

Mothers Support Group: Invasion of Peace in the Red Corridors

[Report, June 2017]



**By SEEKING MODERN APPLICATIONS FOR REAL
TRANSFORMATION**

[Abstract: A report based on the project designed to encourage women to be peacemakers. In rural and backward areas of Jharkhand the life of mothers is extremely tough, they not only have to do the household chores but also collect fodder and wood from the jungles. This leaves them with little time to spend 'quality time with their children. Deeply involved in just putting together two square meals they have no time to engage in any other activity. They are often not included in the decision making process both at the domestic and community level. Victims of domestic violence and abuse they are subjugated and suppressed. Alcohol being the bane of the tribal society, women face violence both in speech and physical action. A sense of despondency among the women is common as they blame it on their 'kismet' and do not have the energy to fight for their rights. They lack confidence and often have a low self esteem of themselves. Even where violence in the society is concerned they take it as a norm, as for years they have not seen peace or prosperity.



Mothers Support Group is an attempt to engage with mothers. Build their capacity and skills, enhance their confidence and encourage them to take responsibility of the future of their children. MSG has boosted the confidence of the women, by making them recognize their inherent skills of multi tasking, love and patience, compassion, negotiation and dialogue. By training the mothers to fine tune their soft skills, SMART has successfully been able to involve the mothers to play more significant roles in dialogue and speaking up against violence to secure the lives of family.]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background of the Project	4-5
Objectives	5-6
About Lohardaga, Peshrar & Community Background	6-7
About Gumla & Community Background	7
About Simdega & Community Background	7-8
About SMART	9-10
About LGSS	10-11
Project Outcomes	11-12
Methodology	13-16
1. <i>Target Group</i>	13
2. <i>Content</i>	13-15
3. <i>Timeline</i>	15
4. <i>Method</i>	15-16
Profile of Mothers School PARTICIPANTS	16-17
Monitoring and Feedback	17-18
1. <i>Role of Trainers</i>	17
2. <i>Role of Supervisors</i>	17
3. <i>Role of Coordinator</i>	18
Audio Programs	18
Feedback from participants	18-22
Challenges and Lessons Learnt	23
Closing ceremony of Gumla, Simdega & Peshrar	23-26
Way Forward	26-28

Background of the Project

Jharkhand is a state in eastern India carved out of the southern part of Bihar on 15 November 2000. The state shares its border with the states of Bihar to the north, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to the west, Odisha to the south and West Bengal to the east. It has an area of 79,710 km, largely comprising of the forest tracks of Chhotanagpur plateau and Santhal Pargana and has distinct cultural traditions.

Jharkhand is the richest state in the country as far as the availability of mineral resources is concerned. It accounts for 40% of the mineral resources of India but unfortunately its people live in abject poverty and destitution, with 39.1 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line and 19.6 per cent of the children under five years of age are malnourished. The State is primarily a rural state as only 24 percent of the population resides in cities.

Another major issue is that Jharkhand has been at the centre of the Maoist insurgency. The Naxal movement took root in 1967 and spread in the jungles like wild fire. The insurgency has seen the deaths of many civilians and police personnel. Some estimate these deaths to be close to 10,000. It is believed that over 6,000 people have been killed in fighting between the Naxalites and counter-insurgency operations by the police, and its paramilitary groups such as the Salwa Judum. The state of Jharkhand is recognized as being part of "Naxal Belt" with the highest concentrations of the groups of combatants.



Though the state is rich in natural resources its people live in abject poverty and destitution. The impoverished state of the people provides ample recruits for the communist insurgents, who argue that they are fighting on behalf of the landless poor that see few benefits from the resources.

Presently out of the 22 districts of Jharkhand 18 are naxal affected areas namely Hazaribagh, Lohardaga, Palamu, Chatra, Garhwa, Ranchi, Gumla, Simdega, Latehar, Giridih, Koderma, Bokaro, Dhanbad, East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Saraikela Kharsawan, Khunti and Ramgarh.

The districts that comprise the Red Corridor are among the poorest and have significant economic inequality. Agriculture, sometimes supplemented with mining or forestry, is the mainstay of the economy, which is often unable to support rapid increases in population. The area encompassed by the Red Corridor tends to have stratified societies, with caste and feudal divisions. Much of the area has high indigenous tribal populations (or adivasis), including Santhal and Gond. Bihar and Jharkhand have both caste and tribal divisions and violence associated with friction between these social groups.

Lack of opportunity is another major challenge confronting Jharkhand. It has resulted in massive unemployment 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. When they become full-fledged leaders their disregard for ethics and values becomes an even more dangerous factor due to the power they gain, inevitably leading to corruption and violence.

Objectives

1. To work with mothers of adolescents to build their skills, capacity and capability to protect their children from radical 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 concerns of safety and security by building their confidence towards 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 radicalization.

The Locations where the centers were run:

SMART started its second phase of Mothers Support Group in three districts of Jharkhand i.e. Lohardaga, Simdega and Gumla. After the successful completion of the pilot programme, SMART decided to go deeper into the areas affected by Naxalism. In fact SMART chose to work in the Peshrar Block of Lohardaga, which is in the interior areas and is known as an area where many of the Naxals live. The blocks in all three districts had a high crime rate and the influence of extremist forces was evident in all three.

Lohardaga

Peshrar is a Block placed in Lohardaga district in Jharkhand. Located in the rural part of Jharkhand, it is one among the 7 blocks of Lohardaga district and deeply affected by Nazalism. It shares its boundaries with the districts Gumla and Latehar as well as Kiskko, Senha block of Lohardaga district. Literacy rate in Peshrar block is 43%. Among males the literacy ratio is 53% however female literacy ratio is 32%. Predominantly an agrarian society very few have land in their own names; they mostly live off the forest produce.

Lohardaga district itself 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.

Gumla

Gumla district is one of the twenty-four districts of Jharkhand state. A large part of the district is covered by dense forests, hills and rivers. Situated in the southwest portion of the Jharkhand the district has a total of 68% of tribal population. There are various legends about its name. The most popular one ascribes to its word 'Gumla' in Mundari language, which relates to the occupation of the local Tribes in rice processing work (dhan-kutna). The second legend 'Gau-mela' relates to cattle fair. Cattle fair was weekly held in Gumla town every Tuesday. In rural areas, Nagpuri and Sadri people still call it 'gomila'. Gumla district consists of three sub-division namely Gumla, Chainpur and Basia. The district is currently a part of the Red Corridor.



Simdega

Simdega was carved out from erstwhile Gumla district on 30th April 200. A part of the Red Corridor it is primarily a rural district with 94% of the total population living in the rural areas. Urbanization is very poor with only 6.6 percent population living in urban areas. The Scheduled Tribe population is around 70.2 percent, which is the highest among all the districts of Jharkhand closely followed by Gumla district with 67.2 per cent ST

population. Majority of the tribal population is Christian making it a minority concentrated district.

Simdega is one of the least developed districts in the country. The economy of the district depends mainly on agriculture, forest products, cattle rearing, mining activities and negligible commercial activities.

Majority of the rural populace depends on traditional methods of agriculture, and face problems like lack of irrigation facilities, absence of scientific inputs, poor marketing facilities, under developed infrastructure etc. The literacy rate of Simdega district is 52.35%, which is below the national level of 67.3%. The female literacy rate is only 40.56%, and male literacy rate is 64.14%. In addition to this, the literacy rate among the minorities like Muslims and Christians and tribes is lower than that of the district level.

List of villages participating in the Mothers' School training

1	Urmi	9	Agharma
2	Ganeshpur	10	Karamtoli
3	Tukutoli	11	Duggu
4	Dumaridh	12	Chandlagi
5	Armai Tagratoli	13	Meram
6	Larba	14	Kekrang
7	Larba Simartoli	15	Madanpur
8	Shivnathpur		

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 centers were usually large and well-lit, with matted sitting. We found no toilets in any of the centers. Water facility was also poor as they need to carry water from nearby hand pumps, well or their own house.



About SMART

Seeking Modern Applications for Real Transformation (SMART), is 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 is committed to the upliftment of women living in conflict zones and apprising them of the role that they can play in the resolution of conflict and bringing back peace. 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 2012, SMART has been working with Mothers in predominantly Muslim areas of Mewat in Haryana and Srinagar and Kupwara in Kashmir. Also successfully run Mothers Support Group in Lohardaga in five different villages. 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.

SMART also runs a community radio-Radio Mewat, in Mewat, Haryana.

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 15 mothers as trainers and 5 supervisors for the centers.
2. Reached out to over 500 mothers and enrolled 375 mothers across 15 villages in Lohardaga, Simdega and Gumla for the training and sensitization on issues of radicalization.
3. Connected them with government schemes through involvement and interactive session with NABARD.
4. Provided a safe and secure place for discussions and deliberations on the current scenario and environment of hostility and hatred.
5. Empowered women to share their stories and speak out confidently against the violence in their immediate environment without fear.
6. Assisted in raising the self esteem of mothers, self belief and gave them a sense of identity as individuals who can contribute in building safer and stronger communities.
7. 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.
8. Strengthened communities by building their stake in peace, strengthening social cohesion by communicating with each other and sharing their experiences and stories.
9. Involvement of Panchayat and Mukhiya in the program encouraged them.

10. From among the first group of women of the Mother Support Group Seventy Five is now part of the Jharkhand Livelihood Program and have set up cooperatives for spices, sattu atta and other home made products.
11. Over 70 per cent of the participants have been linked to the banks and are in the process of seeking loans and other benefits from the banks.
12. NABARD has been handholding the women at each of the centres. The District Development Managers have hosted trainings and counseling of the women and are giving priority to the women of MSG in all their schemes.
13. Close linkages with Block Officers have been established for facilitating the development work in the villages
14. Women have started taking their roles as peace makers and are leading from the front.



Methodology

1. Target Group

The idea of Mothers' Support Group 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 Maoist 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.

2. Content

The innovative idea for Mothers' Schools emphasised on the distinctive role that 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 updated its twelve-module manual on the basis of the need based survey conducted during the first phase of the training in April 2016 and added one Chapter to make it 13. The modules (Table 2) deal 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 radicalisation of the youth, government run programmes, exclusive schemes for tribal regions and special efforts being made to fight extremism.



Module structure for Mothers' School training

1.	This is me Who are you?
2	Me in my Community
3	Mother's strengths and weaknesses
4	Rethinking Mother's role in security
5	Mothers as peacemakers
6	Government schemes for Tribal Areas
7	Understanding the psycho-social development of Children
8	Understanding Naxal Ideologies and influences
9	Media and Publicity of violence
10	Improved Communications: Talking and Listening to the youth
11	Recognizing and addressing early warning signs of violent behavior
12	Involving Father's
13	Peace starts at home

माँ अपनी समस्याओं का समाधान कैसे करे:

- 1 सही गलत का फर्क बताएँ।
- 2 अपने व्यवहार में सुधार।
- 3 सकारात्मक सोच (सही नजरिया), प्रोत्साहन देना।
- 4 गलत इच्छाओं को पूरा न करना।
- 5 समय के मूल्य को समझना।
- 6 रुकता के मूल्य को समझना।
- 7 जागरूकता।
- 8 निरीक्षक।
- 9 उत्तरक।
- 10 वैकल्पिक व्यवस्था करना।
- 11 मार्गदर्शक।
- 12 स्वरोजगार को महत्व देना।
- 13 दुर्जा को सही जगह लगाना।
- 14 सही बातचीत के माध्यम से।
- 15 आवश्यकता से अधिक की चाह न रखना।
- 16 उचित अवसर प्रदान करना।
- 17 मुख्य धारा से जोड़ना।

बातचीत का सही तरीका

- 1 प्यार से बात करनी चाहिए।
- 2 बातचीत का सही माहौल बनाना।
- 3 बातचीत का सही अवसर ढूँढना।
- 4 सकारात्मक शब्दों का प्रयोग।
- 5 अपने व्यवहार से प्रभावित करना।
- 6 बातों को समझना।
- 7 बातों को ध्यान देना / सुनना।
- 8 सबके सामने बच्चे को न डरना।
- 9 खुलकर बातचीत का मौका।
- 10 सहमति दिखाना।
- 11 विश्वास रखना।
- 12 आत्मविश्वास से बात करना।
- 13 बात को महत्व देना।
- 14 सकारात्मक सोच के साथ बात करना।
- 15 प्रोत्साहित करना।
- 16 वैयक्तिक व्यवहार।
- 17 औपचारिक रखना।
- 18 बात को न करना।
- 19 उदाहरण देकर बात करना।
- 20 सही शब्दों का प्रयोग।

Each 'chapter' consisted of background information on the theme as well as instructions for home-based multi-sensory training exercises for 42 complete meetings each running upto 3 hours. The 42 weeks included the orientation session and the wrap-up. Each centre was run twice a week to encourage all the participating women to share their thoughts and not be pressured for time. One extra chapter on Government schemes as well as a few interactive sessions with Bank officials, administration and other leading agencies was also included as part of the exposure exercise for getting information on government run schemes and for integration with the government machinery.

3. Timeline

The first phase workshop commenced on 3rd December by recruiting and training the trainers for 3 days in which we have completed 6 modules. The centers started from December 14-20 and continued till March.

Second phase workshop was conducted on 15th March for 3 days in which training was given for the remaining modules. SMART visited all 15 centers and had a discussion with mothers. The centers continued till early June.

The project closed with a function in each of the three districts. Each of the participants was given an honorarium and a certificate.

4. Method

The model adopted was simple:

- Development of the 13-module manual and incorporation of the needs of the mothers.
- Identification of 15-25 mothers from within the community who had some leadership skills and wanted to change the situation they were in.
- Mobilisation of mothers as participants

- Training of the Trainers
- Hosting of training at centers for 6 months plus
- Provision of tea and snacks at the centers

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. Interactive sessions with banks helped them to raise their financial condition by taking micro loans and taking part in SHGs.

Profile of Mothers' School Participants

Mothers were between 29-50 years of age, with children between 5-30 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 as 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 majority of them were victims of domestic abuse.

Monitoring and Feedback

1. Role of Trainers

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. They 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 three 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 coordinator in Lohardaga and with the supervisors through phone and emails to monitor the project and collect feedback. 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.

Audio Programmes

15 podcasts have been produced. Over the period of 6 months SMART spoke to all the 375 women. Though one saw a lot of changes, articulation



in Hindi language was a major issue. However we selected the stories from the community and recorded their bytes. The context of each of the episodes is local and grounded in the experiences of the community members. We have also tried to include

the voices of the men and have tried to get their point of view in.

We will be loading these episodes on our facebook page 'Mothers on Air' after approval from the Ministry.

Feedback from the participants

- **Mariyam Dungdung:** MSG helped in women becoming more aware about their own strengths and power. Quoting her own example she said that circumstances had made her aggressive and intolerant with her children. She hardly spent any time with them and used to give

money too much importance. But she realized that she needed to listen to her children and she has found more peace at home now. The family seems more together.



- **Jyoti Kerkatta:** The training helped her improve her communication skills. Gain confidence to speak out and become more protective towards her children. She had reconciled to them joining the party but is now determined to keep them away- at any cost.

- **Anjaleena Dungdung:** She has been hiding some personal experiences for a few years for fear of being judged. MSG gave her the courage to shed her inhibitions and

share her experiences and personal story with her peers. She felt lighter and at ease in the centre and found the courage to speak out against violence and abuse.

- **Neel Kumari:** The MSG has helped us bond better, empathise with each other, take a broader view of the problem, think beyond individuals, understand the need for safeguarding our children and the imperative of supporting each other.
- **Sarita Kiddo** Our problems are so huge that alcohol has become our source of life. We have to spend so much time outside the house collecting wood, forest produce and fodder that we barely have any time for our children. Most of the time we shout and scream at them and create a rift. They too take to alcohol and drugs early in life and



then need money to sustain their habits. For the first time I realized that I have a role to play, I can make the difference. They need me more than anyone else. I can prevent them from joining the party by giving them emotional security. I have started to find time for my boys. This seems to be making a difference to their lives.



- **Anjela Kerkatta** The power of dialogue and communication is apparent in my own story. My son was convinced that only by joining the party he could be someone big. This strength she got from the MSG. She believed in dialogue and negotiation and succeeded in diverting her son's mind and presenting other better options to him.

- **Ashrit Tete** The MSG gave them the courage to meet the District Collector for the handing over of the community hall.

Earlier they would comply with orders and never question anyone even if it meant giving up what was theirs. But now they are determined to fight for their rights.

- **Phoolon Minj** had withdrawn her only son from school after her husband met with an accident. But after the MSG training she realized the need to give children education, as that is the first step to a brighter future. She has reenrolled her son in school. He will appear for class 10 exams.

- **Mariya Goreti Minj:** She starts her day by memorizing the 10 Commandments of MSG and it has made a world of difference to her lifestyle. She is more organized and tried to manage her time so that she can take out an hour or two



exclusively to monitor her children. This has helped her personally as she could quash her son's plans of leaving home.

- **Sheela Khaka:** MSG has helped her take the help of other women in resolving some personal problems which were to do with harassment of her daughter by someone.



- **Jasnta Ming:** After her husband left her for someone else, her self confidence was low ebb. She blamed herself for it, she did not want to talk to anyone, and she had become a recluse. MSG gave her a new life. She is now starting to come out of the trauma and believing in herself.

- **Bandhani Devi:** The fear of the party walas and their threats had scared her so much that she had stopped going to the forests. Once they had demanded food too. Now with support of the other women she is overcoming her fears and has started going to the jungles with her MSG peers.

- **Anuradha Devi:** Has learnt about the government schemes and availed the benefits of Ujjwala scheme.
- **Mangla Devi:** Had to send her children to Delhi, as the part had asked her to give her son to them. This decision she took after joining the MSG, which gave her the courage to take this bold step.
- **Neelam Minj:** Has benefited by a micro loan. Has become more articulate and can speak to power





- **Reshma:** Though a ward member was afraid to speak in front of villagers and always remain quiet in meetings. When she went back from the training for the first time she spoke up to get the panchayat bhawan to run her MSG center. Now she feels like a different person. And is helping women access benefits from government schemes.

- **Jitan Devi:** She stopped her husband from beating her by holding his hand, and calling out to the children. Something she could have never done without the training.

- **Pushpa:** Recently she complained to the district administration about a bribery case. She understands financial inclusion and knows that you don't need to pay for the services.

- **Anupama Devi:** Her husband was killed by the Maoists. She lived in fear and did not allow her children to interact with anyone is determined to fight their influence at any cost. MSG made her realize that as a collective they have better chances to improve their situation than as an individual. Though she is very emotional even now but things are starting to change.



- **Suman Gudiya:** As a Sarpanch she is seeing more women come for meetings than ever before. They also raise questions and demand answers, particularly when it comes to issues of schools and education, safety and police.

Challenges and Lessons Learnt

- Local communities are suspicious about intent of the NGO and do not want to work with the government to start with. They are always thinking that the government wants information that it can use against them.
- It takes weeks of work to convince them and win their confidence. This sometimes leads several interactions with people of influence within the communities.
- They are afraid of conversions (both ways). Thus the clergy have to be involved and.
- Initially mothers are reticent and unwilling to share their stories. Patience and perseverance is required.
- In the absence of public transportation facilities and infrastructure support, centers cannot be run in interior areas.
- The local administration is reluctant to participate in such programmes.
- There is a trust deficit between community and administration, efforts to bridge the differences takes time and needs to be initiated from the side of the local administration.

❖ Closing ceremony of Gumla MSG held on 12 June, 17

The closing ceremony of Mothers Support Group, Gumla was hosted at the Panchayat Bhawan, of Urmi where all 125 women of the 5 centers were present. Women participated in the event whole heartedly. The event kicked off with welcome song. One of the trainers, Jasinta from Ganeshpur moderated the sessions. A nervous Jasinta confided that she was holding the mike for the first time. But she gained confidence soon.

The function was attended by Mr. C P Yadav, Secretary LGSS, Mrs. Archana Kapoor, Founder SMART, Mr. Bage, LDM and Mr. Nishith, DDM NABARD Gumla. They spoke about the importance of mothers in the family

and community. They talked about the looming threats and the role that mother's could play in protecting their children and navigating them away from the path of violence. Representatives from NABARD promised all support for livelihood training and micro loans. They assured the participants that the doors would always be open for them and that they should come in large numbers and take advantage of the various schemes of the government for upliftment of the tribal and marginalized populations. The certificates and honorarium (in cash) was distributed among the women.



❖ Closing ceremony of Simdega MSG held on 13 June, 17

The closing ceremony of Mother Support Group, Simdega was hosted at Panchayat Bhawan, of Agharma village.



Once again the two trainers of the Simdega centers Fulmani & Rose moderated the program. The program was attended by Suman Gudiya,

Sarpanch of Agharma, and Founders of LGSS and SMART,. The participants shared their experiences and challenges. They expressed sorrow on the fact that the programme was coming to an end. They celebrated their new found friendships. They talked about the difference that the MSG training had brought in their lives and made commitments of strengthening the network. The speakers reiterated the roles of Mother's and how only they could safeguard the interests of their children. Certificates and stipends were distributed to all participants.

❖ Closing ceremony of Peshrar MSG held on 14 June, 17

Closing ceremony of Peshrar MSG was held at the Scheduled Tribes Residential Middle School.



Besides representatives of SMART and LGSS, the programme was attended by DDM, NABARD, Lohardaga. Mr CP Yadav, commended the women for fighting all adversities to be a part of this training. He talked about the difficult conditions, lack of communication and transport facilities, constant threat from insurgents and a number of incidents, including the surrender of one of the senior most Naxal Leader, during this period. He congratulated the women for their show of courage and resilience.

Mr. Ravish Singh, DDM NABARD, Peshrar promised to convert the Mothers Support Groups into Mahila Mandal Samuh's so that women could

benefit from the NABARD sponsored government schemes. All the women were handed over their certificates and honorarium.

Way Forward

The Mothers' Support Group curriculum is 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.

Through our Mothers Support Groups (MSGs), we have trained the mothers in skills that can help them delegitimize extremist voices. That can



help them raise an alarm, that can give them the courage to report the signs of radicalization, that can help them reason with and resist extremist ideologies. It is through these stories and experiences of preventing violent extremism that we have helped create a stronger bond among the mothers who are

dealing on a daily basis with 'at risk' young people

The MSGs through their well-designed training module have helped empower women to take charge of not only their families but also the communities they live in. Through role plays and fun exercises attempts have been made to focus on building confidence, self esteem, communication, negotiation and dialogue skills, the push and pull factors, the challenges of bringing up adolescents in a media crowded environment,

and tools have been provided to question extremist behavior and ideologies.

The MSGs have evolved into a platform to talk, exchange, and share and record their stories of fighting radicalization and violence in their communities. Enhance their capacities to serve as the first response systems and work towards building stronger and more tolerant communities.

Thus it is important to support and expand these networks. To link the participants to livelihood and skill development programmes and to stay engaged with them. If not continued then they would disintegrate and all the efforts would be wasted.

Our experience of deploying this strategy in all fifteen centres in Peshrar, Gumla and Simdega has shown that mothers have been successful at internalising 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 are looking to operationalise the model in much deeper and affected areas of Gumla and Khunti districts of Jharkhand as well as in Chhatisgarh. It is a given 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 while going forward. One, while we laud the work of our supervisors and trainers in Lohardaga,

Gumla and Simdega they are by and large unwilling to work outside their own communities. Exposure visits will help them trust others and will help them in trying to use their skills outside their comfort zones. Two, it is equally significant that fathers/men need to be sensitized and their perspective also be included in the trainings. A couple of sessions with them can also be added.

