Women's Empowerment at the Local Level (WELL) - a study undertaken in the state of Uttarakhand

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Since the study was undertaken in a period of six weeks, it is possible there are gaps and inadequacies in the report. For these lapses, if any, I would like to take the sole responsibility.

September 22, 2008.   **Anita Dighe**

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1. Background

The last decade has seen a growing importance of the term `empowerment.' While the term has been used for the poor and the deprived groups, it has now been used even more extensively with regard to women's programs. As a matter of fact, most state governments now consider it desirable to offer women's empowerment programs in order to alleviate poverty and to bring about women's development. Considering the widespread use of the term, it was decided to understand what the term connotes for such government programs and to understand how the term has got translated into programs that are run by the government as well as by non-government organizations (NGOs). What kinds of programs are these? Are training programs organized for women? What is the nature of such programs? Do they use technology for ensuring reach of such programs? What would be the appropriate technology that could be used to ensure that such programs reach out to large numbers of women? How do they measure success? In what ways have these programs affected the lives of women? It was thought necessary to ask such questions to understand whether technology based learning could play a role in the empowerment of women, particularly of poor rural women.

It was keeping these questions in mind that the Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, commissioned Himgiri Nabh Vishwavidyalaya, Dehradun, to undertake an environmental scan in the first phase, to ascertain what is currently happening for empowering women (including poor and marginalized women) in the state of Uttarakhand. It is envisaged that based on the highlights of phase one, phase two will be undertaken that will widen the scope of the study more broadly in India and to identify key elements that will be included to build up a model that could then be scaled up and out through technology mediated learning and shared for use by all in South Asia. Specifically, it is envisaged that the model will enable women at the local level to access learning opportunities through partnerships that will allow them to identify their needs and participate effectively in activities that will improve their lives and their children's lives.

The women's empowerment at local level (WELL) model will include the following broad concepts:
  ➢ How to form a women's group;
  ➢ How to sustain a group;
  ➢ How to set priorities for action;
  ➢ How to elicit information with respect to various areas such as facilitating women's involvement in local Panchayat matters, agriculture, school management (for primary or secondary school), income generation, health.

It is envisaged that phase three will focus on receiving inputs and validation from activists and professionals in this area in India as well as

representatives from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka first through email discussions and followed by a Round Table event.

2 <u>Understanding the Context of Uttarakhand</u>

The state of Uttarakhand was carved out of Uttar Pradesh in 2000 as the 27th state of the Indian Union. It is bounded by Tibet to the north, Nepal to the east, the state of Himachal Pradesh to the west and the plains of Uttar Pradesh to the south. Uttarakhand consists of 13 districts and is geographically diverse- with fertile plans in the south to the trans Himalayan ranges that mark its northern border. The total population of the state is about 8.5 million, with women accounting for about 49 % of the total population. The state contributes 0.82 % of the total population of the country and is the 11th most sparsely populated state in India. More than 70% of the total population lives in villages. The villages are small and the population is scattered over the hill slopes.

Compared to the larger state of Uttar Pradesh out of which it was carved, Uttarakhand shows it is better off in terms of certain gender disaggregated variables (Population Foundation of India, 2002). Thus
  - ➤ female literacy rates in Uttarakhand have increased from 41.6% in 1991 to 60.3% in 2001
  - ➤ crude birth rates, crude death rates and infant mortality rates have shown better values than Uttar Pradesh
  - ➤ about 15% of the women in Uttarakhand are getting married before the age of 18 years against 49% in U.P.

- around 45% of the eligible couples with wife in the age group of 15-44 currently use family planning methods compared to 28% in U.P.
- about 72% of the children between the ages of 1-3 years receive basic immunization against preventable diseases compared to 43% in U.P.
- IMR (infant mortality rate) per 1000 live births is 52 as compared to 84 for U.P. and 70 for India.

In general, Uttarakhand has shown better indicators of health with reduced infant and maternal mortality rates, lower birth rates, and improvements in the use of family planning methods and higher life expectancy (USNPSS, 2005).

Economically, poverty and daily grind of eking out a living from the hills have become a central fact of life for most people. A cluster of houses surrounded by terraced fields makes up most villages. Both deforestation and introduction of money-based economy into the hills have dramatically dislocated Uttarakhand village communities. The large scale out-migration of men in search of employment in the plains or in the army has led to a demographic imbalance in the region. While men predominate in urban areas, the interior rural districts are amongst the few in all of India that contain significant female majorities (Rawat, 2004). When men migrate to cities, apart from the domestic chores of cooking, fetching fuel, fodder and water, looking after children, the tasks of caring for livestock and agricultural work also fall on women's shoulders.

Since agricultural fields are located on terraces in the hilly region and are generally very small, modern agricultural implements cannot be used. As a

result, agricultural work becomes highly time-consuming, thus increasing women's workload tremendously. Men prefer to do less time-consuming work which requires less labor, and generates more and quick money. They do not show much interest in routine agricultural work because it requires hard labor and is less productive. Therefore, instead of sharing the work with women, they prefer to migrate to urban areas (Nautiyal, 2003). The agricultural work in Uttarakhand comprises diverse activities including making compost for fields, providing water for cultivation, beside plowing the fields, sowing, harvesting, winnowing, picking and cleaning vegetables. Traditionally, all agricultural work, except plowing was done by women. However, increasingly women are taking up plowing also, especially in female-headed households, single women homes and among nuclear families (USNPSS, 2005).

Apart from converting hill economy into money order economy, migration by the male population has also given rise to various social and psychological problems among the hill women. Due to the prevailing social customs and traditions, women are often mistreated by relatives, which at times gets so serious that it has led to cases of women committing suicide.

The retreat of India's forest cover has been particularly acute in the Himalayan region. As a result, hill women have borne the brunt of the modern assault on their natural resources and livelihoods. The longer time that they now take to collect water, fuel wood and fodder has caused enormous hardships in their already difficult lives.

If one examines the social attitudes towards women in general, one notices that their basic needs and aspirations are also ignored (Nautiyal, 2003). Because of their poor social status, women are excluded from decision-making processes. As a result, development has failed to bring about significant changes in the quality of life of women in most of the remote areas of this hilly region. Actually, there is very little understanding about the basic needs of hill women and there is no appropriate strategy to give them an equitable share in the fruits of development. According to Nautiyal (2003), despite large number of schemes for women's welfare, education, economic development, hill women are not only deprived of facilities necessary for a good quality of life, but they often remain uninvolved in the development process as well.

Interestingly, despite the problems of disparities, gender bias and low status, the women of Uttarakhand have played a very constructive role in resolving some of the social problems of the region. Gandhian activists began organizing women's self-help groups or Mahila Mangal Dals (MMDs) against alcoholism as the chief social evil during the 1960s. Alcohol consumption that was breaking families and ruining the lives of young adults became a major issue for many rural women who were struggling to support their families despite the menace. Women participated spontaneously in these campaigns that were eventually successful in banning alcohol from five districts of the erstwhile Uttar Pradesh by 1971. Rural women's participation in these campaigns laid the foundation for the environmental struggles of the seventies. The combined hardship and adversity of hill life prepared the women to respond radically to the forces that were destroying their land and wrecking their livelihoods. As a distinctly non-violent

grassroots movement, women organized against the commercial logging operations that were threatening to affect their livelihood, by literally hugging the trees. Now known famously as the Chipko Movement, poor rural women provided leadership and protested against the government's forest policy.

The 1990s saw yet another resurgence. The lack of development in Uttarakhand led to the demand for a separate state which was galvanized by a resurgent socio-political identity and resentment over insensitivity shown to the region (Rawat, 2004). Once again, women were at the forefront of the movement which was a largely non-violent struggle for political empowerment and autonomy. By November 2000, after years of marches, rallies and strikes, the state of Uttaranchal (now re-named as Uttarakhand) was formed out of Uttar Pradesh.

The new state faces many formidable challenges. In addition to the environmental crisis, there is a dearth of health facilities and educational institutions. The lack of employment opportunities is still leading to an out migration of men to the plains. According to Rawat (2004), the state also has come of age at a time when the Government of India is in active retreat from its development responsibilities. Furthermore, the growing role of the private sector represents a new factor whose potential impact remains largely unknown.

What is apparent from the above profile is that the state of Uttarakhand provides a contrasting picture with regard to the socio-economic and political status of women in the state. While women, particularly rural

women, have shown that like women from other parts of India, they too have suffered due to their social and economic neglect and deprivation, what has set the women of Uttarakhand apart is the resistance they have offered and their history of engaging in struggles against these forces. What is also unique about the state are the favorable indicators relating to women's educational and health status. It is this context that has to be kept in mind while critically examining the empowerment programs for women in Uttarakhand. However, before doing so, it would be useful to understand the debate that has taken place with regard to the concept of women's empowerment.

3 Women's Empowerment- Understanding the theoretical debate

The concept of women's empowerment emerged from debates generated by the women's movement during the 1980s when feminists, particularly from Third World countries, evinced dissatisfaction with the prevailing development discourse that was largely apolitical and economistic in its orientation. While Paulo Freire (1973) did not use the term, his emphasis on `conscientization' provided an important backdrop for those social activists who were working with the poor and the marginalized groups. The mid 1980s therefore saw the emergence and spread of `women's empowerment' as a more political and transformatory concept that challenged not only patriarchy but also the mediating structures of class, race, ethnicity and in the case of India, caste and religion. Feminists, particularly those from Latin American and South Asian countries, evolved their own approach, emphasizing the importance of consciousness raising, leading to organizing and building a movement for women's equality. According to this thinking,

empowerment was a socio-political process that required shifts in political, social, and economic power between and across both individuals and social groups (Batliwala, 2007).

By the beginning of 1990s, the term `empowerment' had entered the development discourse and was widely used with reference to women and gender equality. Development agencies (multilateral and bilateral) started using the term to replace the earlier terminology of `people's participation' and `women's development.' The World Conference at Beijing (1995) played a critical role in introducing the term to national governments for whom it soon became an attractive catch phrase.

Definition of Empowerment:

It might be useful at this stage to understand how feminists have defined the term `empowerment.' While the common thread for most definitions has been on grassroots participatory methods and of their empowerment potential for the poorest of the poor (especially women), there is no gainsaying the fact that there have been multiple definitions of empowerment. Kabeer (2000) defines empowerment as `the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.' For her, empowerment is inescapably bound with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. In other words, empowerment entails a process of change and women themselves must become agents of that change if empowerment has to take place. According to her, the ability to exercise choice incorporates

three interrelated dimensions: resources (pre-conditions), agency (process), and achievements (outcomes).

The World Bank's *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook* defines empowerment in its broadest sense as the `expansion of freedom of choice and action.' Although this applies to women as well as to other disadvantaged or socially marginally groups, it is necessary to understand that women's empowerment includes some additional elements. Thus, women are not just one group among various disempowered subsets of society (the poor, ethnic minorities, and so on); they are a cross-cutting category of individuals that overlaps with all these other groups. Secondly, household and interfamilial relationships form the mainstay of women's disempowerment in a way that is not true for other disadvantaged groups. This means that efforts at empowering women must take note of the household level implications for broader policy action. Thirdly, it can be argued that while empowerment in general requires institutional transformation, women's empowerment requires systemic transformation not just of any institutions, but specifically of those supporting patriarchal structures (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005).

According to Stromquist (2002) empowerment consists of four dimensions, each equally important but none sufficient by itself to enable women to act on their own behalf. These are the cognitive (critical understanding of one's reality), the psychological (feeling of self-esteem), the political (awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize) and the economic (capacity to generate independent income). The women-led NGOs have fostered the crucial political dimension of empowerment by organizing

and mobilizing women. In the process of organizing, women identify common experiences and conditions and consequently develop shared identities. But developing a sense of collective identity also leads women to mobilize. `Organization at the local level is essential to accomplish immediate gains linked to the household and the community, but women have learned that they must be organized beyond the local to increase their capacity to interact with the state' (Stromquist, 2002).

Batliwala's conceptualization of empowerment draws on the experiences in the subcontinent, and especially in India, of experiments that attempted to enact the process of empowerment on the ground with various marginalized communities, but most often focused on poor rural and urban women. She defines empowerment as a process of transforming the relations of power between individuals and social groups, shifting social power in three critical ways:

> ➢ By challenging the ideologies that justify social inequality (such as gender or caste),
> ➢ By changing prevailing patterns of access to and control over economic, natural and intellectual resources,
> ➢ By transforming the institutions and structures that reinforce and sustain existing power structures (such as the family, state, market, education and media).

This understanding of empowerment influenced the policy and implementation strategies of the broad-based, multi-faceted and radical consciousness-raising approaches of the program called Mahila Samakhya

(Education for Women's Equality) that was initiated in India in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Mason (2005) refers to the relational nature of empowerment. According to her, empowerment is about the extent to which some categories of people are able to control their own destinies, even when the people with whom they interact oppose their interests. Thus, according to her, people are not empowered or disempowered in a vacuum. Rather, they are empowered or disempowered relative to other people of groups whose lives intersect with theirs and whose interests differ from theirs, at least in part.

Commenting on the need to understand the term in an increasingly globalized world, Parpart, Rai and Staudt (2002) aver that most approaches to the term have focused on ways to improve its effectiveness at the local level and have underplayed the impact of global and national forces on prospects for poor people's (especially women's) empowerment. They therefore propose a new approach to women's empowerment that focuses on four issues. First, since even the most marginalized, impoverished communities are affected by global and national forces, empowerment must be analyzed in global and national as well as local terms. Second, understanding and facilitating women's empowerment requires a more nuanced analysis of power. Drawing on Foucault's writings, they argue that empowerment involves the exercise rather than possession of power. According to them, empowerment must be understood as including both individual consciousness (power within) as well as the ability to work collectively which can lead to politicized power with others, which provides the power to bring about change. Third, since empowerment takes place

within institutional contexts, it is important to pay attention to the broad political and economic structures and cultural assumptions. Finally, empowerment is both a process and an outcome. While, as a process, it is difficult to measure empowerment since it is fluid and often unpredictable, it can also be seen as an outcome that can be measured against expected goals.

What is evident from the above discussion is that the literature reflects considerable diversity in the emphases, agendas, and terminology used to discuss women's empowerment. While there is some agreement that empowerment is about power, the variation in definitions makes it difficult to pin down any one definition that can be considered definitive. However, what is important to note is the transformative potential of the term empowerment.

The literature on measurement of empowerment also reflects variety of views. There are apparently those that subscribe to the processual model of social change (Batliwala, 1993, 1994). Such an understanding of social change tends to treat empowerment as open-ended. It is premised on the unpredictability of human agency and on the diversity of circumstances under which such agency is exercised. On the other hand, there are those who realized that there was need to translate feminist insights into the discourse of policy, a process that led to quantification and measurement, but also a process in which some of the original political edge of feminism was lost (Kabeer, 2000). According to her, quantifying empowerment put the concept on more solid and objectively verifiable grounds. There has consequently been a proliferation of studies attempting to measure empowerment, some seeking to demonstrate the impact of specific

interventions on women's empowerment, and others to demonstrate the implications of women's empowerment for desired policy objectives. While it would be difficult to capture all the salient features of these studies, it might be useful at this stage to highlight some understanding that has emerged from these studies. Thus, it is recognized that empowerment is a multi-dimensional term. As a result, several efforts have been made to develop comprehensive frameworks to delineate the various dimensions along which women can be empowered. Also, the studies have shown that empowerment cannot be understood without understanding the socio-cultural as well the political and economic context in which development takes place. Then there are studies that show that women's empowerment reflects community norms, rather than women's individual traits. Indeed, as with the definition of the term `empowerment' so also in its measurement, there is variation in methodology as well as in the indicators of empowerment,

In recent years, there has literally been a high-jacking of the term so that it has become a popular, largely unquestioned `good' aspired to by such diverse and contradictory institutions such as the World Bank, Oxfam and a large number of more radical non-government organizations (NGOs). While initially it was commonly associated with alternative approaches to development and in particular, with the women's movement, more recently, empowerment has been adopted by diverse agencies and institutions. Thus, business and personnel managers have generally thought of empowerment as a means of increasing profitability within established structures. Mainstream development agencies adopted the term in the 1990s when they too began to use the language of empowerment, participation and people's development,

more to improve productivity within the status quo than to foster social transformation. Batliwala (2007) therefore bemoans the fact the empowerment has now not only become a buzz word but a magic bullet for poverty alleviation and economic development, rather than a multifaceted process of social transformation, especially in the arena of gender equality.

Given the widespread use of the term by diverse agencies and institutions and their understanding on what it connotes, it might be useful to find out why empowerment is acceptable to such different and often conflicting development approaches and institutions.

The present study is an attempt to understand how the term empowerment has been understood by the government as well as the NGOs of Uttarakhand and how it has been operationalized as programs in the state.

4 <u>Methodology</u>

The present study constitutes phase one and is an environmental scan that has been undertaken in a period of six weeks. In order to get an overview of the nature of programs and activities that are undertaken as women's empowerment programs, it was decided to

1. undertake a literature scan through the net
2. collect secondary data, wherever possible, of published and unpublished reports/research studies on Uttarakhand brought out by the state, NGOs as well as by research institutions or whatever documentation was available at the state level

3. undertake field data collection in 6 districts of Uttarakhand by visiting NGOs/government departments and administering an interview schedule (see Appendix A) to understand the nature of programs, activities undertaken, of challenges faced, and of the changes that are now taking place in women's lives due to the program interventions.

An attempt is made below to collate the information that has been collected from these various sources. Since the focus of the environmental scan was to collect qualitative data, the analysis attempts to provide broad contours of the nature of women's empowerment programs, their content, the kinds of training programs that are organized, as well as the impact of such programs on women's lives.

5. Women's Empowerment Programmes at the State level – policy, schemes and programme implementation[1]

The state of Uttarakhand was formed in November 2000. At the state level, it is the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Development that has the overall responsibility for formulating and implementing schemes relating to Women's Empowerment. As the nodal agency, the responsibility for preparing the Women's Policy was given by the Government of Uttarakhand to the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Development. The Department, in turn, mandated that the draft be prepared by the State Commission for Women that was set up in 2003. The Commission prepared the draft policy in 2006 which was also circulated

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[1] This section is based on the text compiled and written in Hindi by Ms. Geeta Gairola, State Director, Mahila Samakhya, Uttarakhand.

among the various women's groups. However, the draft policy has still not been passed by the State Government. This has happened due to various reasons:

> the mandate for preparing a draft policy was given by the then Congress government. The Commission was then headed by a President who was loyal to the party in power

> due to the change of government after the elections, there was a change in the office bearers, including the President and other members. As a result, the term of the Commission came to an end and a new Commission had to be constituted;

> presently, only the President and the Vice President have been appointed. So far, the other members of the Commission have not been appointed;

> The Commission is unable to function effectively since it is not fully constituted;

> Due to the change of government, the draft policy has not been able to get the attention it deserves. There is a perceptible lack of interest in formulating such a policy for women.

Presently the Government of Uttarakhand is running various schemes/ programmes through the different departments of the Government to bring about women's development and their empowerment.

For lack of an overarching policy that would have provided a common understanding and a unified vision, each department has defined and operationalized empowerment through its own prism and from its own perspective and understanding. In the case of some departments, the stated

goal is not to bring about women's empowerment, but rather, the emphasis is on bringing about their overall efficiency and economic development. Thus, for example

- ➢ the Social Welfare Board aims to bring about women's development and empowerment through partnerships with NGOs;
- ➢ Department of Rural Development focuses on economic self-reliance as an indicator of women's development;
- ➢ The Agriculture Department endeavors to make women better agricultural workers by increasing their understanding about the use of technology in agriculture;
- ➢ The Horticulture Department aims to provide training to women for vegetable and fruit production and preservation and link them to the market so that they can become economically self-reliant;
- ➢ The Dairy Department, in the name of Women's Dairy, has started a new scheme whereby women are given training in animal care, a traditional occupation followed by them, and are encouraged to set up their own dairy and thereby become economically self-reliant;
- ➢ The Social Welfare Department offers various scholarships and pension schemes and thereby provides economic support to certain vulnerable groups to bring about their upliftment;
- ➢ The Education Department, in order to bring about gender equality, has initiated special programmes for girls whereby they can be mainstreamed with the existing programmes;
- ➢ The Adult Education programme of the Education Department considers women's literacy as the first step towards their empowerment and is pursuing the Continuing Education programme

through the self-help groups (SHGs) in order to bring about their economic self-reliance;

➢ The Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Development is running various schemes and programmes for the empowerment of women by setting up self-help groups (SHGs) with the help of NGOs.

What is apparent from above, is that while the aims and objectives of the different departments of the state government is to cover the various facets and dimensions of women's empowerment, they do not present a holistic picture but rather provide a truncated approach, more like the proverbial story of the blind men trying to describe the different parts of the elephant's body.

An attempt will be made below to provide a description of the schemes/programmes for women's development and empowerment. Two strands seem to run through these programmes. Thus, a number of the programmes are welfare-oriented. The welfare-oriented schemes are a continuation of the earlier schemes that viewed women mainly as recipients of welfare. They are based on the assumption that certain vulnerable sections of the society are so handicapped that they need special assistance to lift them out of the morass of poverty and deprivation. Welfare schemes are therefore perceived as necessary for such sections. Then there are the empowerment and gender equity schemes. Some of the new schemes under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan have been designed to reduce the prevailing gender gap in education. There are also those schemes that are called women's empowerment programmes and whose stated goal is awareness-

raising, and forming women's self-help groups (SHGs) to bring about their economic empowerment.

While an examination of the various development programmes that are run by state departments showed that there are a variety of schemes that are run for both men and women, it was found that the following schemes/programmes of the different government departments focus specifically on women. An attempt is therefore made to provide a brief description of these schemes/programmes.

I Welfare Schemes/Programmes for Women/Girls

Overall, some of the schemes run by the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Development, those of the State Social Welfare Board, and Department of Health would fall in this category

1.1 Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Development

(a) The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme: This is a flagship programme of the department. While providing `anganwadi' (crèche) services and health and nutritional supplements to infants, ICDS also provides pre- and post-natal care for pregnant and lactating mothers. The anganwadi workers have to dispense iron tablets and iodine-fortified salt to pregnant and lactating mothers. The pregnant and lactating mothers also have to receive dry rations from the anganwadi workers.

(b) *Kishori Balika Yojana* (scheme for the adolescent girls): As part of the ICDS programme, a special scheme for the adolescent girls was initiated from 2001 onwards, with assistance from the Government of India as well as from the World Bank. The scheme is intended for adolescent girls in the 11-18 age group who belong to the BPL (below poverty line) households. The scheme intends to provide training to these girls in order to bring about their overall development. The areas in which training would be provided would include information about how to take care of their bodies, the meaning of a balanced diet, importance of family welfare, beside providing them inter-personal skills and making them self-confident and training them in vocational skills so that they can become independent. During 2005-2006, besides starting the scheme in 40 blocks, 59 additional blocks received sanction from the Government of India. The ICDS programme is run by the Department itself.

The other programmes of the Department include the following:

  © *Old Age Pension Scheme*: This scheme is applicable to both men and women and is meant for both urban as well as rural areas and provides Rs 400 per month to those who are above 60 years of age.

   (d) *Pension scheme for widows/homeless/aged/disabled*: The scheme is applicable only in rural areas and is implemented by the District Social Welfare Officer on the basis of the recommendation received from the Pradhan of the Gram Panchayat as well as the Minister, Panchayats, and forwarded through the Block office..

(e) Financial assistance to destitute widows: Destitute widows are entitled to receive a sum of Rs. 400 per month. This is a scheme for rural areas and is to be implemented by the Gram Panchayats,

(f) Financial assistance for re-marriage of widows: A sum of Rs. 11,000 is provided for the re-marriage of a widow below the age of 35 years.

(g) Grant to female student who has passed intermediate from BPL (below poverty line) family to enable her to pursue her studies: A one time grant of Rs. 25,000 is given to a female student to enable her to complete her graduation. This scheme was started in 2006-2007.

1.2 <u>Social Welfare Board</u>

The State Social Welfare Board was set up in 2003. The Board receives funding from the Central Government to run its schemes and has six representatives from the Central Social Welfare Board and six from the State Social Welfare Board. The state government has the responsibility to provide maintenance for the day-to-day functioning of the Board. All the schemes of the Board are implemented through the NGOs. These schemes include:

(a) *Hostels for working women*

(b) Women's Helpline

© *Family Counseling Centres*

(d) Campaign against female foeticide

(e) Vocational training programs

(f) Creches

(g) Condensed courses for women

(h) *Short-stay homes for women*

The Social Welfare Board has a Secretary who is a government official. The President is a nominee of the political party in power at the state level and has a three year term but her term comes to an end with the change of government.

1.3 Department of Health

In order to reduce the maternal and infant mortality rates, there is a scheme for the safe delivery of pregnant mothers as well as care of their infants. The scheme is applicable to women who belong to the BPL (below poverty line) households and who are taken to the government health centre or hospital for their delivery. A pregnant woman can be accompanied by an ASHA (health) worker or by the local `dai' (midwife) and an allowance is paid to this person. In case a pregnant woman delivers her baby in a hospital in the rural area, she is paid an amount of Rs. 1400/ and Rs. 1000 if she is taken to a hospital in the urban area. The pregnant woman is also provided the tetanus injection and the newly born infant is provided vaccinations against six dangerous diseases at periodic intervals.

2. Empowerment and Gender Equity Schemes

2.1 Department of Education

Under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All), several schemes have been initiated to reduce the gender gap in the education of children. These have been set up by the Department of Education. These are:

(a) *Early Child Care Education Centres*: These Centres are set up to ensure better enrolment and retention of girls in the primary schools. Since the girls child has the responsibility to look after the young siblings and is therefore deprived of school education, an ECCE centre attached to the school, would ensure that girls would come to school. It is intended that if school-going girls have access to such centres, they would get enrolled in schools, and would be retained in schools. The scheme also envisages provision of good quality education to such girls. At the ECCE centres, the physical and psychological growth and development of all children in the 3-6 age group, is provided for. The education department at the district level has the responsibility for the Education for All programme (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) and Department of Social Welfare (through the Integrated Child Development Services Programme) have the responsibility for running the ECCE Centres.

(b) *National Programme on Education for Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL)*: Since education is a concurrent subject, this national programme is also being implemented at the state level in some select districts and blocks since 2003. It is intended to increase the enrolment rates of girls belonging to SC/ST communities at the elementary stage. The scheme intends to focus attention on the educationally deprived sections and to encourage the enrolment, retention and quality education of the girls belonging to the SC/ST communities. It offers materials incentives such as stationery and introduces additional

incentives like awards, remedial teaching and bridge courses as well as development of a model upper primary school in each cluster

© *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV):* The scheme draws its legitimacy from the thrust in national policy documents as well as international discourse that refers to bridging the `gender gap.' Following this thrust, the scheme is being implemented in educationally backward blocks with a wider gender gap. The scheme is intended for girls belonging to the scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs), other backward classes (OBCs), religious minorities and below poverty line (BPL) households. Funded by the Government of India, under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All), the basic idea behind the scheme is to give a second chance for mainstreaming rural girls belonging to deprived social backgrounds who could not study up to or beyond class V. The second opportunity consists of the facility to stay in a hostel while studying for the upper primary stage of elementary education namely classes VI to VIII. They are set up in areas where there are a minimum of 50 school going girls who are school drop-outs. As all the girls are primary school drop-outs, they are above 10 years of age and are mostly in their teens. Presently, there are 13 KGBV hostel-cum-schools running in Uttarakhand.

(d) *Innovative scheme for the adolescent girls:* In order to create and sustain the interest of girls in education, they are trained to produce items that can be used in their daily lives. They are also offered

components of empowerment strategies such as personal development, confidence building abilities, and life-skills oriented education.

2.2 Women's Empowerment Schemes

Presently, there are two main types of schemes that are operational in the state of Uttarakhand. Mahila Samakhya is a major project of the Government of India, with funding support that is now provided by the Department of International Development (DFID), U.K.. The second type consists of state-funded schemes.

2.2.1 <u>Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women's Equality)</u>

The first major scheme that was launched by the Central government was the Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women's Equality) that owed its genesis to the National Policy on Education (1986) that recognized the empowering potential of education and stated `education will be used as in agent of basic change in the status of women…. The National Education system will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women.' Mahila Samakhya as a major programme for bringing about women's development as well as empowerment, was launched by the Education Department of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, in 1989 on a pilot basis in 6 states of India, with funding from the Netherlands Government. Mahila Samakhya was launched in Uttarakhand in 2002 and is presently operational in 2163 villages in 21 blocks of six districts of the state, namely, Pauri, Tehri, Uttarkashi, Nainital, Udhamsinghnagar, and Champawat.

The basic objectives of Mahila Samakhya in the state of Uttarakhand are:

➢ As a gender-based programme, to create an ambience in the society for tolerance and mutual respect for women;

➢ To ensure that education becomes accessible to the socially and economically marginalized women and girls;

➢ To encourage and promote a gender-based discourse in society;

➢ To enhance the self-image and self-confidence of women and enable them to critically analyze their role as individual women and as members of society so that they can begin to challenge that role collectively and initiate a process of social change;

➢ To collectively participate in decision making and seek equal rights and opportunities for a more egalitarian society;

➢ To enhance participation of women and girls in formal and non-formal education programmes and to create an environment in which education can serve the objectives of women's equality;

➢ To ensure physical, psychological, social, economic development of women so that they become self-reliant and can participate in all aspects of societal development;

➢ To form women's groups at the village level so that the `sanghas' (women's groups) can take collective action to start the process of social change;

➢ To create an environment whereby women can seek knowledge and information and enable them to recognize their contribution to the economy as producers and as workers, and enable them to play a positive role in their own development and in the development of society.

Mahila Samakhya forms women's groups at the village level, known as `sanghas.' It is these `sanghas' that address issues that affect women's everyday lives. The `sanghas' have addressed issues relating to education, health, law, panchayats, and local issues such as `jal.' `jungle,' `jameen' (water, land, fodder). Mahila Samakhya runs residential camps for adolescent girls to ensure that they become literate. Mahila Samakhya has also been running the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya in 63 clusters on behalf of the state government. `Apni Adalat' or `Our Court' is a novel experience of Mahila Samakhya whereby the local issues have been taken up by the people's courts to resolve them.

Mahila Samakhya, however, suffers a marginal status in the state of Uttarakhand. It is largely perceived as a project of the Central Government. Also, rather than an empowerment programme, it is perceived as an educational programme since it comes under the Ministry of Human Resource Development. While Mahila Samakhya receives praise and publicity, it is not accorded the status it deserves as a major programme for women's empowerment by the state government.

2.2.2 State Government's schemes for Women's Empowerment

De*partment of Women's Empowerment and Child Development*: Women's empowerment schemes are being run by the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Development in the state of Uttarakhand. While the ICDS programme is run by the department, the women's empowerment schemes are being run entirely by NGOs. The main thrust is to form self-help groups (SHGs) of women. Various schemes are thus implemented

through the SHGs. In each SHG, members have to make a saving of a fixed amount every month. The NGO facilitates the linkage of the SHG with a bank and ensures access to credit for the SHGs.

(a) Uttarakhand Mahila Samekit Yojana (an integrated scheme for the women of Uttarakhand): This scheme was formulated in response to the special problems that women of Uttarakhand face in coping with their everyday lives. It is the intention of the scheme to utilize the resources that women have and to design programmes that would be beneficial to them and would help in empowering them. A registered society has been set up within the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Development known as the Uttarakhand Women and Child Development Society. Under the aegis of this society, funds are provided to the NGOS that have to set up SHGs.

Some of the main objectives of the scheme relate to
- ➢ Lightening the burden of women's lives
- ➢ Providing training for women's self-employment
- ➢ Bringing about a change in gender-related issues
- ➢ Increasing women's participation in Panchyati Raj institutions
- ➢ Encouraging use of technology to lighten women's back-breaking work
- ➢ Encouraging use of better sources of energy for cooking purposes
- ➢ Encouraging use of common village land for production of fuel and fodder
- ➢ Bringing about awareness regarding legal provisions
- ➢ Providing help to women to end gender discrimination

- ➢ Helping women to exercise their rights and providing protection to them
- ➢ Developing entrepreneurial skills among women
- ➢ Encouraging research, evaluation, documentation, publication on women-related issues

It is intended that 80% of the beneficiaries would belong to the SC/ST and the BPL (below poverty line) groups.

(b) *Swayam Siddha Pariyojana:* With assistance from the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, this scheme is being implemented by the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Development since 2001 in Uttarakhand. It is the intention of this scheme is to make credit accessible to the SHGs so that small enterprise can be set up. As per the scheme:

- ➢ Women's SHGs are formed
- ➢ Leadership training is provided so that women can maintain daily accounts for the SHG and can ensure smooth functioning of the group
- ➢ By linking the SHGs to the banks, women can initiate a small enterprise that can later be scaled up

The aim of the scheme is to bring about the overall development of empowered women by

- ➢ Enabling them to demand their rights within the family, in society as well as from the government

- ➢ Making them aware and self-reliant so that they can run an SHG efficiently
- ➢ Bringing about their economic, social and political development
- ➢ Enabling them to raise issues of common concern by strengthening the collective
- ➢ Enabling rural women to access credit
- ➢ Enabling women to participate in local programmes as equal partners

The special characteristic of this scheme is that it is partnership programme between the state government and the NGOs and would be implemented through the SHGs. The scheme also envisages federations to be formed at the block, district and state levels so that the SHGs can function effectively.

© *State Women's Commission:* The State Women's Commission was formed in 2003 in order to deal with the problems of gender-related disparities, violence against women, and to provide legal counseling services to women. At the state level, there is a President, a Vice-President and a Secretary. One member is nominated from each district. The tenure of the Commission is for a period of three years. The budget provision is made by the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Development.

The main functions of the Commission are:

- ➢ To make available legal aid to poor, distressed and oppressed women;
- ➢ To put an end to the discriminatory practices that prevail in society such as female foeticide, dowry deaths, sexual harassment of women, etc;
- ➢ Setting up people's courts for women so that their grievances can be attended to;

➢ Creating an ambience for enabling women to live a life of dignity.

The State Women's Commission has not been functioning in the manner in which it was intended to function for various reasons. For one, while the Commission was mandated to prepare the Women's Policy, it has not been able to get the draft policy passed so far. The Commission also suffers due to inadequate funding. Since the Commission has political nominees rather than women who are reputed social workers, the commitment of the office bearers of the Commission is not commensurate with the nature of work involved. The Commission has not been able to appoint the district level nominees as yet. Also, since the office of the Commission has a larger male rather than female staff, the truly marginalized and poor women have inhibitions in approaching the male staff.

Some of the state government departments also run women's empowerment programmes. These are as follows:

2.2.3 Department of Rural Development: The Panchayat department, with the collaboration of NGOs, provides training programme for the political empowerment of women through their participation in the Panchayats. During the Panchayat elections in 2003, out of the total number of elected members of 58143, women constituted a total of 21564 at the three levels at the gram, block and district levels, making almost 33.08 per cent of the total. In April 2008, due to the mounting pressure from the elected women's representatives from 13 districts of Uttarakhand, with support from PRAGATI, an all women's unit based at Dehradun that strives towards attaining gender equity, as well as other women's organizations, a bill was

passed by the State Legislative Assembly to provide for 50 % reservation for women in the three tiers of Panchayati institutions.

(a) Aajivika (Women's Livelihood Scheme): Women of Uttarakhand play a very important role in the agriculture sector. In the mountainous terrain of Uttarakhand, women perform all the agriculture-related operations. Hence, for enhancing agricultural production, women are trained in the new agricultural practices and techniques, use of scientific methods, use of improved tools and implements, use of pesticides, better quality seeds, etc. In order to improve their productivity, 20 women, in groups of 5 in a group, are provided training by the Department on improved practices, methods, techniques. Special attention is provided to women belonging to the SC/ST communities.

The Aajeevika project in Uttarakhand, under the Rural Development Department is funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The activities of the project have been initiated in 5 districts and 17 development blocks from October 2004 and envisages covering a total of 42,690 poorest household in 959 villages. Up to March 2007 the project activities had been initiated in 618 villages. As part of the initial project interventions, the focus of activities was on community mobilization and their empowerment. The project strives to work for the livelihoods enhancement of vulnerable and poor households through the approach of convergence and collaboration, especially in the field of livelihood support through enterprise and business promotion. In the initial two years, Aajivika especially focused on practical gender needs by concentrating mostly on drudgery reduction, health, nutrition and basic

education. Twelve case studies have been put under four areas of key issues pertaining to the project. These are women's empowerment and gender, SHGs and bank linkages, Livelihoods and creation of linkages, and Convergence and collaboration with line departments (Selected Case Studies from Aajeevika, 2007).

(b). *Sampoorna Grameen Rojgar Yojana (Total Rural Employment Scheme):* This scheme intends to provide employment to those who are unemployed or under-employed and is also aimed at dealing with the problem of poverty and chronic hunger. The share of the Central Government and that of the State Government is 75:25. The aim is to provide employment and make available food grains whereby the nutritional levels can go up. As per the scheme, a laborer would be entitled to 5 kilos of food grain as part of wages and the remaining 25% would be paid in cash. It is at the meeting of the Gram Panchayat that those who are interested in participating in this scheme, are selected. The scheme is intended for all the below poverty line groups. Women form an important category for this scheme.

© *National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS):* This is a national scheme for poverty eradication and guaranteeing employment for a period of 100 days in a year. In the first phase, only Tehri, Champawat and Chamoli were included in the scheme. Presently, the scheme has been extended to the entire state of Uttarakhand. It is the Gram Panchayat that has the authority to make a list of those who wish to be registered under the scheme. Under the scheme, local development work has to be undertaken for which the laborer is paid the minimum wage stipulated by the State

government. Women and men have to receive the same wages as per the scheme. Women are known to participate enthusiastically in the NREGS.

2.2.4 Department of Horticulture: The Horticulture Department has a special scheme for training women in fruit preservation and for the production of pickles, jams, chutneys, fruit juices, etc. The aim is to give fillip to local production and to ensure that women become economically self-reliant.

2.2.5 Dairy Department (Women Dairy Development Scheme): This scheme originated in 1994-95 and its main aim was to bring about rural women's economic and social development as well as ensure that they assume leadership positions. Presently, the scheme is operational in all the districts of the state and receives funding from the Department of Women and Child Development of the Government of India, as well as from the state government. The scheme envisages 100 per cent participation of women and ensures that the women's milk cooperative would be run and managed entirely by the women themselves.

For the Women's Dairy Development scheme, women are formed into groups at the village level by the department. A milk collection centre is then opened at the village level and it is the responsibility of the women's group to ensure that the milk that is collected at the centre, is then sent to the dairying plant. The department arranges for the technical training of the women's group that includes how to measure the fat content in the milk, how to measure the purity of the milk (with the use of Lactometer). Each group has a President and a Secretary and it is their responsibility, in addition to measuring the fat content and the milk purity, to maintain daily

accounts and at the end of the month, to submit the accounts to the department. It is they who also make the payment to each member of the group. Since cattle rearing is an occupation traditionally followed by the hill women,   dairying is linked to their traditional occupation to make it economically attractive to women.

Aside from dairying, rural women are also provided training in such related issues such as first aid for the cattle, grass cultivation, seed production, setting up kitchen garden, use of smokeless chullah (stove), production of organic manure, setting up `sulabh sauchalayas (community toilets), as well as health related issues that are relevant to the lives of women.

2.2.6 State Silk Board: The Board provides training to women's groups and also provides the silk cocoon to the group. After the cocoon is raised, it is bought by the Silk Board from the women's groups.

The section above has attempted to provide a broad overview of the Women's Empowerment Schemes/Programmes at the State level in Uttarakhand. These are mainly schemes of the Central and State Governments and do not include those by the national, bi-lateral and international agencies that directly fund NGOs as well as those that come under the private-public partnership programme. It is still possible that some salient schemes have been left out. In the first phase of the environmental scan, it was intended to broadly identify the types and range of schemes that have been specifically designed by the government for the empowerment of women.

6 Women's Empowerment Programs at the District and local levels[2]

In order to understand the kinds of schemes and programs that are implemented at the ground level, a questionnaire was developed and administered to the institutional heads of NGOs in six districts of Uttarakhand. Information was collected by the District Project Coordinators (DPCs) of Mahila Samakhya who are working in six districts of Uttarakhand. Given the time constraint, it was felt that the DPCs would be more knowledgeable about the work of the NGOs that are engaged in women's empowerment projects in their respective districts as well as the nature of work undertaken by the government departments in implementing different schemes/programs. What follows is a broad understanding that has developed on the basis of collating information from 56 NGOs of six districts of Uttarakhand as well as interviews and in-depth discussions with functionaries of some government departments.

What was apparent from the field work was that the discourse of empowerment had now percolated all the way to the ground level. All the heads of the NGOs that were interviewed were of the opinion that they were engaged in women's empowerment programs. Interestingly, more men that women headed the NGOs that implemented the women's empowerment programs. There was variation in the types of schemes/programs they were engaged in. A majority were engaged in the economic empowerment programs. The other programs included those on awareness of rights, health,

education, science and technology, environment and participation in Panchayati Raj institutions. Another feature was that they were all engaged in forming self-help groups (SHGs) of women. While they were able to make a distinction between forming a group as opposed to forming an SHG, the latter formed the mainstay of their activities.

There was a variation in the conceptual understanding of the term `empowerment.' There was a tendency to focus on the efficiency dimension of empowerment of individual women. Thus women had to become aware, self-confident, independent, and capable of taking decisions. The transformative potential of empowerment that could be brought about through women's collectives was not part of the consciousness of a large number of NGOs. Organizations of women through SHGs was largely to bring about their economic empowerment.

The training programs that were organized by the NGOs were mainly for women, and sometimes for the adolescent girls. Some had even felt the need to train men. But by and large, only women seemed to need training. The training content also varied. Gender issues were not part of the main content for training. Rather, skills-based training in vocational skills formed a major part of their training programs. This was but natural since a large number of them were training SHG members in some economic activity or the other. Alongside vocational skills, a large number of awareness-raising programs were also being organized.

Were women assuming leadership positions? It seemed all of them thought so. In every SHG consisting of about 10-20 members, it was apparent that

about 3-4 women were emerging in leadership positions. It would, however, be interesting to find out what is the background of such women who assume leadership positions. Since most of them reported that they worked with a mixed group of women belonging to different socio-economic background and varied caste groups, it is probable that women with better educational background and from higher socio-economic groups assumed leadership positions in SHGs. This would also conform to the findings of a recent study that was done at the national level that showed that it was invariably women from such a background who assumed leadership positions in SHGs.

In terms of the impact of their work on women's lives, the range of responses was varied. Thus, for a large number of them, women had become more self-confident, better informed, had got an identity in family and society, had become more assertive and had started participating in decision-making. The other responses included the following:

➢ Had started opposing violence and were fighting for their rights

➢ Had started participating in Panchayats,

➢ Had started assuming leadership positions,

➢ Had bettered their economic position,

➢ Had got organized

There was, however, no research evidence to back any claim. Except for case studies, there was paucity of research and evaluation studies to substantiate the nature and extent of changes that were taking place in women's lives due to the program interventions.

There were several constraints and challenges they faced in their work. Due to local politics, caste and class issues sometimes assumed predominance. Working in an environment in which women's status was low, added to the problems they faced. Due to project-based work, there was often pressure to meet targets. Also, due to government funding, often compromises had to be made in terms of the nature of work undertaken. Thus, issues that were addressed tended to be project-based and were not necessarily local issues or those articulated by women.

Did they perceive the utility of technology in taking forward the work they were doing to larger number of women? It seemed from the responses that a large number of them were using the traditional media in their training programs. These included folk songs, nukkad nataks (street theatre), use of puppets, etc. There was also use of appropriate technology, depending up the availability of resources. Thus, there was use of posters, banners, wall writing, and the like. There was limited use of audio and video technology. Also, use of computers was restricted.

With regard to the government officials, there was reluctance on their part to respond to the questionnaire. Also, due to lack of monitoring mechanisms as well as evaluation studies, it was difficult to make an assessment about the efficacy of program delivery as well as the impact of the programs. However, discussions with field level staff highlighted their common experiences as well as the problems they faced in implementing government schemes/ programs. Also, the field experiences of the State Director and of the 6 District Project Coordinators of Mahila Samakhya helped to highlight some common experiences in the implementation of government programs.

With regard to the welfare programs, the government officials reported that there was a higher off-take of these schemes because of better awareness among the women beneficiaries about the schemes and of the services they provided.

The other experiences were as follows:

- ➢ Understaffing in departments leads to one person shouldering various responsibilities. The teacher in a government school is always pulled out during school hours to undertake other work. Needless to say, this affects his/her efficiency and performance;

- ➢ There is paucity of training opportunities to government functionaries. Their professional growth and development does not take place;

- ➢ A government functionary becomes complacent as he/she is assured of his/her salary and other perks that are enjoyed by a government functionary. As a result, there is little accountability for poor performance or for non-performance;

- ➢ Due to political interference and political patronage, those for whom the schemes/programs are intended, do not get the attention they deserve;

- ➢ There is no attempt to undertake any evaluation studies to study impact of government schemes;

- ➢ Program implementation is target-oriented and not process-oriented. As a result, quantitative data is often fudged to meet the targets that are set from above;

- ➢ Progress reports are asked from government functionaries and not from program beneficiaries for whom the programs are intended;

➢ In a large number of cases, the target beneficiaries do not benefit from the scheme due to prevalence of corrupt practices;

➢ Due to government policies, people have developed a welfare mentality and expect government to dole out services/funds;

➢ Government policies have developed a dependency relationship as a result of which there is reluctance on the part of the villagers to assume social responsibility;

➢ Due to lack of transparency in government functioning, there is little or no information about schemes/programs. However, awareness training programs are now bringing about awareness about such schemes;

➢ Those government functionaries who are sincere and hardworking are not able to function as they do not get support from their colleagues;

➢ Oftentimes, the funds that are allocated for the schemes are not released on time, as a result of which program implementation suffers.

7. Emerging Trends

This environmental scan has its limitations. Due to constraint of time, what it has attempted to do is to provide a synoptic overview of what is happening with regard to women's empowerment programs in the state of Uttarakhand. Some of the emerging trends are as follows:

1. **Lack of policy for women's empowerment schemes/programs**: While a draft policy was formulated by the State Women's

Commission, there is a lack of political will to take this forward. This arises due to lack of ideological commitment to women's empowerment that characterizes the political thinking of the party in power at the state level. Due to the lack of a clear policy and a commonly shared vision, the various departments have a myopic vision with regard to women's empowerment. While a separate department has been created, namely the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Development, it runs its own schemes/programs without any interface with other departments. A separate registered society that has been created in the Department, however, provides the organizational flexibility for funding NGOs. Mahila Samakhya as a women's empowerment program has been marginalized by the State government.

2. **Percolation of the discourse of empowerment to the ground level**: There are two distinct strands in the women's programs in the state. These are welfare programs and gender equity and women's empowerment programs. However, the term `empowerment' is now widely used. This has led to its dilution. But on the other hand, it has raised awareness levels among women on various issues such as their legal rights, their entitlements under the different government schemes, about how they can better their social and economic conditions and so on. The training programs that are conducted by NGOs have enhanced the awareness levels of women. In a state which has a history of women's participation in social and political struggles and with higher literacy levels among women, such awareness programs are undoubtedly bringing about positive changes in women.

While there are no research studies to back this claim, the experience of some prominent NGOs in the state certainly provides a basis to such claim.

3. **SHGs form the mainstay of women's empowerment programs**: SHGs have grown phenomenally in recent years in the country. Women's collectives as forums of women's empowerment have not been a new phenomenon in the country. Thus, Mahila Mandals as part of community development initiatives dates back to the 1950s However, it was NGOs such as SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) and the WWF (Working Women's Forum) that gave fillip to formation of women's collectives by linking them to credit. Experience of SEWA and of WWF showed that women were not defaulters with regard to repayment of credit. The collective ensured that there was peer pressure on women to repay loans and the resulting high repayment rates meant that lenders were willing to forego collateral. The basic premise in an SHG is that women must save, and save as a group. This was in sharp contrast to the earlier State credit strategy that focused on individual men. Experience had shown that men were bad defaulters- hence the switch to lending to women.

Since the early 1990s, the Government of India has adopted the strategy of forming women's groups linked to credit as part of development strategy. SHGs are now seen as a means for eradicating poverty and become instrumental in the empowerment of poor rural women. With commitment to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to eradicate extreme poverty by 2015, State governments have also designed

schemes that promote the setting up of SHGs and in making credit available to them.

In Uttarakhand too, the main thrust of the women's empowerment program is on setting up SHGs and in making credit facilities available to them so that they can engage in economic activities. Niranter's study (2007) raises the issue that the fact that micro-credit is focused almost exclusively on women highlights that women are targeted because they are the best repayers of loans and are thus viewed as the most efficient means of making an impact on families and households. The needs of women are therefore not the central concern of micro-credit. By targeting women, it is the institutions, the family, and the economy that benefit from the poor women's own savings and resources. A question relating to burden of work showed that with their involvement in SHGs, there has been an increase in women's workload without any shift in division of labor. A moot question to ask is whether access to credit leads to women's empowerment or poverty alleviation (Niranter, 2007). Clearly, there is need for research studies to critically answer these questions.

4, Is Empowerment a top-down or a bottom-up process? As mentioned in the theoretical debate on empowerment, empowerment is itself a form of power. In feminist literature, `power' is disaggregated into `power over' (domination), `power to' (capacity), `power within'(inner strength), and `power with' (achieved through cooperation and alliance). In feminist use of empowerment, the emphasis is clearly on `power to' and `power with' and not on ``power over.' (Bhavnani, Foran and Kurian, 2006). If conceived thus, empowerment has to be a bottom-

up rather than a top-down process. If women are considered powerless, then the idea of empowering women can imply a top-down approach. On the other hand, if it is argued that despite patriarchal considerations, women have power, then empowerment would be perceived as a bottom-up process. A question that needs to be asked about the NGOs that are involved in the women's empowerment programs is whether empowerment is perceived as capacity building to cope with the requirements of life as opposed to capacity building to transform the conditions of life and assert alternative gender roles.

Since NGOs receive funding from government and have already indicated the compromises they are required to make to ensure continuity of funding, it appears highly likely that a majority of them are engaged in capacity building in order to promote status-quo and not address social justice and equity issues.

5 Empowerment of individual women to improve their efficiency and productivity rather than organizing and building a movement for women's equality: The NGO experience seemed to indicate that there was a tendency to focus on the efficiency dimension of empowerment of individual women. Thus women had to become aware, self-confident, independent, and capable of taking decisions. While these are important dimensions of empowerment, the transformative potential of empowerment that could be brought about through women's organizations was not part of the consciousness of a large number of NGOs. Organizations of women through SHGs was largely to bring about their economic empowerment.

Niranter's study (2007) refers to the agenda of SHGs which is overwhelmingly related to financial concerns and of their limited engagement with gender issues. With NGOs being linked more and more with banks, how much social action would be compatible with micro-finance is questionable. The Niranter study also showed that in the case of government –sponsored programs, governance-related actions were largely part of the instrumentalist use of SHGs such as involvement of groups in inoculation or population control drive. In majority of the cases, fundamental issues relating to poverty and injustice were not taken up by SHGs.

6 Are SHGs really reaching the poor women? Since a majority of NGOs indicated that they worked with a mixed group of women belonging to different socio-economic background and varied caste groups, a question can be raised whether SHGs are really inclusive of poor women. `One of the realities of micro-credit phenomenon that has been established by studies is that it fails to include in its fold the very poor' (Niranter, 2007). While the poor are the target, in order to ensure economic sustainability of the program, whoever can pay becomes part of the program. In other words, realities of micro-credit demand a certain capacity to pay and to save, thereby creating exclusions right from the group's inception.

7. Why are training programs organized only for women? Most NGOs organized training programs only for women. The content of these programs was mainly skills-training and awareness- raising. A small

number of them provided training on gender issues. Some of them also organized training programs for adolescent girls as well as for men. Issues relating to patriarchy have to be addressed centrally in empowerment programs. If that is so, it is incumbent that NGOs would have to organize training programs that address gender issues not just for training women but for training all sections of the civil society.

8. Use of technology in women's training programs: The NGO experience highlighted the use of traditional media in the training programs organized for women. While appropriate media was used in some other cases, depending upon the availability of resources, it might be useful to explore how the ICTs (the traditional as well as the sophisticated computer-based technologies) can be used effectively in the women's empowerment programs.

The section above has raised some critical issues for discussion and for further critical study with regard to women's empowerment programs. Considering that the study was commissioned by the Commonwealth of Learning, and given the main thrust of women's empowerment in Uttarakhand on their economic empowerment, it might be useful to conclude this study by referring to the study undertaken by Gurumurthy (2003) that analyzes the ICT initiatives that have focused on women's economic empowerment in the South Asian region. While these initiatives have been few and far between, the study showed that the following gains for women have been made possible through the use of ICTs.

- **Connectivity and access to information for livelihoods and enterprises;** Connectivity through networks can support access to information, covering technical information on sustainable agricultural practices and innovation, market news and agricultural commodity process, weather predictions and rainfall patterns, recommended crops for the season and information on institutions that provide expertise and training,

- **Data Management:** Information technologies can create systems to store, retrieve and manage information which can help enhance operational efficiency and accuracy in financial transactions, something that organizations that work with poor women, can benefit from;

- **Creation of Data Repositories:** ICTs can help to reclaim women's agricultural knowledge base and can facilitate the systematic recording and dissemination of knowledge about agricultural practices;

- **Mobilization and education of women workers:** ICTs can bring about political empowerment of women by furthering their demand, needs and rights as workers. Also, ICTs can facilitate interactive training and building alliances;

- **Linking of women producers to global markets:** Although not an easy avenue, ICTs can enable women producers to benefit from e-commerce by linking them to global markets. Several experiences have shown how this is possible;

- **Efficient communication for micro-enterprises of poor women:** For those poor women who are involved in micro

enterprises, ICTs can enable building of a network with customers, suppliers, banks, etc., thus facilitating timely access to people and resources and thereby providing better business opportunities;

- **Opportunities for skill building and employment:** It is possible that disadvantaged women with handicaps in education and training, can still benefit from opportunities in the IT labor market. This can happen if they can master basic aspects of computer use and maintenance. There are some organizations that are attempting to explore such possibilities;

- **Opportunities for self-employment:** Self-employment through ICTs is another area that can become an income-earning possibility for the poor. Since ICTs offer business opportunities, the scope for such enterprises for women has to be exploited. Beside the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, women's self-help groups have set up kiosks and have become kiosk operators, thus running a successful micro-enterprise.

Recommendations

The Workshop highlighted several issues. Based on them, the following recommendations can be made-

1. The study undertaken in Uttarakhand highlighted the manner in which women's empowerment programs had been conceptualized and implemented in the state of Uttarakhand. Given the importance of

contextual factors in planning and implementing women's empowerment programs, it would be useful to undertake similar studies in differing contexts.

2. The Uttarakhand study had highlighted that the concept of women's empowerment had been diluted and that while women's programs were emphasizing individual empowerment of women, the focus on facilitating empowerment of whole groups of women and building a movement for women's equality was getting marginalized. ODL materials on case studies of successful women's empowerment programs need to be developed to highlight the multidimensionality of the concept of women's empowerment.

3. Women's empowerment programs tend to be marginalized due to societal attitudes and due to men being in decision-making positions, whether in the family, at workplace, or in the government. Sensitizing and changing societal attitudes, including those of men, therefore becomes a major challenge. Suitable ODL materials can be developed for sensitizing male planners, administrators, policy makers, media producers, etc.

4. The Uttarakhand study highlighted that the biggest focus in women's empowerment programs was on setting up self-help groups (SHGs). Due to the compulsion of national governments to meet the MDGs and reduce poverty, SHGs are likely to remain a major government thrust. While women's economic empowerment is necessary, social issues also need to be dealt with or else women's economic

empowerment programs will put an additional burden on women. Action research studies need to be commissioned to capture how a balance between economic and social empowerment can be brought about.

5. Experience shows that learner-generated materials are a necessary approach to ensure relevancy and authenticity, instill ownership and strengthen sustainability of women's programs. Action research projects can be commissioned in differing contexts to see the effectiveness of learner-generated materials in furthering women's education. Suitable ODL materials can be developed to highlight the importance of women developing and using their own materials in order to promote their learning.

6. There are a large number of success stories in different Commonwealth countries that show how women have been getting empowered through collective decision-making and collective action. There are also a large number of success stories about how women have worked at the local level to promote peace in the family and in the community. Documentation of such success stories, however, is still weak and needs to be undertaken urgently. Women's use of traditional knowledge, whether in agriculture, in health, in medicinal herbs, is an important area for documentation.

7. Mainstream media have tended to portray women in detrimental ways due to forces of commercialization and globalization. Suitable ODL materials for advocacy and training need to be developed.

8. There is a need to understand the impact of calamities on women's lives. Suitable studies could be commissioned and ODL materials developed to understand how poor women have coped with calamities and have re-built their lives.

9. Networking, building alliances and linkages at all levels are essential components for community support and for policy changes if women's empowerment programs have to achieve any degree of success. Workshops, exchange programs, study visits can be organized to facilitate and strengthen the required support systems.

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<div align="right">**Appendix 1**</div>

Interview Schedule for eliciting information on Organizations within your district that work on Women's Empowerment Projects/Programs

Note: This is a project funded by Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver. In the first phase of the project, Himgiri Nabh Vishwavidyalaya will try to find out what is happening in the state of Uttarakhand for empowering women (including poor and marginalized women).

It is expected that each DPC would cover her own district and will cover a maximum number of NGOs and Government programs (eg. Social Welfare, Education, ICDS, Agriculture, Health, Income Generation, Vocational Skills training, District Panchayati Raj office, etc.) within her district. It is expected that field work for each DPC would last for 20 days.

What is given below is a schedule that has been worked out for each organization that would be visited by the DPC. Information has to be collected by interviewing the Head of the institution. Alternatively, you can have a focus group discussion with some of the functionaries of the organization. Questions are grouped under some broad themes.

1. Background of the Organization

a. Name and address of the organization

b. Names of Chairperson and Secretary _____

_____

c. Area of work of the organization _____

 _____

d. Kinds/types of projects/programs (Mention names) _____

_____

_____

_____

2. *Women's Empowerment*

a. Does your organization work on projects/programs/activities for women's empowerment?

        i. Yes   ii No

b. What is understood by the term `Women's Empowerment' in your organization?

_____

_____

_____

c. What are the activities/processes/programs for women's empowerment? Please describe

_____

_____

_____

d. Do you organize training programs for women's empowerment?

        i. Yes   ii No

e. What kind of training programs do you organize?

      For whom? _____

      Duration   _____

      Content _____

            _____

      Type of trainers _____

            _____

3. Women's Groups

a. Do you form women's groups in your programs/projects?

        i. Yes   ii No

b. How many women normally form a group?

    _____

c. How many, among them, would be in leadership position?

    _____

d. How does a group take decisions? How does it set priorities for action?

    _____

    _____

e. What are some of the important decisions taken by women's groups?

    _____

    _____

f. By and large, which caste groups among women, are in leadership positions?

    _____

g. What efforts does your organization make for leadership development among women?

    _____

h. What are the indicators for assessing women's leadership?

    _____

    _____

4. Impact

a. What, according to you, has been the impact of your organization's work, on women's lives?

_____

_____

_____

b. Are there any studies to indicate the impact of your organization's work on women's lives?

_____

c. What are some of the indicators of success?

_____

_____

d. How has your organization been able to ensure sustainability? Does your organization have withdrawal strategies? What are these?

_____
_____

e. From your years of experience, what challenges have you faced?

_____

_____

f. What, would you say, are some of the important lessons learnt?

_____

_____

_____

5. Use of Technology

a. Do you use technology in your projects/programs? If yes, of what kind?

_____

_____

b. Would it be possible to reach more women through the use of technology in the future?

_____

_____

6. Partners

a. Have there been partners/stakeholders in the work of your organization?

     i Yes   ii No

b. What has been the nature of their involvement?

_____

_____

c. Is there a possibility of other partners being involved in the work of your organization?

     i Yes   ii No

d. If yes, who might such potential partners be?

_____

_____