

Mothers' Support Group: A Step Towards Peace

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[Abstract: This is a detailed report of a pilot project designed to train mothers to be peacemakers and change-makers. In Lohardaga, a district of Jharkhand, mothers lead a difficult life. Caught between the demands of the Maoists on the one hand and the indifference of the State on the other, the mothers are unsure of how to keep their children safe, away from radical ideologies and harm. To top it all, they have no platform to vent their feelings, share their concerns or learn from each others experiences. The narratives of violence have spread fear and a feeling of helplessness. By training the mothers to fine tune their soft skills, build networks and stand for themselves and each other, SMART has successfully been able to mobilise mothers to play more significant roles in having a say in securing their families and protecting the youth.]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background of the Project	3
Objectives	3-4
About Lohardaga	4
Community Background	4-5
About SMART	5
About LGSS	6
Project Outcomes	6-7
Methodology	7-11
1. <i>Target Group</i>	7
2. <i>Location</i>	7-8
3. <i>Content</i>	8-9
4. <i>Timeline</i>	4-10
5. <i>Method</i>	10-11
Profile of Mothers School PARTICIPANTS	12
Monitoring and Feedback	12-25
1. <i>Role of Trainers and Reporters</i>	12
2. <i>Role of Supervisors</i>	12-13
3. <i>Role of Coordinator</i>	13
4. <i>Quotes</i>	13-25
Challenges and Lessons Learnt	25-26
Key Gains	26
Closing Ceremoney	26-29
Way Forward	29-30

Background of the Project

Around 80 km away from Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand, Lohardaga, is a less developed, backward and marginalised district with 6 blocks. A small and neglected district, it faces a plethora of problems that are an impediment to its progress. The biggest of these problems is the lack of quality education in the district. While a few private schools impart education of a satisfactory standard, most government schools in the area lack even basic infrastructure. The unavailability of good faculties is compounded by irregularities on the part of available teachers and the lack of up-to-the-mark facilities (e.g. labs and libraries) goes hand-in-hand with the absence of interschool competitiveness.

The second prominent problem afflicting Lohardaga is its extremely poor electrical supply, which is responsible in a big way for the region's economic travails. A major reason for the electricity shortage is the scant government attention towards Lohardaga's developmental needs.

The third problem is the lack of pure, quality drinking water. This causes a multitude of water-borne diseases. To add to this is the increasing problem of alcoholism and drug addiction.

Lack of opportunity and employment is the fourth major challenge confronting Lohardaga. It has resulted in massive unemployment in and around the district headquarters and has given rise to Naxalism and excessive politicisation. Unemployed youth with no means of earning their bread and butter take to antisocial practices or jump into politics with the sole purpose of making money. This has factionalised Lohardaga. When they become full-fledged politicians, their disregard for ethics and values becomes an even more dangerous factor due to the power they gain, inevitably leading to big scams in all public works projects.

Objectives

1. To work in partnership with mothers to build their capacity and capability to protect their children from Maoist ideologies and invest in peace.

2. To highlight the distinguishing role women can play in the security sphere by introducing the concept of smart power - the use of soft skills such as listening, dialogue and empathy.
3. To empower them to voice and address common safety and security concerns by helping them become confident about their social and economic independence.
4. To help strengthen family and community bonds by providing a platform to share their stories and experiences and build resilience to fight extremism.

About Lohardaga

Lohardaga district came into existence after Ranchi was split into three districts, namely Ranchi, Lohardaga and Gumla, way back in 1983. The district is named after the town of Lohardaga, the administrative headquarters of the district. Lohardaga was given the position of a sub division in 1972 and a district in 1983.

According to the 2011 census, Lohardaga district has a population of 461,738.

Community Background

Lohardaga has a sex ratio of 985 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 68.29 %.

The inhabitants of this district mainly depend on agriculture, forest produce and seasonal migration to different parts of the country, with 80% of the population dependent upon agriculture. The main crop of this area is paddy. Wheat is grown on the limited irrigated land to meet annual food requirements. Also this district is linked with larger vegetable markets like Jamshedpur, Rourkela and Calcutta. There is a cold storage in the district. But profitable vegetable cultivation is being limited to road side non-tribal. Generally, villagers of the district keep plough animals. Also they keep goats and poultry birds as buffer. Although there is a dairy chilling plant in the district head quarter, dairy is practiced by very few people mainly non-tribal.

Lohardaga Center is a small, isolated, underdeveloped and neglected area with limited opportunities for employment. Underdevelopment has added to the frustration of the youth and they are susceptible to the lure of anti-social elements. Like anywhere else,

the mothers want their children to be educated and employed in the government offices.

They are keen to play a more active in the future of their children; however they feel inadequate to address a number of issues.

About SMART

SMART –Seeking Modern Applications for Real Transformation, an NGO registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860, has been working in Mewat and other parts of the country since the year 2000.

SMART was closely involved in trauma counseling and working with those impacted by Tsunami in Kancheepuram District. It adopted two villages and used sports as a tool for trauma counseling. SMART won the Ashoka Changemakers Award for its work in the Tsunami impacted areas.

Post 26/11, terror attack on Mumbai, SMART worked with the survivors of the terror attack, with a focus on the families of the constables, sub inspectors and inspectors who were on duty on that fateful night. SMART used Story Telling as a tool for trauma healing and continuously worked for 5 years with the families. It ran Competence and Confidence building centers and helped build the capacities of the mothers and the female children of the police men to earn a livelihood and demand for their rights to better housing and better facilities.

Since 2011, SMART has been working with Mothers in predominantly Muslim areas of Mewat in Haryana and Srinagar and Kupwara. It has been running the Mothers Schools that have helped the mothers create a network for themselves to share their stories, their achievements and their fears. Through the schools mothers have been trained to speak up and speak out and to play a proactive role in raising their children particularly the boys. In 2015, SMART reached out to the mothers of Lakhipur Village, Goalpara, Assam and trained 24 trainers and ran 12 centers of 25 women each. The response was tremendous and the improvement in their lives significant. However, on account of paucity of funds the program could not be continued further.

About LGSS

SMART partnered with Lohardaga Gram Swarajya Sansthan (LGSS) for better on ground presence and implementation of the Mothers Support Group project. LGSS, registered in 1992 under Indian Trust Act 1882 XXI vide Registration No. IV15/1031 has been working to bring people together and organizing them in various cohesive groups in order to bring change in the socio-economic condition of the area. During the period LGSS got considerable success in organizing the people and change their attitude. During working with people it was felt to work in integrated manner covering all the spheres of the life. Hence LGSS tried to contact various agencies to fulfill the need of the community, and diversified its activities with the support of various agencies. At present LGSS has been working in following fields Community Based Education Community Health & RCH Natural Resource Managements Entrepreneurship Development Rural Technology Promotion Community Based Rehabilitations of People with Disability Care of Senior Citizens Institutions Building and Empowering this Institutions Networking and Advocacy.

They have a strong on-ground presence and through their past and running projects have ties with the community in Lohardaga.

Project Outcomes

1. Trained 12 mothers as trainers and rapporteurs for the centers.
2. Reached out to over 300 mothers and enrolled 125 mothers across 5 villages in Lohardaga, for the training and sensitization on issues of radicalization.
3. Provided a safe and secure place for discussions and deliberations on the current scenario and environment of hostility and hatred.
4. Empowered women to share their stories and speak out confidently against the violence in their immediate environment without fear.
5. Assisted in raising the self esteem of mothers, belief in themselves and gave them a sense of identity as individuals who can contribute in building safer and stronger communities.
6. Built the capability of mothers to understand and recognize vulnerabilities and risks; signs of radicalization and wrongdoing and the role that they can play to safeguard the interests of their homes and family.
7. Strengthened communities by building their stake in peace, strengthening social

cohesion by communicating with each other and sharing their experiences and stories.

Methodology

1. Target Group

The idea of Mothers' Support Groups was to work with the mothers of vulnerable youth so that they do not lose their sons or daughters to extremist ideologies or the clutches of such outfits. No mother wants her child to kill or get killed for a cause that they don't even understand or relate with, but get attracted either for money or for a reason that is wrongly marketed to them. The project was based on the fact that parents know when their child takes a wrong turn. The project also focused on building the strength of women as a collective and to inculcate the skills of speaking out against extremism, rather than be mute spectators or allies.

2. Location

As discussed in 'About Lohardaga', the district was chosen as it is underdeveloped and isolated. As per reports, the crime rate was high and the influence of extremist forces was evident. After proper research and effort 5 villages were chosen for the Mothers Support Group. The centres are running in two blocks: Kisko and Lohardaga Sadar

Table 1: List of villages participating in the Mothers' School training

1.	Bakarni
2.	Bhat Khijri
3.	Irgaon
4.	Nini
5.	Durhul

The choice of villages was based the follow criteria:

1. Availability of literate mothers
2. Evidence of signs of radicalization and aggression in the youth
3. Support of the clergy
4. Consent of mothers to attend the schools



Anganwadis or a Panchayat Ghar was allocated in the villages where the mothers met. These centres were usually large and well-lit, with matted sitting. Except in the Panchayat Ghar, we found no toilets in the rest of the centers.

3. Content

The innovative idea for Mothers' Schools emphasized the distinctive role women can play in the security sphere by introducing the concept of smart power - the use of soft skills such as listening, dialogue and empathy. SMART has been working closely with an advocacy group in Vienna and developed a twelve-module manual with the help of psychologists and women's groups. The modules (Table 2) dealt with subjects like raising self-esteem, knowing yourself, building self-confidence, understanding your community, understanding signs of radicalization, making a tree of life and understanding the challenges of each phase of growing up, looking beyond blame and shame, understanding the pull and push factors, building a strong bond with family, importance of dialogue, and all issues pertaining to radicalization of the youth.

Table 2 Module structure for Mothers' School training

S.No.	Chapter	No. of Days allocated
1.	This Is Me, Who Are You?	2 Days
2.	Me In My Community	2 Days
3.	Mother's Self Doubts and Self Esteem	3 Days
4.	Rethinking My Role In Security	2 Days

5.	Mother as a Peace Maker	2 Days
6.	Child Psycho-Social Development	3 Days
7.	Understanding Political Violence and Wrong Influences	3 Days
8.	Purposeful Activities and Media	2 Days
9.	Improved Communication – Talking and Listening to Teenagers	3 Days
10.	Recognizing and Reacting to Early Warning Signs of Violent Behaviour	3 Days
11.	Involving Fathers	2 Days
12.	Peace Starts at Home	2 Days
13.	Government schemes	3 Days



Each 'module' consisted of background information on the theme as well as instructions for home-based multi-sensory training exercises for 32 complete meetings each of 2-3 hours. This included the orientation meeting and the wrap-up. Each Centre met twice a week to encourage all the participating women to share their thoughts and

not be pressured for time. Themes covered included the critical tools of dialogue and understanding, psycho-social process of child development, de-radicalization techniques, as well as applied parenting skills and improved family communication.

4. Timeline

The workshop commenced on May 5 by recruiting and training the trainers and reporters for 4 days. The centers started from May 9 and wrapped up on August 30. An award ceremony for distribution of certificates and honorarium to participants in scheduled for the 31st of August.

The project report and activities:

Sl. No	Activity	Timeline	Remarks
1	Finalisation of partner NGO	March	LGSS
2	Finalisation of block/ supervisors/villages / rapporteurs/trainers/ finalisation of place of centres	April 1-15	Visit to Lohardaga by SMART; discussions and visit to the villages, interview with potential candidates for monitoring, reporting and training/testing of manual
3	Finalisation of mothers for each centre	April 16-30	Each of the identified trainers mobilised the mothers for the training. Conditions applied.
4	Finalisation of manual	May 1-4	Changes incorporated in the manual as per feedback received
5	Training of trainers /supervisors	May 5-8	Residential training organised for 14 participants including trainers/rapporteurs and supervisors and NGO staff
6	Centres commence	May 9 onwards	Centres were launched from May 9 in different villages. Women decided to meet three times a week for two months and then twice a week for the last month
7	Refresher training	June 21-22	Locally done by supervisors and through Skype
8	Training and Feedback	August 3-6	
9	Closing of the program	August 29-31	Closing ceremony was held on 31st August

5. Method

The model adopted was simple:

First, we developed the 12-module manual that has been detailed above.

SMART worked with LGSS to identify 10-15 mothers from within the community who had some leadership skills and wanted to change the situation they were in.

SMART then trained these mothers. The trainers were trained in a weeklong workshop in the first week of the program and then they made groups of 25 women each.

The trainers then identified mothers from within the communities for training. Each trainer worked with 25 women for a period of 3 months and ran the centers two days a week for about 2.5 to 3 hours a day (Table 3).



Trainers arranged a time slot for the meeting based on the availability of the center and the convenience of the participants. A fifteen-minute break was included for tea and snacks, allowing the mothers to refresh themselves.

The meetings built on the personal capacities of the mothers and their

parenting skills to better equip them to guide their children positively, to create alternative activities for them, to prevent their children from engaging in petty crime, to confront the acceptance and use of violence and to deal with their grievances against the state.

Certain rules of confidentiality and trust were set and some were built over a period of time. There was enough space given to build trust and start sharing their stories. Through activities and exchange the mothers learnt more about the psycho-social development of children each week, as well as communication techniques with teenagers, conflict resolution, and the role of mothers in reducing violence and promoting empathy. Often it was seen that mothers shared stories that they had never talked about to anyone before. They shared their fears and their problems with each other and also learnt from each other's experiences.

Table 3 Time schedule for Mothers Support Group training

S.No	Center Name	Days	Timings
1.	Bakarni	Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday	12:00-2:30 pm
2.	Bhat Khijri	Friday, Saturday, Sunday	12:00-2:30 pm
3.	Irgaon	Friday, Saturday, Sunday	12:00-2:30 pm
4.	Nini	Thursday, Friday, Saturday	12:00-2:30 pm
5.	Durhul	Saturday, Sunday, Monday	11:00- 1:30 pm

Profile of Mothers' School Participants

Mothers were between 25-50 years of age, with children between 9-25 years. Most of them were illiterate. Most of them either did not attend school or left school to get married at an early age, meaning that they had not studied beyond Class X. Their husbands usually worked in the vicinity as masons, miners, labourers, or in their fields. Some mothers lent a hand in the fieldwork but mostly they were left to take care of their children and household chores. They had no voice at home and a low status in the community until their participation in the Mothers' Support Group training.

It was common for the mothers to have about 3-5 children. Living in joint families most of them looked after more than a handful of children of varying ages. Even their children were dropouts. Most of the participants were from tribal communities. The majorities of them were victims of domestic abuse, suffered from anemia and were over worked.

Monitoring and Feedback

1. Role of Trainers and Reporters

Each of the centers had a reporter and a trainer. The trainer arranged a meeting with the group twice or thrice a week as per the group's needs, working through the modules and activities and trying to involve each and every mother in the conversation, to keep them engaged. The reporter took notes of the sessions and collected anecdotes and quotes from each mother. She collected feedback on each of the modules and discussed with the participants what they liked or did not like about each module. A feedback form was filled out after each session. At the end of the training, each of the mothers was interviewed to elucidate what they had learnt, what had changed in their lives, the impact of the training in their personal life or in context of their community, etc. The responses were heartwarming.

2. Role of Supervisors

Between two supervisors, each of the 5 centers was monitored and visited regularly, as per schedule. The supervisors oversaw the proper running of the centers and whether the modules were being followed and the disciplinary guidelines were being adhered to. They were also responsible for sending anecdotes from the mothers after the completion of each module. They filled in for any trainer, in case there was any delay or



a personal problem. They were there to help the trainers in the event of an untoward incident or in case they needed training to refresh their modules.

3. Role of Coordinator

A coordinator from SMART was in touch with the supervisors through phone or emails to monitor how the MSGs were running, what the

feedback was, and whether the trainers or mothers were facing any problems or challenges. The Programme Director of LGSS visited the centre on a weekly basis and interacted with the women. The staff held monthly meetings to address day-to-day issues and disbursed money for refreshments, etc. They also recorded attendance and took feedback on a weekly basis. A healthy and competitive environment was created with all participants becoming stakeholders by the end of it.

4. Quotes

1. Chandramuni: I had suffered from very low self-esteem and thought that it is a woman's fate to listen to men and obey them in silence, whether they were right or wrong. But after my time with MSG, I have a new sense of self-worth. I spoke out, telling my husband that I had a voice too and that he had to pay heed to it. This incident not only gave me confidence but put me in a decision-making seat for the first time.



Many women of the village were engaged in work at alcohol breweries, which made them complicit in consequences like alcohol addiction and violence. The women of MSG counseled them to withdraw from such work, as it was spoiling the environment of the village and its youth. It took a

month, but they succeeded.

Another effort of theirs that met with success was that of getting youngsters of the village, who were involved in teasing, gambling, robbing etc, to desist from antisocial activities. The group negotiated with them, driving home the point that they too had mothers and sisters at home. It took a month of effort to bring the youngsters to realize the harm they were causing. Many of them are now enrolled in schools.



2. Anju Oraon: Joining the MSG built my confidence. Now I can communicate with anyone. I have also found a way of solving problems instead of fighting.

3. Neelam Kumari: After attending the MSG training process, I started taking family decisions. No one valued my opinion before, but I have now convinced my family that they should give me equal importance and support.

4. Pratima Kujur: MSG has made me believe in unity. I spoke with my husband regarding the rights of women and my worth at home. After this, my husband started supporting me in household chores. Now I have started taking stands for my rights and communicating with the local administration for NREGA wages. I threaten them, saying

that I will file a case against them. I now have faith in the government and in the principle of law and order.

5. Sarita Oraon: Youngsters of the village used to gamble in the anganwadi, due to which girls and children felt afraid and threatened. But now the MSG women threaten them. They have left the place. Before MSG, I used to beat my children when they argued or refused to go to school. But now I encourage them and talk to them. I find that talking is the better way to deal with problems and people.

6. Sanju Khujur: I have started trusting others and now whenever I feel confused or that I am in trouble, I will definitely approach my group for help.

7. Merkha Khujur: I have found mental peace as I am trying not to fight or argue unnecessarily.

8. Pabrin Khujur: My 14-year-old son had been an alcoholic for six months. After joining MSG, I tried to communicate with my son. I succeeded after a month.

9. Sangeeta Oraon: I believe in the concept of a network of mothers, as we can help children change their minds and choose the right path in life.



10. Sonmatiya Oraon: Before MSG, I felt helpless and afraid of the police in the absence of proper information. Through MSG, I gained confidence in the police. With no money or proper facilities, the youth is attracted towards extremist groups. Now I have started spending more time with my children and listening to them. This continuously strengthens my relationship with them.

11. Sudha Khujur (trainer): It was challenging to gather 25 women for training and I was not sure that they would continue coming for 3 months or that we would be able to run the centre successfully. But here, women feel empowered and, as a result, can talk to the local administration directly if something untoward happens.

There was a piece of tribal land and zamindars were trying to grab it. For this they sold all the trees and bribed the police to threaten the tribes. But MSG women got involved in this and sorted the issue out together. This made them realize that unity is strength.

12. Usha Kumari Lakra: When I heard about MSG, I thought that it would be of no use. But when I attended the training I realized that these are the things we do in our everyday life. Many women felt the same way, and I think MSG fulfilled our expectations.

Women of MSG started making time for the meetings and realized that this kind of training should have been imparted to them earlier.

We had never thought beyond our fields and next meal, but MSG gave us a vision: that we can do more and change society, or at least our own families.

Despite being a ward member, I was unable to say what I thought or felt earlier. But now I am more confident at Gram Sabha meetings. After MSG, my husband started supporting me and paying more attention to me as he felt that this was an opportunity for me to learn and get more exposure.



The main issue in our village is alcohol addiction. Children get addicted at a very early age. The reason is that many village women worked in *daru ki bhatti* (breweries) and made alcohol at home. MSG women asked them to discontinue the practice as villagers were getting addicted. This took a long time, but we succeeded in the end.

Women of the village now think females should be aware and educated, as they can help maintain unity amongst family members and create a safe and secure environment.

After MSG, we realised that we should create a friendly environment so that children would feel free to tell us anything without hesitation.

Merkha Khujur, a mother at a centre, had a daughter who was in love with a boy in neighborhood. When we came to know about this issue we went to the boy's family and convinced them to accept the marriage with the help of his father.

Sanju Khujur was a victim of domestic violence. We were aware of her condition but were unable to raise our voice and help her, but after MSG, we took a stand for her. We raised this issue in the panchayat and got it resolved. Now she is happy and her in-laws are supporting her.

Kiran Khujur, an educated woman, was unable to be a part of MSG as she was not getting her husband's permission. We managed somehow to talk to her and bring her to the meetings. After 2-3 classes, she realized that this would infuse a new energy in her life and she convinced her husband about it too.

We will carry on the MSG project with our Gram Sabha women and take our learning's forward with new women.

13. Pachmaniya Oraon: I have started trusting others and can share my problems with the MSG women and seek help. Now I talk very carefully with youngsters to lessen the chance for argument. I am more confident while taking decisions about the security of family.

14. Shaiun Khujur: I liked learning about the 'psychosocial development of children', as we had never thought that ignorance can push youngsters towards bad company and extremist groups.



15. Jyoti Khujur: My life has become more disciplined. I have started talking to children. My husband appreciated this change, as our children have started listening to us. He also thanked MSG for sensitizing me towards youth and family issues. Now my mind has changed and I feel that the police and local administration work for the betterment of the public.

I have been a part of many women's groups, but found MSG particularly interesting and valuable.

16. Fulita Devi: Before attending MSG training, I had no idea about my identity. I learned how to introduce myself to others here. I have been able to carry over some of my learning's to my family life. I now resolve all issues with communication rather than through fights.

17. Sitamani Oraon: In my maternal village, 2 minors wanted to marry but the whole village was against it. Someone informed party people about this then they came to the village. The boy was beaten in front of villagers and they took the couple with them into the jungle. Four days later, the Maoists released them with a warning.

If this type of incident happens again, I will try to convince youngsters and villagers instead of going to the party people and if necessary, I will seek help from the administration.

I will keep trying and talking to others about what I have learned from MSG. Now my neighbor has started asking me about the change in behaviour and how I keep my family so well.

18. Parvati Devi: I remember the incidents of my childhood. Usually, party people used to come to my house and ask for food. My mother didn't allow them to come in front of Maoists. These incidents created fear in my mind of party people. After the MSG training, I have been able to overcome this fear. Maoists are also like us, but they have arms so we feel afraid with them, but now I know we can take the help of police.

19. Muna Devi: Whatever I have learned after joining the MSG training has been implemented in my family and has created a better environment.

20. Sumraren Toppo: When I visited Kunu village, I heard from villagers that party people used to come into the village and ask for food and also demand money and vehicles. Now the villagers know that if they stay united and appeal to the police and local administration, they can deal with these infiltrations.

21. Sitamani Devi: In my childhood, usually Maoists came to my village, Churgaye, and at that time they demanded children. Because of this, I have lived in fear of them since. If I or my family had had this type of training earlier, we could have faced these situations confidently and surely tried to resolve it with villagers, the village heads, police and administration.

22. Gandhori Oraon: I am controlling my husband's drinking habit, which is the main reason for our economic conditions. Alcohol has had a very negative impact on our children as well. I am able to talk with my husband about these issues only because of MSG training and now can take decisions for my family.

23. Prabha Tirkey: One aspect of being extremist and violent is that the government is not supportive and in the absence of proper infrastructure, the educated youth is compelled to live the poor life. There is a lack of job opportunities, due to which the youth is dropping out of education and being attracted towards extremism and standing against the government. They are also demanding money from contractors because according to them it is the government money which is rightfully theirs.

24. Dharmaniya: In Simardhi village, where Maoist killed a young boy at home on a suspicion, without having any evidence. After joining this Mothers' Support Group I have realised that if the police looked into this case first, they would investigate all aspects and then take decisions about whether to arrest or release him, but they never would kill him.



25. Neain Toppo: I learned during this training how I can play a role in protecting my family and can show the right path to my children as it is a disturbed area. I also included whatever I learned from the MSG centre and also taught my daughters, as in the future they will become mothers too.

Recently one night, 3 young boys came to my house. I felt afraid when they introduced themselves as Maoists. They also asked for food and stayed the night at my home. They were talking about religion and told my children to be religious and respect all religions. When I heard all these things, I asked why they chose this path as they had good hearts. After some days I heard 2 of them had died in an encounter and one had surrendered.

26. Anjali Oraon: I learned from MSG that a mother is like a bridge in a family and also the first teacher to her children. I now guide my children about what they should do and what not. In Chahnu village, Maoists usually come and demand children whom they take away and give training. If this happens in our village, all the mothers of MSG will take a stand against it and seek help from villagers, the village head and police.

27. Raymuni Oraon: After joining MSG, I started taking the decisions in my family. Recently, in the neighbouring village of 'Juriya', a villager's land was occupied by rich people. In revenge, he joined the Maoists. After a few days he was killed, the Maoist group came into his village, captured his land again and gave it to his family. Maoists are helping them earn their livelihood. Some Maoists are good and some are bad, but the way they do all these things is wrong.



28. Kunti Devi: After MSG training, I began to communicate more with my daughter. I also listen to her words carefully. She is now growing up. As a result, my daughter has started to share each and every thing with her. As a mother now, I feel secure and can give guidance to her.



29. Rakhi Devi: I have been working with a women's help group for the last 20 years, but what I found in MSG training was eye-opening, especially the early signs of behavioral change in youth, how to identify if he/she is involved in any illegal work, how to bring them on to the

right path, how the conversation between mother and children can improve, etc.

30. Putur Oraon: I am controlling my family in a better way now. I have convinced my husband to communicate with our children and quit alcohol. It was difficult for him initially, but he is consuming much less now. I am very happy about this. After a long time, I find myself able to do the things that I dreamt of. I am paying attention to my children's activities and demands and I try to fulfill their needs as I learned from MSG that one should pay more attention when children are in the growing stage. Otherwise, as a result of ignorance they can choose the wrong path.

31. Sanjo Devi: Recently, in a nearby village, there was a fight between an uncle and his nephew. The nephew went to party people and complained against his uncle. They killed his uncle based only on this complaint. I have become capable of recognizing the thin line between right and wrong after MSG training. In case of any problems, we should go to the administration and the police, never to Maoists, because they only know the way of violence.

32. Sudha Devi(trainer, Bhatkhijri): On the first day I attended training, I did so without my husband's permission. I was fearful of how my husband and family would react. But after the first day of training, I gained courage and talked about whatever I learned. I also shared my wish to continue this training as a mother trainer. My husband allowed me to continue. Further, I was never confident enough to take my own decisions, but after I joined the MSG, I am not only taking my own decisions but also convincing others.

33. Anju Son Tirkey (reporter, Bhatkhijri): After joining MSG as a reporter, I feel more confident. It has brought about a change in my behavior towards my children. I also appreciate the support of community women. Villagers were not aware about the drought relief fund but the mothers who came for MSG got to know about it and also shared the knowledge with the other village women and this time all villagers benefited from the scheme.

34. Mangi Oraon: Before MSG, all women were kept busy with their work and there was a communication gap in the village. We were not able to get to know each other's problems. MSG created that environment, an environment in which everyone can sit together, share their problems, try to get solutions and learn how they can play a major role as mothers, family members, and community members. During these 25 days, they also solved one participant's family issues. Her husband used to drink alcohol in large quantities and beat and abuse her. When she shared this issue with the MSG women, they decided to talk to her husband. They went her house, tried to convince her

husband and talked to him about the bad effects of alcohol on mental and physical health and family life. As a result of this, her husband has quit drink and is doing his family duty.

35. Shanti Oraon: In Tatikharta, which is located at the border of Lohardaga, there was a rich family that abused their daughter-in-law. When the party people got to know about this, they killed the whole family except their son and daughter-in-law. This incident created fear in villagers.

36. Ranthi Oraon: I am a single mother of adolescents and have faced many problems in her my life. After joining the MSG, I have learned how to communicate with teenagers and control their activities with the help of smart and soft skills. Now I have a good network of mothers who are always ready to support her.



37. Lilmani Oraon: A group of Maoists was passing a village killed a man for consuming alcohol. Maoists always take recourse to violence instead of resolving issues with communication and form judgments after hearing one side.

38. Shanti Oraon: My husband is an alcoholic and does not respect my views. Due to this we often fight. I have never seen any Maoist activity in my area but have heard about many brutal activities. Because of this, I feel scared without knowing the truth.

39. Angni Oraon: I am uneducated but joining the MSG has brought a huge change in her life. I am a single mother of two adolescent sons and through MSG; I have got a platform, a place where I can share my problems as a mother and head of a family. I am afraid that someday both the sons will leave me for money as we are very poor. Therefore I forge strong emotional bonds with them.

40. Sumari Oraon: In July, a bull belonging to my uncle, who lived in Hapamune village, strayed into a neighbour's farm and destroyed the crops. In anger, the neighbour killed the bull. When villagers came to know about this, they decided that the person who killed the bull will have to pay equal money to her uncle, but the neighbour refuse to do so. Her uncle got angry and complained to the Maoists. They came to the village and

decided at a meeting that farm owner had to pay Rs 3 lakh. They threatened to punish him if he did not pay up within 6 days. When the farm owner refused to pay in the given time period, they killed him.

I tried to convince my uncle to complain to the police instead of the Maoists henceforth; as such incidents create a cycle of revenge and loss of life.

41. Suman Oraon (reporter, Irgaon): The MSG has brought many changes to my life. I can now easily put my views forth and communicate, share my problems, and bear myself with confidence. I feel happy when people also recognize these changes in me. After the training, I am determined to create a peaceful environment.

42. Savita Gidh (trainer, Irgaon): Earlier, women were unable to understand the MSG due to which they were not responding properly. But after a few days of training, all the women started to like it. Further, before this, village women were so isolated that there was no communication but now they have started to come together and share their personal problems. During 25 days of training, they also solved a family problem of one of the MSG women, who was facing problems arising from her husband's alcoholism.

43. Reeta Oraon: When I heard about MSG, I was excited to learn how to raise kids in a proper manner, as in our hectic life we don't have time for our children and family. After joining MSG, I realized that this was the wrong way to raise them. I liked the chapter on 'Psychosocial development of children'. It taught me the valuable lesson that if we are friendly with our children, it will be easy for us to keep an eye on their activities.

Now I am sharing all my learning's from MSG with my relatives and village women. This is giving me the encouragement to lead other women so that they gain awareness about extremism and why the youth is attracted towards these groups.

44. Laxmi Oraon: I enrolled in MSG because I thought it would change my life and I feel that MSG fulfilled my expectations as, through changes in my behaviour, I have gained the attention and love of my children. I feel confident while advising others and speaking against wrongs.

My relation with my elder son was very bad. He used to abuse me. But MSG helped me convince him to change his ways and this has strengthened our relationship.

45. Pyari Oraon: I felt MSG was useful for me as I started sharing my problems and got a support network.

My elder son was an alcoholic. After MSG, I openly discussed the same thing with him and took the help of the trainer and other women of MSG and was successful. Now I bond well with both my sons.



46. Phulita Devi: Throughout my life, I have lived in poverty. This made me aggressive and the same transferred to my children. But in MSG, I learned that this aggression turns into greed for money, due to which the youth is moving towards extremist groups, which make them powerful and fulfill all their needs. Now I have changed my

behaviour and my way of talking, not only at home, but with children. Now, despite still being poor, I feel peace.

47. Anju Son Tirki: I joined MSG training to become aware and responsible so that I could bring change to my community. I have learned many new things and skills to deal with violence within myself and in the community. I have started encouraging my friends and relatives to live confidently and not blame other. Instead of accepting what is wrong, we should try to rectify it. I believe that talking is the solution to every problem.

48. Prabha Tirki: Due to lack of jobs in our area, most of the educated youth is dependent on labour or agriculture while the rest are doing nothing apart from gambling and teasing women. In MSG, I have learned many things and shared the same with my husband. He realized his mistakes and has stopped his bad habits. Now we are living peacefully. I have started listening to my children and advising them whenever necessary.

49. Gandouri Oraon: My husband was the decision maker of the family. I had never thought that I could take decisions and do something beneficial for anyone. But MSG made me realize that I have value in the family and can speak up for the betterment of children. After releasing the pain which I was holding inside me for years, I felt very relaxed and thoughtful. My behavioural changes made my family listen to me. This helped me create a peaceful environment for everyone at home.

50. Dharmaniya Oraon: I joined MSG to learn something new and got the skills to deal with youth. Now I take suggestions and advice while making any decisions and give the same when decisions are taken by others. I am confident enough to accept my mistakes as I know that I can rectify my mistakes.



51. Sahiya Kiran Panna, is a member of MSG and has not missed a single session. She is always punctual and says that the centre has been very helpful for her. She is confident about discussing the violence around them at home and is no longer willing to hush it up. The major change in her life is that she has now started spending more time with her children and takes interest in their activities.

52. Asha Khujur, felt that the training would not be useful as there was no skill being imparted, no certificates or promise of a job or employment. She started to come with much reluctance but is now a regular at the centre. Her cynicism is gone and she feels that there could have been nothing better. What is very significant is the trust that the mothers have built towards each other. The feeling of being isolated in a crisis has gone. Mothers have realised the power of not only speaking in one voice, but also raising their voice against what is wrong.

Challenges and Lessons Learnt

1. Suspicions regarding the intentions of a Delhi-based NGO working in such far-flung conflict areas are inevitable. Local communities do not find it easy to believe that there are no ulterior motives guiding our actions.
2. One of the motives attached to our activities was that of religious conversion. The only way to do away with this suspicion is to make the local clergy our partners. The priests then convince the locals that proselytisation is not on the agenda.

3. Pursuant to the above points, mothers are initially very reticent and unwilling to share their experiences. It requires time and patient effort to get them to open up.
4. It is difficult for some of the mothers to reach our centers without roads or public transport. Although many of them made it despite having to walk multiple kilometers, making it more accessible is something that needs to be kept in mind.

Key Gains:

1. Mothers meet regularly
2. Mothers discuss the problems of violence openly
3. They are able to share their stories as MSGs also serve as a platform for expressing grievances
4. The centers reiterate the importance of government institutions and inspire belief in them
5. The importance of rule of law is emphasized
6. De-emphasis of 'party style' justice is a constant
7. Increase in confidence of mothers
8. Proactive and affirmative role in peace building visible
9. Mothers realize and acknowledge their role in reduction of violence
10. Networks build to support each other –even in violent situations

Closing Ceremony

The closing ceremony of Mothers Support Group, Lohardaga was started at 12 pm at sehkarita bhawan. Inauguration was done by Mr Anand Jain with lightning of lamp then a group of participants group welcomed him with a cultural song.

Mrs Archana Kapoor, Foudher SMART gives a brief on what is MSG importance and objectives.

C P Yadav, Lgss Sachiv, gives a brief on Ranchi, Lohardaga and the community and shared how SMART and LGSS become partners. He also emphasized on why MSG is important in this community. Why they said yes for MSG as it was different and important to boost up the self esteem of women. Why this is important for tribes and the description of 13 modules as in future it will help mother's to deal with issues related to youth and extremism.

Meenakshi, Project Coordinator, SMART described the process of MSG project.

Supervisor Chintamani from Lgss described the challenges, why one center they have dropped.



Reporter Usha, Nini center, described when they heard about MSG they were confused that why we join this, but when they get the training, they realized that this is important for them and decide to join the training. This training introduced her with her dignity and powers.

Reporter Sudha, Bhatkhijri center, explained her journey of MSG, problems how she gathered the women's. This training gave her respect back in her family.



Experience sharing:

Rakhi devi, Bhatkhijri center, said that she liked MSG training so that she can guide her children properly. She realized that women should know their dignity and fight for that.

Natasha Khujur from Nini center said that they were not aware of the things explained in modules. Although, they face the issues of the day to day life but are not aware of the same. This training made them realize that it is important.

Soni devi, Bakarni center- her respect increased at home and family listen to them. She got the

confidence to do something.

Bhinsariya, Bakarni center - become punctual and got the value of time, how to communicate with children, confidence to do anything, and can guide children towards right path.

Sarita Oraon, Nini center, tried to talk with some youth who trouble people and gamble in front of school. They did not give up till they succeeded to stop their activities. She added that this confidence they get from the MSG only.

Monika Irgaon center, her life has changed she can spoke to children and confidently do anything.

Jyoti khujur, Durhul center, she become more expressive and trust anyone. Now she can stand anywhere, can speak with anyone or department and can answer them.

Budhmaniya Bhagat, Irgaon center - she started talking with her husband so that he quit alcohol. She keeps trying to talk till she wins.

Reporter Priya, Durhul center, shared her journey, how she liked it, she shared the learning's with her friends.

Kiran Khujur, Nini center- she got confidence and overcome with her hesitation.

Sudha Khujur, Trainer Nini center- she shared her challenges with the program running as she is ward member, she realized that women were not able to understand small-small things and blame others. But training gives them confidence.



Before the certificate distribution a group of women presented a cultural dance to show their happiness.

Reeta, Bakarni center- she shared how she felt in five days training, the journey of three and a half months and the incidence when people fight on a small thing and they came in to stop the fight and resolved the issues.

Laxmi bakarni- she has such a confidence that they can stop Naxalites and Maoist. She got confidence to deal with any situation.

Mr Anand, Mr C P Yadav and Ms Komal distributed the certificates which encouraged the women to express their gratitude towards the MSG training.

Mr Anand shared how he feels about this program, especially after coming here and meeting with women's.



With a vote of thanks Ms Kunti Sahu wrap up the ceremony.

Way Forward

The Mothers' Support Group was designed to impart strength and solidarity to communities in conflict areas by focusing on the smart power or soft skills - speaking, sharing, listening, empathy and dialogue - that mothers and women can use to introspect, understand and find peaceable solutions rather than resign themselves to the conditions that they are living with.

Our experience of deploying this strategy at all of the five centers in Lohardaga has shown that mothers have been successful at internalizing the methods and that we have been successful in opening them up to new, non-violent and constructive ways of handling and resolving conflict, both within their families and in terms of the community

at large. It is a multi-stage process. We must first make the mothers comfortable enough to speak about the issues they face and how they handle such issues, and then get them to accept the possibility of shortcomings in their approach, and finally start introducing them to other approaches.

Once they see the change that can be wrought in their lives, mothers quickly become willing to take upon themselves training responsibilities, which is hugely beneficial as it allows us to expand the project. We are looking to operationalise the model in Gumla, Latehar, Palamu, Simdega and Dumka districts of Jharkhand. It is understood that the modules will be adaptable to the needs of each community; we will modify or develop them on the basis of live feedback. We will rope in local NGOs and make them stakeholders as well, building a solid network of support.

There will be two important considerations for us going forward. One, while we laud the work of our trainers and reporters in Lohardaga, they are by and large unwilling to work outside their own communities. We must encourage them to do so, as their experience in executing the project is invaluable as we branch out. Two, it is equally significant that fathers/men not be excluded from our sphere of influence. Exclusion leads to suspicion and, moreover, men are the decision-makers in patriarchal communities. If they can be sensitized as well, our impact will be direct and grow tenfold.