

Unorganized Women Workers of Uttarakhand Conditions and Living Standard

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Introduction

This paper attempts a review of conditions and living standard of women workers in the informal / unorganized sector with special focus on Uttarakhand. An effort has been made to analyze the empirical evidences in the overall context of available secondary sources to make a few suggestions for the overall improvement of their livingstandard. The work critical evaluates the effect of schemes run by Central or State Governments. It also looks into the impact of political decisions of concerned governments and political participation of unorganized women workers. This study examines conceptual issues along with empirical problems.

Research Area, Sample Size and Methodology of Research

This research was conducted in Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar in Uttarakhand to interview 106 women workers working in various informal sectors. The data were collected through a structured questionnaire (Annexure 1) administered in the mentioned area where the respondents were selected randomly by visiting to their working and household locations wherever necessitated. Snowball random sampling method was adopted to trace the respondents. Following graph (Figure 1) shows a cross-tabulation of working members against the total number of family member households in the two selected areas.

Figure 1

Both the areas have been represented almost equally while conducting the survey (Table 1).

Table 1
Survey Area

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1 (NTL)	59	55.7	55.7	55.7
2 (US Nagar)	47	44.3	44.3	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Informal / Unorganized Sector

Generally speaking the informal sector refers to such income-generating activities which are outside the formal contracts. Central Statistical Organization (CSO), Indiathus definesthis as, "Unorganized sector comprises of all those incorporated and household industries which are not regulated by any legislation and which do not maintain any balance sheet or annual accounts. It comprises of marginalized economic units and workers who are characterized by serious deficits in decent work."Therefore, it is not easy to elicit a concise and all-inclusive definition of unorganized labor. Yet it is possible to spell out the scope of unorganized sector as

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a workforce, which is not associated with any recognized union with defined ideology, goal, and area of specialization. The classic traits of informal sector are unhygienic conditions, insufficient wages, extended hours of work, exposure to noxious materials, lack of adequate lighting, etc. In general, informal sector reveals unity and diversity in the workers' experience. The effectiveness of organizations also varies in nature.

Women workforce in the Informal / Unorganized Sector in India

According to an ILO (2003) women's labor market especially in informal work sector is affected deeply by the recent changes brought by the globalized economy and fast paced technological progress making it difficult for women in this sector to sustain employability, and find skilled jobs. Concerns about unfavorable employment situations regarding the women workforce have been raised for quite sometime. For instance, the ILO report 2003 finds highlights the severe bias against women among women of all the young, the old and the less skilled are present and they are being engaged disproportionately in non standard forms of work such as temporary casual employment and part time jobs. Along with the increasingly discriminative employment situation of women in informal sector there has been a marked increase in the wage difference in comparison to the male workers. This has been due to the biased methods of recruitment, piece rate or daily/ weekly wage rate, ease of entry, hours of work and extent and nature of supervision etc.,

Our survey study shows that in Uttarakhand more than 52% of women workers (out of our respondents) are illiterate and just about 21% of them have attended school up to class 5th, i.e., primary standard (Please refer to the Education Table in Annexure 2 for detailed educational profile of our respondents).

Following graph (Figure 2) represents the cross-tabulation of women workers in various informal sectors in Uttarakhand. Here number "1" represents "Agriculture", number "5" represents "Mining", number "10" represents "Manufacturing", number "11" represents "Other Occupation" and the number "12" represents "Retail Business". Clearly most of the households members, i.e., 37% are engaged in Other Occupations which are majorly not defined or categorized as standard occupations while a few are engaged in Manufacturing. The noticeable point here is that just about 6% of the households are engaged in Agriculture (Cross-tabulation of occupations against age): Please refer to Annexure 1&2 for full occupation details.

Talking about the scenario across India, the trends and patterns in the informal sector at the macro level have been observed and analyzed by A Kundu and Alaka N Sharma (2001) using secondary data. According to Arup Mitra between the size of the informal sector and urbanization and industrialization, exist an inverse relationship which implies that developing backward and forward linkages between formal and informal sector may help their inter-linkages. Some of the characteristics of employment of women in this sector are seasonal nature of employment, heavy physical work of different types, ignorance, illiteracy, lack of skills, sex discrimination in wage structures, lack of guarantee of minimum wages/ comprehensive legislation/ minimum facilities, traditional bound attitudes, long hours of work with limited payment; migration and disintegration of families, bondage and alienation etc.

Present Conditions & Standard of Living

During the survey a few questions pertaining to their living conditions and facilities/ schemes provided by the Government were asked. Some of the responses are presented below:

While asking if they feel benefitted with any of the government's initiatives (Table 2 & 3) more than 96% of the respondents' responses were negative. When asked specifically about programs such as MNERGA, more than 95% of the respondents

had negative response. This indicates directly that State or Central Government must offer schemes which would benefit the poor women and be sustainable. It seems that most or some of the schemes, which are on offer in the present time, are obsolete. These people need some permanent solution such as a sustainable social security allowance.

Table 2: Do you feel benefited with the government initiatives by which you can earn more?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 (Don't know)	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
Valid 1 (Yes)	2	1.9	1.9	3.8
2 (No)	102	96.2	96.2	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey

Table 3: Do you feel benefited with the government initiatives (MNERGA etc.)?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0(Don't know)	4	3.8	3.8	3.8
Valid 1 (Yes)	1	.9	.9	4.7
2(No)	101	95.3	95.3	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey

Before the questions of domestic violence were asked the respondents were first detailed about the meaning and legal status of the term 'Domestic Violence' and then the question was raised. In response the majority of the respondents feel satisfied (Table 4). Only about 19% respondents think that domestic violence has increased. Also, more than 92% of the respondents have not faced any kind of

domestic violence themselves (Table 5). In this regard this survey gives out a positive response and indicates that the State policies have been effective in protecting the rights of women at home and to a great extent within the society.

Table 4: Do you think domestic violence has increased?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 (Don't know)	3	2.8	2.8	2.8
Valid 1 (Yes)	20	18.9	18.9	21.7
2 (No)	83	78.3	78.3	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey

Table 5: Have you faced domestic violence?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1 (Yes)	8	7.5	7.5	7.5
2 (No)	98	92.5	92.5	100.0

Source: Field Survey

We tried to investigate about the social and political participation of our respondents by administering through a few questions. Following are the (Table 6, 7, 8 and 9).

Table 6

Participation in Local Activities

Total	106	100.0	100.0	
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0 (Don't know)	1	.9	.9	.9
1 (Yes)	70	66.0	66.0	67.0
2 (No)	35	33.0	33.0	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey

Table 7

Do you discuss your problems or propose solution of a problem in public?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 (Don't know)	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
Valid 1 (Yes)	59	55.7	55.7	57.5
2 (No)	45	42.5	42.5	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey

Almost two thirds of the respondents participate in several local activities in their area of residence, whereas, about one thirds don't. When asked about their participation in the local meetings in their society to discuss and resolve their problems with the help of the society about 56% of the respondents agree to do so actively. But there are more than 42% who don't participate at all in any such meetings. We also discussed to know if they have formed or be a member of any local social gathering / meeting / panchayat and if they discuss their family problems in such a meeting to seek solutions, following are the responses tabulated (Table 8 & 9 and Figure 3)

Table 8

Do you get solution?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 (Don't know)	2	1.9	1.9	1.9
Valid 1 (Yes)	30	28.3	28.3	30.2
2 (No)	74	69.8	69.8	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

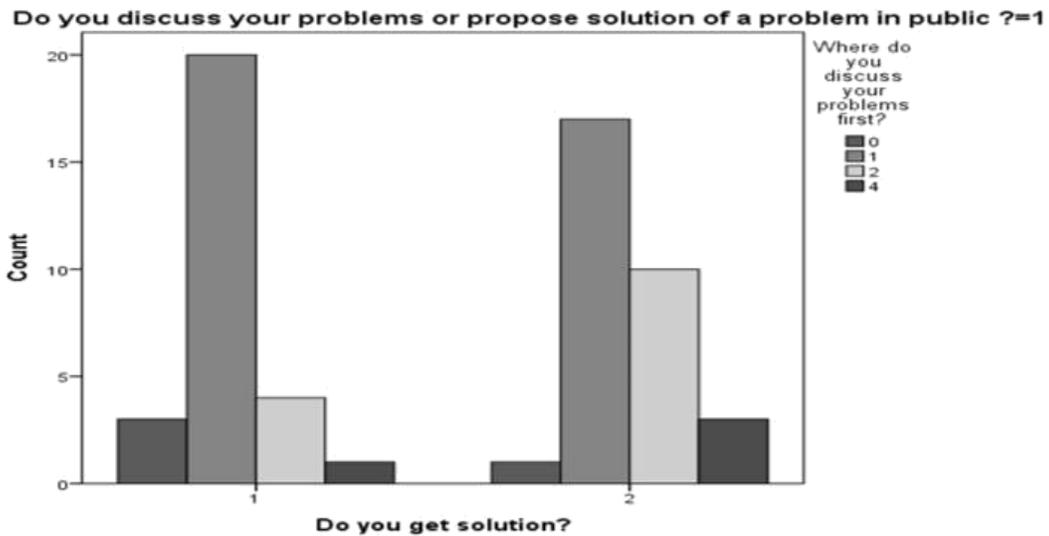
Source: Field Survey

Table 9
Where do you discuss your problems first?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 (None)	6	5.7	5.7	5.7
1 (Society)	55	51.9	51.9	57.5
2 (Pradhan)	31	29.2	29.2	86.8
3 (Police Station)	1	.9	.9	87.7
4 (Others)	10	9.4	9.4	97.2
5 (Neighbors)	3	2.8	2.8	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey

Figure 3

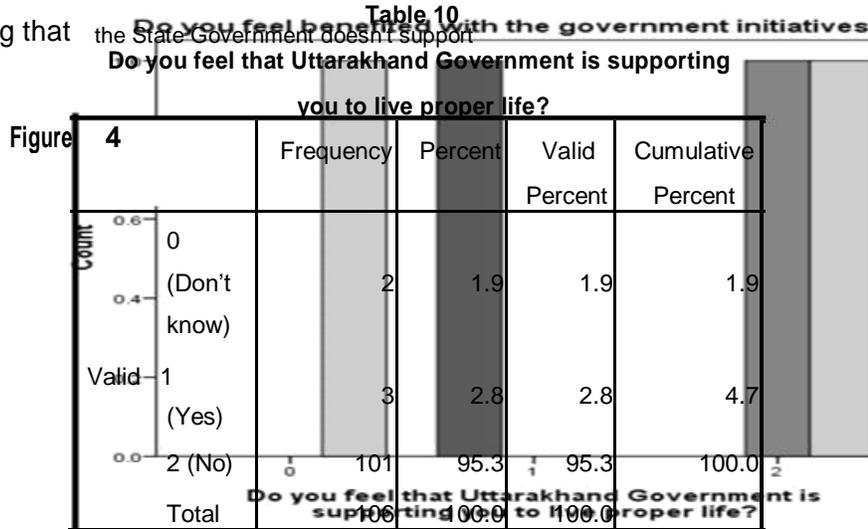


About 70% of the respondents who participate and even those who don't think that most of the time they don't get any solution to their problems. When asked where they discuss their problems first, approximately 52% of the respondents say that they keep it before the society which consists of their fellow villagers and the head

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of the village (Pradhan). But about 29% of the respondents say that they discuss their problems first with the head of the village (Pradhan).

We finally asked a few questions on overall satisfaction with the performance of Uttarakhand Government and following were the responses (Figure 4): While asking a general sort of question such as the one mentioned in the table below, almost all of them respond negatively by saying that the State Government doesn't support them to live a proper life.



Perseverance on the Need for Minimum - Adequate Standard of Living

Need for 'minimum / adequate standard of living' for citizens is considered as an important element these days. At adequate level, international human rights instruments recognize the right to an adequate standard of living as a human right and establish a minimum entitlement to food, clothing and housing. The right to an adequate standard of living is enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which aimed to create conditions under which women and mothers would be economically secure and independent. The Convention requires states to end discrimination against women in relation to employment and other economic activities.

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) recognizes the right to an adequate standard of living, stating that: " (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All Children, whether born in or out of wedlock shall enjoy the same social protection."

Although, defining - "standard of living" - is not easy; to evaluate properly the cost-of-living requires a sound clarity of what the concepts - "standard of living" - and - "minimum-adequate standard" - involve. It is closely linked to the economic and

Table 3: HDI and IHDI estimates across Indian states

State	HDI	IHDI	Ratio	Loss (%)	Rank HDI	Rank IHDI	Difference
Andhra Pradesh	0.485	0.332	0.685	31.55	11	12	-1
Assam	0.474	0.341	0.718	28.17	12	11	1
Bihar	0.447	0.303	0.679	32.06	18	16	2
Chhattisgarh	0.449	0.291	0.649	35.14	17	18	-1
Gujarat	0.514	0.363	0.705	29.50	8	7	1
Haryana	0.545	0.375	0.688	31.18	5	6	-1
Himachal Pradesh	0.558	0.403	0.722	27.81	3	3	0
Jharkhand	0.464	0.308	0.663	33.67	15	14	1
Karnataka	0.508	0.353	0.696	30.44	10	9	1
Kerala	0.625	0.520	0.832	16.78	1	1	0
Madhya Pradesh	0.451	0.290	0.643	35.74	16	19	-3
Maharashtra	0.549	0.397	0.722	27.75	4	4	0
Orissa	0.442	0.296	0.669	33.11	19	17	2
Punjab	0.569	0.410	0.720	28.04	2	2	0
Rajasthan	0.468	0.308	0.660	34.02	14	13	1
Tamil Nadu	0.544	0.396	0.727	27.28	6	5	1
Uttar Pradesh	0.468	0.307	0.655	34.47	13	15	-2
Uttarakhand	0.515	0.345	0.670	33.03	7	10	-3
West Bengal	0.509	0.360	0.707	29.30	9	8	1
India	0.504	0.343	0.680	32.00			

Notes: 'Difference' denotes the difference between the 'Rank HDI' and 'Rank IHDI' above, and therefore denotes the gain/loss in ranking due to inequality-adjustment.

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cultural advancement of a particular country and to the extent that an individual is concerned, it is very controlled by the customs of a particular group to which she belongs and the area in which she lives. According to HDI (Human Development Index), Uttarakhand stands 7th on the HDI ranking and 10th on the IHDI ranking list below.

Something which enables a person to have the minimum amount of those things that will permit conformity with the set of values of the group to which she attaches herself is called a minimum-adequate standard and in order to keep up the appearance of meeting. It is also to be noted that the standard of living of a group and of a society changes over a period of time.

A number of proposed policies to guarantee people a basic standard of living have already been introduced in developed countries. The basic concept that backs up such offering is a 'basic income guarantee' essentially gifting all citizens a basic level of 'free money' to facilitate basic needs such as food and shelter. Article 37 of the UDHR and Article 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) protect the right to an adequate standard of living. Fulfillment of this right depends on a number of other economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to property, the right to work, the right to social security, the right to health and the right to education.

According to the UDHR it requires different measures, depending on the situation of a person, to fully enjoy the right to an adequate standard of living. It says that people have a right to care if they are unable to secure the enjoyment of conditions necessary for an adequate standard of living. Article 25 is closely related to Article 22 of the UDHR and it explicitly incorporates the right to social security.

Right to an adequate standard of living, as further defined in Article 11 of the ICESCR, defines the right to an adequate standard of living in two paragraphs. Paragraph one says that: "The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent."

Health and medical care have been included in the UDHR under the right to an adequate standard of living which were included in Article 12 of the ICESCR under the right to health. Article 10 of the ICESCR on the protection of the family recognizes the rights pertaining to motherhood. During the period when ICESCR was being drafted there were increased malnutrition and it was the need of the hour for the international community to be concerned to come out with Article 11 giving an overall emphasis on food.

Paragraph two of Article 11 states that: "The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international co-operation, the measures, including specific programs, which are needed: (a) To improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition and by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources; (b) Taking into account the problems of both food-importing and food-exporting countries, to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need."

Overall the right to an adequate standard of living is understood as a social right, which requires respect for a number of other economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to education as enshrined in Article 26 of the UDHR and Articles 13 and 14 of the ICESCR, the right to property, which is enshrined in Article 17 of the UDHR, the right to work as enshrined in Article 23 of the UDHR and Article 6 of the ICESCR, and the right to social security as enshrined in Article 22 of the UDHR and Article 25 of the ICESCR. When the right to property, the right to work and the right to social security, three core economic rights, are implemented in combination, it is assumed that an adequate standard of living can normally be secured. By detailing the above arguments we have tried to focus on the need of uniformity among the countries on an international platform about women and their rights in India. Uttarakhand is not more than an example here. The same conditions are there of women in almost all other states as well.

Challenges of Globalized Economy

India Development Report (UNDP) pointed out that one out of every three persons in India earns less than a dollar a day. New threats created out of global economic integration are alike to human security to both rich and poor countries which has created several challenges in assuring equal economic and social outcomes. Social

safety net supported by Subramanya (1995) is probably the best source to remodel social security issues of the unemployed, underemployed and partly employed in India. He evaluates the feasibility and possibility of introducing such schemes.

Social security protection to informal sector workers and rural agriculture in India has been denied for long except for the Act came out in 2008, one that is enjoyed by other sectors of population especially in the developing countries. Jenkins Michael (1993) investigated such issues and made a few suggestions for a strategy pertaining to the extension of coverage. Jha (1996) emphasized the protective social security in the unorganized sector and so also is the need to integrate various schemes to improve the sector's operational efficiency.

The worker's quandary in informal sector activities can be made better by providing better social protection, improving labor skills, increasing access to credit and implementing labor laws. According to Harjit Anand (2001) sectors of construction, scrap collection, handicrafts, tourism and IT expose that workers except IT suffer from low educational skills, low wages, poor working conditions and high exploitation by middle men in informal sector activities.

Housing is another important social security program. Mahadeva's (2005) work depicts some lessons for the Indian circumstances in which resource crisis has provoked the problem in the context of housing. The most interesting part is the financial support by private institutions has encouraged the market to produce housing surplus. The Canadian practice of market supported housing success could be one of the choices in Indian circumstance as the National Housing and Habitat policy is intended to form a favorable milieu for various players in the market to assuage housing scarcity. It offers some policy options for financial facilitation for housing development too.

Suggestions

Micro credit could play a fundamental role in economic empowerment of women in unorganized sector. The success of micro finance institutions (MFIs) working in the area seemingly offers great trajectories to achieve economic empowerment for women. Thus Ajith Kantikar (1994) finds that micro enterprise has become successful in the rural non-farm sector due to unemployment. Our study also suggests that it is not just the unemployment but also the underemployment of women, which has become conspicuously higher in the informal sector. Our study indicates the scope of such financial institutions as SHGs or MFIs being harnessed to encourage the

Uttarakhand women in unorganized sector to become micro entrepreneurs. This will certainly not only improve the self-confidence among them but also empower them economically, politically, socially and in every day family decisions. This section of society mainly needs a comprehensive package of social security including but not limited to secure their health, be empowered at home and in society.

Refernces

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