

Role of Women Panchayat Representatives in Promoting Sustainable Livelihood

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1. Background of women empowerment

After the independence in India, the Indian constitution of 73rd and 74th amendment (1993) play a central role in the process of increasing women's involvement in common life by ensuring equal participation for women in the structure of political rights and gave important success in the direction of confirmation of women's participation, in which it was ensured that Panchayati Raj institution and local self-government institutions would be actively involved in the implementation and execution of National women policy at the grassroots level. Government of India gave constitutional status to village level councils or Panchayati Raj institution and reserved 33% seats for women in Panchayats. Apart from this, women were organised into self-help groups to mark the beginning of a major process of empowering women, although the formal education of women was not given much attention. It was also an important initiative to ensure the participation of government and non-governmental organization working on activities relating to the creation, implementation, monitoring, training and livelihood related policies and programs which effect women's life. The main objective of which is to encourage international, regional and sub-regional cooperation through equitable and multilateral participation in women's society and along with women empowerment, women should be made self-reliant.

The overall development of any country is incomplete without the active participation of women. The concept of women's empowerment seems to be the result of criticism and debates about the movements initiated by women of the world, especially in the Third world. Signs of women's empowerment have many aspects as a whole concept such as personal, family, social, economic, political etc. The process of women empowerment begins with the feeling of women's personal consciousness and self-esteem and continues till the access to resources related to various aspects of life and have control in them. Beijing World Conference had proposed to evaluate the qualitative and quantitative signs of women empowerment, in which the group of women, mainly at the individual level increases their mutual understanding in the home and community, change has been occurred in the level of women's participation such as women participating in public meeting and training programs, at village, district and state level it must be ensure positive change in social attributes by strengthening the women's group, formation of union, involvement of community members to change the thinking in discrimination against women's and girls. In addition to expanding their decision-making capacity towards the work being done by women, primarily on the increase in self-esteem of women, personal and group confidence, especially on the topics affecting women on a wide scale, such as technical and

livelihood education, and increase in level of knowledge and awareness about basic facilities etc., new programs included results in the reduction in workload of women and change their roles and responsibilities towards their family and community.

After the disaster in the study area (Kedarvalley), the impact of empowerment programs on women was studied. It became evident that women recorded her strong presence in the family, home, on work and contributed to the empowerment to all women. Completely fulfilling her family obligation and continuously engages in social work. The outcome of which is shown as follows:

- 1) Contribution to the family in economic security and philanthropy.
- 2) Moving towards social, economic and leadership development through self-help groups and organizations.
- 3) The maximum number of women took advantage of government schemes through participation in government workshops and training.
- 4) In the direction of self-employment with the help of government and non-governmental organization.

In the clear from the studies of women empowerment that it is meant to make women capable of doing work, in fact, women's empowerment, under which there is effective participation in capacity enhancement, efficiency enhancement, self-confidence enhancement and decision-making process. Women's empowerment as the main index of development speaks of a clear sharing of resources for half the population of the world and clear participation in decision making process. Women's empowerment does not mean women's struggle against male, but their intent is to understand their changing roles, makes new adjustments and live a harmonious life.

In one study, four main processes have been mentioned through which women empowerment happens-

- 1) Changes in women's mobility and mutual social interaction.
- 2) Changes in women's labor models.
- 3) Changes in access and control of women to resources.
- 4) Changes in women's control on decision making.

After the natural calamity of June 2013, the livelihood production in Kedarvalley had become a serious problem with the development of basic facilities for which local women along with government and non-government organization worked on self-employment options, which proved to be effective in improving the socio-economic conditions of the people of Kedarvalley's disaster prone area, which is as follows:

Mahila Mangal Dal

Women at the village level create groups and form self-help groups according to their mutual understanding, united them and conforming to their actions and their future goals and ideas. In addition to this mahila mangal dal do cleanliness drives in the village, collectively visit on livelihood training programs, seminars and educational tours. During the rainy season they do tree plantation and protect the forest and woods from forest fires.

Self-help Group

With the creation of self-help group by the local women in Kedar valley, they have been stepped up into women empowerment and livelihood enrichment along with economic stability. Women have created self-help groups in small groups, along with mahila mangal dal at village level. In which they organize meeting each month, the group provides financial assistance for the promotion of livelihood as well as making the family self-reliant by providing fixed money to each member. The women of the group operating at the beginning level are currently preparing vegetables for themselves by arranging vegetable seeds, agricultural equipment and manure from the amount deposited by the groups. While self-help groups, which has been formed in the past, collecting money from group and preparing vegetables in polyhouse and use in their daily life as well as earn money by selling untimely seasonal vegetables by using polyhouse in their nearby markets. When asked from the women of self-help group about the future strategy, they said that in the near time they take advantage of self-help group and government schemes such as small and cottage industries in which they produce vegetables, having sheep farming, by purchasing cow and cattle they started dairy production, at the time of yatra they grow local product and medicinal plant for making incense and agarbati to worship god and grow malta, lemon, oranges, burans, and extract juice and make jams, jelly from wild fruits and also produce manduwa, jangora, pulses and mushroom, produce coal from pine, makes candle and decorative items from ringal at local level to generate the livelihood option. Women are currently working on the options of livelihood with

government and non-government organizations in which they make jute bags, make shawls and warm clothes, produce local species, lentils, juice, jam, pickle and nurse of medicinal plant and dairy production are being done. As a result, women are also taking training with livelihood option, which is a positive initiative in the direction of new employment opportunities and women's empowerment in Kedar valley after the calamity.

Initially, the formation of self-help group started from 1975. NABARD speeded it up from 1986-1987, but the serious effort in this area came from 1991-1999 when the association of self-help groups started dealing with banks. Self-help groups were first created in the perspective of the rural bank. The idea behind this was that if poor women collect together their smallest capital, they could provide each other with loans if needed. Many organizations in India have found that self-help groups can not only become financial institution, but also can be an important and effective medium for economic and social empowerment.

After the formation of self-help groups in the rural areas of the study area, mainly on one hand where the banks get large custom base through it, the returns of loans have been ensured and only a small amount of money can be utilized through small savings. The villagers have seen an increase in the benefits of government schemes, close relations, increase in income, credit and confidence as required.

Self-Help Group (SHG) is a small voluntary association of poor people, preferably from the same socio-economic background. They come together for the purpose of solving their common problems through self-help and mutual help. The SHG promotes small savings among its members. SHG is a group formed by the community, which has specific number of members like 5-15. Such a group the poorest would come together for emergency, disaster, social reasons, and economic support to each other have ease of conversation, social interaction and economic interaction. Self-Help Groups have emerged as the most effective mechanism for delivery of micro-finance services to the poor.

Table 1 : Self-Help Group in Upper Kedar Valley

S.No.	Name of village cluster	No. of Self-help group	No. of Female member
1.	Barasu	24	146
2.	Toshi	1	11
3.	Triyuginarayan	13	120
4.	Nyalsu	13	91
5.	Kalimath	18	119
6.	Kablitha	7	50
7.	Chaumasi	8	60
8.	Jaltalla	5	39
9.	Lamgondi	6	36
10.	Lwani	5	26
11.	Lwara	26	188
12.	Devlibhanigram	20	129

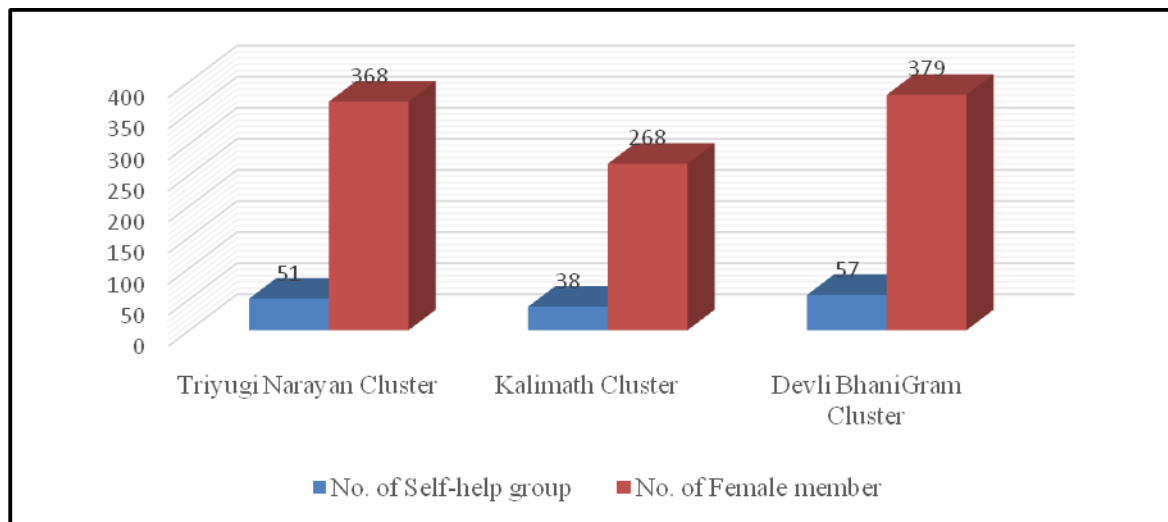


Figure 1: Self-help group in upper Kedar valley

After the initial research study in the field area, information regarding self-help groups for livelihood promotion has been obtained which are as under:

- 1) Its aims are to raise the livelihood of the poor villagers economically self-sufficient.
- 2) Developing local livelihood enhancements through scientific and technical knowledge in women.
- 3) Develop and explore local resources and livelihood at the local level by simple scientific technology.
- 4) Eliminating the problems faced by the poor in getting loans, simplifying them with low interest and process, providing them loans as needed.
- 5) Increase in income by doing part-time work in addition to daily activities.
- 6) Development of various local economic activities.
- 7) Developing the leadership qualities potential in women.
- 8) Working as an effective medium for the growth of credit in rural areas.

Table 2: Information about self-help groups for livelihood promotion

Information about self-help group	Percentage
From self-help groups member	45
Government employees	26
From family members	16
Bank employees	13

By analysing the table 2 above, it is known that most (45 percent) respondents received information about self-help group schemes from the members of self-help groups. After this, 26% of respondent received information from the government employees, 16% from family member's and 13% from the bank employees. It can be concluded that the role of the members of the self-help groups and the role of government employees in the field of self-help group is extremely important in the study area. However, in the rural areas, the absence of government banks in the present time has become a major problem.

Table 3: Types of business of group members before membership

Types of Business	Percentage
Agricultural work and animal husbandry	53

Non-government (NGO)	26
Other business	12
Government job	9

It is evident from the above table no. 3 that 53% of respondents are engaged in agricultural work and animal husbandry, 26% of respondent in NGO, 12% of respondents in business and 9% in government jobs.

Training obtained for business

Training has a direct connection to skill development and income earning. Skill acquired by training is helpful in increasing the opportunities for good employment. The responses received from the respondents in this regard are displayed in the table no. 3, whether or not the respondents who were involved in income earning activities received more training for their business.

Table 4: Getting training for business

Getting training for business	Percentage
Yes	71
No	29

The observation from the table above clearly shows that 29% of respondent did not take any kind of training. Only 71% of respondents were trained in their work. In conclusion, it can be said that most of the respondents before the self-help group's membership were untrained and unskilled and earn income from the primary sector like agriculture and animal husbandry. The major problems experienced prior to becoming a member of group were mainly that the rural women were unorganized. Because of which they were experiencing backwardness in other areas i.e. with personal, social, economic and family members.

Table 5: Support of family members and friends to become a member of self-help group

Collaboration to become a member of a group	Percentage
Yes	73
No	27

It is clear from the analysis of table no. 5 that 73% of respondent got support from their family members and friends. While 27% respondent rejected it for various reasons. The data received which is related to issues were mainly in front of the

respondents before the membership of the group were represented in table no. 6.

Therefore, the major problems related to livelihood activities in Kedarvalley were shown in the following table 6:

**Table 5:Problems faced by female Self-Help groups
Descriptive Statistics**

Problems faced	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Unawareness of govt. schemes and related formalities	14	34	78	56	21
Lack of fixed savings	18	37	80	49	19
Lack of discussion in various problems	16	33	76	63	15
According to the need loans are not provided	12	35	73	59	24
Lack of coordination with government officials	19	43	68	52	21

In the above table, 21% of respondent are strongly agree that they have difficulty in understanding the information received by the government institution and have difficulty to reach banks and filling forms, 19% of the respondents are strongly agree that they have lacked in fixed savings, 15% of respondents lacked in discussions on various issues, 24% of respondent did not receive loans as needed and 21% of respondents held opinion as the main obstacles related to livelihood activities and due to lack of coordination with government officials.

Respondents consider the problem of going through geographical reasons in bank/govt institutions, understanding information and filling forms. Because of which they have difficulty in coming, low level of education and lack of leadership, training and less communication with workers. At the same time, financial problems are a major hindrance in the beginning of new livelihood options, due to which they cannot make self-determination towards self-employment. The

administration is doing commendable work in this direction but in the absence of knowledge and coordination and organizations, they become disinterested.

In below table 6, the ANOVA was conducted in order to identify differences among demographic and socio-economic characteristics of female respondents- including education, economic status, and cluster wise against problem faced by them in sustaining their livelihood. As per cluster-wise, three clusters were found to have significant differences among themselves as per the problems faced by female respondents are considered. Major problem was found out to be unawareness of govt. schemes and related formalities among respondents followed by lack of fixed savings, unavailability of loans lack of discussion and lack of coordination with government officials. The results were significantly validated by post hoc tests as Kalimath cluster showed predominantly lesser signs of such problems as against cluster regions of Devlibhanigram and Triyuginarayan.

Table 6: ANOVA table displaying problems faced by female respondent's cluster-wise

ANOVA		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Unawareness of govt. schemes and related formalities	Between Groups	21.927	2	10.964	10.525	.000
	Within Groups	208.339	200	1.042		
	Total	230.266	202			
Lack of fixed savings	Between Groups	14.680	2	7.340	6.723	.001
	Within Groups	218.355	200	1.092		
	Total	233.034	202			
Lack of discussion in various problems	Between Groups	6.950	2	3.475	3.429	.034
	Within Groups	202.686	200	1.013		
	Total	209.635	202			
According to the need loans are not provided	Between Groups	9.840	2	4.920	4.539	.012
	Within Groups	216.810	200	1.084		
	Total	226.650	202			
Lack of coordination with government officials	Between Groups	8.807	2	4.404	3.773	.025
	Within Groups	233.449	200	1.167		
	Total	242.256	202			

Table 7 describes the ANOVA being applied to find the differences among economic status wise female respondents with regard to the problems faced by them. As per economic status, significant difference was found among problems like unawareness of govt. schemes and related formalities, lack of fixed savings and unavailability of loans. Post hoc test reveals

that lower income people were the most affected people as against middle- and upper-income group people. Surprisingly, no significant difference was found in lack of discussion and coordination among govt. officials as far as different economic status respondents are concerned.

Table 7: ANOVA table displaying problems faced by female respondents based on economic status

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Unawareness of govt. schemes and related formalities	Between Groups	12.803	2	6.401	5.887	.003
	Within Groups	217.463	200	1.087		
	Total	230.266	202			
Lack of fixed savings	Between Groups	15.530	2	7.765	7.140	.001
	Within Groups	217.505	200	1.088		
	Total	233.034	202			
Lack of discussion in various problems	Between Groups	1.347	2	.674	.647	.525
	Within Groups	208.288	200	1.041		
	Total	209.635	202			
According to the need loans are not provided	Between Groups	14.181	2	7.091	6.675	.002
	Within Groups	212.469	200	1.062		
	Total	226.650	202			
Lack of coordination with government officials	Between Groups	6.711	2	3.356	2.849	.060
	Within Groups	235.545	200	1.178		
	Total	242.256	202			

Table 8 displays the ANOVA based results which provides information regarding the differences among different education qualification wise female respondents with regard to the problems faced by them. As far as education level is

concerned, intermediate and UG/PG qualified respondents were found to face lesser problems (as mentioned in the table 8) in sustaining their livelihood activities as against less qualified or uneducated respondents.

Table 8: ANOVA table displaying problems faced by female respondents based on Education qualification

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Unawareness of govt. schemes and related formalities	Between Groups	34.700	3	11.567	11.770	.000
	Within Groups	195.566	199	.983		
	Total	230.266	202			
Lack of fixed savings	Between Groups	43.139	3	14.380	15.069	.000
	Within Groups	189.896	199	.954		
	Total	233.034	202			
Lack of discussion in various problems	Between Groups	9.226	3	3.075	3.054	.030
	Within Groups	200.410	199	1.007		
	Total	209.635	202			
According to the need loans are not provided	Between Groups	27.141	3	9.047	9.024	.000
	Within Groups	199.510	199	1.003		
	Total	226.650	202			
Lack of coordination with government officials	Between Groups	20.032	3	6.677	5.980	.001
	Within Groups	222.224	199	1.117		
	Total	242.256	202			

2. Conclusion

The Kedarnath pilgrimage provided some small alternative livelihood opportunities in the form of porter, hotel operators, priests, selling offerings for the Kedarnath temple etc. for the farming families but the Kedarnath disaster of 2013 caused huge damage to the human capital, agriculture land and property which adversely affected the economy of the region. The government of Uttarakhand was satisfied by distributing compensation in lieu of the death of the male members in the deluge, but for the helpless and deprived people, the affected families this compensation was only a means of resolving the current problems but not a long-time solution. The Kedarnath pilgrimage, which supported the livelihood of several households every year got completely derailed due to the effect of natural calamity as well as loss of local people. The uneasy calm posed a question as how to bring normalcy in the upper Kedar valley. Gradual rehabilitation and reconstruction work by the government and efforts on the part of the local people started to bring changes in the grim scenario caused by the loss of men and material. The women of the hill areas considered to be the backbone of the mountainous region ignoring their losses and sorrow once again stood at the forefront. They exhibited immense patience and handled the circumstances with great courage which gradually started to bring normalcy in their lives. It was the determination of the women to rearrange their own and their families' lives and attain opportunities for social, economic and political upliftment that changed the scenario. Besides fulfilling the necessities of grass, water, timber and fodder, which are indispensable for every household and basis of the family's maintenance they also tried to explore other opportunities.

The government gave a compensation of Rs.7 lakhs 25 thousand to the widow of the deceased family and it was used by women to pay the loans previously taken by the family members or for economic activities. But it was necessary to provide some alternative sources therefore after the disaster, training and assistance for livelihood was provided by government and non-governmental organizations to bring normalcy and into the lives of such women who had lost their husbands or sons by empowering and making them economically and socially secure. In such initiative's women were provided training and encouragement to use local products for business like local fruits and ayurvedic products like Malta, Orange, peppermint etc for making juices, pickle,

marmalade, biscuits etc. They were also provided training for making handicraft products by exposing them to spinning, knitting, making shawls etc.

The people of Kedar valley accept that such efforts have improved the quality life of women and their economies at different levels. In addition to this, it was also accepted by the women representatives that the expectations of development work are increasing the implementation of various government development schemes.

New connections of LPG and its supply in time is decreasing the dependence of women on the forest for fuel. As a result, the protection and conservation of trees is increasing. Women are also working on tree plantations and forests in waste land. Under the MNREGA in the village, construction of security walls for protection of crops from wild animals is also a positive effort. As a result of these developmental activities, there is an increase in employment opportunities for future from agriculture and animal husbandry, from MNREGA and small industries like jam, juice, shawls, sweater, pickles and from local products.

Though it was seen that the educated and youth are migrating from the region for livelihood in the absence of basic infrastructure facilities which is affecting the agriculture sector and women's workload is increasing due to their absence. As due to lack of higher education and technical knowledge and training, women cannot do other work except agriculture, but the self-help groups and NGO with their trainings are making a change in their lives in the aftermath of disaster. Although these livelihood opportunities have not eliminated the basic problems and the geographical disadvantage of the area. But despite the shortcomings the generation of a little ray of hope by these livelihood options is an auspicious sign for this region and the women's empowerment in the future.

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