

Women Leadership and Development: A Study on Grassroots Women Leaders in Uttarakhand

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Abstract

Women leadership influences holistic development, this proposition is substantiated with several studies. The socio-cultural background of the women potentially influences this process. The socio-economic characteristics of grassroots women leaders, their awareness level, perspective of development, work and initiatives undertaken by the women leaders in their respective areas and their contribution on development is getting more attention in recent years. This study discusses the background of formal and informal women leaders, their socio-demographic background which influences the process of development. The study further discusses the perspective of the women leaders towards development of their village/block/district; the awareness level about the various development programmes/schemes; nature of work initiated by the women leaders in their respective areas; problems and constraint faced by the women leaders in performing their role in development domain. And finally the opinion of the public regarding the development work had done by women leaders. The study is descriptive in nature and interview and FGD were the tools for data collection.

Keywords: Grassroots Women Leaders and Development

Introduction

Development and its related terms remain fundamental to contemporary thinking. There is no agreement among developmental thinkers regarding a common concept of development. Some said it is a process of growth in the direction of nation building and socio-economic progress (Weidner, 1970) while others lay emphasis on the quality of life (Bernstein 1973; Belshaw, 1977) and provision of basic needs happiness, and wellbeing (ILO, 1976). But the concept of development has been implemented by different countries in different ways. The common consensus among economists and researchers is that

the attainment self sustainable growth with people's participation is the main thrust of development (Gwanya, 1989; Sen, 2000).

Women can play a pivotal role in addressing many social, political and economic issues. With the help of women many problems related to environment have been solved. Studies have shown that women are very efficient managers of resources. Energy sustainability can be attained through the role of women empowerment as they are directly related with the consumption of natural resources. Women of Uttarakhand have always been the active participants in Uttarakhand's statehood movement, environment protection and sharabbandi movement (movement against liquors). In every village of Garhwal and Kumaon region there is an informal female organization known as the mahila panchayat which takes up the different tasks of social forestry. There are also areas such as health, education, social, economic and political where women play an important role. (HARC and PRIA, 1997; Joshi, 1999; Lakshmi, 2000; Pragati, 2000; Rawat, 2004; Rahman, 2007; Rekha, 2014).

Moreover, the innumerable factors have also slowed down the contribution of women in the developmental activities. This can be attributed to the traditional notion that women's work and worth are generally under-valued and hence they are underpaid. This is basically due to the assumption that females are inferior in capacity to males and that no family runs on the income of females alone in a patriarchal society, which makes the earnings of women as supplementary. Such a view violates the principle of equal work wage for equal work. Women's social, economic and political participation is therefore hindered by illiteracy, low skills, capacities as well as lack of ownership and control over assets (Sen, 1992; Jumani, 1987; Planning Commission, 2001; Planning Commission,

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2011; Jassal, 2001). The major constraints faced by the women leaders are caste-politics, unwillingness to participate in meetings, lack of trust between the higher officials. These have acted as hurdles to not only their participation in the meetings but also in working at the village level (Sivanna, 1999). The women leaders also face problems such as lack of adequate financial aid and market linkages (Rani, 2000). Women's participation in decision making on issues related to social, economic and political varies from region to region. Very few women are involved as decision makers in regulatory institutions and organizational bodies. Encouraging women to participate in the process of decision making right from home and providing them with power and authority to control resources could help women to develop in the long run (Desai, 1986).

The women of this region have no doubt collectively and individually resolved many social and economic problems for the betterment of the society. Thus, it becomes imperative to understand the levels of participation in development programmes and schemes and know their perception towards development.

Women are major contributors to the economic, social and political, agricultural, export industries, science and technology, environment, and allied sectors. Despite the presence of women in all the arenas there still exists issues that need to be tackled with a rights based approach. Though Uttarakhand state has a long history of women leaders. The opinion of the women is not taken into consideration before designing and implementation of programmes and schemes for development. Apart from being a case of lack of involvement by women, the very idea of women leaders as studied by scholars and researchers, fails to look into the issues and tensions internal to the functioning and organization of women leaders and workers.

If women are provided with quality trainings, ownership of property, made equal partners in decision making in household activities and in different development programmes and schemes; if they are provided with travel expenses, honorarium and safe boarding-lodging, and provisions for entrepreneurship development, then they will come out as true leaders in all spheres of development (Nayar 2006; Bindu 2006).

Rationale of the Study

The present thesis attempts to focus on the contribution made by various informal and formal women leaders, the nature of problems faced by them and suggestions for their improvement and the opinion of the general public. The study extends to the grassroots women leaders who play a vital role in the socio-economic set up of the state's economy and in various development works in Uttarakhand. This study gives the crucial idea of how can the tacit knowledge of grassroots women and the views of public about their knowledge and practices on development can be tapped more effectively through the communities in practice.

It was emphasized that unless women were actively involved in decision-making and in the planning and implementation of programmes for action, modernization could have adverse effects on their lives. The participation at all the stages of programme for women leaders is important in order to understand and deal with the developmental issues within stipulated time frame and also for effective functioning of programs and schemes in the villages. The state government could introduce a noble scheme through which the hill women may be provided an ideal opportunity to enhance their social status, their overall personality, improve their awareness and outlook towards life, exhibit their talent, and improve their financial condition.

The study will fulfill the above mentioned needs and will also enable the policy makers and planners to design curriculum to improve the capacities of grassroots women in dealing with the development programme and schemes in their respective district/block/villages. As the study is focused on the grassroots women profile, the planners engaged in execution of development program can take into consideration the socio-cultural milieu of Uttarakhand women. Also officials and non-officials of voluntary organization involved in this programme can take advantage in planning and execution of various programmes. The endeavor of this study is also to be useful for social worker and researcher of women studies in a broader sense.

Visualizing the above facts and there is a necessity to disseminate the success stories of women leadership

to act as motivational guide in other areas where it is deficient. It is necessary to identify the grassroots women leadership in the state of Uttarakhand. This research also tries to study the success of extension and implementation of various programmes and schemes of government and its bodies. Furthermore, in order to study the development of the grassroots women leaders and how the women folk of the state have contributed to those extension programmes, the research scholar undertook study on '*Grassroots Women Leaders and Development: A Case Study of Uttarakhand State*'.

Methodology

In the present study descriptive research design is used. This is because the study aims to describe the present status of grassroots women leaders along with their functionary administrative, political, social and economic environment. The present research study also envisages to describe the working environment of grassroots women leaders in the light of prospects and constraints before them, to recommend the remedial measures after through analysis of their roles in the extension of the programmes and schemes of the government and other related bodies. There is also an attempt in the present study to illustrate the perspective of grassroots women leaders towards development. The present study is carried out in both Garhwal and Kumaon region of Uttarakhand. Two districts from the Garhwal region namely Dehradun, Uttarkashi and two districts from the Kumaon region namely Nainital and Pithoragarh is selected for the study. The Probability sampling method is used to draw the required sample. It is done by using Multi Stage Stratified Random sampling technique. A sample of 350 respondents from above mentioned blocks are selected. Out of 350 respondents, 150 are formal women leaders and 200 are informal women leaders. Interview schedule and Focus Group Discussion were the major tools for data collections.

Results and Discussions

Socio-economic Profile of Formal and Informal Women Leaders

Most of the formal and informal women leaders in the study area are in the age group of 25-35 years i.e. 43 per cent and 33.8 per cent respectively followed by age group of 35-45 years i.e. 33 per cent and 31.4 per

cent respectively which shows that women leaders are mature enough to take decision and actively involved themselves in development programmes and schemes. In both the categories of women leaders in the age group of 18-25 years is less, even lesser than those of 45 years of age. The research results confirm that the 82.7 per cent and 83.3 per cent formal and informal women leaders respectively are married. A small percentage 2.0 and 2.6 per cent rested with widow women in formal and informal women leaders respectively. No divorced women were found as grassroots leaders out of the total population of 350 women investigated. Average age of marriage in the study area was less than 18 years. This result shows that women leaders are burden with household chores during the young age of 18-25 which inhibits them to contribute in different programmes and schemes.

The General category constituted 47.1 per cent of formal women leaders and 38.7 per cent of informal women leaders. The study reflects that women involved in the development programmes and schemes are from higher caste. Study also revealed that 39.7 per cent of informal women are from ST category which is quite higher as compared to the formal women respondents i.e. 29 per cent. The study exhibited that 20 per cent of formal women and 19.6 per cent of informal women are from SC category. The percentage of formal and informal women leaders from OBC constitute only 3.9 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. The study also collected data and analysed it on the type of families, family size including number of children. 60.6 per cent of the formal women leaders are from nuclear families and 39.4 per cent are from joint families. Research also describes that 51 per cent of the informal women had joint family and 49 per cent are from nuclear family. It is also revealed from the study that the average family size is $8.23 \approx 8$ and $6.77 \approx 7$ for formal leaders and informal respectively. In case of formal women leaders the number of male and female child varied from 0 to 4. In case of informal leaders the number of male and female child varied from 0 to 5.

Compare to the formal women leaders, the rate of illiteracy is phenomenally higher in case of informal women leaders (14.2 per cent). The study explains that 19.4 per cent of the formal women leaders had studied up to primary level and a significant number of informal women leaders i.e. 30.4 per cent had primary level of education. While 37.4 per cent formal women leaders and 31.4 per cent informal women leaders studied up to intermediate level/

middle level, 34.2 per cent of formal women leaders and 22.1 per cent of informal women leaders had completed graduation. The details property owned by women revealed that majority of the formal and informal women leaders (i.e 80.6 per cent and 80.6 per cent respectively) are not having property in their name. Only 19.4 per cent of the formal women leaders and 13.7 per cent of informal women leaders had ownership of property.

The income of formal women leaders ranged from zero to a maximum number of Rs. 25, 000. More than half of formal women leaders had an income below Rs. 5000 per month. While one third of the women had an income within the range of Rs. 5000-10,000 per month, very few women leaders had an income above Rs. 25,000 per month. The study also revealed that 74.55 per cent of the informal women respondents are not earning any monthly income. Only few informal women respondents (25.5 per cent) earn less than Rs. 5000/-. Most of the informal women leaders are Helper, former MMD members, NREGA workers and Voluntary women teachers. In order to analyze the relation between the age and leadership position, Correspondence Analysis of a Two-Way Table is used in the study. The designation of Aaganwari and facilitator are mostly concentrated in the age group of 18-25. Other designations such as ASHA, teacher, ward member and MMD are from age group of 25-35. Data further shows that while designation of pradhan and businesswomen falls in the age group of 35-45, the SHGs members are in age group of 25-35 and 35-45 years.

Perspective of the Women Leaders Towards Development

According to the study, for 23 per cent of the formal and informal women leaders, development meant inclusion of women development oriented programmes in every government scheme and programme. While 20 per cent of the women leaders believed that the programmes and schemes which can build the capacities of women are main features of development, 18 per cent of leaders talked about improvement in women health as the basic characteristic of development, and only 5 per cent of the women opined that the creation of new and enhancement of the existing infrastructural facilities as their perspective and vision of development.

The perspective and vision of the women leaders towards concept of development in their area are also been considered enlisted at the time of investigation. Their

concept of development amongst the women leaders meant achievement of their goals without interfering with other developmental programmes and schemes. Another valuable concept propounded by them meant that educated women can understand their roles and responsibilities in better manner than the uneducated lot and this can help in the overall development of the villages.

The definition of development during the FGD by some of the grassroots women leaders include better road communication, women literacy, empowerment of women in social platforms, shedding of gender differences, recognition of women as active social volunteers. Development is not the enhancement of physical structures; amenities however it is also connected with the improvement in knowledge, motivated people contribute to the upliftment of the society.

Awareness Level Regarding the Various Development Programmes and Role of Women in their Implementation

The study revealed that 42.9 per cent of formal and informal women were aware of 1 to 5 programmes/schemes running in their respective villages. On the other hand 47 per cent of formal and informal women leaders were aware about 6 to 10 programmes/schemes. Bare 9.5 per cent of women leaders were aware of more than 10 programmes/schemes being implemented in the study areas.

Nature of Work Initiatives by the Women Leaders in their Respective Areas

The targets/plans set by the formal women leaders for developing their villages are mainly focused on income generation activities for women (20 per cent); protecting the women from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (18.3); health and sanitation (13.3). The other targeted programmes are for creating awareness programme against child marriage and discouraging female foeticide (12 per cent); educating women (11.7 per cent) and creation of infrastructure development (7 per cent). This shows that women leaders are highlighting the issues which can benefit the women group directly to improve their capacities and abilities for the betterment of individual family and society. The least weighted targets are providing physical amenities like house/roads/

drainage (6.7 per cent), enabling weaker section to stand up equal with upper classes of society (6 per cent) and potable water (5 per cent).

According to this study, more married women are involved in the development programs as compared to the unmarried women. The number of children in a family also played an important factor for involvement of formal women leaders in the development program. The level of involvement of the formal women having no children or one child is higher compare to women having two, three and four children. The data reveals that the gender of child and number of children has no difference for their involvement in development programme.

Statistical analysis illustrates the involvement of formal women in development programme is more whose husbands are involved in farming and agricultural labour and other category. Further, there is more involvement of formal women leaders coming from joint family. The obvious reason is the division of labour at the household level which gives time for involvement of women in various developmental activities. The other reason is due to migration of male partners from the family, responsibility of women towards the family increases.

Most of the informal women leaders participated in pre-implementation and networking stage of the development programmes and schemes in their respective villages/blocks and district. According to the research, 30 per cent of the informal women leaders participated in pre-implementation stage, whereas 35 per cent of them participated in networking stage. Very few informal women leaders i.e. 9 per cent participated in implementation stage.

Problems and Constraint Faced by the Women Leaders in Performing their Role in Development Domain

One of the important constraints was observed to be non cooperation from the senior officials in different levels of development works. The other problems are lack of mobility, response, education, time, fund, need based training, support for women specially to attend evening classes, support shown to formal/informal women leaders from the villagers, and trust for women in position. It is noticed that all development programmes are male dominated in nature.

Various solutions to tackle these problems are also suggested by the women leaders. increase in the literacy level of people in the villages, increase in unity, promoting we feelings, togetherness in development works, higher level of education for pradhan women, training programme from time to time, awareness on development schemes and establishing women literacy camp are some of these solutions. The other suggestion are networking with other institute which are working on entrepreneurship development like training before the involvement in any programme; mutual respect for each others feeling; and capacity building of women to handle different challenges in the development programmes and schemes.

Opinion of the Public Regarding the Development Work Done by Women Leaders

35 per cent of the public found level of participation has improved very effectively among the women leaders and 51.8 per cent of the public found women leaders to be effective in community mobilization. Further, the public rated the grassroots women leader in terms of decision making power in the family. 17.8 per cent of women leaders are effective in decision making power in family. 29.4 per cent of the women leaders are very effective in resource maintenance and 24.9 per cent in accomplishing the given task within the scheduled time framework.

The analysis of the data indicates that 28.9 per cent of the public opined that higher participation of women leaders in development programs will reduce exploitation of women as their awareness level increases. The other 25.1 per cent of public believed that problems of the community can be solved on priority basis, while 25.8 per cent of the public felt that problems of the women and child can be addressed quickly.

The research revealed that 22.6 per cent of public opined that timely and constant training about development programmes and schemes should be undertaken to increase the effectiveness of women leaders. Also 23.8 per cent of the public suggested that organizing follow-up programmes will tend to improve women leaders' effectiveness as leaders. Other suggestions indicate increasing honorarium (22 per cent); providing transport facilities (17.7 per cent) and regular administrative monitoring and supervision (13.9 per cent) are bound to produce quick and effective results in the implementation of socio-economic programmes and schemes.

Social Work Interventions

While linking the continuum of women, leadership, social development and empowerment, there are several emergent issues and these require the role of social work intervention. Social work interventions in the context of women leadership could be in the areas as follows.

Individual Level

This would require effective social work interventions with women and emerging formal and informal leaders, the following are the plausible interventions at individual level.

Encouraging women's participation in decision making

- Affecting femininization of poverty.
- Gathering spousal and familial support for emerging leaders.
- Education for women.
- Encouraging women to participate in local administration.

The Processes Required

The processes refer to the methods and techniques social workers working with women leaders would require to employ, they are as discussed:

- Community organisation
- Awareness generation
- Affecting attitudes
- Macro level

This implies state level interventions requiring facilitation by social workers, the aspects are as given:

- To implement the developmental programmes and schemes, the government requires not only the support of its formal government bodies however also local informal change makers in the shape of village bodies, NGOs, formal and informal grassroots women leaders.
- To extract the maximum advantage of the experience, knowledge and impact of grassroots level women leaders, their real life problem solving recommendation need to be included in the future programmes.
- Delegation of authority to lower level for amending the procedure is the need of the time.

- Imparting proper education and creating awareness amongst the rural folk, utilizing the feedback provides the important tools for the rural socio-economic development.
- Creation of suitable linkages for adequate and proper liaison between the government programmes implementing officials and the rural leadership needs to be evolved to facilitate smooth and effective communication along with feedback.

Conclusion

The present study examined the role of formal and informal grassroots women leaders, of Uttarakhand, coming from various socio-economic backgrounds along with their perception of the meaning of the word development. Out of the four districts (two each from the Grahwal and Kumaon region) of Uttarakhand; two low density and two high density districts. A total of 500 respondents were studied, out of which 150 were formal women leaders, 200 informal women leaders and 150 were general public.

Empowerment being an important indicator of development, it has been analysed using the formal and informal women leaders involvement. For instance, formal women leaders have held positions such as being members of SHGs and Mahila Mangal Dal, ASHA workers and participants in government projects like IFAD and Swashakti. Informal women leaders on the other hand are women who have contributed in the development of their area and acknowledged as influential by their community but do not hold any formal position. The maximum grassroots women leaders have developed independently without the support from the organizations at a later stage of emergent leadership. This phenomenon can be called as the rise of natural spontaneous leadership which arises out of the void leadership in typical circumstances, but eventually for constructive use of their leadership, various grass root organisations have facilitated resources, opportunity and space for the emerging leaders.

The grassroots leaders emerge due to high sense of responsibility towards the betterment of community; they seek to extract the maximum possible benefits out of the programmes and schemes for the local community. There are indications that general public also admires and prefers the women formal leaders' involvement in social activities. There are certain areas of development where

formal women leaders were unable to participate, the informal women leaders comes to the fore and replace them, this yields wide application of devoted social activists.

Seasoned leaders can affect overall proposed and envisaged development in any society. Furthermore, they are also instrumental in motivating the people to learn leadership techniques and become a part of the development process. The word development cannot be defined in isolation as it needs to cover all the aspects related to socio-economic and political fields, which affects the living environment of the society. The overall development covers not only the fulfillment of the basic needs of society but it also seeks to improve the status of all section of the society including the deprived ones in terms of economic and social processes. The rational development should look for the betterment of all the members of society irrespective of the caste, creed and religion along with all the sphere of activities and necessities connected with up gradation of general life style of the people and provide a promise for the better future.

The available literature on rural women leadership and development studies carried out by various scholars also throws light on stories of successful cases in the areas of micro finance, alcohol prohibition drives, national freedom movement, environment protections and other important social issues. Various researchers have also mentioned women leadership as entrepreneurs to quote for example the 'Lijjat Papad Group and SEWA.' It is also evident that there are only a few reliable research studies in this area that describe the existing gaps and initiatives leading to the development of women in the hills to become the leader in true sense to effect socio-economic changes.

In the newly formed state of Uttarakhand, the policies and action plans are in the budding stage in all fields of development including women empowerment, leading to lack of good practices in the form of policy guidelines and action plans has led to new burdens on the women who are in the process of acquiring status of women leadership.

The present research problem is a contemporary issue and it is the high time to realize the present status of the grassroots women leaders. Both formal and informal women leaders have been studied. The socio-economic profile of formal and informal women leaders, their contribution in the field of development, their awareness

regarding the existing schemes and programs, problems and constraint faced by them have been studied. The study also analyses the opinion of the public regarding the women leaders and their views to improve the numbers of prospective women leaders for contribute towards development of their villages and society. One of the important issue that the present study infers relate to the vision and perspective of development by women leaders and whether the schemes and program running in their respective villages are in tune with their vision and perspective or not?

The present study embarks upon the study/analyses and inquires into the policy implication and result of implementation of various policies aimed as the development of rural populate. It also analyses the present situation in which the formal and informal women leaders are functioning, their mindsets and various constraints. Furthermore, the existing opportunities and instruments available for implementation are scrutinized to assess recommendable reforms which suit the best for the women leaders.

In fact government has taken up many initiatives and provisions, however despite of continuous efforts, rural women in general and hills women in particular are still living in the miserable condition. The rural women are marching ahead with the various developmental programmes to open out in the society as change leaders despite the fact that they have to overcome the traditional limitations and taboos which generally prohibits rural women to come out of their homes. Despite these obstacles some determined women have proved themselves as grassroots women leaders to become model and example for others to follow.

The present study found out that most of the grassroots women leaders have participated the most in pre implementation stage and networking stage however not in modification/implementation of program, evaluation and follow up stage which shall be given special attention by the policy makers. The participation at all the stages of programme for women leaders is important in order to understand and deal with the developmental issues within stipulated time frame and also for effective functioning of programs and schemes in the villages. Finally to sum up it may be pointed out that the state government could introduce a novel scheme through which the hill women may be provided an ideal opportunity to enhance their

social and economic paths of life.

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