

**BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE CENTRE**  
**ST. XAVIER'S NON-FORMAL EDUCATION SOCIETY**

**AN OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES (1987-1997)**

**Introduction**

The Behavioural Science Centre (BSC, hereafter referred to as 'the Centre'), run under the aegis of St. Xavier's Non-Formal Education Society (SXNFES), is a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) involved in development work in rural Gujarat, Western India. It was set up in 1977 and is registered as a Trust and Society. Initially an undertaking of a few educators from St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad, the Centre today is an autonomous, non-denominational development organisation.

**Mission statement and explanation of various terms**

The mission statement of the Centre, after 24 years of work in the field, stands as such:

“The Behavioural Science Centre is a voluntary organisation which exists to empower the marginalised communities, particularly the Dalits, the Adivasis, the OBCs, the minorities and women of these communities to bring about social change, by conceiving and conducting programmes of an educational nature, facilitating people's movements and creating sustainable livelihood options”.

The thinking on important components of the mission statement has evolved through active engagement at the grassroots for over 22 years.

Social change:

Marginalised communities:

Empowerment:

Education:

Movement:

Approach

Organisations

Advocacy

*The promotion of local organizations has the clear purpose of providing people with the support they need to be self-sufficient, but also to be more effective in dealing with pervasive injustices and atrocities. BSC's vision is not only that Dalit organizations are created, effective and self-sufficient, but that they are able to network and support each other to effect long-term change regarding unequal caste relations. For this, policy changes need to take place. As a continuum of its work in Dalit rights as human rights, and in conjunction with the hundreds of existing local Dalit organizations, the BSC has taken up advocacy at the local, state and federal levels.*

*Advocacy is a cross-cutting theme in all of BSC's projects and programmes. The Resource Support team is spearheading advocacy initiatives such as representing Gujarat cases at National Public Hearings while it is a support function for all BSC areas of intervention including the AVSC, MVS, and SVS.*

*Banaskantha, in Danta, BSC's newest project area, holds one of the highest rates of atrocities in the state. Recent advocacy actions co-ordinated by BSC include a rally in Prantij, in the adjacent Sabarkantha district where a young girl had set herself on fire to escape sexual assault by upper-caste men. This, and the issues of protection of Dalit tribal rights and abolition of atrocities brought 3 000 people together, in solidarity.*

**Functions**

Organisation and mobilization

Advocacy and human rights

Watershed

PRI

MSFI

Government schemes

BVK

*The BSC has remained committed to education as a critical component to individual and community empowerment. One of the AVSC's activities has been in the formal and non-formal education of Dalit children. The 1999 "Bal Melo" cultural show*

*involved over 150 Dalit children and teachers who came together to practice and perform the folk songs, dramas, dances and crafts which they have been learning and creating over the year. In formal education systems, Bhangi children are ostracized, beaten, insulted, ignored or forced to leave at an early age to earn money. The impact over the past 5 years of the AVSC-supported Dalit child development centres (Bal Vikas Kendras), teacher trainings, outdoor education and cultural camps has been a significant growth in literacy, but also their sense of identity, self-confidence, personal potential and optimism about their future.*

#### Courses

Training and capacity building

Drought relief

Sustainable livelihood options

*With the success of the self-managed credit co-operatives, BSC has been expanding its vision of economic and organizational empowerment to include innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihood options. Training for income-generating activities such as goat rearing, and the Rural Entrepreneurship Development Programme for youths have had a significant impact. Jagruti Garments Ltd. was initiated primarily to provide skills and employment to the marginalised women of the area. With the experience from the Jagruti endeavour, and with the grounding of local organizations and the credit co-operative movement, BSC is now branching out into the new strategic areas of micro-finance and sustainable livelihood options. The aim is to equip the rural poor with the skills and know-how to enter, work and compete in the mainstream market economy.*

*These programmes respond to the increasing depletion of natural resources on which the agricultural industry is dependent and on which dalit and tribal communities depend for their livelihoods. BSC's Development Initiatives team, through the sustainable livelihoods programme, is responding to environmental, social and market changes to develop ecological, and economically viable solutions.*

### Team and Organisational Structure

#### Infrastructure and other facilities

Since its inception in 1977, under the aegis of St. Xavier's Non-Formal Education Society, the Behavioural Science Centre (**BSC**) has had a dual commitment to active involvement in the rural areas of Gujarat and to training and research in development issues. Initially an undertaking of several educators from St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad, the BSC today is an autonomous, non-denominational development organisation.

The Centre harbours a basic commitment to the integration of field experience and theoretical reflection, contributing at a wider level to a better understanding of the issues of development. To carry out its mission, the Centre has attempted to combine two important aspects of development strategy: active involvement at the grassroots level (through helping the economically and socially marginalised to organise themselves); and a serious attempt to conceptualise that involvement through reflection, research and training.

The BSC is involved in a variety of different projects which range from direct grass-roots interventions and local level trainings, to the creation and offering of courses in development management. The Centre is organised into major teams, each with its own distinct objectives and responsibilities. While each team works somewhat autonomously, there is constant exchange of ideas and techniques through inter-team activities and Centre-wide activity meetings held in the first week of every month.

### CAPACITY BUILDING

The Behavioural Science Centre sees its capacity building function as a major focus of its activities. Within most of the projects and activities of the Centre there exists a strong capacity building component. The BSC believes that the success of its efforts, and sustainable development as a whole, strongly depends on the strength and cohesion of local organisations (LOs) and people's movements. It is therefore BSC's objective to assist in enhancing the capabilities and building the capacities of Community Based Organisations, and people's organisations.

The BSC's strategy has been to establish effective local organisations and ensure that local people themselves run these entities efficiently. Through this method, it is BSC's belief that empowerment can be realised in its most practical form.

BSC uses formal and non-formal trainings as a main tool to carry out its capacity building function. All teams attempt to support and bolster the capacities of their target communities. Moreover, the focus on capacity

building is not restricted to the Centre's involvement at the grass roots. The BSC sees the value for capacity building within the Centre as well. The Human Resource Development team has, as its main objective, the goal of building the internal capacities of the staff of the Centre.

### **RURAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM (RDT)**

The Rural Development Team of the Behavioural Science Centre is responsible for direct interventions and involvement in the geographical areas of Danta taluka of Banaskantha district, 5 other talukas of Banaskantha district, Dhandhuka Taluka, Ahmedabad district and Khambhat Taluka, Anand District. Following from the overarching mission of the BSC to, "...empower the oppressed groups/communities through programs of an educational nature to build peoples movements" and its focus on building the capacities of local organisations and peoples movements, the RD team undertakes activities which assist in the empowerment of the marginalised communities of Gujarat. Working directly with the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (with special focus on the women of these groups), the staff of the BSC has undertaken many new initiatives to achieve these goals. Below are examples of the Centre's efforts in these areas.

#### *Dhandhuka*

Situated in one of the most oppressive and saline areas of all of Gujarat, the needs of Dhandhuka are daunting. For over ten years the BSC has been working directly with the Dalits and OBCs in the region to combat poverty and oppression and bring about sustainable, equitable change. The forms of these efforts have been varied. There are currently many different projects running simultaneously. The RD team of BSC, working directly in conjunction with women from the area, has established the Shree Bhal Mahila Credit Co-operative Society, a women's savings and credit organisation. This group now consists of approximately 1200 members from 35 different villages in Dhandhuka Taluka. In this last three years it has distributed over 4 lakh rupees in credit and currently has assets equaling over 11 lakhs. It is working towards the greater goals of women's participation and empowerment but also directly affects positive change in the lives of the women and their families.

The Rural Development Team also uses trainings and direct interventions to build the capacity of this local organisation. Members of the credit co-operative are trained in areas of accounting, group dynamics, empowerment, and management capabilities. The aims of these interventions are to enable the women to self manage the savings and credit co-operative.

The BSC also hosts a wide variety of formal and non-formal trainings in the Dhandhuka area. These trainings tackle such issues as women's reproductive health, the environment, caste and class issues and other longer term, more intangibles such as empowerment, equity and gender awareness. The BSC has also taken a direct interest in the lives and well being of the entire family unit. The goals of this program are to provide education to those marginalised groups and has therefore begun holding training camps and non-formal education for children. These efforts are designed to enhance the self-esteem of these children and prepare them for entry into formal educational institutions.

A further initiative by the Rural Development Team in the Dhandhuka area is the Mass Contact Programme (MCP). This is a widespread, comprehensive effort by the RD team. It involves aspects of gender awareness, trainings, multi-media interventions, and issues of empowerment. Recognising the oppressive conditions of women, these efforts often revolve around issues of women's reproductive health but further has the flexibility and scope to envelope such imperative issues as legal rights and access to government schemes. The MCP is a long term, comprehensive undertaking that examines and tackles many different, though interrelated aspects of oppression, marginalization and impoverishment and works towards supporting local organisations and building the capacities of rural leaders.

A final intervention in the area was the establishment of a peoples' organisation consisting of Dalits, Koli Patels and women from these groups. This group, called the Manav Vikas Sangh (MVS), strives to bring the Dalits and the OBCs together to discuss and tackle the issues of economic deprivation. Established in 1995, MVS has continued to fight against the economic and social injustices, including "upper caste" oppression and atrocities faced by these groups. The activities of the MVS include:

- i. Social Forestry Co-operatives
- ii. Employment generation programmes

- iii. Mobilisation of Government schemes
- iv. Women's issues

For the past five years the BSC has been directly involved in supporting the efforts of the MVS. The Centre conducts trainings for the general body members, committee members, and employees of the organisation in the areas of caste, gender awareness, class as well as other more structural trainings such as organisational management, project management etc.

### *Danta*

Danta taluka of Banaskantha district is situated in the northern part of the state of Gujarat. The area is characterized by a hilly topography with a relatively high annual rainfall. BSC started work in this area in 1994 with the tribals who constitute 49% of the total population of the taluka. The main problems of the area are:

- i) Lack of effective use of local resources;
- ii) Lack of implementation of government schemes;
- iii) Indebtedness.

The creation and strengthening of an area level organisation was seen as an effective vehicle with which to address these problems. To this end an area level organisation, the Danta Taluka Adivasi Sarvangi Vikas Sangh (SVS) was registered which operates in 44 villages of the taluka with a membership of 784 men and women. Its activities include:

- i) Effective implementation of government schemes;
- ii) Electrification of villages;
- iii) Milk co-operatives;
- iv) Fertilizer distribution;
- v) Seed bank;
- vi) Trainings;
- vii) Watershed development programme.

The future direction of BSC work will be in the areas of capacity building and strengthening of the local team who can then carry the work forward. Plans are also afoot to increase networking with governmental and voluntary organisations.

Another major area of engagement for the BSC is with the women of the area who have been organised around the savings and credit activity. It was registered as a co-operative in 1997. The total membership of the co-operative today stands at 647 from 18 villages.

### *Bhal region*

The other major target area of the rural development team is Bhal region of Khambhat Taluka. Located approximately 100 kilometres south east of Ahmedabad city, this area was a major site of BSC intervention for the past 20 years. The project is now in its final stages and the BSC has almost completed its withdrawal from the area. In its place the Centre has established, and continues to support, three locally run, self managed autonomous peoples' organisations called the Shree Khambhat Taluka Anusuchit Jati Kheti Tatha Utpadan Sangh – also called the Federation (established in 1988), Bhal Bara Dalit Mahila Credit Co-operative Society, and the Antyodaya Vikas Shikshan Centre. The BSC now works with the Federation to identify and train local entrepreneurs in the area and further, act as a linkage to formal financial institutions. Moreover, the Centre offers functional assistance and advice when required.

The Federation now takes the responsibility for managing and co-ordinating many of the development initiatives which were begun by the BSC. These include a fish hatchery, a major agriculture and forestry project (which now has over 1500 acres of fertile land), a paddy processing unit and many other smaller initiatives. Most of these projects fall under the umbrella of Federation activities and represent BSC's commitment and determination over the past two decades.

In recognition of the major social constraints in the area, the BSC formed the Antyodaya Vikas Shikshan Centre (AVSC) in 1993. Unlike the Federation, which is primarily an economic empowerment body, this

peoples organisation concentrates on social aspects such as education, women's empowerment, networking with government of Gujarat, and enacting social change within the community. The Centre is directly involved in training the employees of AVSC in areas such as management capabilities and organisational development. The BSC also offers some financial support for the cohesive functioning of this organisation.

In order to combat the economic hardships faced by the members of the priority communities in this area (primarily the women) the BSC established the Bhal Bara Dalit Mahila credit co-operative society in 1993. This local level women's organisation currently has a membership of over 1300 members, drawn from 35 villages in the area. This organisation is currently entirely self managed and acting as an autonomous credit and savings body.

Though the Centre is in its final stages of withdrawal from Bhal, it still plays an integral role in the overall development of the area. Rather than direct interventions, the Centre now sees its main objective in the region as building the capacities of local organisations. To this end, the BSC continues to offer support through contact and trainings.

By concentrating its efforts in supporting local development organisations, the Behavioural Science Centre is working towards sustainable solutions and equitable development.

### **RESOURCE SUPPORT TEAM (RST)**

The Resource Support Team (RST) is designed to provide support to local organisations and build capacities of community-based organisations and greater peoples movements within Gujarat. The RST has three major areas of activities:

- (i) Research
- (ii) Training
- (iii) Advocacy

#### ***Research***

Following from the BSC's commitment to education and knowledge, the RST takes the responsibility of researching and documenting selected relevant issues. This is done through constant upgradation of training material, used by both the Centre and external trainers, as well as conducting independent research for publication. The Centre's research is normally in the form of articles, audio visual materials, and case studies centred around a wide range of topics including development theory, social realities (specifically, though not exclusively, issues of caste), gender issues, group dynamics and examinations of the self. Moreover, the Centre also takes on larger projects for publication. It has recently completed The Silken Swing, a book which examines the self-image and coping techniques of Dalit women in Gujarat. This full size book is to be published in mid 1999.

The research arm of the Resource Support Team is designed to offer support to the Centre as a whole. Its' constant reflection and investigation into the current issues in development (both in India and throughout the world) ensures that the work of the BSC remains both relevant and contemporary.

#### ***Training***

More than just responsible for research and publications, the RST is also directly involved in grass-roots outreach and interventions. The RST's non-formal education program consists of trainings designed to provide conceptual as well as skill-based training to individuals and groups outside BSC's major project areas. These non-formal educational interventions attempt to integrate an understanding of the context and the theory of developmental actions and initiatives. The RST trainings are further designed to offer support, and more importantly to enhance the contributions of individuals to their respective organisations. The overarching goal of this branch of the RST is to increase the effectiveness of individuals, groups and organisations.

More than merely acting as a catalyst for change in the target communities, the training function of the RST has direct impact on the effectiveness and cohesion of the Centre as a whole. By preparing and conducting

approximately 80 days of trainings per year, the RST is ensuring an adequate level of professionalism and competence from trainers, both within BSC and the external community. More importantly, it is promoting reflection and learning on formal and non-formal educational practices and offering insights in the establishment of effective techniques.

### *Advocacy*

The advocacy arm of the Resource Support Team is the newest direction to be taken by this section of the Centre. While the BSC has been involving itself in direct interventions in the area of Dalit rights and atrocity cases for years, it has only recently institutionalised this practice within the Resource Support team. The main goal of the advocacy arm of this team is to mobilise support and effect change in the areas of legal struggles, specifically in the area of atrocities against Dalits. The major activities taken up by the Centre are: networking with other NGOs (as a support initiative), identifying the major issues in the areas of legal rights and oppression of the target communities, conducting trainings and providing financial support. As well, the Centre will be directly involved in conducting an annual meeting in order to examine and discuss issues in the area of advocacy. This programme will be directly linked with the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights. The advocacy efforts of the Resource Support Team offer support and attempt to meet the growing needs of the target communities in the areas of legal education and direct assistance.

### **DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES TEAM (DIT)**

The Development Initiatives team of the BSC is designed to identify new directions for the economic development of members of priority communities. This team works to develop non-agricultural income generating alternatives. Established by the Centre in 1996 the DIT has begun working in many areas of economic empowerment. The overall goal of this team is to identify and establish viable businesses and to offer support to these endeavours. Its major projects to date include:

- i. Jagruti Garments
- ii. Watershed Development
- iii. Micro-Credit and Rural Entrepreneurship Development Programme

#### *Jagruti Garments:*

Jagruti Garments was established by the BSC in 1997 in response to the expressed need for activities working towards "women's empowerment". BSC believes that empowerment and awareness, though lofty ideals, remain meaningless to the rural poor unless they are translated into tangible results. Led by this simple axiom, and driven by the diligent efforts of its committed workers, the BSC and Jagruti Garments has been making concerted efforts to help the rural poor through financial and social development.

Jagruti Garments is an integrated fashion and utility garments centre located in the town of Petlad, situated in Kheda district of Gujarat, India. Apart from producing goods for urban markets, Jagruti also provides an adequate livelihood for more than 100 women in the area.

The workers of Jagruti Garments are given intensive skills training by experts who have come forward to support this venture. This project has raised ample interest and funds thus enabling the company to acquire modern equipment and skills.

One main criterion for starting this activity was that it should be at a scale which makes a tangible difference in the lives and livelihood of the women. Moreover, it needed to be market driven without losing out on the ethics and ideology of being rooted within the community. To this end, the women's collective has been registered as a company under the name of Jagruti Garments Ltd. This functioning company is a corporate body with a social emphasis. Thereby, certain structures have been institutionalised; for example, all employees benefit from the growth of the company through direct share holdings. By ensuring partial ownership by each and every woman employed by Jagruti this competitive company is working towards economic autonomy and women's empowerment.

#### *Watershed Development:*

The newest initiative by the DIT is direct involvement in Natural Resource Management (NRM) in the Tribal area of Danta Taluka, Sabarkantha District located in northern Gujarat. The BSC has recently commenced one project in the area of watershed development. This area has been the sight of comprehensive study and investigation for the Development Initiatives Team. Along with the continuing work in watershed management, the DIT is also examining the possibility of running entrepreneurial trainings and other business initiatives. The DIT has begun work on a series of feasibility studies in order to identify new areas of interventions both in the Danta region as well as throughout Gujarat.

The BSC has completed a basic social-technical feasibility study in collaboration with Action for Food Production (AFPRO) unit of Udaipur. The study has clearly established a strong need for taking up the watershed development program.

The BSC, in an effort to make this program both sustainable and effective, has used fully participatory methods in its watershed development program. To this end, trainings and technical knowledge are imparted on the members of this community so that they may take part in and direct all areas of construction and management.

### ***Micro Credit and Rural Entrepreneurship Programme***

The DIT team is currently running a program in rural entrepreneurship training in the Bhal region of Khambhat Taluka. This initiative targets unemployed, educated rural youth and provides training in the areas of small business enterprise management. To date, three programs have been completed (with approximately 70 participants) and one is still being conducted. Of those graduates of the training, over 40 are currently running their own tiny enterprises.

The major goal of this programme is to identify individual capacities and business opportunities in any of the Centre's project areas. Therefore the DIT links individuals with financial institutions, training institutions and other resource personnel.

### **HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT TEAM (HRD)**

As such, human resource development has always existed within the Centre, but in 1996 the BSC institutionalised this function through the establishment of a formal team. The goals for the HRD are:

- i. To promote and assist the professional growth and development of BSC personnel
- ii. To promote and facilitate organisational climate/culture for improving the quality of professional output

The major objective of the HRD is to ensure and carry out the capacity building activities of the Centre. To this end, the HRD team plans and carries out orientations, exposure visits, trainings and seminars. All are designed to directly support the staff at all levels of the Centre.