



## VO Book Keeping Training in KADAPA

Self help groups (SHGs)<sup>1</sup> aren't a recent phenomenon in the Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh, where they have been promoted for almost twenty years and there are over 12,000 functioning groups. However, when APMAS conducted a research study in the region in 2001, it came away with some troubling discoveries. The study found that the groups in the district lacked dynamism, a crucial element to SHGs and as a result their future sustainability was at risk. Based on these findings, the promoting organization requested that APMAS work intensively in the district to enhance the quality of the SHGs and the federation as a whole.

One of the major areas in which APMAS has focused its efforts in Kadapa is the training of bookkeepers at the village organization (VO) level. When APMAS first started its intervention the bookkeeping was poorly maintained across the entire district. Although the APRPRP (World Bank funded Project) had supplied books to over 700 VOs, the bookkeepers had inadequate skills and were therefore unable to maintain up to date records. Instead, they had resorted to keeping notebooks with rough and informal notes about the status of the VOs. This problem was further compounded by the transfer of large funds from the project for on-lending; bookkeepers who were unable to maintain the records of the initial small savings and loan transactions were now held responsible for the distribution and monitoring of large funds.

The first step taken by APMAS in addressing this wide scale problem was to discuss the issues and concerns

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<sup>1</sup>Self help groups (SHGs), are informal groups of 10-20 women who are joined together for a common purpose. These SHGs come together into federation of 5-35 SHGs to form Village Organization (VO). VOs are then further formed into federation of 20-40 to form Mandal Samakya (MS), or a 'federation of federations'. Each level of the federation provides different services and assistance to the members. Moreover, a network of 400 SHGs with more than 5,000 women together in one mandal samakya creates strength in numbers from which the women can tackle larger social issues within their communities.

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with the project manager for the district. This communication was a vital first step, as it ensured the full support of the promoting organization in APMAS' intervention. Following this discussion, APMAS conducted in depth training sessions for 111 of the 119 bookkeepers in the span of one month. Along with the training sessions, APMAS administered tests before and after the training in order to gage the effectiveness of the sessions. The results were extremely encouraging; 75% of bookkeepers had improved their knowledge and skills. After the successful completion of the training, APMAS and the district level resource persons provided on the job support to bookkeepers as much-needed follow up to the training. This one on one follow up ensured that each bookkeeper fully understood the record keeping processes and was an opportunity to address any particular accounting challenges being faced by a VO. The final step in the intervention consisted of refresher courses for the bookkeepers in order to review the status of the bookkeeping and to resolve any field level problems.

APMAS' in-depth training and follow up has brought about drastic improvements in the bookkeeping status in Kadapa; the awareness and skills of the bookkeepers has drastically improved, and now more than 60% of VO records are up to date. Further, there is now regular review of bookkeepers at the mandal and district levels, which ensures quality control and timely resolution of any problems. Monumentally, an internal and external audit of all VO books has been completed for the first time in the State.

As accurate and up to date bookkeeping is one of the most important practices for the ensuring the sustainability of a federation, APMAS' work has had a large impact on the federation. The result of good bookkeeping is a decrease in idle funds, a reduced risk of fraud and money mismanagement, and an increase in information for decision making by members.

**This is just one of the many high quality and effective initiatives APMAS has undertaken in its role as a resource institution for self help group promotion in Andhra Pradesh.**



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