

**“THE NEED TO CHANGE”  
ANNUAL REPORT OF ASTHA SANSTHAN  
APRIL 2003 – MARCH 2004**

**Introduction to Astha**

Astha is a Hindi word meaning “deep faith or conviction” and Astha has “faith in the people”. We believe that everyone, the poor, exploited, deprived, have strength and abilities that often they themselves don’t recognize. Society also speaks disparagingly of the poor. However, we also believe that unorganized, the poor are not able to change their condition – organized, amazing things are possible. Along with this, is an understanding that “knowledge is power”, and so the strategy of Astha includes training programmes, study tours so people can learn from others, analysis of social reality understanding inter-relationships and social forces.

Some of the other principles that guide Astha’s work are:

- The poor can identify and prioritise their issues and problems.
- Local and grassroots level work is affected by state and national policies. People’s organisations and groups must have an understanding of the effect of micro- and macro-level realities, and work to change those too, when needed
- The role of the NGO is not “to parallel the government” – the government should run schools and health facilities, etc., and one of the roles of the NGO to help people to access the government resources
- Women’s participation in development and change activities is necessary, and unless a special effort is made to include women, women’s participation will be negligible.
- Learn with the people in one place, and then, when some strategy has been worked out that helps to solve some problems, then, with the leaders who have come up in the process, go to other places where people face similar problems, and in this way, issue-wise, and with the people, expand the work.

Astha was formed in 1986, and over the years, it has evolved from work in one Block of one District (Kotra Block of Udaipur District), to work in much of South Rajasthan, issue-based work in other parts of Rajasthan, and network issue based work with others all over India, and in South Asia.

In the 3 year period of work sanctioned, of which April 2003 to March 2004 is the first year, the plan was to prepare the work of Astha for a structural change in the organization, and for an addition to the roles that Astha had taken upon itself. That is to say:

- Astha would continue to work with and strengthen the People’s Organizations which had come into being as a result of Astha’s work over the years – but the work would be focused on preparing them for greater autonomy. (At first, we had talked about “greater independence” from Astha, and while that term has a good meaning – of less “dependence” on Astha – nevertheless, the reality is that Astha, in whatever form, will continue to be “inter-dependent” with the People’s Organizations in the common cause of working for justice and equality.)
- With the decision to establish some issue-based Resource Units – for documentation, training, research, advocacy, field support – Astha did some work in this year to gain conceptual clarity about the work of the Resource Units, and to plan for staff placements.

In this Report, we attempt to outline the work done in the previous year along those lines. The new structure with the Resource Units would come into effect in April 2004.

## **STRENGTHENING PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATIONS**

### **The Dilemma of Reporting about the Work of the People's Organizations**

In reporting about the work done by Astha with the various People's Organizations, the dilemma is, that the really interesting work, the case studies, the social change, is done by "the People's Organizations" and not by "Astha". And that is how it should be, according to our strategy – we want to create strong, vibrant, active organizations of people in many places, to work, through struggle and constructive action, to remove the root causes of poverty and deprivation. And we all know that for all the centuries of India's history, not much of this mobilization happened. There needs to be a "catalyst", some intervention that will help to release the people's power which is locked up.

In this report, there is an attempt to share some of the case studies of work done, which undoubtedly had something to do with Astha's work.

### **Consolidation and Preparation of the People's Organizations**

#### **1. *Adivasi Vikas Manch* – The Tribal Development Forum –**

The Tribal Development Forum was the first People's Organization formed, in 1992, in 15 Gram Panchayats of Kotra Block. 12 years later, the organization, structure, and spread of the Organization has strengthened and expanded. There are 5,525 members and work is going on in 3 Blocks of the area:

1. Jhadol Block, Panarwa area. Udaipur District. 6 Gram Panchayats, 39 villages. There is a Tehsil or Block Level Committee of 103 persons.
2. Kotra Block, Udaipur District. 30 Gram Panchayats, 255 villages, and the Forum has a Coordinating Leadership Committee of 50 members to oversee and plan for the work in the Block.
3. Pindwara Block, Sirahi District. 12 Gram Panchayats, 60 villages, and the leadership structure in the Block is an Executive Committee with 14 members.



"Face to Face" Meeting of Candidates organized before the State Election by AVM

### Highlights of the Work –

- Forest Land Displacement – 2,907 claims have been filed with the Collector, to grant legal land title to the homestead land on which the tribal people have been living for decades.
- Tribal Self Rule – 50 Tribal Self Rule Gram Sabhas have been formed. The work is going on to solve disputes, work for ownership of forest produce and control and protection of natural resources.
- Work is going on in relation to the impact on the area in Pindwara of limestone mining and cement factory emissions
- An attempt was made to join the traditional community leaders, “mukhi patels” to the Tribal Development Forum, and a camp was held with them and the active tribal leaders of the Forum.
- There are 48 women’s Savings and Loan Societies in the area. The objective is not to try, at all costs, to link them to the banks – some of this over-zealous work to get the women’s Savings Societies “graded” has led some women in other places into a “debt trap”. But women, saving their own money collectively, and making loans to each other when needed, is a constructive piece of work of the Forum.
- The Tribal Development Forum organized a Ward Panch Training for the Ward Councillors of the local self-government bodies, Gram Panchayats, in which 80 men and women elected representatives participated.
- Voter Awareness Camps were organized around the time of the State elections, in which awareness about electronic voting machines and other matters were dealt with.
- The annual “Milan Mela” or “Get-Together Fair” which is a learning and sharing event held every year by the Tribal Development Forum on September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, and to which about 10,000 people come, was held this year on the theme of “Right to Work” and the need for an “Employment Guarantee Scheme”. The Chief Guests were Aruna Roy of the Right to Work campaign, and Mr. Namunaryan Meena from the Rajasthan Human Rights Commission.

A systematic overview of the work of Astha with the leaders of the Tribal Development Forum is shown below:

	Activity	Dates	Number Participating
1	Tribal Self Rule Committee Training	15 April 2003	32
2	“	22-23 May, 2003	50
3	“	10 June 2003	20
4	“	16-17 July 2003	55
5	Youth Camp	27-29 July 2003	106
6	Tribal Self Rule Committee Training	7-8 August 2003	25
7	Gram Sabha Convention	28-29 March 2003	220
8	Sanchalak Mandal Members Camp	10-11 September 2003	126
9	Leadership Training Camp	21-23 November 2003	45
10	Milan Mela	23-24 September 2003	9,000- 10,000
11	Voter Education Training Camp	10-11 November, 2003	103
12	Leadership Training	10-12 December 2003	40
13	Leadership Training	18-20 December 2003	37
14	Traditional Community Leaders Training Camp	7-8 January 2004	43
15	Legal Awareness Training	10-11 January, 2004	105
16	Women’s Saving and Loan Societies Camp	5-7 February 2004	56
17	Women’s Leadership Training Camp	13-15 February 2004	50
18	Women’s Convention	25-28 February 2004	300

### Meetings at Block Level in the Year

1. Manch / Forum Workers Meeting -- 12
2. Coordinating Committee Members Meetings – 4 (3-monthly)
3. Tribal Self Rule Meetings – 4
4. Grain Bank / Village Fund Meeting – 3
5. Forest Land Displacement Meetings – 6
6. Association of Strong Women Alone Monthly Meetings – 12
7. Meeting with Tribal Development Commissioner – 1

And now, a case study from the work of the Tribal Development Forum, to give life to some of the figures mentioned above:

#### **Relocating the “Relocation Park”**

In the Panarwa area of Jhadol Block, Udaipur District, the Forest Department unilaterally decided to create a “Relocation Park” in a forested area along state highway #10, and to “relocate” deer and panthers to the new Park area. The local people objected, but the Forest Department said they would file police cases against the people if they objected. The people were afraid, and so the work on the Park began. However, the Tribal Development Forum called a meeting of about 500 – 600 people from the 6 Gram Panchayat areas where they were working there, and the people reasoned that because it was a tribal area, without the agreement of the Gram Sabha, no project work could go on. And so, after 7 months, the work stopped. Then, on February the 6<sup>th</sup>, 2004, the Gram Sabha Panarwa gave a notice to the DFO (Deputy Forest Officer) and the SDM (Sub-Divisional Magistrate) that they must come in the meeting of the Gram Sabha. In the meeting, the DFO and SDM heard the people’s problems, that the displacement from grazing areas was causing as a result of the declaration of the Relocation Park, and about the forest employees taking bribes from them of between Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 5,000 for collecting dry wood. The DFO and SDM were sympathetic to the problems of the people, and so asked them: “If not a Park here, then where?” The people told them of a good place 4 km. further inside the forest, which was even more dense. And so, the location of the Relocation Park was changed, and the problems the people were facing were solved. Many new people joined the Tribal Development Forum, as a result of this action by the Forum leaders.

## The Lok Jumbish Programme

While the Lok Jumbish Programme of strengthening Primary Education in a cluster of villages of Kotra Block near the Village of Devla, was a separate "project" funded by a semi-government body called the Lok Jumbish Parishad, nevertheless, it worked under the overall supervision and with the help of the Tribal Development Forum.

The Lok Jumbish work was carried out in an area of 76 villages, in which the total population was 22,703 and the number of families were 4,169. The objective of the programme was to increase the participation in Primary Schooling of the children of the area. Motivation to join existing government schools; special schools for working children; special learning centres for young children to study to class 3 near their homes so that when they are old enough to walk to the government school, they will not be able to enter class 4; special residential education camps for girls to help them to "catch up" to the grade of their age level, and enter school at class 6 or so. Specifically, the work done in this financial year by the Astha Team, and the Tribal Development Forum workers, was:

- a) Creating the Climate for Schooling and Education – done in all 76 villages. In 33 villages, there were special programmes of community singing programmes (*bajan mandlis*), school children's rallies, meetings, etc.
- b) Women's Development Camps – 6 camps were held, and in each camp, 5-7 women's group's members participated. Discussion was held about why girls' education is important, and the need for girls' education.
- c) Girls aged 11-14 Camp – The objective of the camp was to help the girls present feel the need to join the school or a Lok Jumbish educational opportunity. The girls were helped to get rid of shyness and hesitation, to make them aware of the physical changes in their bodies, to learn about Child Rights, and to enjoy playing games. 94 girls came in 1 camp.
- d) Women and Girl Children's Fair/Camp – The inequality of men and women, the exploitation by the society of women and girls were discussed in the camp. Those assembled were helped to understand the need for women and girls to be educated, to have a knowledge of the world, and to get organized. 118 women and girls participated.
- e) Village Education Committees – 19 committees were formed to take responsibility for education and development work in the village.
- f) Children's Fair (Bal Mela) -- 13-14 November at Berda Magra Village, the fair was held. 840 children from the various programmes of Lok Jumbish in the cluster attended. There were games, a cultural programme, and the Block Development Officer and the area MLA also attended.
- g) Nonformal Education Centres (Shehj Shiksha Kendras) – 45 centres were run under the programme, with the objective to prepare the students to pass grade 5, and be able to enter the regular school system at the grade 6 level. An 8<sup>th</sup> class pass local person is the teacher, and testing is done every 6 months. If a student gets 60% marks, they can go on to the next level. There are 618 boys and 619 girls studying in these centres, a total of 1,237 students.
- h) Small School – (Shiksha Mitra Kendra) – 1 hamlet, where the education of children was extremely low, with a 10<sup>th</sup> pass local person as the teacher, a small school was opened for 20 students, 14 boys and 6 girls.
- i) Open-timing School for Working Children – 9 such schools have been running since 1998. Each school is open 8 hours a day, and teaching and learning is available for classes 1 to 5. In this year, there were 344 boys and 208 girls, a total of 552 children enrolled in these schools.

Perhaps one of the most successful activities of Lok Jumbish, was the Girls' Education Camp – a residential, 7-month learning opportunity for girls who have never gone to school, and are presently between ages 9 and 14 years of age. In 7 months, it is possible to bring the girls up to a class 5 standard, and so, after completing the course, they can enter class 6. In this year, Astha conducted the 7<sup>th</sup> such camp. The Tribal Development Forum workers spread the information about the Camp in the villages, and helped to make the parents understand the

importance of girls' education. During the Camp, the Tribal Development Forum workers helped in problem solving, mobilized some resources for the Camp, and took pride in its success! In this Camp, 116 girls joined – 91 girls passed the 5<sup>th</sup> class exam, 10 passed the 4<sup>th</sup> class exam, and 15 passed the 3<sup>rd</sup> class exam.

The impact of these Camps is that the enrolment and attendance of girls in the government schools has increased. Parents have understood the need to educate their daughters – parents came 1 month in advance to fill the registration form to make sure their daughter got a chance to get educated in the Camp. And parents are now motivated to see that the problems of teachers in the school system are solved.

### **Watershed Work**

The 500 hectare Watershed programme being implemented in Uplawas of Malwa ka Chora Gram Panchayat, Kotra Block, Udaipur District, is 60% complete. In the last year, soil conservation, pit digging, and trenching was done. Even though the work is not complete, in the 2003 monsoon, when the rains were good, the retention of moisture in the soil had increased from what it was before the Watershed work was done. As part of the Watershed project, the local people sowed a fodder seed called "puwad", and with the rains, the trenches, the increased holding of moisture capacity of the soil, the local people got a good crop, (they had never been able to sow this crop before), and sold it for a good price.

Then, further grants from CAPART were delayed, and the work stopped. When finally, a small amount of the grant was released, work started again, but within 2 months, it had to stop due to local inter-personal disputes.

## **2. Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan, The Vagad Area Labourers and Farmers Organization**

In 1996, some people from Dungarpur District came to join the meetings of the Forest Land People's Movement, on the issue of displacement from homesteads on forest land, and joined the "sit-in" (dharna) in front of the Tribal Development Commissioner's Office on the issue. The people asked that Astha come and work with them in Dungarpur District, and so, in April 1997, Astha placed one worker in Dungarpur to work with the people.

The Organization has 7,775 members, and is working in:

- All 5 Blocks of Dungarpur District – Aspur, Beechiwada, Dungarpur, Sagwara, Simalwara
- 1 Block of Banswara District – Kushalgarh

	Name of the Block	Number of Gram Panchayats Where There is Work	Number of Villages Where There is Work	Number of Tribal Self Rule Villages
1	Beechiwada	22	78	38
2	Simalwada	9	20	10
3	Sagwada	10	18	7
4	Dungarpur	24	83	33
5	Aspur	8	13	10
6	Kushalgarh (Banswara District)	30	38	4
	Total	103	250	102

**Families Associated with the Vagad Area Labourers and Farmers Organization  
Related to Specific Issues**

	Name of the Block	Revenue Land Issue	Forest Land Displacement Issue	Credit Issue, Banks and/or Moneylenders
1	Beechiwada	935	790	350
2	Simalwada	370	210	180
3	Sagwada	117	190	130
4	Dungarpur	880	181	380
5	Aspur	150	--	60
6	Kushalgarh (Banswara District)	395	640	90
	Total	2,847	2,011	1,190

Some very interesting and important issues affecting large numbers of people have been taken up by the Organization in the Vagad Area. Perhaps the most interesting is the issue of exploitation in bank loan recovery

**Problems of Credit (Loans and Loan Repayment) in Dungarpur District**

**1. Defaulters** -- Since drought has lasted for about 5 years, the tribals of Dungarpur who have taken loans could not make any repayment in this period, and have been labeled “defaulters”.<sup>1</sup>

**2. Subsidy Benefits Do Not Reach Tribal Borrowers** -- The tribal farmers took Agriculture loans from the banks (the banks were implementing a government scheme), and the banks have created problems for the farmers in relation to the government subsidies that were part of the programme. For example: the loans were for varying amounts -- Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 20,000, and the subsidy amounts varied around 50%. So, if the farmer took a loan for the purchase of animals, or a pump set, then the bank purchased the item for them, and the farmer signed the papers for the TOTAL amount. *In other words, the amount they had to repay did not take into account the government subsidy, and the subsidy money was taken by the bank people, and the subsidy amount plus the loan amount is being taken back from the tribal farmers by the bank.*

**3. Simple and Compound Interest Problems** -- Compound interest was being charged on the total loan amounts. In a precedent judgement, the Rajasthan High Court had ruled that the banks could only take *simple interest*, not *compound interest*. The banks of Dungarpur are not following that.

**4. So-called “Renewal of Loans” by Cooperative Department Societies (LAMPS)** -- The Cooperative Societies (Government run Societies) have made many mistakes in the procedures around “renewal of loans” (of which there is no authorized system in banking -- although there are such systems in the traditional money-lending culture). At the end of each year, the banks have been showing their loan repayments as totally repaid -- when in fact, they have not been repaid. (The drought period has further slowed down repayments.) Then early in April, they show a “new loan” for the tribal farmer, which includes all the unpaid principle and interest, plus some arbitrary penalties which the LAMPS (Large And Multi-Purpose Societies) managers have added. The tribal farmers are asked to put their signature or thumb impression on these “new loan” papers. The balance between the principle plus interest outstanding, and the total “new loan” written is an amount that will go in the Manager’s pocket!! This process has been going on for the last 7 years in Dungarpur District!

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<sup>1</sup> Assets of Bank Loan Defaulters can be confiscated by the banks towards the repayment of their loan amounts.

**5. No Receipts for Loans Repaid** -- In other irregularities, the tribal farmers have repaid their loans but have not received receipts from the banks or from LAMPS for their repayment amounts.

**6. Banks Ignore Reserve Bank Directives Which Benefit the Poor Who Have Taken Loans** --

The Reserve Bank and NABARD, have passed a new guideline that for those who have outstanding loans (and would then be "defaulters") since 1998 and up to March 2003. *The banks are directed to waive the total interest and make only the principle amount due.* The banks have not implemented this ruling with the masses of the people who are defaulters (because of the drought, etc.). And -- it has been found that all those tribal farmers who took loans from the Co-operative Department's LAMPS, are not classified as "defaulters" since on the books of the LAMPS, the total loans have been cleared at the end of each year and "new loans" "loan renewals" have been done. So, this guideline cannot be applied to these farmers, and these farmers cannot benefit from the Reserve Bank and NABARD directive..

**7. Animal Insurance Ignored by Banks** -- The government has a scheme that when banks make loans for livestock, the government automatically insures the animals purchased and in case of death of the animals, the bank recovers its loan money from the insurance company, and not from the farmer. However, in Dungarpur, due to the inefficiency and incompetence of the bank managers, and lack of interest in the problems of the tribal farmers, when the animals have died, the reports have been given to the banks, but the bank managers have not cleared the loan accounts with the insurance money, and the bank managers continue to demand repayment of the loan amounts from the poor tribal farmers who now do not even have animals!

These problems have been uncovered by the Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan, and after hearing about a few cases, the Organization did a survey of about 1500 poor farmers with loans outstanding, taking case study information. This data reveals that there is a huge problem in this tribal area for poor farmers, and the issue has been taken up by VMKS. The Organization has handled this problem using the PESA legislation (Tribal Self Rule -- TSR legislation). Section 3 - ta-V of the State Act gives the Village Assembly (*Gram Sabha*) the power to control money lending. The PESA Village Assemblies (*Gram Sabhas*) have gotten the facts out about the cases, and if the records are correct, the tribal farmer must still repay the bank, but if there have been mistakes, the Village Assembly (*Gram Sabha*) decided to take up the case and "get it right".

After realizing that all these "irregularities" are probably not isolated to Dungarpur District, the members of VMKS have gone to meetings of poor tribal farmers in other Blocks and Districts, and shared their insights and explained about the actions they have taken. Now, NGOs and People's Organizations in other places are taking up surveys and investigations, and at least in Rajsamand District, there is a report that a bank manager has closed the loan accounts of persons who have paid (or more than repaid) their loans.

### **Money-Lenders**

Likewise, VMKS has done surveys of loans given by moneylenders, and have taken action where the recovery from the poor tribal farmers has been extortion. They have shared their action with moneylenders, with other people's organizations.

In Kumbalgarh Block of Rajsamand District, the problem of "over-recovery of loans" with extremely high interest rates (like 120%) was tackled when the People's Organization decided to direct the poor tribal farmers to stop repayment of loans. Repayment was stopped, and the money-lenders have come to the People's Organization there saying -- "Okay, repay the loan with only 12% interest per year". Also in Kumbalgarh, the moneylenders have stopped recovering money against loans made!!! In addition, Jarga Development Society (*Jarga Vikas Samiti*), the People's Organization in Kumbalgarh, has done a survey of the LAMPS loans made, and found many irregularities, and have submitted a report to the Collector, Rajsamand. The Collector has ordered an inquiry into the loaning system through government channels in the Block.



In this way, the work of Vagad Area Labourers and Farmers Organization is spreading beyond Dungarpur and Banswara, and is an example of Astha's approach – first figure out how to improve a situation in one place, and then, with the people, share the experiences and strategies with other poor and exploited people in other places.

And now, for the meetings and training programmes that Astha helped the Organization with throughout the year: First, the regular meetings held:

	Programme Meetings	Participants
1.	Every month, on the 6 <sup>th</sup> , General Body of the P.O., so 12 such General Body meetings in Dungarpur were held in the year	1,500
2.	Every month, on the 9 <sup>th</sup> , General Body of the P.O., so 12 such General Body meetings in Kushalgarh, Banswara, were held in the year	750
3.	Women's Meeting, 30 <sup>th</sup> of every month – 6 in the year	250
4.	Coordinating Committee Group, 9 meetings in the year	
5.	Workers of the People's Organization, 6 meetings	
6.	National Meeting of Tribal Self Rule organized by Bharat Jan Andolan – 2 meetings	
7.	State Level Meeting of PUCL – 2 meetings	
8.	Udaipur Area Coordination meeting of People's Organizations 6 meetings	

Date	Programme	Participants
13-14 June 2003	Leadership Training Camp	24
20-29 August, 2003	Women's Literacy Training	36
27 August 2003	Forest Land Rights Claims Submitted in the Courts, Dungarpur	460
8 September 2003	Rally of Forest Land Rights	550
18-20 September, 2003	Leadership Training Camp	62
23-24 September 2003	Study tour to Milan Mela (Large Learning and Sharing Fair, Kotra, Dist. Udaipur)	70
30 Oct. – 1 November 2003	Women's Camp, Kushalgarh, Dist. Banswara	80
24 November 2003	State Election Candidates Interaction Programme, Kushalgarh	120
25 November 2003	State Election Candidates Interaction Programme, Dungarpur	380
13-15 December, 2003	Women's Camp,	72
24 December 2003	Tribal Self Rule Annual Convention	3,200
9-12 January 2004	Tribal Self Rule Committee Camp	120
14-23 January 2004	World Social Forum, Mumbai	17
25-27 February 2004	Women's Training Camp, Dungarpur	220
13-14 March, 2004	Legal Awareness Training Camp	107
18-19 March 2004	Issue Based Camp, on Credit/Debt, Kushalgarh	92
27-28 March, 2004	Tribal Self Rule Committee Members Camp	81
27 March 2004	Debt/Credit/Forest Land Rights Rally	1500

The Astha staff working with the Vagad Area Labourers and Farmers Organization are:  
 1 Full-Time Field Coordinator  
 1 Fellow, a local man from Dungarpur, who is working in Banswara  
 Paid workers of the Organization are 4 Animators, 3 in Dungarpur and 1 in Banswara.

### 3. Gordward Adivasi Sangathan / Gordward Area Tribal Organization

The Gordward area of Rajasthan centers around Pali District, and the work of the Gordward Area Tribal Organization is going on in Bali and Desuri Blocks of Pali District. The tribals of the area are mostly Garasias. The area is one in which tribals are not in the majority (unlike Kotra, Dungarpur, Banswara, Jhadol, etc.) and the Rajput hold on the area is reminiscent of more feudal times. On top of that, it is the area from where Bhairon Singh Shektawat comes, the former BJP Chief Minister of Rajasthan, and presently Vice-President of India. Hindu fundamentalist organizations are strong, and the Rajput dominance in the area makes it a difficult place to work with secular values, and the ideology that all persons are equal.

Issues of Forest Land and Revenue Land entitlements are issues in the area, and several notices for displacement from homesteads on these categories of land were appealed to the District Collector.

The rains continue to be deficient in the Gordward area, and so a Drought Relief survey was done, and given to the SDM with the request to open more drought relief work in the interior hamlets, to sanction well-deepening for drinking water, and to issue Employment Cards. There are 7 women's savings and loan societies in the area.

The kind of problems the people are up against, and the injustice they are living under, is exemplified in this case study below.

#### **Tribals Challenge the Establishment**

On March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2004 about 12:00 noon, the Forest Department, the Police, along with women constables, came with a photographer Devela Village, Nana Thana area, Panchayat Bundar, Bali Block, Pali District, with the objective to demolish the homes of 2 tribal poor families Chunna Ram s/o Kala Ram, and Naina Ram. Their homes were on forest land, but the men objected when the Forest officials said they were going to demolish their homes, and said they had filed their cases in appeal in the court of the Collector against displacement. But the Forest Department officials didn't listen, and broke down the houses, took out 50 kilos of wheat, 6 quintals of corn, cooking utensils, cots, etc. and put them in a tractor trolley and took them away! They broke the drinking water pots and roti *balen*/rolling pin in front of those assembled. Chunna Ram's wife, Rami Bai, was beaten by the Forest employees, and she suffered cuts and injuries to her head, back and "private parts". She went to the District Collector, but the Collector sent her to the senior Police officer. He sent her for a "medical investigation", but because there was no lady doctor available, there was no medical report done. The Senior Police officer said to file an FIR in the Nana police station. On March 28<sup>th</sup>, Rami Bai reached the Nana police station, but the *Thanadar*/Station House Incharge was not available. The case was ultimately filed on March 29<sup>th</sup>, and on that date, Rami Bai went to Nana for the medical report. But nothing happened in this case -- the case has been closed, and no action was taken against the forest officials.

"Coincidentally", in these days, 4 members of her and Chunna Ram's family Joma s/o Naina Ram, Naraian s/o Naina Ram, Vala Ram s/o Chunnaji, Sawla Ram s/o Kalaji were jailed for breach of peace. For bail, on 31<sup>st</sup> March, the magistrate asked for Rs. 20,000 security, and gave them bail.

How dare a tribal family try to raise its voice against actions taken by the influential, instigated by the local powerful persons, who do not want to see the tribals raising their voices and demanding their rights!

Aside from taking up cases, and trying to survive in this atmosphere, the work of the Goward Area Tribal Organization does work on some of the issues that are taken up by People's Organizations in other places. In addition to the activities listed below, there are of course monthly meetings of the core group of the Organization, participation in the 3 monthly meetings of the leaders of People's Organizations in South Rajasthan.

Below is a summary of the special training and other activities of the Organization in the previous year:

	Programme	Dates	Days	Participants
1	Leadership Training Camp	21-23 August	3	48
2	Forest Land People's Movement Demonstration in Pali District	30 August	1	450
3	Coordinating Committee Training Camp	28-30 October	3	35
4	Face-to-Face Meeting with Election Candidates	19 November	1	550
5	Women's Convention	11-13 February	3	300
6	Literacy Training Camp	20-29 February	10	38

#### **4. Jarga Kshetriya Vikas Samiti / Jarga Area Development Society**

The working of area of Jarga Society is in 3 Blocks -- Gogunda Block, 12 Gram Panchayats, in Udaipur District; Kumbalgarh Block, 25 Gram Panchayats, and Amet Block, 12 Gram Panchayats, both in Rajsamand District.

The membership of the Society is about 4,000 men and women.

The structure of the Society is that there is a meeting of representatives of the 3 Blocks, which meets monthly on the 30<sup>th</sup> of the month, and those from anywhere in the 3 Blocks who has a problem, or has some work with the Society, comes to that meeting. There are also monthly meetings at the Block Level of the 2 newer Blocks --Gogunda meets on the 18<sup>th</sup>, and Amet meets on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of every month, there is a meeting of the Sanchalak Mandal, key members Committee of the Society from all 3 Blocks (about 35 people) who meet in Kelwara. This Committee makes decisions about the direction and future work of the Society.

In the year under reporting, there was important work done on the issues of

- Credit / Debts
- Forest Land homesteaders
- Ration Shops, and the Public Distribution System
- The Right to Work
- Conventions and Large Camps Organized

#### **Credit / Debt Issue --**

There was a survey of 85 indebted families in Kumbalgarh Block, to assess the level of indebtedness. Most of the loans had been taken from the Cooperative Bank, the Land Development Bank (Bumi Vikas Bank), and the rest from Moneylenders. Out of all those who reported their indebtedness, only 10 families who had taken loans from Moneylenders had cleared their debts. Their rate of interest had been 130% !! It was discovered that the Kalibelia caste group are the persons who take the capital from the Jain or Mahajan Moneylenders, and then do the actual loaning themselves. They of course make a profit on increased interest. The Jains and Mahajans have stopped giving loans very freely, as they are not sure they will get their

money back. But the Kalibelias "middle men" and "middle women" get their money back by extortionist tactics. E.g. the Kalibelias men send their women to recover the loans, and they stand in front of the debtor's house, shout abuses, accusations of sexual assault, sometimes even take off their clothes! The neighbours, and the family themselves, think that they must repay the loan to get those people out of here! Sometimes the Kalibelias beat the person who has taken a loan, and if the debtor reports this behaviour to the Jarga Society, then the persons associated with Jarga Society run the risk of being beaten by the Kalibelias!!

However, the Jarga related people went to the police station, and filed a case against the Kalibelias and what they had done to the person who had taken the loan. The Police arrested several of the Kalibelias, and kept them locked up for a few days. After that, the Kalibelias were ready to negotiate, and with the help of the Fellow working with the Jarga Society, a list was made of those with outstanding debts, and their loans were repaid at the rate of 24% interest.. That is how 10 families had freed themselves from debt!

### **Land Issue**

744 cases of forest land encroachment farm families  
671 cases of community grazing land encroachers (charnot land)  
1,001 cases of revenue land encroachers (bilanama land)

391 farm families whose homesteads are on forest land, gave their applications to the Collector for regularization of their homestead plots in the last year. The farm families who are on forest land had a sit-in (*dharna*) at the Range Office of the Forest Department in Kelwara, Kumbalgarh Block, on 15 October, 2003. Most of those who participated were those living in or near the Kumbalgarh Game Sanctuary, as they were being particularly harassed when they went into the Game Sanctuary to collect grass / fodder for their animals.

Those families who are living on community grazing land or on revenue land, drafted a petition and gave it to the Tehsildar, asking that their homesteads be regularized.

### **Ration Shops and Public Distribution System**

There was a big Public Hearing on January 30, 2004, organized by the MKSS (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan) and the Jarga Area Development Society, on the issue of corruption in ration distribution and in the operating of the ration shops. There were about 800 people present, including the media, and people from Jaipur and Delhi. About 25 IAS officers from various postings were also in attendance.



Part of the large number of people who attended the Public Hearing on The Public Distribution Ration Shops in Kelwara January 30th, 2004

The ration dealers were unready to give the data needed to open discussions in the Public Hearing. However, on the night of January the 29<sup>th</sup>, when the ration dealers came to fight with the Block Development Officer (BDO) who had ordered that the records be given, they were forced to give the photocopies of their records when they saw that the BDO was ready to take their resignations, and was unwilling to compromise with them.

On the Public Hearing day, there was high drama as the Ration Dealers, and the elected Block Pradhan or President of the Block Development Council, tried to give the impression that everything was all right. They had planted spokespersons in the audience to report that they always got fair prices and good grain. But when these persons experiences were challenged, then strong armed men were ready to fight. With great difficulty, and police protection, those who wanted to tell of their experiences that revealed the exploitation and corruption in the ration shops, were able to speak. In the end, 5 ration dealers had their licenses takes away from them. Further, it was suggested that persons could take amounts, up to their ration quota, in 2 or 3 installments if they did not have money to lift the entire quota on one day.

### **The Right to Work**

In Kumbalgarh Block, the Jarga Society and MKSS together went on a 10 day walking tour (padyatra) throughout a part of the Block. The objective was to raise awareness and spread information about the national level efforts about The Right To Work Campaign, and the proposed Employment Guarantee Act. A second objective was that since it was a Drought year, that as many persons as possible should get Drought Relief Work in the area.

Many people from this walking tour (padyatra) later attended the May 1<sup>st</sup> convention on the Right to Work held in Bhim, of Rajsamand District. They raised their voices with others that something definitely needed to be done.

### **Conventions and Large Events Organized**

a) Mahila Sangam -- Women's Convention was organized in Amet from 28-30 December, and 385 women participated, and 100 men participated. This was the first time such a big gathering of women had been organized in Amet, and everyone was amazed! The MLA participataed in the Convention as a resource person. The main issue discussed was the BPL lists, the Right to Work, pensions, land issues and the debt problems. A rally was held on the last day.

b) Jarga Members Convention -- Organized in Kelwara on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. Tribal Issues were the main topic of discussion -- land displacement, excessive liquor consumption, social customs, Jarga Society membership, and the custom of natha, women being allowed by custom to leave her husband and with social acceptance after the payment of certain amounts, to live with another man as his wife. The MLA of Gogunda, and the MLA of Kumbalgarh both attended the Convention.

c) Women's Empowerment Day -- the one day programme of meeting and Rally organized by low income widows and separated women, with other women, and men, who think that the empowerment of women is a good idea, was organized on June 1<sup>st</sup> in Kelwara. About 200 women attended, and in Amet, the Women's Empowerment Day programme attracted about 400 women. Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan, or the Association of Strong Women Alone, joins with the Jarga Society to work on issues of low income widows and separated women in the area.

## 5. Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan / The Association of Strong Women Alone

In November 1999, a Widow Convention was held at Bassi, District Jaipur. It was the first of its kind, and over 425 widows from 22 Districts of Rajasthan attended. At that Convention, a State Level Coordinating Committee of Widows was formed, with the responsibility to bring into existence a Rajasthan statewide widow association, to fight for the rights of widows.

In the follow-up meetings of that Committee in January 2000, it was decided to broaden the concept of the Association to include other women who are alone – those who have been thrown out of their homes by their husbands, divorced, or those who have walked out due to abuse. And so, “Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan” was formed – the Association of Strong Women Alone.



Women's Empowerment Day Celebrated at Block Headquarters in 60 Blocks of Rajasthan June 1. Here, the Rally in Beechiwara Block, Dungarpur District

The objectives of the Association are to bring together low-income widows and other women alone for the following purposes:

- To work to change the social customs which marginalize women alone
- To work together to claim land and property rights
- To overcome superstitions and cruel practices which rob such women of their self-confidence and dignity
- To work together to strengthen the economic position of the members
- To take collective action on atrocities committed against members
- To help women alone to take advantage of laws, policies and schemes of the government which can help them in their lives
- To work together for the education and development of the children of the widows and other women alone

During the past year, the Association has increased in size, and in membership. By March 2004, there were Block Committees in 64 Blocks of 22 Districts in Rajasthan, and the membership of the Association stood at 14,973. The support of the work of the Association is shared between Astha, Udaipur and Hadoti Hast Shilp Sansthan Kota. Astha takes the responsibility of the work in Southern and Western Rajasthan, and Central Rajasthan of Chittor, Rajsamand and Ajmer, with some Blocks of Bhilwara and Nagor.

In the past year, the structure of the Association has also expanded. Earlier there were the Members, Block Level Committees and the State Level Committee. In this year, the need for District Level Committees was felt, and each District Committee is formed of 4 selected members

of each Block Level Committee in the District. The District Level Committees meet 3 times a year, or oftener if necessary. These Committees are providing some co-ordination amongst the Block members.

In addition to the District Committees, it has also been decided to form Village Level Committees. The need for Village Level Committees was felt when it was observed that there was a widespread problem of too many women attending the Block Level Committee meetings! That is to say, the members of the Block Level Committees have been selected by the women of the Block, and have been given training in how to be the “front-line” leaders of the Association at the local level. Other members of the Association began attending the meetings, in large numbers – because they felt they learned something new every time that would help them in their lives! But the dynamics of the Block Level monthly meetings changed, with so many non-Committee Members present. And so, it was decided that only Committee Members would be allowed to attend the meetings, but that the Committee Members would call Village Level Meetings and form Village Level Groups to share what all had gone on at the Block Monthly meeting, and to distribute copies of the newsletter, “The Voice Of Women Alone” (Ekal Nari Ki Aawaz). The Astha Staff would be with some of the women, if required, in holding the first meeting in the village, to show how to conduct a village meeting. And the Astha staff would include “Formation of Village Level Groups” as an agenda on the Block Level Committee Members training curriculum. What has happened is that the low-income Women Alone have formed many groups, to which other women alone come, and other women too – and even some men ! And, the Village Groups have started dealing with local problems, as well as hearing about what went on at the Block meeting.

Also, the structure of the Association of Strong Women Alone has been clarified. At the training programme for the Executive Members of the Registered Society, The Organization of Strong Women Alone (Ekal Nari Shakti Sansthan) held in August 2003, it was discussed whether the Executive of the Organization was also the leadership core group for the Association. The Executive of the Organization had a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer. It was decided that the two organizations were organically linked, in membership and objective, and no one wanted there to be one President of the Organization, and another person as President of the Association. The next meeting of the State Level Committee of the Association confirmed that the 11 women who formed the Executive of the Organization, were also the Executive of the Association.

Aside from the regular training programmes and membership camps, the Association of Strong Women Alone organized a Workshop at the World Social Forum, held in Mumbai, January 2004. Astha helped the Association with the booking of the Hall, and with preparing the hand-outs. In a Forum, titled: “Another World Is Possible”, it will be possible when women from amongst the economically poor get a chance to raise their voices about what kinds of policies, customs, organizations are needed to bring in a better life for all. 10 key women members of the Association travelled to Mumbai, and shared the platform of the Workshop, each one presenting a part of the history or activities of the Association. Over 150 people from many Indian states, and several countries of the world, attended. One young man tearfully told his story of how his mother, when widowed, had struggled to survive and also to bring him up. Another strong woman from Kutch, Gujarat, with energy and colour, told of all they were doing under the banner of The Association of Strong Women Alone, Kutch, an organization they had formed after visiting the Rajasthan Association of Strong Women Alone 2 years earlier.

Another special piece of work done in this year, was a survey research to determine the percentage of the Rajasthan female population that was “living separated from a husband who was still living” – abandoned, divorced, separated, thrown out, walked out. The survey was carried out, in a house-to-house survey, in 16 villages spread throughout the 8 cultural zones of Rajasthan. The Association wanted this data, to add to the data it had about widows. The study showed that of all females age 7 and above, 1.2% were “separated”, but that of all females age 15 and above, 1.5% were “separated”. Since it has been established that 8% of all females in

India are widows, and if we add that 1.5% of all females (age 15 and above) are separated, then it means that in Rajasthan, it can be argued that 9.5% of all females in a marriageable age group are "ekal nari" or "women alone". That figure, in Rajasthan, would be about 21 lakh, or 2 million 100 thousand females/women.

The Association of Strong Women Alone wanted that figure to use while lobbying the political parties and party candidates in the Rajasthan State elections, which were held in December 2003. A strong delegation of the State Level Committee did present a petition of demands to all Political Parties, of actions the Association wanted to see taken if their party came to power. Some of the key demands given were:

1. *The Widow Pension must be increased from Rs. 200 per month to Rs. 1,000 per month. Inflation has eroded the buying power of Rs. 200, and by our calculations, a widow and 2 children between ages 9 and 15 need at the very least, Rs. 1,400, and the demand is that the pension be Rs. 1,000.*
2. *The regulation for Widow Pension, that if the widow has a son age 18 or older, then she is not eligible for a pension, must be removed. The experience of the Association of Strong Women Alone is that the sons of low-income widows rarely support their mothers.*
3. *The regulation for Widow Pension, that if the widow has land in her name, or the legal right to land, then she is not eligible for a Widow Pension, must be removed. The experience of the Association is that although low-income widows may have legal rights to land, they seldom have possession and use of the land they own. Therefore, this rule must be removed.*
4. *All low income and economically poor widows and separated women must be listed on the Below Poverty Line list, and therefore, be eligible for the BPL benefits.*
5. *If it is not possible for all low-income widows and separated women to be listed on the Below Poverty Line lists, then at the very least, all low-income widows and separated women must be provided with Health Cards, which give free medicines and diagnostic services.*
6. *Those low income widows and separated women who do not have a house, must be covered under the housing programmes at the Gram Panchayat and village level.*
7. *A new rule must be made, so that 30% of the plots to be distributed by the Gram Panchayat, be reserved for low income widows and separated women.*
8. *If the husband of a widow had taken a loan, and he dies, the rule about the responsibility of repayment of the loan must be that the widow will be responsible for the principle only, and not the interest.*
9. *When a woman is separated from her husband, and she goes to the court, fights her case for Maintenance, and wins, and then the husband does not pay, then the husband must be punished by:*
  - *being sentenced to jail for life*
  - *it is our experience that when the court has issued the order that the husband should be arrested, many times the police report that they cannot find the man, and therefore cannot arrest him. Therefore, our demand is that when the court issues a warrant for the arrest of such a husband, that the court must send a copy of the arrest warrant to the Association of Strong Women Alone. The members of the Association will help the police in finding the man and arresting him.*
10. *The government must begin a Package Programme for Income Generating for low-income widows and separated women. In this Package Programme, there must be provision for: training, loan, linkages with the market and help with marketing.*





The Press Conference at the Pink City Press Club after meeting Party Presidents.

*Women Alone need these provisions so that they may earn from selling their products, or selling their labour by work in the service sector (e.g. running a nursery school, working as a house maid, cooking food for a tiffin-supply)*

Since the elections, members of the State Level Committee have been trying to meet the Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje Scindia, to follow-up on the petition points given. But the Chief Minister has consistently refused to give an appointment.

One issue that was given special attention in the previous year, was the issue of Land Rights of Widows. Because of the Hindu Succession Act, widows have legal rights to the property of their deceased husbands, but usually, they do not have possession of the land and property. Others think that a woman alone, without a man, is weak and vulnerable, and that her land can be occupied, and there is nothing she can do about it. Many cases (about 25) have been solved and the land possession has been won for the widow member of the Association of Strong Women Alone. Below is one successful case study:

### **Owner's Pride Neighbour's Envy**

Name	:	Dhannu Bai
Husband's Name	:	Khalji Tabiyad
Age	:	40 years
Village	:	Batabalgun
Tehsil	:	Dungarpur
District	:	Dungarpur

*Life was never a "bed of roses" for Dhannu Bai, who was widowed at an early age. But her in-laws had been fair with her. They all lived together — her father-in-law, brother-in-law, their wives and their children. Dhannu Bai had a son who is married. Her father-in-law had not divided their property but had written his will, and told each one of their shares. Dhannu Bai also had a share in the property. They are a poor family, and live on agriculture alone.*

*Thus, though stricken with poverty, life was fairly uneventful. But God had other plans. Their neighbor Pannalal Kharadi, a rich man, along with his brother, Somolal, saw an opportunity to seize Dhannu Bai's land. He knew she was alone, uneducated and poor. And even if her in-laws did try to stand up for her, they were no match for Pannalal and Somolal's money power.*

The Kharadi brothers would throw stones at Dhannu Bai and her family members. Dhannu Bai could neither read nor write. Pannalal took advantage of this, and said that the land was his, and he had documents and maps proving it. His atrocities did not end here. **Since his house was further up the hill from Dhannu Bai's house, he would roll stones down on top of Dhannu Bai's house from his house!** He even started stealing grass from her farm, and thus made life a living hell for her.

Dhannu Bai's elder brother-in-law was a fair man. He felt sorry for Dhannu Bai. He went to Pannalal's house and said to him: **"You are a rich man. Why are you harassing this poor widow? Why do you take away her grass? This is her only source of income. The land belongs to Dhannu Bai and it is in her name."** Pannalal was enraged, and he instigated his family members to do cruel acts. So when Dhannu Bai, her brother-in-law and aunt-in-law went to Pannalal's house, his daughter-in-law threw stones at them. Like a parrot, she repeated Pannalal's words: "We have the land map, the land is ours, you will have to move off the land."

When Pannalal saw that these poor people had dared to stand against him, he came up with a devious plan. He got fake papers of the land made. Then he got some one from the next village to impersonate as the Patwari. He showed the fake papers to Dhannu Bai and her family. The fake Patwari said his rehearsed line that: "The land belongs to Pannalal".

Dhannu Bai and her family were aghast but did not lose hope. They went to the police station and filed a case against Pannalal. But Pannalal was a rich man. He bribed the Police and the case was closed. What is a little money given as a bribe to the police, when land is at stake!

But Dhannu Bai was not one to give up easily. She got to know about Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan — The Association of Strong Women Alone. She told the Block Committee members her story and asked them to help her. All the members supported her, and pledged their help. Ashaji ( a social worker of The Association of Strong Women Alone), advised her to go the legal way to get justice. They decided that first and foremost they needed papers of the land which was in Dhannu Bai's name — they needed to have in their hands the original and authentic papers.

Thus, Ashaji wrote an application to the real Patwari, requesting him to send a photocopy of the original land documents. The Patwari acted on the application and immediately sent a copy of the authentic land documents, which clearly showed that the land was in Dhannu Bai's name.

Emboldened with legal documents in hand, Dhannu Bai and her family members went to the police station and showed them the original papers. But bribery has its roots deep in our legal system. Their soaring spirits dipped as soon as the inspector demanded a bribe of Rs.1000/- for any action to be taken by him! Dhannu Bai and her family could not afford this amount. It was beyond their reach. Disheartened, they went away.

During the Association of Strong Women Alone convention held from 23-26 September, 2003 at Dungarpur, a rally was organized. In the rally, a well-known advocate Mr. Kantilal Shukla was invited. Ashaji discussed Dhannu Bai's case with him. She showed him the original documents of her land. After Mr. Shukla saw the papers, he said: "These clearly show that the land is in Dhannu Bai's name. The case would be resolved in her favour".

Thus with this reassurance, Dhannu Bai's flagging spirits saw some hope. She told Ashaji about the policeman's behaviour and his demand for a bribe. Ashaji was shocked to hear this. She immediately called the policeman and ridiculed him for asking a poor woman like Dhannu Bai for a bribe. She threatened him that if he did not take action against Pannalal, the Association would take action against him! She said that Dhannu Bai was not alone and that she was a State Level Committee Member of The Association of Strong Women Alone. That caught the Inspector's attention, and he got scared. He promised to take necessary action.

But Ashaji knew that until the time that the land was not declared officially in Dhannu Bai's name, she would not be able to live peacefully. There would be many like Pannalal, who would try

and take advantage of this helpless widow. Ashaji asked the Inspector to call the Patwari and the villagers in support of this case. The villagers fixed a date for the meeting and reached the appointed place. In front of the whole village, the police officials and the Patwari, Advocate Mr. Kantilal Shukla declared: "Pannalal has no right over the land. Dhannu Bai's father-in-law owned the land and as stated in his will, the land will be divided amongst his living sons and the widow of his deceased son. Pannalal cannot illegally occupy the land. And if forcibly he tries to, he would be sent to jail." It was clear now. Neither Pannalal, nor any one else, could dare to take advantage of Dhannu Bai. Her life was her own. She had hundreds of women backing her. She was not alone — not any more.

In the chart that follows, the work done in the previous year to strengthen the Association of Strong Women Alone, through training, membership camps, meetings, special events, are listed:

<b>Event</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>From Where Did The Participants Come, and Where Held</b>
NGO Workers Meeting	25 April	Astha and Hadoti Hast Shilp Sansthan. Lodha Dharamshala, Ajmer
Executive Members of Organization of Strong Women Alone (registered body)	25 May	11 members, (10 Districts) Lodha Dharamshala, Ajmer
Women's Empowerment Day Rallies and Meetings	1 June	25 Districts, 60 Blocks . Held at Block headquarters, all over Rajasthan
Block Committee Members Training	14-16 June	Devli, Hoorda, Jahajpur. Place, Devli
Block Committee Members Training	19-21 June	Atru, Hindoli, Kota City. Place, Kota City
Executive Members Training	9-11 August	11 members (10 Districts). Astha Training Centre, Bedla
State Level Meeting	30-31 August	Chittor Fort
Lobbying the Political Party Presidents before the State Elections	13-16 September	Jaipur
District Level Members' Camp	24-26 September	Dungarpur, Banswara Blocks. At KVK, Dungarpur
District Level Members Camp	20-22 November	Sawai Madhopur
Block Committee Members Training	3-6 December	Jawaja, Binai, Beawar, Sagwara, Kamnor. Place, Beawar
State Level Committee Members Meeting	13,14 December	Jodhpur Youth Hostel
District Level Members Camp	17-19 December	Udaipur District. Astha Training Centre
District Level Members Camp	23-25 December	Tonk
World Social Forum Workshop	19 January	Mumbai. 10 women participated
Advisory Committee Meeting	14 February	Jaipur, RAEA building
Executive Committee members meeting	15 February	Jaipur, RAEA building
Block Committee Members Training	25-27 February	Dudu, Tonk, Dausa, Sanganeer. Place: Sanganeer, Jaipur District
State Level Committee Meeting	13-14 March	Jaipur, Scouts and Guides Campground, Jagatpura
General Body Meeting of Organization of Strong Women Alone (registered body)	14 March	Jaipur, Scouts and Guides Campground, Jagatpura
Block Committee Members Training	24-27 March	Kumbalgarh, Rail Magra, Karachi, Sagwara, Pindwara. Place: Astha Training Centre, Bedla, Udaipur

## **6. Adivasi Mahila Jagriti Samiti / The Tribal Women's Awareness Society**

The Tribal Women's Awareness Society came into existence in 1992, as a follow-up to a "Women and Sericulture" project Astha had been involved with from 1989, which had been funded by UNIFEM. The Sericulture villages were 12 only, and after the project ended, the women of those 12 villages formed the nucleus of the Tribal Women's Awareness Society, and today, there are women's groups in 80 villages of Jhadol and Girwa Blocks of Udaipur District. These 80 villages fall in 14 gram panchayats of Girwa Block, and 13 gram panchayats of Jhadol Block – in a total of 27 gram panchayats.

The work of the Society is carried out by Committees – Education, Health, Income Generating, Social Reform, and Case Committees. There is a monthly meeting of the 80 women's groups at the village level, and a monthly meeting of the leaders of the 80 women's groups held in each of the 2 Blocks where the Society is working. There is also a monthly meeting of the "Sanchalak Mandal" or the Committee of Directors who guide the whole organization across the 2 Blocks. The Committees also meet monthly to decide on the work of the next month.

In the past year, the Social Reform Committee and the Case Committee have worked hard, and more male members have been added. Over 300 cases came to the Committee and most were solved. A few that could not be solved, were referred to the courts. The members of the Social Reform and the Case Committees were given training, including counseling training. As a result, the key women leaders of the Committees have been called, from time to time, to the Police Stations of Jhadol, Nai and Umba Mata to help the police in counseling family members who end up in the Police Station seeking to solve their disputes. The Police have recognized the Tribal Women's Awareness Society's ability to settle family disputes outside the police and court systems, and have sought their expertise and help when needed.

There are 40 Self-Help Groups (Savings and Loan Societies) being run in the groups of the Tribal Women's Awareness Society. The groups have been inspected by the Udaipur District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) of the Government, and the DRDA has certified that the Tribal Women's Awareness Society itself is certified as a facilitator of SHGs – and Astha does not need to come in between at all. This recognition by the state government of the abilities of the Tribal Women's Awareness Society was important in the further grants to the work area of the Tribal Women's Awareness Society by UNDP. The work of the UNDP supported project did not start in the Jhadol –Girwa area until April 2004, but the groundwork was laid and planning done by the Society in the financial year under reporting.



Getting at the Root Cause of Domestic Violence - "Protesting Liquor Rally" - Raising Public Awareness that excessive liquor consumption leads to Violence.

The issues that are being worked on by the women's groups at the village level, with the guidance of the Committees and the experienced tribal women leaders of the Society, are:

- Violence against women
- Excessive liquor drinking by men
- Disputes over land and animals
- Social customs that are harmful,
- Problems of accessing development programmes of the government
- Widow pensions, old age pensions, handicapped persons pensions, separated women's pensions, etc.
- Forest land dwellers threatened displacement from their homesteads
- Education issues of non-attendance at schools of students, and teachers
- Health related problems
- Problems with the political systems and administrative systems.

The Tribal Women's Awareness Society was an organization that was part of a larger effort to work to strengthen local self-government bodies, by the creation of local people's organizations that would monitor the working of the Gram Sabha or the Village Council. These organizations, called a "*Jagrook Manch*" or "Awareness Forum" would educate and motivate the citizens of the Council of Villages area about their rights and duties, and about the responsibilities of the local self-government bodies of elected representatives, with their government officials.

Two Gram Panchayats or Council of Villages areas were selected, Madla Gram Panchayat and Khatik Madi Gram Panchayat. At the Gram Panchayat level, in each Gram Panchayat, a "*Jagrook Manch*" or "Awareness Forum" was formed, which met monthly. These groups were formed of the key men and women in the Gram Panchayat areas, of 5 persons from each Ward – 2 women and 3 men. These Gram Panchayat level Forums, and also the Ward level sub-groups, worked on the problems of the people of the area, many of which are mentioned in the list above. In addition, they also:

- Gave information about laws that can help solve problems.
- Helped spread awareness about the BPL list campaign – the Jagrook Manch helped a lot. The members explained the form to the people, and helped the right people to get selected.
- Carried out an election awareness campaign – before State elections. The members gave information about electronic voting machines, they held voter list checking camp and helped new voters to get their names on the voters' list, and to remove those who had moved out or died. At the ward meetings, the voters' list was read out to see that no one was missed. The effect was that there was 62% voter turnout.
- The Awareness Forum members helped to fill up Social Security forms– 84 forms for old age pension, 12 for widow pensions, 4 for handicapped pension. 7 forms were filled for people eligible for "antyodaya" benefits. 7 "annapurna yojana" coupons were signed with their help, so that the families could get Rs. 2 per kilo grains from the ration shops.
- The Forum members helped with the Family Planning Campaign
- They also saw whether Drought Relief Work was running properly

The linkages and relationship between these Awareness Forums and the Committee structure of the Tribal Women's Awareness Society, can be seen nicely in the case study below:

Laxman and Sajaan Devi

Leeldee Village of Madla Gram Panchayat -- Laxman, of Leeldee Village, beat his wife Sajaan Devi, when he was drunk. Sajaan Devi went to her parent's house and stayed there for 6 months. When the issue came to the Awareness Forum (*Jagrook Manch*), the Forum tried to solve the problem, but was unsuccessful. Then, they referred the case to the Tribal Women's Awareness Society's Social Reform Committee. The Committee members called both parties, and got them to agree to live together again. Laxman signed a paper saying that he would not beat his wife again, and if he did, Sajaan Devi would be free to choose another Life Partner. Up to now, both are living happily, and both come to the *Jagrook Manch* meeting together.

### **7. Rajsamand Mahila Manch / The Rajsamand District Women's Forum**

The Rajsamand Women's Forum began in 1998, first in Rail Magra Block of Rajsamand District, and soon after to Rajsamand Block, Kumbalgarh Block and Kamnor Block. At present, the total number of Gram Panchayats in which the Rajsamand District Women's Forum is working is 71. The total number of villages in which the Rajsamand Women's Forum is working is 231, and the number of members of the Rajsamand Women's Forum is 5,468.

The Forum takes up issue based work, depending on what issues the women raise, and what is happening in the larger social and political context. In the period under reporting, the following were some of the issues that the Women's Forum worked on:

- Water
- Drought
- The Below Poverty Line (BPL) list, and insuring that the actual poor families got listed
- Education
- Health
- Election related matters before the State elections – voters' list accuracy, electronic voting machines, etc.
- Unemployment and income generating training
- Child marriage, and how to stop it from happening

One of the biggest areas of activity of the Women's Forum, is the work done in taking up cases of women who have suffered atrocities. The cases come to the committees and leaders of the Women's Forum, and the leaders, with counseling, help the women to solve their problems, and if they can not be solved in that way, they are helped to deal with the problem legally, or administratively.

Training is given to the leaders of the Block level work in each of the 4 Blocks, including training in how to counsel women who have been victims of atrocities. The total number of Forum women leaders trained in the last year was 167. In addition to counseling skills, the Group Leader Training of 3 days dealt with problem solving, how to pick up issues in the village, and some exercises to build self confidence. The new key women attended. Likewise, the key leaders of the Forum who make up the Sanchalak Mandal or Direction Giving Group, were also given a 3 days training to increase their leadership skills.

In the previous year, there were 3 Block Level Conventions, designed to nurture new members, and bring in new members to the Forum membership, from new Gram Panchayat areas. Information about laws, health, political and administrative systems, the importance of being organized into the Rajsamand Women's Forum, was given to the women. In addition to the Block level big events, there is an annual District level Convention, held usually on or near International Women's Day, March 8<sup>th</sup>. In this event, the Forum presents what all has been done in the year. In the Convention held, March 2004, there were 900 women participants.

Aside from issue-based workshops, and meetings, educational and awareness raising events and training programmes were organized for the Forum leaders and members. 3 study tours were organized, to enable the women to learn from others in other places; a Legal Awareness Training was held to learn about the legal provisions to help in cases of land and property rights, assault, liquor issues, dowry, men taking second wives without divorcing the first one, maintenance provisions, common law marriage laws. A Face-to-Face Meeting With Election Candidates was organized by the Forum and the People's Organization, MKSS (Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan) which gave the women members a chance to hear and compare the party positions on several issues. Income generating training programmes on making incense sticks, dal, soap, durries and handicraft items were organized, and the women were helped to sell their products in the Haat Bazaar and other places.

The period April to June, 2003, was a drought period, and the Rajsamand Women's Forum had taken the responsibility for the deepening of 12 wells in places of special need in the 4 Blocks of the project area.

In preparation for greater autonomy, the Registered Society attached to the Rajsamand Women's Forum underwent training. There was a Management Training for the women members, and 40 women participated. The training curriculum covered accounts keeping, budgeting, management of the office, and project formulation and proposal writing. These skills will help the registered body to provide resources and manage the support infrastructure which will allow the Rajsamand Women's Forum to do strong work in the future.

The Rajsamand Women's Forum was also an implementing organization for the Local Self-Government awareness raising work that included the formation of citizen awareness raising and monitoring groups at the Gram Panchayat level, and the training of elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions. A training programme was organized for Ward Councilors (*Panches*) and Chairpersons of the Gram Panchayats (*Sarpanches*) – women *sarpanches* and *ward panches*. Training was also conducted for the members of the Awareness Forum (*Jagrook Manch*).

Below is a chart of the activities of the Rajsamand Women's Forum, carried out during the period April 2003 to March 2004.

#### **Summary of Activities of the Rajsamand Women's Forum**

	<b>Name of Programme</b>	<b>Rail Magra</b>	<b>Rajsamand</b>	<b>Kamnor</b>	<b>Kumbalgah</b>
1	Total Panchayats	29	29	37	39
2	Presently working in	24	21	15	11
3	Total Number of Villages in which work is going on	72	67	60	32
4	Total members	2,000	2,222	946	300
5	Group Leaders Training	1 (50 participants)	1 (50 participants)	1 (67 participants)	--

6	Issue Based Trainings	2 Training Camps on: Water and Drought  1 On Information about Social Welfare Department 1 On Birth and Death Certificates 1 On Antyodaya Gram Sabha 1 On Social Security  1 On Screen Printing 2 On Incense Stick Making	1 Training Camp on: Water and Drought  --  1 On Incense Stick Making	--    1 on Incense Stick Making	---
7	Committee Leaders Training	1 45 participants	1 40 participants	---	---
8	Support Society Training	1 – 40 participants	1 – 40 participants	--	--
9	No. of Savings and Loan Societies	24	29	11	5
10	Savings Societies Training	1	1	--	--
11	Issue Based Training	1 – BPL List	3 – Water, BPL lists, Child Marriage Prohibition Campaign	1 – BPL listing	1 – BPL listing
12	Camps	3 – Legal Awareness	4 – Health Camps	2 – Legal Awareness, Health	--
13	Convention	1 – 500 women	2 – Block level, 200 women District level – 900 women	1 – 250 women	--
14	Study Tour	Pai – 20 women KVK – 15 women WSF – 10 women	Pai – 20 women Legal Awareness – 5 WSF – 10	Pai – 20 women Vermiculture, Udaipur – 25 WSF – 10	Pai – 5 women KVK – 4 WSF – 2
15	Young adolescent girls' workshop	1 (80 girls)	1 (60 girls)	1 (70 girls)	--
16	Survey	1 BPL – 2 Gram Panchayats	1 BPL – 1 Gram Panchayats 1 Ekal Nari – 2 Gram Panchayats	1 BPL – 2 Gram Panchayats	1 BPL – 1 Gram Panchayat
17	Block Level Monthly Meetings	12	12	12	12
18	Coordinating Council Meetings, Block Level	12	12	12	--
19.	District Level Coordinating Committee Meetings	--	12	--	--
20	Cases of Women's Atrocities Taken Up	108	32	25	8



21	Panchayati Raj Programme Monthly Meetings -- Mini-Secretariat Quorum of Gram Panchayat Jagrook Manch	2 2 2	2 2 2	2 2 2	---
22	Training – Sarpanches	1	1 (70 participants)	1	--
23	Training – Jagrook Manch Members	1	1 (60 participants)	1	--
24	Campaigns -- 1 only, with participation from various gram panchayats -- Subjects covered: Gram Sabha Voter Awareness Stopping Child Marriage Special Gram Sabhas	2 Gram Panchayats	2 Gram Panchayats	2 Gram Panchayats	5 Gram Panchayats

#### 8. **Samarthak Samiti / Rajasthan Forest Produce Collectors and Processors Groups Support Society – Called the “Support Society” for Short!**

The Support Society was formed by the Tendu Leaf Cooperatives of Kotra, daipur District; of Abu Road, Sirohi District; of Pratapgarh, Chittor District; and of Hum Kissan Cooperative of Manohar Thana, Jhalawar District. Since then, other Tendu Leaf Cooperatives have been formed, and joined the Support Society, and other unregistered groups working on other forest produce issues have also joined. The Tendu Leaf Cooperatives themselves have expanded their activities, and are now a base for collection and sale of other forest produce too.

The Support Society is a Resource Centre which helps the groups with a knowledge of the trade and issues – when the dates for tenders are coming up, how to fill in tender forms and make bank drafts, how to make budgets and estimate capital needed for the collection of the forest produce. The Centre makes linkages with the market, and with sources of credit for the groups. The Support Society also makes people aware of the economic value of products that exist in their area, and from which they are presently earning no income, or less income than they could.

##### (a) **Tendu Leaf Related Work –**

- **Lobbying the Government About an Increase in the Official Collection Rate per 100 Bundles --** The collection rate of tendu patta is decided by the Forest dept. rate-deciding committee recommends the proposed rate to the government. The committee members are tribal M.L.A.'s, and tendu patta traders, and Officers of Forest Dept. Samarthak Samiti has given the broader note to increase the rate from 320 to 350 per bag, because the rate has not been increased since last three years. Representatives of Samiti personally went and had the discussion with the committee members but unfortunately they didn't agreed to increase the rates.
- **Recovery of Due Amounts of Tendu Leaf Sale –** The Support Society has been trying to help the Cooperatives get the due Amounts from tendu leaf traders. In this year, the Support Society has succeeded to recover Rs. 19.55 lakhs out of 30.20 lakhs. Representatives of the Support Society made visits from time to time to Indore

to ensure the recovery, and also to get an advance cheque from a party. The Support Society has also helped the Cooperatives to send legal notices to the erring parties.

Name of Samiti	Due amount of lasts year (Rs in lakhs)	Amount Recovered (Rs in lakhs)
Kotra	20.00	10.75
Abu Road	10.20	8.80



- **Improve Capacity of Cooperative Office Bearers and Members**
  - The Support Society works to improve and build capacity

of the Cooperatives' office bearers and members. The Society organized management training for leaders and members of the Cooperatives to give information regarding cooperative audit, accounts, taxation and about new cooperative laws. The Support Society invites experts from the field, as a resource person in these training. The Society also helps to keep and maintain necessary records, and also gives opportunity to work practically with the help of the staff of the Support Society.

dles of Tendu Leaves  
ction Depot or "Fud".

Samiti Name	Date	Description
Kotra	May-June	Tendu Leaf collections work and make sale agreement of tendu leaf.
	19 Sept.	To handle a meeting of the General Body & help with elections ,
	10.11.03 Jan.28-29	To remove audit objection work How to fill the tender amount and form of tendu leaf auction.
Pratapgarh	Sept.17-19	To complete the proceedings register, and the membership register
	25.09.03 28-29 Jan.	To up-date the accounts How to fill the tender amount and form for the tendu leaf auction.
Abu Road	28-29 Jan.	How to fill the tender amount and form for the tendu leaf auction.
	May-June	Tendu leaf collection work, and make sale agreement of tendu leaf

Dungarpur	28-29 Jan.	How to fill the tender amount and form for the tendu leaf auction.
Jhalawar	May-June 16-17 Mar.	Tendu leaf collection work, and make sale agreement of tendu leaf Member's camp
Jhadol	28-29 Jan. 11-12 Sept.	How to fill the tender amount and form for the tendu leaf auction. To complete the proceedings register, and the membership register. To up-date the accounts

### (b) Work Related to the Collection and Sale of Minor Forest Produce

- **Providing capital for collection of MFP** – The Support Society has provided money for a short time like one or two months, to groups for the collection of MFP, which has helped the groups to be successful in selling their produce in the market at a good price.
- **Advocacy work for increasing the rate of MFP --** The Support Society works on the issue of fair prices for the sale of MFP. The Society did the work of lobbying and advocacy with the government officials, with the people, and also pressured the traders with help of the local people or their People's Organizations. This year, the efforts made by the Society to get better prices for collectors of the area, are as follows:
  - **Ratanjyot:** The collection rates of Ratanjyot (a non-edible seed used for making soap) in Kumbhalgarh area are decided by the contractors. Generally, they pay Rs. 2-3 per kg . When the Society came to know about this, lobbying and advocacy was started with government officials, with the help of the local People's Organization, the Jarga Development Society. By this lobbying, the people decided not to sell the ratanjyot to the contractors at lower rates. They started storing the seeds at their homes, and after two months, the contractors finally agreed to pay Rs. 6-7 per kg.
  - **Sithaphal:** The collection rates of Sitaphal (a forest fruit, which in English is called "Custard Apple") in Kumbhalgarh area are decide by the contractors. Generally, they pay Rs. 30-40 per basket. The Support Society came across this and stared lobbying and advocacy with government officials, with the help of local Peoples Organization, the Jarga Development Society. By this lobbying, the people decided not to sell the Sitaphal to the contractors at a lower rate. They started selling the fruit outside the Block, where they are getting Rs. 70-80 per basket
  - **Promoting "Safed Musli", a medicinal root found in the forest** – The Support Society has provided the seeds of *Safed Musli* to farmers at a subsidized rate, and has provided 60 kg roots of safed musli at Bichiwara block of Dungarpur. The production of this produce has come five times of seed provided. And the Society has also trained the people in the art of cultivation of *Safed Musli*. After the production, the Society also helps the people to market the crop at a good rate. Trainings were also organised for the cultivators of the *musli*, since this was the first time they were cultivating this crop.
  - **Awareness Raising about Minor Forest Produce** – 7 Awareness Camps were rganized regarding MFP in the previous year, Group Meetings were held,

Exposure Visits were conducted, and Exhibitions were put up at big events of People's Organization in South Rajasthan. In addition, the staff of the Support Society went as resource persons to training programmes organized by other People's Organizations, and spread the ideas about the advantages of the collection and sale of MFP. Information about minor forest produce collection as a livelihood option was talked about. The Society workers also gave information about current market prices and uses of various MFP, and distributed pamphlets. The Society staff assures the people that they will help in marketing if they collect any of forest produce available. These awareness raising efforts have had some success.

Below is a chart about some of the awareness raising work done in the last year.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Big Events</b>	<b>Partici- pants</b>	<b>Organiser</b>
23-24 .09.03	Kotra	Milan Mela	4,000	Adivasi Vikas Manch, Kotra Tribal Development Forum
27-29 .12.03	Amet	Mahila Sangam	480	Jarga Kshetriya Vikas Samiti, Kumbhalgarh – Jarga Area Development Society
24.02.04	Dungarpur	Mahila Sangam	200	Vagad Majdoor Kisan Sangathan, Dungarpur – Vagad Area Labourers and Farmers Organization
27.02.04	Kotra	Mahila Sangam	250	Adivasi Vikas Manch, Kotra Tribal Development Forum
2 March, 2004	Kelwara	Jarga Sammelan	3,000	Jarga Kshetriya Vikas Samiti, Kumbhalgarh – Jarga Area Development Society
--	Udaipur	Block level Training	150	Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan, Rajasthan – The Association of Strong Women Alone
8 March, 2004	Rajsamand	Mahila Sammelan	300	Rajsamand Mahila Manch, Rajsamand – Rajsamand Women's Forum

### **Preparing All the People's Organizations for Greater Autonomy and Less Dependence on Astha**

This was the year when the Astha staff, working with the People's Organizations, helped the organizations to get some training, and make some structural changes, to prepare for greater autonomy in the future. One of the structural ways that the People's Organizations were prepared for the future, was to encourage them to create a registered body which could legally help them to continue to learn, to grow, and to accept more opportunities.

Since it seemed impossible for the People's Organization to be registered, as each is a large membership based organization, mostly with thousands of members – and anyway, there were serious reservations about the desirability of registering the free and independent People's Organization (nothing should prevent it from making its rules, deciding on its actions, working through struggle and constructive action). And so, a model was worked out, that from the membership of the People's Organization, a limited number of persons would be elected/selected to form the General Body of a registered organization, and from those, an Executive would be

elected/selected. The need for such a body arose first from Kumbalgarh, where the local people wanted to give the Jarga Area Development Society a piece of land on which they could build an office, and stay working in the area for a long, long time. Who or how would the land be accepted? The Jarga Society was not registered; to give it in the name of one of the key members would risk the long-term use of the land for the Society. Also, in Kotra, the Tribal Development Forum wanted to take on contract, one ration shop and run it as a model ration shop in an effort to clean up the widespread corruption of the ration shops of the Block. But who would take the ration shop contract? An individual is a legal entity; a registered body is a legal entity; an unregistered association of persons is not a legal entity. Further, when the thinking about greater autonomy grew, some ideas were put forth that each People's Organization should have a registered body to be used to support the work of the People's Organization whenever needed, and in whatever way needed.

Of the 8 People's Organizations listed and reported about above<sup>2</sup>, the following have a parallel registered body associated with them:

	<b>Name of the People's Organization</b>	<b>Name of the Registered Body Associated with the People's Organization</b>	<b>Year in Which Registered</b>
1.	Tribal Development Forum	Kotra Tribal Association (Kotra Adivasi Sansthan)	16 October 1998
2.	Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization	Vagad Labourers and Farmers Association (Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sansthan)	16 December, 2002
3.	Gordward Tribal Organization		-- pending --
4.	Jarga Area Development Society	Prayog Organization (Prayog Sansthan)	16 March 2004
5.	The Association of Strong Women Alone	The Organization of Strong Women Alone (Ekal Nari Shakti Sansthan)	23 April 2002
6.	The Tribal Women's Awareness Society	The Tribal Women's Awareness Organization (Adivasi Mahila Jagriti Sansthan)	13 September 1995
7.	The Rajsamand Women's Forum	Rajsamand People's Development Organization (Jan Vikas Sansthan)	19 May 2003
8.	The Rajasthan Forest Produce Collectors and Processors Groups Support Society	The Rajasthan Forest Produce Collectors and Processors Groups Support Society	13 December 1995

The Registered Societies associated with each People's Organization are at different stages of maturity. In Kotra Block, Udaipur District, the Kotra Tribal Association has been registered for several years, has accepted a grant from the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, has implemented a health project with funding support from CARE. Also, the Tendu Leaf Cooperative working in Kotra has been able to give the Kotra Tribal Association Rs. 50,000 per year from its tendu leaf net profits. The Association has a bank account and an office. The Rajasthan Forest Produce Collectors and Processors Groups Support Society – "The Support Society" has an FCRA registration. But the important thing, is that the leaders of the People's Organizations, and the Astha staff have begun to think about the future with the P.O. with greater degrees of autonomy and self-sufficiency.

<sup>2</sup> At one point in the work of Astha, there was a 9<sup>th</sup> People's Organization, the urban women's organization called "The Aware Urban Women's Forum" – *Jagroot Shaheri Mahila Manch*. However, Astha had serious trouble in getting and keeping good workers to work with the urban women, and so ultimately, Astha's intervention in the colonies and neighbourhoods of the city was withdrawn. A few of the women's groups continued to meet for some time; from time to time some of the women came to ask us when someone from Astha would be coming again to help them work together. But, the Aware Urban Women's Forum is nowhere on the ground at this time.

## OTHER ISSUES

### **The Land Issue, and the Forest Land People's Movement**

Astha has been working on a major land issue in Rajasthan, for the last 9 years. The issue is of thousands of farming families, mostly tribal, being told by the Forest Department that they have to leave their homesteads, because the land on which they are living is Forest Department land, and the farmers do not have legal land papers for their land. However, there is also a law that says that if a forest land encroacher has been on the land since 1980 or before, then the family is entitled to legal land papers. There is a system of inquiry to determine who was there before 1980, but this system has not been operationalized, and so there is the constant struggle, harassment, exploitation of the people by the forest department guards and officials. In Rajasthan, the efforts of the people on this issue are organized under the banner of the Forest Land People's Movement (Jungle Jamin Jan Andolan), and Astha has played a key role, probably "the key role", in the systematic way the struggle has stayed alive and gone forward.



Forest Land People's Movement Mobilized to Meet the State Tribal Commissioner, Udaipur



In the past year, the issue was taken to the State, National and Supreme Court levels.

At the State Level, leaders of the Forest Land People's Movement talked to the Chief Minister, the Forest Minister and senior Secretaries many times. There was pressure created on the State Assembly, but it couldn't be fully utilized because of the pending state elections. However, the pressure created resulted in all major parties endorsing in their Party Manifestos, the principle working through the process to determine who was on the land before 1980, and who came after. Also, in this period, 5,355 cases of Rajasthan forest land dwellers were forwarded to the Central Government by the Rajasthan Forest Department, for regularization. (Forests are on the concurrent list of responsibilities of both state and centre.) At the District level, action was taken by the people as follows:

- 120 encroachers from Gogunda appealed their cases to the ADM, Udaipur.
- Bali Tehsil, Pali District, 16 forest dwellers appealed to the ADM Pali. They proved their had been there before 1980 by giving written proof (like receipts, etc.) or situational proof (like land developed with wells, mature trees, etc.)
- Individual Cases Filed –
  - 7,841 people from Udaipur District filed their cases proving they had been on the land since before 1980. House, well, contour bunding, etc. had been constructed. They stated that the major resource of livelihood was the land, and they were doing nothing to harm the forest or the environment.
  - 18,000 cases were filed from Pali, Dungarpur, Sirohi, Banswara, Chittor and Rajsamand Districts. They said that they had the rights to the land, whether the government decides it or not.

At the national level, there was a Public Hearing on the issue, 18-19 July, in Delhi. Representatives of the people's movements from 13 states participated: Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, etc. Movement leaders presented the conditions and problems in their own state. After the Public Hearing, a National Coordinating Committee was established. The Coordinating Committee gave the responsibility for correspondence to Astha. As a result of the Public Hearing, the media took up the issue at the national level.

The Coordinating Committee approached the Supreme Court, and an appeal case was filed – pointing out that where tribals are living, there is no destruction of the environment. They have occupied forest land for their livelihood. The Supreme Court asked the CEC – Central Empowered Committee, to oversee the whole case, and see that those who were there before 1980 are not bothered, and given legal land rights

And the struggle goes on!

### **Drought Relief – Struggle and Constructive Action**

The rains of 2002 were deficient, as were most of the monsoons in the previous 10 years. In a few areas, the rains had been normal, but a situation of drought pervaded most of Rajasthan.

At the state level, the Drought Struggle Committee of NGOs and People's Organizations from various parts of the state, lobbied the government to create as many jobs as possible, as the condition of the masses of the rural poor was desperate. Astha was an active part of these meetings and delegations to meet the Chief Minister, Drought Minister and government officials. At the local levels, the leaders of the People's Organizations mobilized people to write and sign petitions demanding work, and give them to the senior government officers at the Block and Tehsil level.

As a result of this activity, and the experience of previous years, the government of Rajasthan evolved a new formula of organizing drought relief work. Earlier, there had been 2 periods of 15 days each in the month, with a change of labourers every 15 days on the drought relief works. Significantly more work was created across the state when the system changed to:

10 day work periods, with changes every 10 days in the month. One labourer could work for only 10 days in a month, but then, the next month he/she could work again, for 10 days, and so on. The payment was at the rate of the Minimum Wage per day, Rs. 60, and the payment was of Rs. 15 cash and Rs. 45 worth of foodgrains per day, at the ration shop BPL rate of Rs. 4.60 per kilo. That means, for 1 day's labour, a person got about 10 kilos of grain, and Rs. 15. In one 10 day period, one worker earned about 90-100 kilos of foodgrain, and about Rs. 150 – enough to keep a family of 5 alive until the next month. The system was appreciated.

Astha, in previous drought years, had raised special funds to help the people survive the drought – but in this 2002 to 2003 June period, the donors, Astha, and the people, were “drought weary”. Astha was able to raise a bit of funding from CARE India, and from the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) of the Rajasthan Government. The Executive of Astha voted an amount of up to Rs. 7,00,000 from the Core Funds of Astha for needed drought relief work.

In this period up to July 2003, work was done:

- to deepen 103 old wells,
- to operate 1 grass depot in Kotra where fodder was sold at reasonable prices,
- to run 2 Cattle Camps in Kotra
- to provide drinking water by “tankers on a trolley pulled by a tractor” to villages in Kotra

The rains of 2003 were much better than the monsoons of the previous 10 years, in most places. However, pockets of drought still remain, even today!

### **Local Self Governance**

The efforts to strengthen and bring awareness about the potential and the importance of local self-government structures, has been an area of work of Astha. Much of the work has been done in collaboration with the People's Organizations, and reported there. The work that has been done has been on two fronts:

- (a) Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions
- (b) Working to establish and increase the effectiveness of declared Village Republics in tribal villages of Schedule V areas

#### **(a) Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions**

In the previous year, a special piece of work was carried out in 2 Districts of South Rajasthan, Udaipur District and Rajsmand District. The basic idea was to create awareness in the general public about the roles, responsibilities and structures of the Panchayati Raj system of local self-governance. Once aware, the public was encouraged to keep the system accountable, and help the system to be as effective as possible. More resources are being channeled to the people through local self-government structures, and it is important that these resources are well used. Corruption is a big problem in the country, but if the local people are aware, then corruption can be checked, from the bottom up.

Astha became involved in working on a project to create a forum or platform of local people, who would receive special training about Panchayati Raj structures, roles, responsibilities and who would commit themselves to working in their Wards and Gram Panchayat areas to



create an active and aware citizenry. People would be encouraged to attend the 4 Gram Sabhas in the year, to participate in Ward Sabhas, to monitor development works in the area. This Gram Panchayat level forum was called a "Jagrook Manch" or an Aware Forum.

Specifically, the Objectives of this Forum, or Platform, are:

- To restore the faith of rural people in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- To provide basic and new information about the Panchayati Raj System.
- To ensure maximum participation of women and rural people in Gram Panchayats, and their capacity building
- To ensure equal participation of oppressed, marginalized and exploited people in each and every activity of the Panchayati Raj system
- To develop measures to enhance harmony among the villagers, public leaders and government employees.
- To plan, implement and monitor.

The Members of the Forum would be mobilized by Astha, and the other NGOs working on this programme initiative with Astha. Specifically, the Forum would be constituted:

- Through local workers the voluntary organizations will mobilize five active people with positive attitude (2 women + 3 men) from each ward of gram panchayat (number of women members may exceed 2)
- One woman and one man from each ward will be an active member of the platform and will be in direct contact with the public leaders and government officers.
- At the panchayat level there will be a head elected from among the members.

The activities of the Jagrook Manch are:

- Organization of regular meetings at cluster, village and panchayat level to develop an understanding about the importance of ward sabha, gram sabha and panchayat.
- Identifying and creating an enabling environment to raise issues regarding the problems of village panchayats.
- Encouraging proposal formulation for the ward sabha, to work for their inclusion in primary proposals of gram sabha.
- Monitoring the quality of work at the ward level.
- Identifying the actual beneficiaries of social security and people's welfare schemes.
- Creating awareness about different programmes of the government among the rural masses and facilitating their implementation.
- Supervising and harmonizing the activities of concerned government employees.
- Special monitoring of programmes of vaccination, mother child hood care, health, hygiene, "mid day meal" and ration shops.
- Informing local people about the PR system under the right to information .
- Promoting issue based trainings of villagers.
- Organizing a district level platform.

Astha took the responsibility to be the lead organization to spread this work throughout the 2 Districts of Udaipur and Rajsamand, with the help of other NGOs. Also, there was

somework of training of elected representatives from the Gram Panchayats being worked on. In the year under reporting, each of the 26 NGOs worked with 2 Gram Panchayats. The chart below shows something of the spread and quantity of work done.

Particulars	Udaipur	Rajsamand	Total
No. of Gram Panchayat	22	26	48
No. of Organisation	12	14	26
No. of Blocks	6	6	12
<b>No. of Sarpanches</b>			
Female	12	22	
Male	10	4	
Total	22	26	48
<b>No. of Ward Panches</b>			
Female	41	44	
Male	87	103	
Total	128	147	275
<b>Jagruk Manch Members</b>			
Female	262	355	
Male	328	393	
Total	590	748	1338
<b>Participants of Jagruk Manch Training</b>			
Female	276	488	
Male & other	609	636	
Total	885	1124	2009
<b>Participants of PRI Training</b>			
Female	63	94	
Male & Other	357	135	
Total	532	240	772

All of the representatives of the NGOs working on this Panchayati Raj initiative, met together regularly in a meeting structure called the "Sahyogi Sangh" or the Support Federation. The evaluation of the work throughout the area is that the people have become much more aware about their responsibilities as citizens, and are attending the Gram Sabhas, accessing the government programmes, and holding their elected representatives accountable. In the State Government elections which were held in this year, the structures of the Awareness Forums and the Support Federations worked on voter awareness for that democratic body too.

#### **(b) Tribal Self Rule**

In 1996, the central Parliament passed a law titled: The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act which gave a lot of autonomy to the tribal communities located in areas covered by Schedule V of the Constitution -- that is, tribal people in areas of tribal concentration, in states other than the North East (which is covered under Schedule VI). This 1996 Central Act, is called the PESA Act for short.

The Astha Team, working with the tribals of South Rajasthan, had been facing a lot of problem in relation to displacement from land, controls over the collection and sale of Minor Forest Produce, the activity of Money-Lenders, the plethora of liquor shops, etc. The Central

PESA Act gave jurisdiction and decision-making power over these and other resources and matters, to the “direct democracy” body, the Gram Sabha, which was a meeting of all adult citizens in the Village. And the Village area was demarcated by the people who lived there – they knew the boundaries of their villages. ( For example, in feudal Rajasthan, the tribal people knew that “in the old days”, the men from their village would accompany the king and his hunting party into the forest up to a certain limit, or that the queen when she was traveling in her “doali” or palanquin, was to be carried by men of their village up to a certain boundary place, after which she was the responsibility of the porters of another village.)

The state governments of states in which there were Schedule V tribal areas, were to make enabling state legislation within one year. But the Rajasthan government passed the state Act of PESA only in 1999. And when it was passed, it was discovered that there were serious differences with the Central Act. Some of the differences that have caused problems in the implementation of the dreams for the PESA Act, are:

- The State Act does not include the process of declaring and demarcating the boundaries of the Village, within which the citizens will meet to form the decision making body called the Gram Sabha. The State Act has created bodies called Ward Sabhas or Ward Council areas, which follow the geography of the Wards of the Gram Panchayat. Regardless of cultural homogeneity, the people in one Ward are all part of one Ward Sabha.
- A second major problem, is that other laws in Rajasthan have not been changed to acknowledge that now, these local Village Councils (Gram Sabhas) have power and control over matters of land displacement, minor forest produce, minor minerals, minor water bodies, the activities of money lending and liquor selling, indeed, all development projects that are planned for implementation in the area.
- A third major problem is that the Central PESA Act give sole powers to the Gram Sabha of the Village for some decisions, and in the Rajasthan state Act of PESA, there is a lot of powers which are given to “the Gram Sabha, or the Gram Panchayat, or the Panchayat Samiti ....” This causes confusion.
- A fourth major problem is that the State PESA Act in many places talks about, actions will be done, “according to the Rules” – but there are no Rules formulated to implement the intentions of the State PESA Act.

Therefore, the State PESA Act is un-implementable, and is in contradiction with the Central PESA Act in some serious matters.

Astha has been working with the Tribal Self Rule (PESA understanding) villages in Kotra Block of Udaipur District, and with the Tribal Self Rule villages of the Blocks of Dungarpur District which have declared themselves Village Republics. Because of the problems for implementing the visions of the Central PESA Act, it was decided to file a Public Interest Case against the State Government in the High Court, asking them to make corrections in the Act to bring it in line with the Central Act, and to frame Rules so the Act could be implemented.

Other than that, the work on Tribal Self Rule has been going on, and Astha and the People’s Organizations – The Tribal Development Forum and the Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization, have been working according to the Central Act.

## **SHUCHE**

The SHUCHE Campaign was started in 1998, with the objective of creating a Sanitary, Healthy Urban Clean and Hygienic Environment. Up to the end of March 2004, there were a total of 900 outlets, which include residential families as well as commercial outlets like small hotels.

There are 21 Society Areas in Udaipur City. A "Society Area" is a neighbourhood, in which there is an organizer who contacts the neighbourhood residents, and motivates them to join the SHUCHE Campaign, by paying Rs. 40 per month. The household members have to separate their household waste into "compostable" and "non-compostable". This Rs. 40 will insure that household waste is picked up by an "arogya mitra" or sanitary worker of SHUCHE, thus keeping household waste from being thrown and scattered on the roads of the neighbourhood. Some of the neighbourhoods have formed "women's groups" to manage the affairs.

SHUCHE produces vermi compost manure on the Vermi Farm property of Astha, near the Astha Training Centre at Chotta Bedla. The manure is packaged and sold, and, combined with the income from the Society Area Collection, makes the activity of SHUCHE self-sufficient financially. Astha has helped by constructing sheds and a 2-room office for the project, and helping the sanitary workers of the project to go for a study tour to Jaipur, to the Centre for Development and Communication to expand their experience and understanding of Solid Waste Management.

A number of other activities have been added to the initial activity of household waste collection and processing. The benefits of composting and vermiculture have been promoted in the city, and now, many home owners have dug compost pits on their property, and are producing their own fertilizer. Other environment friendly activities like reduction in the use of polythene, save trees campaigns, approaching the municipality to put waste bins at various public places have been started. Also, training of NGOs, farmers and rural women's groups in vermiculture has been started. Two training programmes were held in the year. Also, SHUCHE promoted the idea of vermiculture by putting an exhibition booth in the Kotra "Milan Mela" (Get-together Fair of Learning and Sharing) September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

### **The South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication – SAAPE**

Astha has been involved in the Workshops that formed SAAPE, and then met to work on the follow-up action. There was a SAAPE Poverty Report, written by the Nodal Organization persons from the South Asian countries associated, and the Astha contact person for SAAPE, Ginny Shrivastava, wrote the poverty report on India included in that document. Later, with a summary of the India poverty report, titled "Expose! Oppose! Propose!", she attended the first General Assembly of SAAPE in June 2003, organized in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Astha is very much a part of those working in the region, on the root causes of Poverty in our countries – which have very much to do with the globalized and privatized economic policies of the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO and others. Ever since India joined hands with the World Bank and IMF, and accepted the Structural Adjustment Programme in July, 1991, the condition of the Poor has entered a new and more critical phase. The struggle is a many-sided struggle, with many actors joining with the Poor to point out realities and fight for resources for the Poor. SAAPE is one voice from South Asia.

#### **"Concerns of SAAPE**

Alliance members underscore the grave crises that mark the entire region as follows:

- Growing numbers of people living in conditions of abject poverty;
- Skewed development policies leading to large scale displacements of poor people;
- Mass migration increasing the fragility of rural based populations, particularly landless labourers and poor peasants;
- The escalating violence faced by women living in abject poverty;
- The declining social sector expenditures by governments;
- The increasing costs of militarization;

- The acute distress of large masses of people neglected by unresponsive governments implementing distorted agenda of development priorities;
- Severely endangered food security aggravated by multinational companies acquiring patent rights over our bio-diversity;
- The dismantling of government food security systems in the name of privatization;
- Forced and exploited labour;
- Escalating communalism and fundamentalism which are undermining the people's struggles to address the root causes of poverty;
- The people's right to information not being uniformly available in the region
- Social conflict within countries resulting from state and other systemic suppression over people. People raise their voices about real problems, and the State does not listen to them, resulting a frustration, and violence in society;
- Governments not addressing the structural causes of poverty;
- Escalating numbers of refugees in the region; and
- Extremely high national debt as a result of international financial institutional borrowing, etc.”

#### **“The Purpose of SAAPE –**

The South Asia Alliance of Poverty Eradication and its members are committed to undertake the following roles and responsibilities:

- Monitor national governments in their performance to implement their commitments;
- Resist anti-poor policies, be they economic, social, political or environmental;
- Encourage regional development cooperation amongst the governments of the region, as well as amongst non-state actors;
- Develop strategies which create space for people's initiatives and support people's struggles for reinstating social justice, recognizing the specific and different contexts of marginalized groups;
- Facilitate alliances in the region and support existing networks, to work on strategies that could effectively change and combat the harmful economic policies of corporate globalization, liberalization and privatization which cause increasing poverty in the region;
- Develop common strategies that make governments, states, and local authorities accountable and responsive to people's needs and aspirations;
- Establish regional dialogue with the European Union, and other international bodies and networks, both state and civil society ones that can be seen as allies in the struggle to control and change strong international actors who are causing impoverishment in the region indeed, in the world;
- Set-up a “People for Peace” initiative in the region to work towards peace in the region. This will include influencing governments to reduce defence expenditures.

The times call for joint resistance to external interventions that harm equitable distribution of resources within countries. All development policies, plans and budget exercises need a people's audit so that the planning process may be owned by the people living in the areas.

Civil and political rights essentially fortify people's access to economic, social and cultural rights. Social justice is under siege and people's organizations have indeed shown success in realizing constitutional rights, as a result of their field and policy interventions.”

Astha has seen that macro policies affect themicro situation, and the approach of SAAPE is in line with Astha's “faith in the people and their organizations”, and with the need to raise a voice and act for change in the Region, and beyond.

#### **Watershed**

In addition to the Watershed Work that Astha is helping to implement at the field level in Kotra Block, Udaipur District, there is a piece of Watershed work that the government has asked Astha to do In Rajsamand District. Astha was selected by the Rural Development Department of the Rajasthan state Government, acting on behalf of the Central Government to do “supplementary observations of the ongoing watershed work” being implemented by government departments and NGOs implementing government funded projects. During this year, the Astha civil engineer visited Rajsamand for this work, and gave his supplementary observations to the State Government, as per the guidelines.

## **ASTHA’S RESOURCE AND SUPPORT WORK**

### **Literacy for Leaders of People’s Groups and Organizations**

Astha has developed a methodology of a crash, condensed, residential training programme to help leaders of People’s Organizations to acquire basic literacy skills of reading, writing and arithmetic in a period of a total of 20 days. We feel that literacy strengthens the leadership, and the organization, and that if the leaders are literate, at least the group will have literacy available to it for its work. The group can then write petitions, keep minutes of meetings, check daily wage labour “muster roll” calculations, run savings and loan societies, read notices, etc.

The pattern of literacy training is:

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Phase One -- | The leaders come for 10 days, then return home. In the 10 days they learn all letters, and “matras”, and counting up to 100. They learn how to put together simple words.   |
| Phase Two -- | The same leaders return for 5 days. They learn how to make sentences, write longer words, learn some half letters, and work on making their handwriting good. They begin to learn the arithmetic skills of adding, subtracting.                         |
| Phase Three  | The same leaders return for 5 days. They learn the format for writing petitions, letters, they take dictation, and write original sentences from ideas they have. The arithmetic skills are increased, adding on numbers in hundreds, thousands, lakhs. |



We feel that the leaders of People’s Organizations will be highly motivated to pick up literacy skills, because, as a leader, they have already experienced the limitations due to illiteracy. They know how they will use it! Secondly, leaders are probably mentally brighter than average, and so can pick up the literacy skills quickly. We have also observed that the leaders, if they are women, are usually between age 30 and 45, and so they will probably not have small children to distract them, as they are already free enough from household and family responsibilities to be a leader of a group or organization. So, the learners are highly motivated, bright, and have time to come for the residential training.

The literacy courses have been used to strengthen the leadership of the People's Organizations with which Astha works. On one or two occasions, other organizations have asked the literacy trainer to train their leaders too. Astha has responded to these requests.

During a Crash Condensed  
Residential Course of Literacy

In the past one year, the following training programmes were conducted:

Area or People's Organization, of Trainees	Dates	Number of Days	Phase	Place of Training	No. of Participants
Jhadol, Girwa, Bali, Kotra	1-6 May, 2003	5	III	Astha Training Centre, Bedla	14
Rajsamand, Jhadol	10-14 June (Training had been planned 10-20)	5	I	Astha Training Centre, Bedla	19
Dungarpur, Banswara	20-30 August	10	I	KVK, Dungarpur	27
Kumbalgarh	1-6 September	6	I	KVK Badgaon	17
Dungarpur, Kumbalgarh, Jhadol, Rajsamand	15-20 October	5	II	Astha Training Centre, Bedla	23
Kotra, Sirohi	21 December – 1 January	10	I	Astha Training centre, Bedla	64
Bali (Pali District)	20-29 February	10	I	Nimbeshwar Mahadev Dharamshala	38
Jhadol, Girwa, Association of Strong Women Alone	24 February – 4 March	10	I	Astha Training Centre, Bedla	24

A Case Study of what happened when the one Literacy Learner went home after the first 10 day training programme of literacy, is presented below:

From Literacy, to Credit, to Rights, to ...

This is the case of Puspaha Bai w/o Narayan Karardi Village Goondi Kua, District Dungarpur  
Pushpa Bai was associated with the Vagad Labourers and Farmers Organization. She came to Udaipur for the first 10 days course. When she went home, she informed everyone that she would form a women's group, and a savings society too. Her husband supported her, and soon, 20 women started meeting, and formed a SHG. But she had problem in writing the names of the women, and the amounts they contributed to the savings fund, and so she thought to return to take more literacy, and again joined the 10-day course. She brought 2 new women from her group with her, and they all learned *matras*, counting, reading, writing. She wants to make her group stronger, and help the women to fight for their rights.

## **Budget Analysis Rajasthan Centre (BARC)**

When Astha did the “SAP Study”, or the study to assess the impact of the New Economic Policy of Globalization, Liberalization, Privatization on the poor in Rajasthan (1996-98), we realized clearly that the larger policies affect the conditions at the grassroots. Since then, Astha has seen that it is necessary to work both with the grassroots and at the policy level. In this connection, in 2002, Astha has started a resource centre in Jaipur, the state capital, for data on the Rajasthan Budget. The analysts look at the state budget from the perspective of the poor, and pull out data and do analysis that will help mass based groups in their lobbying and advocacy efforts.

The budget analysts at BARC do some basic work on Health, Education, Tribal Sub-Plan, Drinking Water, Drought, and then it does specific work as requested by NGOs and People’s Organizations in Rajasthan. The data provided is then used by the Rajasthan organizations in their advocacy work. The BARC staff conducts orientation programmes throughout the state, to make activists and NGO workers aware of the use of and the need for budget data in their work. As part of this awareness and information sharing work, a newsletter is published and distributed widely.

BARC also meets the M.L.A.s of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly, and gives them printed information about the implications of the budget on the poor in the state. The BARC staff also gives questions to be asked in the Assembly, which will point out short-comings in the budget from the point of view of the poor. These budget questions in the Assembly help to raise awareness about the budget and the condition of the poor, and also, sometimes, the answers give the BARC staff information that they could not get anywhere else!

BARC was formed by a group of social workers, following a meeting on Budget with M.D. Mistry of Gujarat. From the beginning, it was intended to be a resource for the whole state, producing materials and digging out data that would help to strengthen the work being done by groups and organizations.

In the year under reporting, there were 2 pieces of work that were done that helped campaigns of several NGOs and People’s Organizations. They were, the work BARC did on:  
(a) Drought Relief and (b) The Right To Work Campaign

- (a) Drought Relief – The Rajasthan civil society sector had formed a state-wide Drought Struggle Committee which met to put pressure on the government to open more drought relief works in needed areas of the state. BARC supported this Committee by doing research in the budget books, about where there could be even more money which the government could use for drought relief. This data was used by the Struggle Committee in its advocacy work.
- (b) The Right to Work Campaign – Rajasthan has a vibrant Right to Work Campaign, which had focused on the need for an Employment Guarantee Act. The Rajasthan Government had publicly committed itself to bringing in such an Act. However, it had been estimated that the



cost to the state would be Rs. 1,600 crores. With the help of an economist from Delhi, it was possible to point out to the Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot, that there was enough money in the budget, where it was, and how it could be justifiably used.

Other data which was asked for by various NGOs and activists, is listed below:

**DATA SUPPLIED TO NGOs AND PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATIONS**  
**ON ISSUES OF THEIR CONCERNS**

**a. Disabled and widows**

- i. Action Aid, Jaipur

**b. Food Security / Social Security**

- i. Action Aid, Jaipur
- ii. MKSS, Rajsamand
- iii. Adivasi Vikas Manch, Kotra

**c. Area based development programme**

- i. Saharia Area Development
  - Sankalp Sansthan (Shahabad)
- ii. Border Area Development head
  - Barmer network of NGO's
- iii. Mewat Area Development head
  - MMSVS
- iv. Desert Area Development head
  - Urmul Jyoti Sansthan

**d. Forest and wild life head**

- i. Prayas Sansthan, Chittorgarh
- ii. Jarga Area Vikas Samiti, Kumbalgarh, Dist. Rajsamand
- iii. Adivasi Vikas Manch, Kotra, Dist. Udaipur
- iv. Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan, Dungarpur
- v. Forest land movement
  - Astha, Udaipur
  - Ramesh Nandwana

**e. Tribal area development**

- i. Ankur Sansthan, Jhadol
- ii. School of Social Work, Udaipur
- iii. Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan, Dungarpur
- iv. SC-ST Commission, Jaipur

**f. Drought Head in Rajasthan Budget 2002-03**

- i. Care India, Delhi
- ii. Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan, Dungarpur
- iii. CECOCECON, Jaipur
- iv. Adivasi Vikas Manch, Kotra
- v. Rajendra Kuntal, Bharatpur
- vi. Godwad Adivasi Sansthan, Pali
- vii. Pariwar Manch, Udaipur
- viii. Akal Sangharsh Samiti, Jaipur

**g. Dalit Allocations in Rajasthan Budget 2002-03**

- i. Centre for Dalit & Human Rights, Jaipur

**h. Agriculture & Allied Activities**

- i. PUCL, Jaipur
- ii. Action Aid, Jaipur
- iii. ARAVALI, Jaipur
- iv. Hum Kisan Sangathan, Jhalawar
- v. Grameen Mahila Vikas Sansthan, Jaipur
- vi. SPWD, Udaipur
- vii. Prayatna Sansthan, Udaipur
- viii. Pariwar Manch, Udaipur
- ix. Akal Sangharsh Samiti, Jaipur

**i. State Budget – Revenue / Receipts with a development perspective**

- i. MKSS
- ii. Seva Mandir, Udaipur
- iii. Vagad Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan, Dungarpur
- iv. Society for Sustainable Development, Karauli

**j. Panchayati Raj Budget**

- i. Astha, Udaipur

**k. Education Budget**

- i. Astha, Udaipur
- ii. Vividha, Jaipur

**l. Health Budget**

- i. RVHA, Jaipur
- ii. Vividha, Jaipur

While the analysis of the budget is ongoing work, nevertheless, some Meetings and Training Programmes were organized by the BARC staff, to share the budget data analysed, and to help NGO workers and activists to know about the importance of using budget data in their work.

The following table will summarise the work done in the period April 2003 to March 2004. During the period April to June, much of the time of “meetings” was taken with the Rajasthan Drought Struggle Committee and the Right To Work meetings. Both issues sent the BARC staff back to the budget books to see where there could be more money for Drought Relief, or for an Exmployment Guarantee Scheme.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Advisory Committee Meeting	May 26, 2003
Advisory Committee Meeting	September 6, 2003
Special Meeting on Election and Budget – 15 NGOs and activists attended	September 29, 2003
Special Meeting on Right to Work – 18 participants from different NGOs joined the meeting	October 14, 2003
Regional Training conducted for NGOs about budget, at Lok Adhikar Network, Barmer. 27 NGOs and People’s Organizations attended	October 18-19, 2003
Regional Training conducted for NGOs about budget, at Astha, Udaipur. 54 NGOs and People’s Organizations from Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Banswara, Rajsamand, Pali and Sirohi Districts attended	November 17-18, 2003
Issue Based Meeting on Education. 11 participants and education activists from different NGOs joined the meeting	January 2, 2004
Staff Development Tour to World Social Forum, Mumbai. 2 staff	January 16-21, 2004
Capacity Building Workshop on Budget Analysis (special Workshop requested by Save the Children for its partners). 37 participants	

There is also a good Case Study of how ordinary people, in this case, tribal students, used Budget information to bring about needed social change:

### **THE TRIBAL CHILDREN'S HOSTEL CASE STUDY**

*The Budget Analysis Rajasthan Centre (BARC), a recently formed resource centre for budget situated, in the state capital, Jaipur, was invited by a District-wide People's Organization in Dungarpur District, the "Vagad Labourers and Farmers Association", to do a workshop explaining the budget details for government school hostels for tribal children (the children of tribal or indigenous people).*

*The Vagad Labourers and Farmers Association had called about 50 youth together, both boys and girls ages 12-18 who were studying in 6<sup>th</sup> class through 10<sup>th</sup> class in schools. The students came from 5 hostels in the District. Prior to the workshop, the BARC staff had asked the Association what information the young people would like to know about the budget. They reported that they would like to know about schemes that affected tribal youth. And so, the budget provisions for tribal children's hostels were put before them.*

*The budget for tribal students' hostels was broken down so that the budget provisions for each child living in a hostel per day, per month, and per year was explained. There is a provision of Rs. 6,225 per student per year. It was explained that there was budget provision for tooth paste, tooth brush, soap. The amount in the budget provided for food was calculated on provision of "dal" (lentils), vegetable, rice and "roti" (flat whole wheat bread). Also that there was provision for one special diet per week with fruit or a sweet. The budget made provision for 2 sets of school clothes per child per year.*

*At this point, the young people began to speak out –*

*"We get no tooth paste, or tooth brush!"*

*"We eat "dal and roti" only, no vegetables or rice, and certainly no special diet every week – we have never had that!"*

*"Two sets of clothes per year – we get only one!"*

*Along with some of the leaders of the Vagad Labourers and Farmers Association, the young people decided to form a District Committee of the tribal girls and boys living in the hostels of Dungarpur District. Representatives from the District Committee would go and meet the Tribal Commissioner of the Government of Rajasthan, and inform him about the fact that they now knew what provisions were in the Rajasthan budget for them, and that they were not getting them. They also made plans to make Student Committees in each hostel, and present the new information they had acquired from the budget, to the Hostel Wardens.*

*When the students of the hostels went to the wardens with the data, the wardens responded to each group by saying: "Where did you get this information – it is all false." Then the District Level Committee of the students received the reports from all the hostel wardens, and about 15 students of the District Committee went to meet the Tribal Commissioner. The Commissioner knew that the information was not "all false", and he consulted the government, and some new rules have been made.*

*Now, the Hostel Wardens have been instructed to give the budgeted money to the Student Committees in each hostel every month, and the Committees can purchase the food, toothpaste with the money given. The corruption by the Hostel Wardens has been stopped. Reports from the hostels in Dungarpur District are that things are running well now. The leaders of the Vagad Labourers and Farmers Association also have formed a Youth Committee of the Association, and these students of the District Committee of students have joined the Youth Committee.*

While still in its beginning stages, the Budget Analysis Rajasthan Centre has proved to be a useful resource to many working with the poor in Rajasthan.

### **The Astha Training Centre, Sukhdevi Nagar, Chotta Bedla, Udaipur**

The Astha Training Centre is a resource for those who want to conduct training programmes to increase the understanding and analysis of the poor and of those who work with the poor, to work on strategizing, problem-solving, material production, and anything else that will take the causes further of those who are poor, deprived, exploited, oppressed, or of those who work with them.

In the year 2003-04, the following table is a report of the programmes that were conducted at the Astha training Centre:

	Meetings	Trainings and Workshops	Study Tours	Others	Total
Astha Sansthan	67	24	-	3	94
People's Organizations	5	10	3	-	18
Udaipur District NGOs and Government Units	3	13	-	4	20
Rajasthan NGOs, Government units, and Other group	4	12	8	4	28
Out of Rajasthan NGOs and some foreign groups	-	4	8	2	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>174</b>

### **Documentation Centre**

The Documentation Centre is a resource for all of the work and workers of Astha, and others working in the sector are also using this resource. The Centre has 3 resources at the present time:

- (a) Editor
  - To write or help in writing newsletters, booklets, case studies, pamphlets, press notes, etc.
  - To help Programme Coordinators and other programme workers to write reports, case studies, press articles, etc.
  
- (b) Librarian
  - To catalogue print materials kept in the library, and make them available to field workers and activists. These include: books, journals, posters, reports, maps, etc.
  - To maintain a kind of "archives" of Astha, by keeping safely all major programme reports, newspaper clippings
  
  - To keep ready up-to-date lists of political leaders, senior

administrators of both the centre and the state, and the Districts in which Astha has special pieces of work, with phone numbers, addresses, e-mail addresses, FAX numbers  
 To help with training programmes when requested, by providing subject-matter reference material for use by participants during the training  
 To arrange exhibitions and display items for large programmes organized by Astha  
 To keep a catalogue of the video tape material available that can be used in training programmes

(c) Audio-Visual Technician

To take photographs and video footage of programmes and activities of the work of Astha and its related People's Organizations and issue-based activities  
 To help in editing raw video material  
 To be available to show video material in training programmes and other events, when needed  
 To purchase videos that can be used in training programmes of Astha  
 To keep video tapes, photograph negatives, and some photographs in a systematic way

**Support to the People's Organizations by Making Fellowships Available**

During the year, there were Fellows attached to 7 People's Organizations. These Fellows are local men or women who have abilities and interest to work for the People's Organization on a part-time basis, and are "People's Organization Workers" not "Astha Workers". The stipend for the Fellows comes from the Astha budget at present, but the idea is to build up local workers who can stay with the Organization for the long term, and who can be paid, if necessary, by the People's Organization. The stipend from Astha is at the level of Rs. 1,500 or Rs. 2,500 per month, not amounts that could not be handled by a mature P.O.

In this year, there were 12 Fellows who worked with the People's Organizations::

- Tribal Development Forum – 2
- Vagad Labourers and Farmers Association – 2
- Jarga Area Development Society – 1
- Gordward Tribal Society – 1
- Rajsamand Women's Forum – 3
- Association of Strong Women Alone – 1
- Tribal Women's Awareness Society – 2

The Fellows met monthly, to share their experiences, to learn from each other.

**The Need for Change**

An Organization Development consultant from Gujarat, meeting with the Senior Staff of Astha, pointed out that it was time for Astha to bring about some structural changes in the organization. He listened to the senior staff say:

"We want the People's Organizations to be independent"  
 "We are with The People in their struggles"

Then he asked, that if the People's Organizations would "be independent", would those Astha workers who had been working with those people over the last 10 to 15 to 18 years still be "with them"? No one felt that they could leave The People entirely, but in what form Astha would remain "with them" was not clear.

It was also pointed out that the previous 5-6 years had been spent with almost all of Astha's resources, human and material, being focused on the building up of grassroots People's Organizations, and working with them on whatever issues were raised by them. Some of the issues had been very widespread, like displacement, forest rights, women's rights, globalization/privatization economic policies, local self-governance, tribal rights, etc. etc. etc. Astha had a lot of experience, a strong core team, and unless Astha made some changes, and changed the roles of many of the senior team, and field workers too, then the people's leadership would soon feel "capped" – there would be no further growth possible for them.

And so, the decision was made to work to make the People's Organizations more autonomous, and able to handle more of the tasks needed to remain vibrant, large, mass-based People's Organizations working for social justice and social change, over the long term. Therefore, in this year, there were programmes to train the core teams, the Executives, of the People's Organizations and the members of the Registered bodies formed to support the People's Organizations. In this report, these training programmes are noted in the reports of the different People's Organizations.

Likewise, it was decided to bring into existence, "Resource Units" in Astha, which would help some of the long-time workers of Astha to go deeper and wider into issues on which Astha has a lot of experience. Conceptual work of thinking through the role, the staffing needs, etc. was done, and steps were taken in the last part of the period under reporting, to find staff, and to give old staff new roles which would come into force in April 2004.

Therefore, one of the pieces of work done in the financial year 2003 to 2004, was to get ready for the structural changes we had planned which would start April 2004.

## **Conclusion**

The year 2003-04 was a particularly difficult year for Astha, since one of the main founder-member workers of Astha, Dr. Om Shrivastava, was killed in a train accident in June 2003. The organization remained in shock for almost 2 months. The work that Om Shrivastava had been doing had to be shared by other colleagues. A big hole was left in Astha, which has been hard, indeed impossible, to fill. The previous annual report of Astha, for 2002-2003, carried a 2 page tribute to Omji.

In this year, everyone worked very hard to prepare the People's Organizations for the changes they would be facing, the new responsibilities and roles they would be taking on, in the years to come. The Astha team realized too, that new roles would also mean new responsibilities. There was much anxiety across the field team about everyone's ability to do fund-raising, however, beginnings were made there too, with UNDP and CAPART funding lined up.

Perhaps this report should not be titled "The Need to Change", but "Preparing to Change". For that is what the Astha Team has done in the last year.

**A List of the Full-Time Staff of Astha Working in Astha as of 31.03.04**

Coordinating Director --	Dr. Ginny Shrivastava
Programme Coordinators –	Mr. Bhanwar Singh Chadana Mr. Raghav Dutt Vyas Mr. Ashwani Kumar Paliwal Mr. Chandan Jain  Mr. Kamlender Singh Rathore Mr. Nana Lal Meena Mrs. Shanta Garg Mrs. Shakuntala Pamecha
Administrative Coordinator	Mr. Ramesh Paliwal
Financial Coordinator	Mr. Abdul Rashid
Accountant	Mrs. Sharda Jain
Field Organizers	Mr. Mann Singh Sisodia Mr. Ramesh Singh Mrs. Madhu Joshi Mr. Narayan Meena Mr. Mangi Lal Gurjar
Lok Jumbish Team	Mr. Ramesh Meena Ms. Pawan Kumari Ms. Meera Bhagora
Literacy Trainer	Mr. Sohan Lal Gameti
Association of Strong Women Alone (Ekal Nari) Team	Ms. Parveen Banu Ms. Chaggi Bai Bhil Ms. Asha Aharee
Budget Analysis Centre Team	Mr. Vijay Goyal Mr. Nagendra Singh Mr. Praveen Sharma
Panchayati Raj Team	Mrs. Sarita Jain Mr. Birendra Singh
Documentation Centre Team	Mr. Vishnu Joshi Mr. Rajendra Kumar Hilaria
Accounts Team	Mr. Shyam Lal Purohit Mrs. Amita Bhatti Mr. Manglesh Joshi Mr. Shanti Lal Panchal
Computer/Shorthand Team	Mr. A.L. Joseph Mohammed Imran Sheakh

	Mr. Raj Kumar Jalora
Training Centre Staff Team	Mr. Ganesh Lal Gancha Mr. Babu Lal Paliwal Mr. Beru Lal Dangi
Multi-Purpose Worker Team	Mr. Mirza Sadaqat Beig Mr. Ramesh Nagda Mr. Rajesh Paliwal Mr. Lehar Singh Mr. Ganpat Singh Mr. Puree Lal Dangi Mr. Ram Chandra Gameti

## APPENDIX NO. 2

### **The List of the General Body Members of Astha**

1. Mrs. Anita Mathur, Jaipur, Rajasthan
2. Mr. Ashwani Paliwal, Udaipur, Rajasthan
3. Dr. Ginny Shrivastava, Udaipur, Rajasthan
4. Mr. Raghav Dutt Vyas, Udaipur, Rajasthan
5. Mr. B.L. Mantri, Udaipur, Rajasthan
6. Mrs. Shiraz Bulsara, Dhanu, Maharashtra
7. Mr. Bhanwar Singh Chadana, Udaipur, Rajasthan
8. Mr. M.D. Mistry, Ahmedabad, Gujarat
9. Mr. Avdhash Kaushal, Dehra Dun, Uttaranchal
10. Mrs. Sunita Dhar, New Delhi
11. Dr. Arvind Bhatnagar, Udaipur, Rajasthan
12. Mr. Nand Lal Pandey, Udaipur, Rajasthan
13. Mr. Abdul Rashid, Udaipur, Rajasthan

### **The Executive Council of Astha Sansthan**

President	Mrs. Anita Mathur, Jaipur, Rajasthan
Secretary	Mr. Ashwani Paliwal, Udaipur, Rajasthan
Member	Dr. Ginny Shrivastava, Udaipur, Rajasthan
Member	Mr. Raghav Dutt Vyas, Udaipur, Rajasthan
Member	Mr. B.L. Mantri, Udaipur, Rajasthan
Member	Mrs. Shiraz Bulsara, Dhanu, Maharashtra
Member	Mr. Bhanwar Singh Chadana, Udaipur, Rajasthan



MAP OF RAJASTHAN

