

Women's Inclusion And Empowerment Through Capacity Building And Social Mobilization: A Case Study Of Uttarakhand Gramya-II Project

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Abstract

Watershed Development Project in Uttarakhand has worked to enhance the role of the community, especially the women, since they are using and managing water, particularly for domestic purposes and livestock. A well-structured capacity building and social mobilization methodology were adapted to create awareness among the women of the community. The significance and relevance of capacity-building majors and enhancing women's participation and empowerment are the mainstay of this paper. The analysis shows that the promotion of collective thinking, and capacity-building training for females has built confidence in them. It has made them more communicative, breaking the barriers of restricted mobility and economic dependence. Gramya-II interventions focus on encouraging the participation of women as well as other vulnerable groups in the training and exposure visits organized and it has been observed that participation of women has increased. The greatest impact of Gramya II in the project region is on building gender-responsive strategies, encouraging women's leadership and their representation in governance. It has enabled women to voice their opinions and has given a them platform to present their issues; concerns of women were given priority and a change has been observed in terms of understanding women's issues and problems at the panchayat level. Women are encouraged to take up leadership positions and place new proposals before the committees constituted under the Gramaya-II that plan and support the need for women. It has enabled women to voice their opinions and give them a platform to present their issues.

Keywords: Capacity Building, Social Mobilization, Women Empowerment, Women Participation, Gender Inclusion, Watershed Management project

Introduction

With the success of Gramya I implemented from 2004 – 2012, the Uttarakhand Decentralized Watershed Development Project(UDWDP) – Phase II, also referred to as Gramya II, is being implemented with the financial assistance of the World Bank. It was implemented in 82 villages of 8 districts of Uttarakhand from 2014 to 2021. This project focuses mainly on the development of rainfed agriculture through the use of watershed development tools, particularly rainwater conservation and harvesting and natural resource management. Gramya II is built on a successful community-based approach. The project has given greater emphasis to community participation and community ownership. The project is built to develop greater ownership, planning and management by the community through a

participatory approach involving all stakeholders at Gram Panchayat (GP) level. The project staff and project partners (Facilitating NGOs, Partner NGOs) have a facilitating role to play regarding the planning, implementation and management of the project.

Capacity building measures have been undertaken particularly at the Gram Panchayat level to empower women and their decision-making abilities. The capacity building initiatives like training, workshop and exposure visits have created awareness and are focused on a gender inclusion strategy. Women Aam Sabha (WAS) has been initiated under the project to create greater participation of women in governance forums and voice out their concerns about the need for work in the village. The suggestions of the WAS are being given importance and these are being incorporated in the plans. Budget allocations for women-centric plans have also been encouraged under this project.

The project has improved the participation of women involving Field- NGOs as well as internal multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) in the project implementation. The capacity building strategy of the project has attempted to address the concerns of all stakeholders including the women who are also the beneficiaries. Social mobilization through active engagement with women within the community, women committee members and continuous monitoring and evaluation of the project has been done to drive social change, promote social justice, and empower women within the communities to take charge of their own futures.

Review Of Literature

Capacity building refers to the process of enhancing the skills, knowledge, resources, and capabilities of individuals, organizations, and communities to improve their effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability in achieving their goals. The ultimate goal of capacity building is to enable individuals, organizations, and communities to take control of their own development and become self-sufficient in achieving their objectives. Capacity building can take many forms, including training programs, workshops, mentoring, coaching, technical assistance, and access to resources and tools. It can be applied to various fields such as education, health, agriculture, business, government, and non-profit organizations.

Some of the key benefits of capacity building include increased productivity, improved quality of services, better decision-making, increased innovation, enhanced leadership skills, and improved resilience to challenges and crises. Capacity building is essential to sustainable development and is necessary for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Capacity building is an essential tool for promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and sustainable development. Capacity building has a critical role in various areas, including women's economic empowerment, political participation, health, and education. It focuses on improving women's knowledge, skills, and abilities can have a positive impact on their lives and contribute to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Capacity Building and Women Empowerment

The role of capacity building has been identified as a crucial factor in women's empowerment. A study conducted by Kabeer (2001) found that capacity building interventions that enhance women's knowledge and skills can have a positive impact on their decision-making abilities and their ability to participate in public life. Similarly, another study conducted by UN Women (2015) concluded that capacity building programs that focus on women's economic empowerment can help women gain access to new opportunities, increase their

income, and improve their standard of living. Several studies have highlighted the role of capacity building in promoting women's political participation. A study conducted by UNDP (2012) found that women's political empowerment can be enhanced through capacity building interventions that improve their knowledge of political processes, their leadership skills, and their ability to mobilize support. The World Bank (2016) concluded that capacity building programs that focus on women's political participation can help to promote gender equality and reduce gender-based discrimination. Capacity Building and Women's Health Capacity building has also been identified as an important tool for improving women's health outcomes. The WHO (2012) found that capacity building interventions that improve the skills and knowledge of health workers and can have a positive impact on women's health outcomes, particularly in low-income countries.. Capacity Building and Women's Education Capacity building has been identified as a critical tool for promoting women's education. A study conducted by UNESCO (2015) found that capacity building interventions that improve the skills and knowledge of teachers can have a positive impact on girls' education outcomes, particularly in low-income countries. Similarly, another study conducted by the Brookings Institution (2017) concluded that capacity building programs that focus on improving the skills of school administrators can help to promote girls' education and reduce gender-based discrimination in the education system. Awan and Azam (2020) found that a capacity building program that focused on entrepreneurship skills had a positive impact on women's empowerment in Pakistan. The program helped women develop their business skills and provided them with access to capital and markets, which enabled them to start and grow their businesses.

Social Mobilization and Women Empowerment7599

Social mobilization refers to the process of engaging individuals, groups, and communities to bring about social change through collective action. It involves the promotion of participation, collaboration, and empowerment of people to take ownership of issues affecting their lives, and to take action to bring about positive change. Social mobilization can take various forms, including community organizing, public awareness campaigns, advocacy, and networking. It is often used to address issues such as poverty, inequality, discrimination, environmental degradation, health, and education. Effective social mobilization requires a clear understanding of the social, cultural, economic, and political context in which it operates, as well as the issues and stakeholders involved. It also requires effective communication, collaboration, and coordination among the different actors involved, including community leaders, civil society organizations, government agencies, and the private sector.

Empowering Women through Social Mobilization: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia" by Benjamin A. Olken and Junko Onishi. The authors find that the intervention led to significant improvements in women's empowerment, as measured by changes in their attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes. Social mobilization is empowering women in rural India, with a focus on the impact of women's self-help groups. The groups have been successful in increasing women's social, economic, and political empowerment. (Vartika Sharma and S.K. Singh). social mobilization interventions increased women's participation in community decision-making processes, leading to greater gender equality in resource allocation and greater social support for women's empowerment initiatives (Bhandari et al., 2018). Social mobilization interventions that focused on increasing women's access to financial services led to significant improvements in women's economic empowerment and decision-making power within the household (Datta et al., 2020). It interventions that focused on building women's leadership skills and facilitating collective action led to significant improvements in women's political participation and empowerment (Nakkazi et al., 2017).

Research Methodology

This research enables an embedded case study approach focusing on the Gramya II project implemented in Uttarakhand over seven years from 2014 to 2021. The study enables a critical and empathetic study of the social and cultural context through interaction and learning with the women beneficiaries of the project through participant observation in the surrounding communities of the Gramya-II project of Uttarakhand. The study focused on how capacity building and social mobilization were adopted by the project has led to women's empowerment, better decision-making and enhanced leadership qualities in the women of the project-covered villages. Interviews were conducted with the women beneficiaries and the community. Conversations with the respondents emphasized on the measures taken within the project for their capacity building and how the inclusion of gender in the project has benefitted them. A total of 20 project villages and 5 control villages were covered during the study.

The baseline data, or the data at the start of the project was taken from the funding agency and the Watershed Department of Uttarakhand. The data has helped to make a comparison between the baseline and the endline phases of the project and to understand how the inclusion of gender through capacity building and social mobilization has enhanced women's participation and leadership qualities.

Sampling Design

The evaluation design was based on the most rigorous approach to evaluation and a Difference-in-Difference (DiD) technique was followed. The basic idea behind the DiD method is to compare the change in the outcome variable between a treatment group and a control group, before and after the intervention. This difference in changes represents the causal effect of the intervention. The DiD method assumes that any difference between the treatment group and the control group that existed prior to the intervention remains constant over time.

The difference-in-difference method compared the changes in outcomes over time between a population that is enrolled in the program (the Project group) and a population that is not (the Control group). The difference-in-differences approach combines the two counterfeit estimates of the counterfactual (before-and-after comparisons, and comparisons between those who were part of the project treatment and those who choose are not) to produce a better estimate of the counterfactual. It helps in controlling the factors that vary over time (time-varying factors) which could be a source of bias. The DiD estimation seeks to measure outcomes for two groups – treatment (project) and control (counterfactual) – over a given time period. The control group is not exposed to the treatment and the same units within both groups are observed in each time period, where the average gain in the control group is subtracted from the average gain in the treatment group.

Capacity Building , Social Mobilization and Gender Inclusive Focus

Gramya II activities are focused on a gender inclusion strategy and therefore has targeted interventions for promoting the same. It is mandatory for the Revenue Village Committee (RVC) formed at the Revenue Village level to comprise at least 50 percent of women voters. To ensure fair representation of women from the SC/ST category, at least one male and one female member were selected from the SC/ST category. As per the RVC guidelines, the Secretary of the RVC should necessarily be a woman. If the Chairperson of the

RVC is a female, in that case, Secretary can be a male. The Bank account of the RVC is operated jointly by the Chairperson and Secretary. The Gender and Social Category-wise Distribution of RVC members is reflected in the following Table 01 which clearly shows that RVC has more than 50 percent woman members. This is a testimony to the empowerment of women through Gramya-II and speaks about how women have been mobilized to participate in project institutions and activities through RVC committee,

Table 01: *Composition of Membership of RVC*

Total no. of Revenue Villages	Total no. of RVC Formed	Total members in RVC	Total no. of a woman member					
			SC	ST	OBC	Gen	Total	% of women
1057	999*	7293	1035	209	846	1992	4082	56%

*Pauri division has smaller RVs hence RVCs are formed by combining adjacent RVs together.

The Water & Watershed Management Committees (WWMC), a constituted body under Gramya II, comprises six members, including at least one woman, one OBC and one SC/ST member. One female ward member of WWMC is nominated as a co-signatory to the project account along with the Gram Pradhan. In the case of Gram Pradhan being a female, male co-signatory to the project account can be nominated at the discretion of the WWMC. From Table 02 below, it can be seen that 63 percent of the WWMC members are women, which clearly indicates that the project has been conscious of the inclusion strategy and have included members in leadership position. Across the social class, there is equitable distribution as well in proportion to the population.

Table 02: *Composition of Membership of WWMC*

Total number of GPs	Total no. of WWMC Formed	Total members in WWMC	Total no. of woman member					
			SC	ST	OBC	Gen	Total	% of women
527	527	3201	557	135	445	894	2031	63

Women Aam Sabhas (WAS)

Mobilizing women for ensuring their participation in project activities was one of the project's major objectives. The project envisaged empowering women by enabling them to draw maximum benefits from the project and help reduce their drudgery. The concept of WAS was introduced in the project to provide a suitable platform for women to express and share their experiences and have their say without any gender-based hesitation. Women Aam Sabha have helped in greater participation of women in governance forums and voicing out their concerns about the need for work in the village. Due to WAS women got a platform to discuss and formulate-based proposals which is then placed in Gram Sabha for approval. During these meetings, proposals highlighting the needs of women were invited for being incorporated into GPWDP and other respective Gram Panchayats. A total of 9,780 WAS meetings have been conducted till date. The participation of women in Aam Sabhas was at 70 percent of the total women population which is a good representation of women's involvement. Subsequent to 2019-20, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of WAS meetings organized has though reduced to half and also the percentage of women participation has decreased. Table 03 below represents the year-wise participation of women in Aam Sabha.

Table 03: *Women Aam Sabha Participation and Financial Year*

Financial Year	WAS Conducted	Total Female Population	Female Participation in WAS	Percentage participation
2014-15	148	40630	9841	24.2
2015-16	808	112969	37367	33.1
2016-17	948	112969	49833	44.1
2017-18	1756	112969	80658	71.4
2018-19	1922	112969	80271	71.1
2019-20	1308	112969	53717	47.6
2020-21	1279	112969	48422	42.9
2021-22	1611	112969	47366	41.9
Total	9780			

Findings

Increased participation of women in Gram sabha meetings because of WAS has also been observed. WAS has brought a significant change among women in the space where they had a limited role to play. The suggestions of WAS are getting due importance, there have been open discussions on the suggestions of WAS and are incorporated into the plans.

Table 04: *Gram Sabha Participation of Women*

	Project		Baseline		Endline	
	Target	Project	Control	t	Project	Control
Intermediate Indicator 1:						
(i) Percent of participating households in Gram Sabha meetings (%)	80%	67.2	58	95.6	94.6	53.90
(ii) % of which are female	50%	62.4	54.3	57.0	54.6	32.20

Women's participation in Gram Sabha has also eventually improved over a period of time as the DiD gives a positive result proving the outcome to be significantly positively attributed to by the project-led initiatives. Parameters for Women in capacity building

Togetherness and Trust	Social Cohesion
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Trust and honesty	<input type="checkbox"/> Attitude towards usage of common property resources
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Welfare	<input type="checkbox"/> Management in crisis situation
<input type="checkbox"/> Trust in community	<input type="checkbox"/> Conflict resolution
<input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to help	<input type="checkbox"/> Safety scenario
<input type="checkbox"/> Associate with community	

The following parameters were considered while planning the capacity building and social mobilizations measure for the women of the project village.

Women Participation through capacity building measures

Gramya-II interventions focus on encouraging the participation of women as well as other vulnerable groups in the training and exposure visits organized. It has been observed that the participation of women has increased.

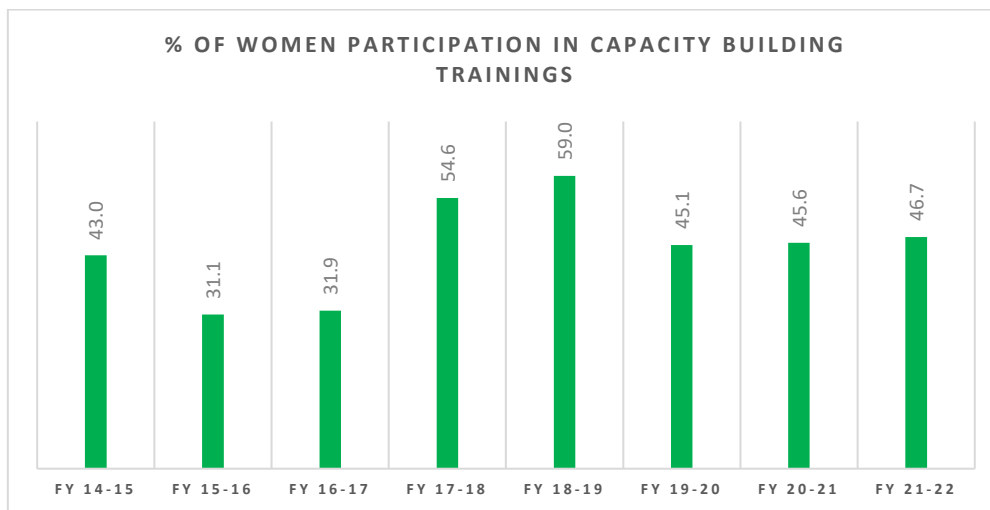


Figure 01: Percentage of women participation in capacity building

Participation of women in trainings/workshops and exposure visits has increased from 43 percent in 2014-15 to 46 percent in 2021-22. There has been a decrease in participation since 2018-19 from 59 percent in 2018-19 because of restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Women Empowerment Score

Women’s opinions were captured to calculate the women empowerment score. The score was calculated for all the households covered under treatment and control separately both during baseline and endline study based on various parameters grouped under multiple dimensions. A total of 24 parameters were considered under the dimensions of ‘Mobility’, ‘Women’s role in agriculture’, ‘Decision making’, ‘Access to services’ and ‘Safety’ as shown in the Figure 2 below.

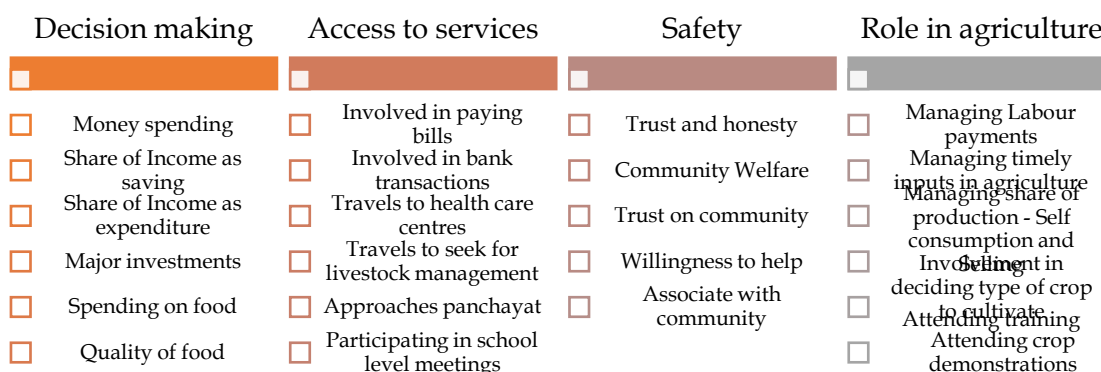


Figure 2: Parameters of Women Empowerment

Perceptions of women are reflected in the Women Empowerment Score. The graph below shows that women in project areas feel more empowered post project interventions and over 16 percent change is seen in the highest (excellent) quadrant. Women’s ease of mobility in visiting markets and other areas outside the village is significantly better than control area and also women’s role in making household decisions has increased.

During qualitative consultations, for the case study it emerged that the most prominent strength for women through the project livelihood interventions was the ‘ability to have savings in cash or in account’. Women were more vocal about feeling independent as a result of income earned through various activities. They were encouraged to participate in various trainings and meeting as a result of which men often consulted them for crucial decisions in family as well.

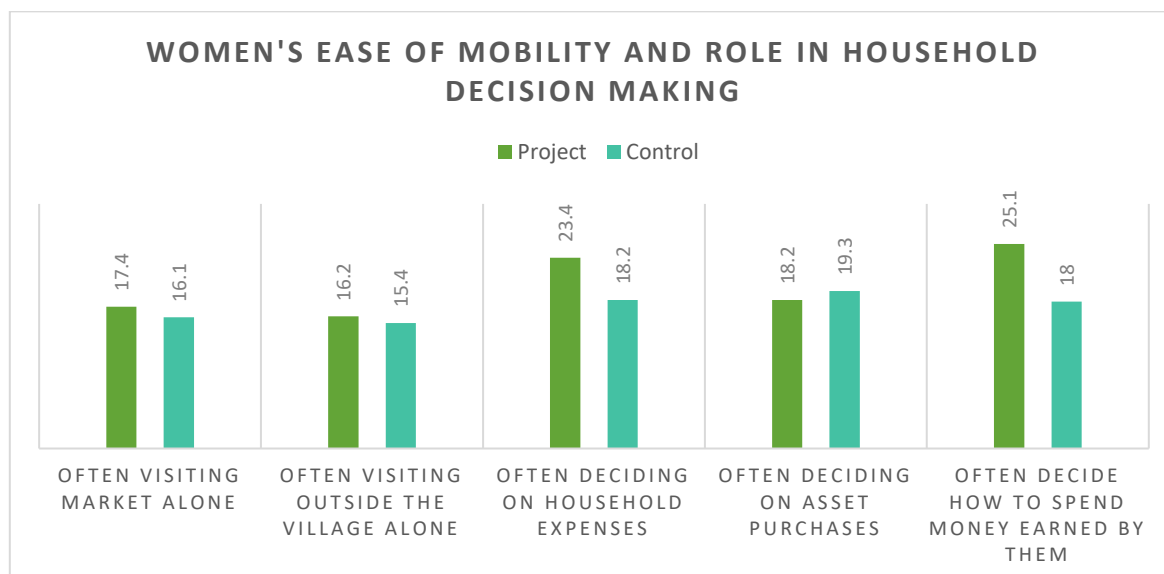


Figure 3: *Women's Ease of mobility and role in household decision-making*

Women's role in agriculture and economic decisions at home is also more often than that in the control areas and the change can be attributed to project activities which encourage participation of women in through different interventions.

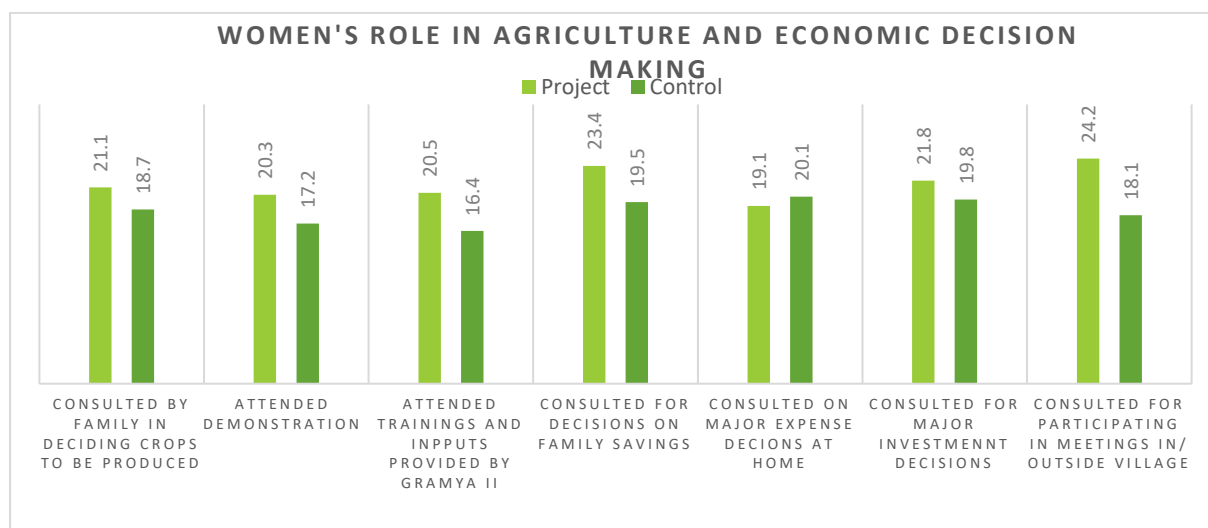


Figure 4: *Women's Role in agriculture and economic decision-making*

Women's perception on ease in accessing the different services as well as safety while participating in the different community forums is good to fairly good showing that the women regard the interventions undertaken in the project important in changing the gender dynamics. Women's participation in demonstrations and trainings is 18 percent higher compared to that of control.

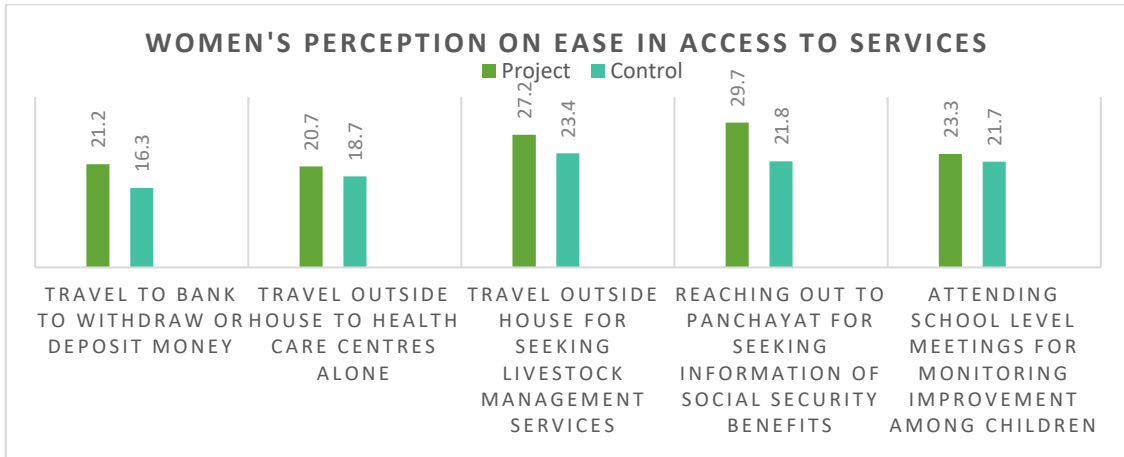


Figure 5: Women's Perception on ease in access to services

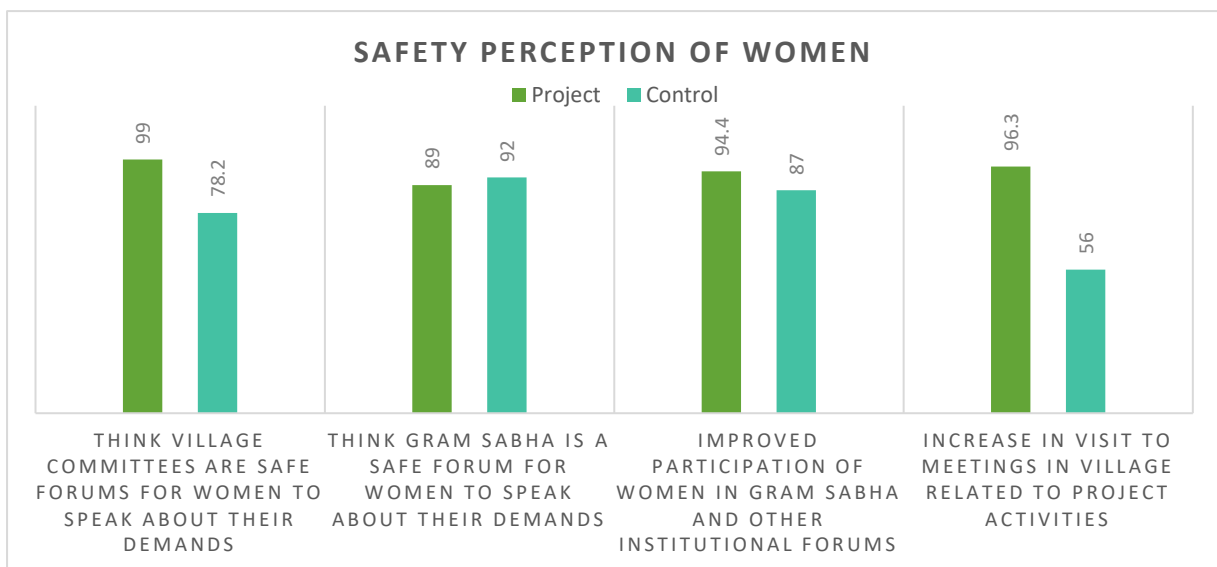


Figure 6: Safety Perception of women

The difference-in-difference of scores of each quartile indicates a positive progression in each of the groups. The above charts in each category indicates how exposure to various trainings, participation in demonstrations, participation in Women Aam Sabha, taking up independent IGA activities have helped in improving mobility of women and providing financial independence.

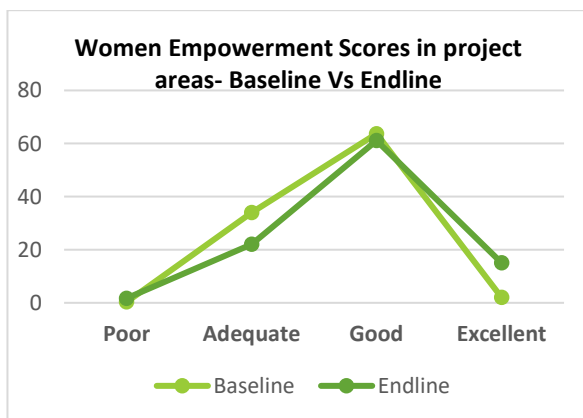


Figure 7: Women Empowerment Scores in project areas- Baseline Vs Endline

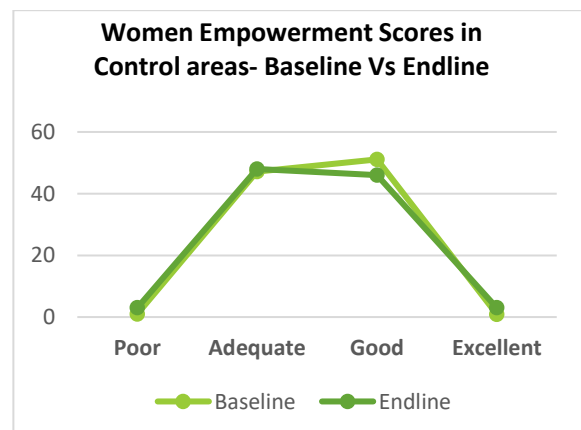


Figure 8: Women Empowerment Scores in control areas- Baseline Vs Endline

Emerging women leadership in the region

The project created forums have facilitated both men and women to come forward and undertake activities which was earlier not done by them such as managing books of accounts of Growth Centres, handling business activities, maintaining profit and loss details of businesses etc. This has pushed them to become more mobile and confident in representing themselves in many forums. Though women seats have been reserved in the PRIs, but the leaders emerging post project interventions are leaders and have been responsible in decision making, etc. The regular interaction of the motivators and facilitators with the community for understanding the need of community and implementing interventions accordingly have resulted not only in building trust but has enhanced confidence and leadership skills. The various capacity building programs and awareness sessions have provided information to the project beneficiaries regarding various sources of development and opportunities to take responsibilities and ownership for various activities and then relating it to the representation in PRIs

The platform provided by the project helped instil a great deal of confidence in the rural women. Their experiences in WAS, gram sabha, FIGs and other institutions where they were taking the lead and voicing out their needs helped them in going a step further and participating in the PRI institution elections and other administrative processes. There was high number of women participation in elections and their interest in leadership roles from all communities including the ST and SC. This made the reserved seats for women in elections de facto which were earlier filled with proxy candidates (where women are only token office bearers and a male relative is the actual decision maker) or left unfilled.

About 311 men & women members who were part different institutions across the 9 divisions have been elected in various positions in the PRI institution demonstrating remarkable leadership abilities which is certainly and unintended impact of the project.

Table 05: Emerging women leadership in the region

Representation of Project Beneficiaries in Panchayati Raj Institutions)		Women in elected positions			Total
Male	Female	Gram Pradhan	Ward member	BDC & Jila panchayat members	
115	196	34	155	7	196

Table 06: WAS proposals raised by Women and completed

Division	Total Issues Raised in	Activities	Proposals Completed through		
	WAS	Accepted	GPWDP	Convergence	Other Sources
Dehradun	727	647	452	16	179
Pauri	937	937	598	147	192
PMU (MWS)	220	209	155	0	54
Tehri	1517	1455	1340	34	81
Almora	6996	4503	3120	373	1010
Bageshwar	2126	1076	721	188	167
Pithoragarh	2032	1890	1201	331	358
Rudraprayag	780	640	580	20	40
Total	15911	11933	8741	1109	2083

Cumulatively, till date the Women Aam Sabhas have placed 15,911 proposals to be implemented from GP Fund out of which 55 percent of proposals (8741) are directly taken up

under GPWDP and 3192 were addressed through convergence and other sources such as funds from public representatives.

Here below are the list of proposal that has been included in the ongoing project as proposed by the women in different meetings before the committees.

NRM proposals included –	Other proposals raised by women included -
Fodder development	IGA for Vulnerable households
Water resource rejuvenation	Training and exposure visits
Plantation work	Mushroom cultivation
Orchard Development	Exposure visits for IGA activities
Pipelines	Flour/ spice mills,
Construction of Irrigation Channels	Goatery, Poultry, dairy units
Irrigation tank	Improved variety of seeds
Roof water harvesting tank s	Agricultural tools
Biogas plants	Construction of animal shelters, mangers, compost pits and animal chari, etc.
Construction of Check Dams	Solar lights
Solar water lifting pumps	Weaving, Sowing and Computer Training
Terrace repair	Fencing of agricultural land to protect crops
Crate wire and Vegetative check dams	Repair of School Building
Protection walls	Construction of Link roads, connecting paths
Bio composting pits	
Poly houses	
Fencing of Forest Land	

Case Study: Gram Panchayat Digoti (Consultation during Women Aam Sabha Meetings)

The community knows about the Project as a Watershed project. They know about Budget envelop also. Though the participation of women is lesser as compared to men, yet they have participated at the time of GPWDP planning.

“When we realized that this (GPWDP Planning Process) is not a regular panchayat meeting individual as well as Group’s came forward to give proposals which was needed and would help us fetch an additional income. We felt very happy that all our requests were included and supported through the Panchayat Budget”-Vimla Devi (VGA Member)

Almost 100 of the proposal given by the community were approved. The community knew about the different activities carried out in the village. Less knowledge about the expenditure, although it has been clearly displayed on the walls of the Panchayat. There are no of institutions at village level, repeating the same members which would mean every individual has been connected through one or the other group formed under the project. The Group meetings are organized on monthly basis on a fixed date, but sometimes changed for local reasons. Women participation in pieces of training and meetings is more as compared to man. The community has received individual as well as group support from the project like Polyhouse, cow shed, Goat, cow etc. Participation in agriculture interventions such as grading and marketing of crop. The project activities have given an exposure to the community, particularly the women. The group members are contributing in group account as they have gathered trust in the collective activity. Time to time training has been provided to groups. The women showed keen interest in participating in exposure visits. Apart from project-led interventions, social issues, such as, girls’ education, employment, sanitation, widow / old age / handicapped pension, rural road connectivity, etc. were raised and were resolved through

convergence with different social welfare schemes, skill development programmes of Rural and Social Welfare Departments.

Conclusion

The greatest impact of capacity building and social mobilizations tools used by Gramya II in the project region is on building gender-responsive strategies and encouraging women's leadership and their representation in governance. The WAS formation has enabled women to voice their opinions and given them a platform to present their issues. Community-women reported that the concerns of women were given priority after the WAS formation. There has been a change in terms of understanding women's issues and problems at the panchayat level. The issues and problems were discussed in detail and efforts were made to address them. The positive change in the community due to WAS and its work has also encouraged women to take up leadership positions and there is a supportive environment, the family members and the community at large. The suggestions of WAS are getting due importance, there have been open discussions on the suggestions of WAS and are incorporated in the plans. Women in the community are much aware of the schemes because of mobility and active participation in governance forums their knowledge about the schemes has increased many folds. The measures have helped in improving the mobility of women and providing financial independence in the villages covered under the Gramaya-II project in compare to other villages.

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