards self-development and self-reliance. She undertook a strong personal campaign to inculcate self-belief among the rural, backward women and gradually convinced them to come regularly to the literacy classes. She began transacting literacy lessons in all earnestness.

Then she was asked to undergo the training given at the district level by the District Literacy Society. The training helped her to understand how the Literacy Primers I, II and III are to be taught. More importantly, the training increased her comprehension about how teaching an adult is different from teaching a child and how an adult learner's interest is to be sustained. She also learnt how education and learning issues can and must be related to other development issues such as health, sanitation, environment etc. Her enthusiasm in fact, transcended the boundaries of regular training and spilled over into areas of motivation, sustenance, equivalency, convergence and the like. She decided to work for total literacy of females with commitment. The response from the learners who came under her wing was so heart-warming that she soon became some kind of a legend in her locality.

Some female learners were absent now and then from their literacy classes on account of domestic compulsions and the rigors of agricultural work. She would gently but firmly chastise such defaulters and exhort them to ensure regularity by organizing their time in a planned manner. She taught them that literacy offered limitless opportunities and opened for them a window to the world. Literacy would offer them salvation and true empowerment. She would place before the learners the example of the local heroine Savithri Bai Phule, a popular social worker of the pre-independence Maharashtra. She never tired of telling stories about Phule and her exploits and the manner in which she overcame trials, tribulations and biases to fiercely espouse the cause of women's education.

She would insist on the learners finishing all the three primers and this helped them to develop their personalities. There were other beneficial outcomes as well. Personal hygiene improved by leaps and bounds as did sanitation. The learners understood the problems of large families and were taught about reproductive rights and methods of contraception. Concerns about environmental degradation and methods of conservation were also imparted. This holistic approach instilled great confidence and self-assurance among her clientele. Many learnt about the management of family accounts and mastered the formalities associated with opening a bank account or applying for a loan. Some of the neo-literates started preparing to appear for the 4th class examinations. Sushila Dinkar became, in fact, a household name and earned for herself a lasting respect and recognition.

## **VARANGAON VILLAGE :**

### **Ms. Jameela Hassan (Literacy Volunteer)**

Ms Jameela Hassan, 32, served as a Literacy Volunteer. She had pursued her education doggedly despite severe resistance not only from within her own family but also from the elders of her own Muslim community. Her determination enabled her to go all the way up to a D.Ed. (Diploma in Education). When the Literacy Campaign was launched, she, like the others, went through an initial period of hesitation and doubt. There existed among many, serious doubts as to whether it would receive adequate state as

well as national government support. Would the members of the community, particularly the Muslim community, whose elders were opposed to modern education in general and female education in particular, take advantage of literacy learning or not? Would learners, especially women learners, come forward and attend the literacy classes? Would they be able to surmount local resistance and antiquated mind-sets? Would they be able to balance their time so as to fit in literacy classes in between their many domestic chores and the compulsions of agricultural work? How would the absence of electricity at crucial times be taken care of? Jameela decided to go by the old maxim “nothing ventured, nothing gained” Literacy teaching and learning became a challenge as well as an obsession with her. She gathered together a dedicated team of volunteers and conducted a door-to-door campaign persuading, cajoling, nagging and convincing. Gradually, but surely, her efforts began showing results. The attitude of the elders softened. Women and men began to join up in large numbers. Suddenly, reluctance was transformed into demand.

She warmly welcomed the call to undertake training at the district level. Here, she had many of her queries answered particularly with regard to the Urdu primer and the manner in which it was to be transacted. She acquired sufficient knowledge to organize literacy classes which covered and discussed such important issues as personal hygiene, immunization, savings, thrift, gender justice, etc. To her surprise, the number of learners continued to increase rapidly because of the interest she was able to build up and sustain. Urdu learners, in fact, started showing an even greater degree of interest than the rest. Their sense of belonging to a minority community gave them an inner sense of urgency as well as a desire to learn and make progress. All the 3 Primers were completed very fast in Urdu. Jameela’s motivation and sense of purpose helped to knit the female members of her community together and spurred them onto the acquisition of knowledge and a heightened awareness of the world around them.