CHAPTER IV
LOCAL PEOPLE-CENTRIC CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

As mentioned in Chapter I PRDC is a process based on the efficiency and effectiveness of key communication channels—both technological and human. In this chapter, which focuses intensely on the areas of study, we would try to explain the importance of face to face interaction.

1. Local People: Who They Are

The researcher feels the necessity to reiterate that the local people constitute the 'major' focus in the study undertaken. The 'people' being referred here belong to the four GPs each selected from DP Block and Kalimpong I Block. Individual-based interviews and FGD have been undertaken for interaction and understanding their way of life. As the study is rural-based, the people comprise mostly of agricultural farmers, agricultural labourers, small-scale business men, tea-garden workers, unskilled workers, retired-army personnel and government service holders With reference to the selected GPs the agricultural farmers comprise those who own land which is commercially cultivated. Farmers who do not own land but live and work in others' land and get an equal share from the total produce, locally known as adhya. Besides agriculture they also keep livestock (1).

Agricultural labourers, locally called khetala, are those who own very little land or are landless and work on other's land. They are paid per day @ Rs.40/-, besides being provided with one time meal and tea. Thus, as mentioned in Chapter-II, the population is highly depended on agriculture and livestock for their livelihood.

Small-scale businessmen includes grocery-shop owners, who sell essential commodities within the village, those who collect the produce from the local villagers like broomstick, seasonal green vegetables, orange, ginger, potato, squash etc and sell in the market and small eateries selling local snacks along with raukshi (liquor) and chyang (local millet beer).
Of the study areas, the tea-garden workers are concentrated only at Chongtong GP, DP Block. The women-folk mostly pluck the tea leaves (2) and the men work at the factory as well as in the garden (3). They are economically dependent on the garden and majority of them live in the garden land.

4.1: A Villager

4.2: Villagers taking their produce to the market
Unskilled workers comprise of carpenters, mistry (mason), weavers and labour at construction sites like roads, houses, culverts etc. They are capable of undertaking local work within the village. Agricultural labourers also work at construction sites. Retired army personnel, mostly soldiers, have settled in the villages and have taken up agriculture, livestock and small business to manage their lives.

Last but not the least, there are few government job holders like primary and junior high school teachers, GP staff and workers in sectors like power, animal husbandry, sericulture and others. The departments are several but recruitment from the village level is neglected and overlooked.

As mentioned in Chapter II, the GPs represent a mixed ‘community’ comprising mostly of Hindus, along with Sherpas, Subbas, Lepchas and Tamangs who fall in the ST category and Christians. 80% of the people are BPL.

As a local of the area and being well accustomed with the local language and dialects, the researcher mixed individual-based interviews and FGD as the major modes of interaction and communication. Field visits were made to the GP areas, for ascertaining local people’s opinions and views on relevant issues, with the PRDC as ‘background’.
2. People’s Perception of Rural Development

We have already mentioned in the earlier chapters that rural development is supposed to be directed to ameliorate the socio-economic condition of the underprivileged and the marginalized sections and their role cannot be detached from its overall framework. Thus, the essential prerequisite of rural development is the ‘people’ themselves who have a crucial role to play in drawing up their common and individual needs and problems, making group and individual plans to fulfill their needs, solving problems and executing the plans. However, the people cannot work autonomously, so mobilization is essential for mass participation in the development process. Above all, there is a need to understand and pay attention to the development needs and aspirations of the local rural people and then evolve communication strategies to support and effect development.

PRDC is reduced to a stagnant concept if we do not study the people-to-people communication linkage. People cannot stay in isolation; they have to live in a society and in doing so they need ‘shared space’ for developing their ideas, problems and solutions. Dialogue among them ensures an effective circulation of information that in turn leads to proper understanding of development schemes and projects.

Rural communication is part of exchange of thoughts, ideas and experiences among the people who are directly involved as beneficiaries of various development programmes. Thus, it involves a two-way process where people’s views, their feelings, their understanding are critical to the working of the government.

The researcher too has made a modest effort to analyze the ordinary people’s everyday perception and understanding of rural development in relation to their local surrounding. It is an important facet which helps us to further understand the span of communication between the government agency and the people at the grassroots level who are in need of relevant information and knowledge and its specific applications to improve their participation, increase their productivity, improve their standard of living and so forth.
2.1. Voice of the People

The rural people of the four GPs selected each from DP and Kalimpong I Block also talk about rural development in varied versions. Tashi Penzo Sherpa (7) of Sherpa goan, Relling GP DP Block identifies electricity, road and water as *bikash*. Ironically, his village neither has a proper road and in the absence of a tank water is carried from the nearby *dhara*. Only few houses can afford *batti* (electricity), most of them use *dhibri* (oil lamp). Indra Bahadur Rai (8) of Upper Gurdung, Jhepi GP, DP Block, states “agricultural development is rural development”. He also feels that if remedies for the eradication of diseases in ginger, cardamom, orange and other crops are provided by the agriculture department, then development can take place. But the reality lies elsewhere. It can be substantiated by an article printed in *Himalaya Darpan* (9): “The office is in a dilapidated condition and in need of renovation. The office is not in a condition to distribute seasonal seedlings and provide preventive cure to the crops....” Hasta Maya Gurung (10) of Seokbir GP Kalimpong I Block views rural development as “schemes and benefits that come to the Panchayat”, which, she says, rarely reaches the poor. Under such circumstances, the local people prefer to till whatever little land they own, grow crops, vegetables and domesticate animals. They have managed to live their lives in the face of underdevelopment and scarcity.

Several interviews conducted with the local rural people of the eight selected GPs show their hesitance in talking about *bikash*. When even the basics of road, water and electricity are yet to reach it seems natural for them to think hard on the *bikash* question. Despite the difficulties the ‘rural voice’ has found some strength in the form of SHGs. The difference may not be tremendous but it has helped the local people to address some vital issues. For some, like Usha Tamang (11) of Tejman Goan Upper Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I Block, development means not only development of her village but also of herself as it would help her to run the house along with her husband.

Kavita Dahal (12) of Lower Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I Block points out that earlier she was not aware of the importance of development but today she looks at rural development as a ‘combined growth’ of the village and herself. She is conscious of
the schemes and programmes, her rights and has learnt to save money. Like her, Binita Gurung (13) of Chongtong GP, DP Block states, earlier most of her time was spent in doing household chores but today attending Gram Sansad, participation in cleaning the surrounding areas of her village, helping the poor is ‘development’ to her. Dinesh Bhujel (14) of Samtar GP Kalimpong I Block defines rural development in terms of health centers, schools, motorable road and elimination of superstitious elements which he locally calls *andha biswas* (superstition).

In fact it was Dhan Bahadur Yonzon (15) an illiterate farmer from Seokbir GP, Kalimpong I Block who explained that motorable road would allow the farmers to take their produce to the local market (avoiding the middlemen), take the sick to the hospital, construction of water tanks within the village would allow regular watering of crops and vegetables, resulting in earning money. He also accepted the fact that it was not possible for every local inhabitant to directly take the produce as she/he cannot afford the transport cost nor does she/he have large quantities to sell. Sukraj Subba (16) of Tumbayok of Nayanore GP, DP Block says "*Hamro goanna bato, batti ani paniko subhidha sarkarlae garidimu bhayae; yo bhandha thulo bikash hamro lagi khehi chaina*" (If the government provides us with water, road and electricity, then what can we ask for more; this is *bikash* to me).
It is important to mention that not all the respondents are willing to open up. But this does not mean that they remained unresponsive. Thus, Gopi Maya Biswakarma (17) of Thapa Goan, Jhepi GP, DP Block, was hesitant to talk but managed to express her thoughts. She said, development cannot happen when only a few benefit but it should be the development of the entire village. This statement is a testimony to the fact that
favoritism and discrimination rules, and at the end of the day it is the poor and the
downtrodden who have to suffer.

The people prefer to think in terms of the ‘basic necessity’ of road, water and
electricity which the areas lack. The reality is that the people’s problem lies unheeded.
It looks more complex with officials hardly making visits. Thus, they are forced to
live without the basics. At times the reaction of local political leaders of the GP made
them reluctant to voice their opinions. At least, some respondents in every GP had to
be convinced of my work and intention. For example, in Relling GP, a villager (name
withheld on request) said, “DGHC bata kati asha thyo tar hami garib ko garib
choung”, (We had high expectations from DGHC but we still remain poor) (18).

3. People in Participatory Rural Communication

Rural development will materialize when the state is supported by strong community
action from below. In other words, we need to understand the possibilities and pitfalls
of people’s participation in development programmes and projects which depends to a
large degree on how the stakeholders manage the involvement of the people.

The stakeholders have to look at people as *partners* in the development efforts and not
merely as *beneficiaries*. In doing so, the people gain skills, strategies, opportunities
and support which enhance their struggle towards self-sufficiency and self-
development. The thrust, however, lies in the adoption of ‘communication’ as a
prospective and potent agent for enhancing and facilitating PRDC.

PRDC, as stated earlier, is a people-oriented methodology that promotes the
involvement of the rural people in decision making aimed at development. It also
seeks to facilitate dialogue among the rural people themselves, and between them and
the government. It utilizes various techniques to interact with the people, create space
for development and understand their perception of the local issues. Thus,
communication serves its purpose as it allows local people to develop individually as
well as a community.

In the present scenario, with reference to this study, the realization that utilization of
appropriate channels of communication at the local level can facilitate people in the
decision making process, define their needs and problems and prioritise solutions does
not hold much ground. Close interaction with the informants/respondents reveal that
they are willing to co-operate with authorities in any kind of programme, even if it means only a step towards development. Nimthith Lepcha (19) of Samtar GP, Kalimpong I Block, feels that poor and simple villagers like her do not expect large-scale development schemes. But again villagers will participate if the government provides good guidance and the scheme is clearly interpreted.

Rural-based communication strategies have not yet reached the people and it stands in a diminutive form. Programmes have been formulated in paper by the government but they lack practical performance. For example, training and programme awareness for disaster management at the local level has been broadly described in paper but lacks implementation due to shortage of fund.

It is noteworthy that at the local level, more than the mass media and the traditional media, the interpersonal media seems to be an important channel of communication. The interpersonal interactions to some degree have provided clarity in communication and invited audience participation. This is what Sonam Bhutia, BDO of DP Block, had to say, “The physical presence of the Block and GP staff for dispersal of information has always made the impact and the reach at a much deeper level. It also helped to understand and get closer to the people and secure the needed feedback” (20). Communication therefore, becomes effective if there is close dialogue amongst the government agencies and the rural masses.

3.1. Role of Media

The role of media has been minimal. Insufficient fund, absence of devices for spread of development programmes with the Block and the GP who work at the village level portrays a grim position. Thus, they are not in a position to utilize gadgets like projectors, big size televisions etc for dissemination of information. Television, radio and other appliances, which constitute ‘one-way’ communication, are not owned by most families and so they remain distant from rural-based news and programmes.

Generally traditional media plays an important role in the communication process. However, the impact and the presence have not been the same for the study areas. Folk theatre, puppetry, folk songs, dance are some of the strategies that are occasionally utilized but their frequent use is barely seen. Inquiry with the GP and the Block does not give any information on locally designed traditional medium. But
NGOs like CMD do use skits during training sessions of SHG members which have been discussed later in the chapter.

4. People-centric Communication Channels

4.1. SHG: Community Action

With reference to the study areas it is important to understand the role the SHGs play in face-to-face communication. Though the SHGs do have some constraints they have made an impact as the primary channel of community development, oriented towards the poorest of the poor. Majority of the rural local people are illiterate and they are more ‘active and comfortable’ in their own locality and with their own local villagers. The interactions have gained momentum since the initiation of SGSY. The SHGs formed under this programme have become a major channel for dissemination of information and messages to the people at the grassroots level. Besides the implementation of various works of the SHGs, they also disseminate messages on Gram Sansad and Sabha programmes, pulse polio, NREGS and any other information related to ration cards, buro bhatta, APL and BPL certificates and the like.

The SHGs are emerging as the channel for giving voice to the weaker rural sections of the society. They have improved human communication by giving people the opportunity to relate to one another on issues which could be anything, from their personal problems to the problems of community. The people to people communication has advanced to a great extent with the SHGs, and therefore has been studied and expatiated in the next chapter.

4.2. People-to-People Channel

When people interact amongst themselves in reasonably affective terms and condition they form the most credible channel of communication. It becomes an important source for self and community development because it makes them aware of the local issues and their own responsibilities. As they communicate, they participate and as they participate, they communicate.

In the context of the study area community-based organizations (CBOs) like Youth Clubs, Samaj Ghars, and religious institutions, to some degree established by the people in their villages, play a key role in bringing the people together. Their role has been elaborated in a sub-section in this chapter.
We have already noted that life for the rural people has not been easy, particularly with the unpredictable political situation, extreme fluctuation in development fund and schemes and the dissolution of the elected GP body. Survival is difficult as they have to grapple with poverty everyday. We have also mentioned how these factors affected communication among the people.

However, ‘informal’ communication has been found during field visits. The local rural people relay *khabar* through school going children (21), during the weekly *haat* or sometimes they themselves take the trouble of walking long miles to interact (22) despite their preoccupation with agricultural work. But the general scenario is that the people for too many constraints get the time to interact. They are more occupied in pursuing their livelihood. This breed pessimism in some cases. Thus, Rudra Raj Gurung (23) of Relling GP, DP Block argues, that his participation will ‘bear no fruit’ as benefits are manipulated by the rich and powerful in the village. He referred to the rich farmers with political backings, land owners, people running business etc. The disadvantaged sections are dominated by the local elite. This is not surprising. As Sylive.I.Cohen states, “Communities may be highly socially stratified... and may contain a range of conflicting and compelling groups and interests” (24).

It is difficult for the rural people to take out time for long hours of meetings. However, it has been observed that the people are at ease when they communicate with one another within the same economic and social stratum. They also open up without any kind of inhibition if the medium is Nepali. Sometimes it has a positive outcome where the people approach the GP or the Block Office for their work, accompanied by their ‘trusted friends’.

There are certain CBOs which are effective in the villages in intensifying people-to-people communication. Samaj Ghars, Youth Clubs and religious organizations, to name a few, have been studied to understand their role in PRDC. These organizations may not have a great economic impact but they do have lot of social impact.

4.2.1. Samaj Ghars
The Samaj Ghar (popularly known as Samaj) plays an important role in the life of an ordinary rural man. There has been a long tradition of establishment of such Samaj in both the rural and urban areas of Darjeeling Hills. A Samaj is formed when people of a village come together under one roof for social ceremonies. In every GP the
maximum number of Samaj found adds up to five. These Samaj are usually formed by a single *goan* or at the most comprising of two *goans*. Samaj has also been formed on the basis of caste. For instance, the scheduled castes, Lepchas and Tamangs etc have their respective Samaj.

A nominal membership fees has to be paid by the people to be a member of the Samaj, but vary from village to village. They have office bearers (25) and the people from amongst themselves are nominated to the respective posts. There is provision for yearly payment of fees. It is compulsory for all members to lend a helping hand on any occasion that takes place in a member’s house. It can be a marriage ceremony, and incidents like death, serious illness etc. They also help in providing cash, known as *sarau* (26) by which a fixed amount is given by every member, the minimum being Rs.10/-.

4.7: A Samaj Meeting

The Samaj also possesses big-size utensils, a number of chairs, tables, sound system, and crockery which are let out for a fee. However, it is not necessary that all the Samaj will have all the items mentioned above. Occasionally the Samaj also undertakes social activities like cleaning the village, weeding and removing overgrown bushes, clearing places to make footpaths, blood-donation camps, solving family and village disputes etc. The Samaj also participates in reaching to the disadvantaged and poor in the society.
A close monitoring on its working shows that the local people congregate there to help themselves. The members participate not only with the notion that they will also need help at one point of time but also that they are ‘happy to be together’. The Samaj to some degree is active at the time of a natural calamity. They come together to help the victims and provide cash, kind, physical and moral help. It may not fulfill what they have lost but render some aid. Tilman Gurung of Limboo Goan, Relling GP, DP Block views the Samaj as an organization that binds the villagers together in times of need (27). Another villager, Rinchen Lepcha of Upper Dong, Samtar GP, Kalimpong I Block states, that their social life revolves around their Samaj (28).

A close observation reveals that participation can materialize in social activity with proper communication ‘back up’. During normal times the people are occupied with their own work but in times of need they help one another and can avail the facilities offered. The Samaj has particularly benefited the poor and the needy by promoting ‘we group’ feeling and sentiment, based on the ‘felt needs’.

The general scenario shows that in all the eight GPs the Samaj may not be having a large scale and a prominent socio-economic contribution. However, to some degree it has helped to bring people together. Thus, the samaj is one of the important channels of *people to people* communication.

### 4.2.2. Youth Clubs

The Youth Clubs are village-level organizations which have been opened by the local youth themselves. Field visits show that the existence of Youth Clubs varies from GP to GP and they may range from three to five. It is a voluntary organization where the youth, mostly male in the age group of eighteen to thirty five, form a club. The strength of members depends on the size of the goan and the number of local youth willing to take the membership. It also needs mention that all the clubs are not male-oriented. There are also clubs which also comprise of all the villagers both male and female. Sometime these clubs also function as Samaj. Here there is no specific age group.

The objective of the club is focused on social activities to be undertaken at the village level. The Youth Clubs too have their own office-bearers and the members choose from among themselves the persons to be nominated. Usually a nominal amount is fixed as membership fee which is to be paid annually. *Siru ko Ghar* (thatched house)
or a wooden one comprise the club premise. Such constructions are on voluntary basis from the members. In the absence of such a premise they also hold meetings in the community halls or schools of their area.

The clubs undertake various social activities (See Annexure IV-A) in the village like voluntary help in times of natural disasters, in case of a death in a family, taking the sick to the hospital, marriage ceremonies, making kuccha road, blood donation camps, eye camps in the village, cultural programmes, sports meet and any other social work that needs their service. These activities differ from GP to GP and are mostly seasonal. Besides offering their service for the goanle (villagers), they also provide the necessary and required help to its members.

4.8: A Youth Club

The clubs are also in possession of certain articles that are rented out for a fee. But the number of articles varies from club to club. The common ones include the sound system, musical instruments (29), plastic chairs and tables, buffet ware, big sized utensils etc. The fee collected is used in maintaining the club and in buying more things that can be put to use commercially. Occasionally, the youth organize musical programmes to raise fund for the club (30).

Preparing the rural youth for community development also constitutes an important aspect that needs to be analysed. Sometime they also act as volunteers to form the
QRT for their areas. The youths also locally known as yuva can be politically active at the time of elections, mobilizing the masses for their respective parties. Interactions with the club members show that they are willing to take part in government-aided programmes for the development of their village. Roshan Rai (31) of Lali Guras Yuva Sanga (Lali Guras Youth Club) states that the people of the villages are mostly poor and it is our duty to help them and if the GP gives us work, we will definitely do.

A number of GPs too are interested to take the help of the Youth Clubs but they don’t have sufficient fund for remuneration. The youth are of the opinion that to a certain extent they are willing to give social service but not beyond a point as their source of fund are limited. However, the most important finding was the lack of employment among the youth and the irregularity of fund in the club, which have compelled the youth to ask for allowance if they are allotted any work by the government.

Despite their problems the club members are willing and happy to give a helping-hand to the deserving, needy and poor. Participation in the activities of their villages gives them a kind of satisfaction, as pointed out by Suman Pradhan of Tiger Hill Club (32). A similar view was given by Jiwan Subba of Nawa Jyoti Sanga (33) who states that what they do is “very little” as contribution from the government is inadequate. These clubs too are not without obstacles. Mostly lack of fund leads to the disintegration or stagnation of the clubs.
The youth clubs communicate with the rural people in their own way, not following any 'grammar' of communication. However, they can act as key communicators if provided with proper training and assistance in dissemination of information to the people at the grassroots level. They have been born and brought up in the village, they are well accustomed with their surroundings, they know the people and their 'psyche'. Yet this channel has not been harnessed to act. Most important, the local people too look upon them for help and assistance in times of need.

4.2.3. Religious Organizations
Various religious organizations prevalent in the villages also contribute to people's communication among themselves. There is an existence of diverse form of religious communities, each having its own independent identity. The most common among the Nepali Hindu community living in the villages are followers of Shri Satya Sai Baba (34) and they have their own mandli (community).

These mandlis not only propagate religious teachings but they also undertake various social activities. These activities are not only for the welfare of its members but also for the community at large. The members are in close contact with each other and help one another in times of need. For example, the members extend help individually on the given occasion and also make cash contribution.

The members also participate in community activities like pruning, cutting of overgrown bushes, shrubs of the surroundings, visiting the sick and the old, making kaccha roads, etc. The mandlis cannot bring bikash to the local rural people nor can they allocate fund for rural development programmes but they have given the local people, especially the weak and poor, a sustained support during crisis however limited it may be.

Christians also have their organizations and they too have their own small communities, generally referred as samudaya. They too function like the mandli and they extend all support and cooperation to their members.

4.3. Communication Technology
Face-to-face communication can be supported and facilitated by technology. Thus, in different parts of the world the cellular phones are also utilized by the people for communicating with one another. But it has limited availability as most rural people
cannot afford to own one. It is considered a luxury by a majority of the rural people. Non-availability of proper network, absence of electricity, financial constraint being the major cause has hindered the number of people owning a cellular phone.

Despite the limitation this modern gadget has been utilized for communicating messages. For example, the SHG members use the cellular phone for conveying messages, like an emergency meeting, or a cluster meeting. Sometimes the phone is used for disseminating information on programmes to the people by the people (35) who have been intimated by the GP. The phone also plays a crucial role during the occurrence of a natural calamity. It is an important ‘channel’ but it has not been able to reach every individual, especially the poorest of the poor, living in the widely dispersed areas.

5. People-to-Government Channels

If the fundamental objective of rural development is to organize the local rural community it is necessary to study people’s communication with the government agencies. Simultaneously, as the previous chapter elaborates, the government agencies also have the task of encouraging, guiding and facilitating the people at the grassroots level. It is important to assess it too.

The analysis of the two-way participatory communication is important in order to understand the relation between the government and the rural masses and vice versa. Here the focus is not only on the people’s involvement in placing their needs and problems, deciding rural programmes and their implementation but also the steps or measures practised for communicating with the government agencies- the GP and the Block Office.

5.1. Communicating with the GP

Shyam Khatiwada (36) of Lower Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I Block, points out that the GP is “everything to us” and the local people depend on the Pradhan and members for bringing development schemes to the village. It is attributed to the fact that the elected members of GP are ‘closer to the people’ than the officials, for they live and work in the villages. Similarly, the people too prefer to be with them, because they feel that government officials will not always be there to see them through their problems. Ironically, the elected body stands dissolved since 2005.
Tshering Lama (37) of Seokbir GP, Kalimpong I Block shares this opinion. He says: “We have trusted our elected members, we listen to them and we expect them to bring development schemes and projects to the village”. This shows that the people are depended upon the ward members for implementation of any scheme in their village. Accordingly, the people are much comfortable with the ward members and a common belief among the people is they rely and trust the candidates for whom they have voted and won.

4.10: A Villager interacting with GP Staff

As cited in Chapter III, the members live and work in the village and are in constant touch with the rural masses that can make a better communication scenario. The ward members, if provided with training on various rural based programmes and if given detail information on any rural subject, can play an important role in reaching to the people at the grassroots level. But the reality projects a different scenario as the status of the ward members stand dissolved. There is no legal paper from the state government to indicate that they stand dissolved or they remain in their legal position. Under such circumstances the people suffer and sometimes it becomes difficult to make them understand.

5.1.1. Importance of Community Meetings

The Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha have been observed as the vital areas of communication, not only for people’s participation but also people’s communication
with the GP staff conducting the Sansad or the Sabha. It acts as a forum for open interaction between the local rural people and the GP staff. It gives an opportunity to voice their problems, place their demands to the officials, gain knowledge and information on the development schemes meant for them and other information. A Gram Sabha is held annually for the number of Gram Sansads held in the respective GPs. But as mentioned earlier in Chapter II these community meetings have not been conducted since 2008.

Funds for implementation of development programmes and projects have not been stable for the rural areas of Darjeeling. Allocation of funds was always at the mercy of DGHC and as repeatedly mentioned before, from 2005 it has been always been a dry season. A bitter reality which has affected people’s participation. It seems the rural masses have come to terms with the condition of the GP. Yet under such situation the local people attended the meetings till 2007. Observation shows people’s participation in the age group in the range of twenty seven years to sixty five years with the dominance of the male members. However, the presence of women has been slowly increasing with the increase in SHGs.

It has also been observed that the attendance of the youth is thin and interaction with them reveal that they have no hope in the government and every year it has become a custom to place their applications both individual- and- community based (See Annexure- IV B and C) with the GP. Binod Subba (38) of Lower Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I Block is not interested to participate in Gram Sansads because he feels that every year the same programmes are repeated and DGHC has ‘nothing new to give’. Instead the programmes seem to become fewer with time.

Communication in such meetings reveals that the ordinary people do voice their opinions and speak about their needs and problems, but not all of them. It seems that the extent of communication depends on one’s level of income and status in the village. As mentioned in Chapter I it is a question of ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ But here again one cannot overlook the alertness of the SHGs as they have built the confidence to some level to speak up not only for themselves but also for others. Lidya Thapa (39) spoke on behalf of her neighbour explaining why she needs the IAY scheme. Such community meetings are also utilized by the GP staff for raising awareness on the advantages of joining SHGs or on health and hygiene. For instance, Jagat Man Rai
(40) Secretary of Relling GP, made the Sansad interesting as he gave the opportunity for the members of the SHGs to talk about their experience so that others will be inspired to be a part of it.

Communication sometime seems to become ‘bold’ when people come intoxicated to the community meetings. Around 10% of male members come drunk in such meets, though not in the extreme state. This was observed in GPs like Relling, Jhepi, Nayanore, Samtar, and Seokbir where tribals live. It is a known fact that consumption of liquor is more among the tribes in the Hills that is why they are known as the *matwali jath*. However, they do seem to get the strength to speak their mind out when drunk. Like (name withheld on request) (41) of Gairi Goan, Nayanore GP, DP Block who commented aloud, “Why don’t you talk about road, water and electricity when you expect us to pay the tax on time”.

Post-Sansad interviews reveal the reluctance on the part of the people to speak up. They have a common answer, “There is no point in speaking, it’s a waste of energy and we are never in the beneficiary list”. But it does show that they are aware of their interests. What is evident is the disposition of the government agencies to facilitate the people, especially of the BPL category, to place their needs and problems and provide satisfactory answers to their queries. Deprived of the power to work freely among the rural masses, the GP is also at the mercy of DGHC for allotment of fund and schemes which makes PRDC more vulnerable.

### 5.2. People and Block Development Office: Communicative Dimension

Besides the GP the rural people also communicates with the Block. But the frequency of interaction is much less as compared to the GPs. The alarmingly situation shows that around 5% to 10% (42) from the villages have not been to the Block Office. A common response was- *kam nai pardaina* (no work with the Block). Awkwardness with the Block staff, inability to speak, remote and far-flung goans, pre-occupation with agricultural work, ignorance, illiteracy are some of the factors that can be identified as causes of lesser communication.

At the same time the entire blame cannot be put on the rural people. It is an open secret that since the creation of DGHC the Block has been paralysed in its functioning. It has been observed that the staff of both the Blocks have not reached
that stage of consciousness where they can raise awareness of others about the importance of the Block. Instead they have a tendency to blame the people sighting excuses like 'they don’t want to understand', 'they have adamant nature'. The Disaster Management Department attached with the Block however, seems to interact with the people. During the time of a calamity like landslide people do visit the Block for tirpal, blankets etc. This does not mean that the department does not make spot visits for relief distribution. The people also visit the Block after disasters for monetary compensation which sometimes takes more than a year.

One cannot overlook the fact that the visits have increased since the initiation of SHGs. A common point that all the respondents share in all the eight GPs is their visit to the Block Office only after joining the groups. As a result, they not only have been able to recognize the staff but also developed the ability to interact. At the same time they also become aware of other information which they can take back to their villages. We also cannot ignore the fact that the people’s interest in the Block arises only when it is necessary or when some crisis arises.

It is also to be noted that people do not seem to take interest in higher authorities like DM Office and DGHC. They feel that they are too far and assert that the GP is their ‘only administrative apparatus’.

5.3. Variance in People's Participation

It has been repeatedly mentioned by us that people’s participation is a ‘mixed bag’ and an exceedingly complex one too. The extent of people’s participation is co-related to factors like income status, literacy level, location of the village, level of awareness, gender status, caste and the like. For example, the upper lying areas of Nayanore GP hardly find room for participation. A tribal dominated area, with little education, they lack interest and awareness. Caste apparently seems to play an important role in the context of the study areas. It has been observed that members of some castes have long been active and alert where as some others seem to be generally oblivion to the activities happening in the goan. But in actuality poverty and illiteracy are the intervening elements, which guide the ‘caste factor’, also affecting people’s participation in the rural development programmes. It would be absurd to claim that every individual at the village level participates equally.
However, there are some aberrations. Despite being poor people who belong to the Hindu-Nepali community like the Brahmins, Chettris and Pradhans are more alert and active in meets. They seem to take interest in rural projects and make queries of the benefits. A common view shared by the GP staff was their ‘easiness’ in interacting with the people of these castes as compared with the people of the tribal belts. Traditionally the tribal communities like the Sherpas, Lepchas and Subbas mostly living in the remote goans lead a laid back life. Illiteracy is high among them, they are shy and are not out-spoken. The researcher also occasionally experienced the difference in nature and their way of interaction during the field visits. Then again, the incidence of non-participation should not be reduced to the caste factor.

To reiterate, poverty limits people’s participation. For example, a khetala who earns a maximum of Rs.50/- per day working on others land, prefer to pursue livelihood than to participate in programmes designed by the government. However, some exceptions are there when people like Thupden Bhutia (43) attend the Gram Sansad every year to understand the development schemes that comes to the Panchayat, even if he has to sacrifice the Rs.50/- that he earns working on somebody else’s field.

Lacks of motorable road, scattered settlements and weak electricity coverage have also affected people’s participation. The people of the remote areas are always neglected, messages always reach late, and absence of motorable roads makes the officials lose the zeal to visit every village especially the far flung ones. For example, community meetings are hardly conveyed at villages located far away and sometimes the people themselves have to walk for two to three hours to participate in the meetings. While doing so they ‘waste time’ which could have been utilized in attending to their livestock and working in the field. When these factors combine with the traditionally oppressed castes the concerned individuals suffer from ‘double bind’ which severely affects their participation.

As long as the ‘top-down’ process for the implementation of development programmes continues, participation will invariably be inadequate. What is needed is participatory development from below. If there is ‘imposed’ development the rural masses have to silently endure and accept whatever DGHC has in store for them. Release of fund is not according to the AAP but depends on DGHC. Consequently,
the concept of local and community-level participation seems to have acquired a secondary status.

The Hill administration is yet to look at people from mere recipients of development programmes to instruments of development. The political situation in Darjeeling Hills has taken such a turn that the people, specifically the rural masses, have been deprived of their rights and benefits. Thus, the pace at which development was supposed to take place in Darjeeling Hills has not been accomplished. The slow movement of development programmes and projects to the grassroots level has affected communication, which could have facilitated participation of people in their implementation. The community meetings play a crucial role in the life of an ordinary people, being an arena for decision making. This has been clearly referred in The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, which states that the “Gram Sansad is to ensure active participation of the people in implementation, maintenance and equitable distribution of benefits with respect to such subjects” (44).

People are supposed to place their individual and collective problems and needs in such meetings with the hope that it will be heard at the higher level by DGHC. But local political leaders and the rich villagers have a tendency to manipulate things to their advantage. It is a question of – to what extent PRDC can be achieved in this milieu. Besides the SHGs, which are the most important community-based channel of communication, there is an absence of ‘planned’ channels for initiating people’s participation. Paucity of fund can be seen as major obstacles as the government agency at the Block and village levels are not able to conduct trainings, workshops, seminars and other programmes to reach the people at the grassroots level. This is exactly what the Executive Assistant (name withheld on request) of Nayanore GP, DP Block had to say “The blockade of fund from DGHC has made it difficult to work amongst the villagers” (45).

The rural people are entirely dependent on agriculture and livestock for sustenance in the village. Close interaction with the local people reveal their dissatisfaction with the Krishi Bibhag (Agriculture Department of DGHC). Binu Hangma Khewa (46) of Nayanore GP, DP Block comments that they do not get any assistance; oranges have
been falling prematurely for the past three years before they ripen, ginger starts to wilt in five months, but there is none to ascertain the causes and suggest remedies.

Incidentally the agriculture office of this Block is situated in the lower belt of the GP. This shows that the people do not get an opportunity to participate in securing solutions which as a rule should have been conducted by the *Krishi Bibhag*. There is a huge communication lag between the people and the agencies and the former are left on their own to fend themselves.

Similar problems were faced by the farmers of Relling GP which was intimated through the Gram Sansad, and the Area Councillor (47) was also provided with a petition. But there was no response from the higher authorities and no initiative was taken to eradicate the disease that afflicted orange trees. Demonstrations are not conducted to show how the cultivators can eliminate the root cause. Neither are the officials of the *Krishi Bibhag* interested to stay and work within the villages. The villages could have been the ‘active spot’ for enunciating PRDC had the concern leadership of *Krishi Bibhag* realized its potentiality.

The local rural people, particularly the poor, are also deprived of benefits that could have helped them to improve their socio-economic condition. Co-operative Societies (48) have been opened in the GP areas with the objective of providing agricultural credit loans to the rural people on easy interest. However, they lack the initiative of informing the ordinary people the benefits of taking loans from a legal organization on low interest rate and other facilities attached to it.

SHGs have to a certain degree lessened the dependence of people on money-lenders. However, there are situations where the poor prefer to borrow money from their local *sahu* or *mahajan* (money lenders). Interaction with local people reveals that they are comfortable borrowing money from the money lenders as no official formalities are required and they get it instantly. Proper guidance and communication with the people can save them from the clutches of the money lenders who charge not only exorbitant interest (often to the extent of 5 to 10% per Rs.100/-) but even force them to forfeit proprietorship of land.
For the local rural people, mostly farmers, the opportunity to participate in the identification of their agricultural problems and the search for solutions remain a distant dream. Field visits show that the people are willing to participate in programmes that will help them to earn a decent livelihood. Lalita Pradhan (49) of Jhepi GP, DP Block, and many like her, lament that with no help from the government, they have been compelled to carry on with the traditional system of agriculture and the ‘evils’ associated with it.

6. Local Hill Organizations as Channel

The people residing in the GP areas under Kalimpong subdivision have been fortunate to avail facilities which have given them respite to some extent. Here the rural people have become more participative as they are involved in organizations like Farmers Cub (50) and Himalayan Farmers Front (51). Programmes are often (52) organized, which to some degree has enhanced the participative ability of the ordinary people. However, it is also important to mention that such organisations are yet to reach every GP of Kalimpong. The distance and the remoteness of the areas have particularly limited mass participation.

Though the organizations are regional representations the local rural people under DP Block have not been able to benefit much from such organisations. Institutions like Himalayan Farmers Front have representatives from a few GPs like Relling GP but the mode of functioning seems irregular. Communication gap and the distance from the main office based at Kalimpong have made the situation even worse.

The above-mentioned organizations do not come under, nor do they have any link, with DGHC. Therefore, they work independently. For example, the Himalayan Farmers Front, an independent organization involves the marginal farmers and their participation with an objective to place their demands and fight for their rights. A booklet prepared for their annual meet titled *Himalayan Krishak Adhiwasen* focuses mainly on awareness creation among farmers for agriculture related government schemes, closer ties between the related department officials and the farmers etc (53). The organization has helped the gwahlas (dairy farmers) to get a better price for their milk from Himul (54).
Our study of the organization shows that it can serve as an important channel of communication to facilitate people's participation. Tashi Sherpa (55) of Upper Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I Block and member says that the organisation has helped him to be aware of his rights and his hard work has not gone to waste, which has helped to improve his income status. A common opinion amongst the members, who, to repeat, are the ordinary rural people, cannot be overlooked. They point out, “The organization has helped to unite the rural farmers, improve our economic condition and has extended help in bringing the government sponsored rural schemes to us”. The organization has thus given them the platform to voice their opinion and grievances.

The Farmers Club affiliated to National Agricultural Bank for Rural Development (NABARD) (56) has been introduced with the main objective of providing the rural farmers with easy loans and making the rural people, mostly comprising of cultivators and agricultural and dairy farmers, aware of the means and methods of work to bring about greater ‘professionalism and maturity’ and show them alternative working skills that will pave the way for more income generation. The club has also given importance to the adoption of the government-sponsored rural development schemes and benefits by the ordinary people, with the view that they will be able to earn a decent and stable livelihood, keeping in mind that agriculture forms the most vital part in their lives.
Such organizations do not have any political affiliation, so they work independently and facilitate communication between the local rural people and the government. Their main objective is to identify the problems related to agriculture— from production and marketing to crop diseases.

Thus, they intend to bring to light the plight of the rural poor and give them a platform to speak their mind out. For instance, June 01 every year is celebrated as Farmers Day by the Himalayan Farmers Front where they give the poor marginal farmers the opportunity to speak in the programme and the farmers are also awarded with the Krishak Award (Farmers Award) (See Annexure IV-D) in the form of certificate. The farmers mainly address the day-to-day problems faced by them and ask for solutions.

Such initiatives can definitely bring the deteriorating conditions of the rural masses to the limelight. Their modes are such that the people will have the urge to participate in such programmes. As we have repeatedly noted, even if the people are interested they do not get appropriate opportunities to involve themselves in decision-making, implementation and evaluation of rural development programmes. The channels mentioned above can serve to communicate to the rural people the messages of change. The advantage of being local makes it possible for the audience to understand, accept and adopt the messages. The realization that they themselves can become the source of effective communication can attract active cooperation of the rural masses in development activities.

However, these organizations too have constraints. Fund crisis, inability to have a wide coverage area and limited organizational skill seem to have hindered their expansion.

Thus, the outlets for people-centric communication are present but their position in the upliftment of the rural poor is yet to be realized.

7. NGOs

NGOs “constitute a potentially important vehicle by which social and economic development can be promoted in developing countries, especially at the micro level. At the same time it is recognized that NGOs too depend largely on people’s participation in accomplishing their objectives” (57). The intensity of their work lies
in the ability to efficaciously motivate the incentive to action among the people at the grassroots level.

I have also made a study of the NGOs working in the selected GPs of the two Blocks. Under DP Block and in the four concerned GPs, NGOs can hardly be seen. The reason for their absence may be that Bijanbari, where DP Block is located, is politically very sensitive. However, there has been a recent emergence of the Panchwati Greentech Research Society. This NGO has been involved with the implementation of TSC. The absence of NGOs in the GPs has also affected the SHGs. The members of the SHGs have to travel to Kalimpong to undergo training in various disciplines due to the lack of Training Center at DP Block. In Kalimpong NGOs like CMD impart intensive training on leadership, piggery, poultry, catering, which have been discussed in detail below. While the SHG members of the GPs under DP Block are happy with the training at the same time they face difficulties as they have to leave home for a long period—sometimes for more than ten days. The problem is particularly acute for women trainees. Interviews with them reveal that their main sources of worry are their children, livestock and crops and alcoholic husbands.

The other prominent NGOs based at Kalimpong, which have made a place for themselves among the rural masses, are Hill Social Welfare Society (58) World Vision (59) and Disha (60). These organizations have focused their work on the upliftment of the rural poor, particularly of the neglected and drop-out villages. Women and child development, improvement of their socio-economic condition, heath and hygiene, skill development training and provision of alternative means of livelihood are the major programmes undertaken by these NGOs. Let us have a special focus on the most prominent NGO in the study areas.

7.1. What CMD Does
CMD conducts training for the SHGs and the marginal farmers. Leadership, Basic Orientation Programme (BOP), Skill Development Training, Square Metre Vegetable Gardening (SMVG) (61) and other agriculture related training constitutes the core of their programme. The programmes are conducted in the local language and besides verbal communication, various medium like hand-made posters, television, blackboard, games activity are used for communicating with the participants.
They also have adopted street plays to generate awareness on waste management. But again such plays are yet to reach the most remote and backward villages. Street plays are a form of traditional media which, however, is not taken seriously. They have also taken up the government-sponsored TSC programme for implementation in the rural areas of Kalimpong. Besides awareness programme for health and hygiene among the rural villagers have also been undertaken to convince the people to have their personal toilets. This programme also includes construction of school toilets.

CMD has given responsibility to the resource persons (his/her role has been discussed in following chapter) whose prime duty is to motivate the people and create awareness. He/she collects Rs.20/- from each household for construction of the toilet and the rest of the amount (730/-) is borne by the government. Rs.20/- is usually kept by the resource persons. It is compulsory for every household to participate in the construction and assist the ministry provided by CMD. The mode of operation is based on “sensitization, motivation and action” (62). Yusuf Simick, Coordinator of CMD says, “We connect with the rural people raising local issues, in their local language with a sense of humor that helps in better and open interaction” (63).

7.2. Participatory Communication with TSC
TSC was launched by the state government in the year 2000-01. All the districts of the state were covered under this scheme by 2003-04, except for the Hill areas of DGHC. Although a proper reason could not be sighted for the delay it appeared as lack of
interest and ignorance on the part of DGHC. The delay was over on October 26, 2005, when TSC was launched in a bid to upgrade the hygiene standards by DGHC. The project was implemented under DRDC, DGHC.

The strategy is to make the programme “community led” and “people centered”. A "demand driven approach" is to be adopted with increased emphasis on awareness-creation and demand generation for sanitary facilities in houses, schools and for cleaner environment (64). Infact specific communication strategies have been set for its implementation by the concern department of the government of India (65). To some extent the strategies have also been adopted by CMD with instructions from DRDC. For instance the usage of print media in the form of pamphlets (See Annexure IV-E and IV-F), and the use of resource person as mentioned above for face-to-face communication with the local rural people. The implementation of TSC started only in 2007. CMD has started the project in GPs like Upper Ecchey and Lower Ecchey. Samtar and Seokbir are yet to avail. Surprisingly, in DP Block the implementation started only in 2008. The work has begun only in the lower belt of Nayanore and Chongtong GP.

It can be said that TSC has lot of potentiality to communicate among the rural masses the necessity of a toilet and raise consciousness on health and hygiene. It can facilitate people’s participation in this rural development scheme which can help the rural poor to lead a healthy life. Though the scheme is just at the initial stage it has, to some degree, encouraged the people to be involved for their own benefit.

4.13: Construction of toilet under TSC
7.3. Critique
The NGOs also face difficulties while working. Sometimes the people themselves become a hindrance when they provide wrong or distorted information. Shortage of fund is a major problem but it also happens that some people in the villages tend to instigate the innocent illiterate people to stay away from the programmes or sometimes the NGOs themselves are not able to reach the deserving and the needy. Sometimes it becomes difficult to convince the people of the utility of the programmes and they tend to misunderstand. We can cite the case of TSC programme activists whom some villagers thought of as contractors with the intention to swindle money. However, the reality is that the people are poor, illiterate and deprived of the basic necessities. Some even cannot afford to pay Rs.20/- for construction of the toilet. It seems the NGOs sometime fail to feel the pulse of the people. They on occasions tend to continue with their activities too rigidly, ignoring the reality in the rural areas of the Hills.

The NGOs show little interest in the far-flung GPs, particularly those that are remote and backward. In fact, they argue that it becomes ‘difficult to make the people understand’ their activities. Thus, the NGOs would rather overlook the people’s interest than to help the rural poor understand their motives. It has also been observed that some NGOs only place their programmes and projects to the people without caring for their decisions, their opinions. Under such circumstances the practice of participation becomes even more elusive.

8. Mass Media
Mass media is widely recognized as important agent of communication for its ability to communicate effectively with a large number of people at the same time. Further more, media leaves the audience with images, which have more longevity than text messages. It is presumed that the use of the most advanced media is the most effective gateway to generating awareness among the people. However, we cannot take this statement at face value as not everybody gets an opportunity to avail of the facilities of the modern media. Therefore, it has been said ‘not only have mass media a very limited reach in rural areas, their programme contents are also of little relevance to the daily life of the rural masses, to their information needs and aspirations. They have failed to carry the plans and development programmes into
every home in the language and symbols of the people” (66). He, therefore, emphasizes the necessity for the mass media to have a rural approach and orientation. In the context of my study areas television, radio, newspapers and magazines, are yet to acquire broad base and form an integral part of the rural community. But at the same time we cannot overlook their role, though limited, in the life of the rural poor.

8.1. Newspapers

Print media in the form of newspaper popularly known as Khabar Kakaj is an effective channel as it reaches a large number of readers at the same time. It is a credible and comparatively a cheaper form of media. This media, however, is limited only to the literate audience. In the study areas newspapers are yet to form the channel for communicating messages and information to the majority of people. Although it is a low-cost medium of communication, literate readers are few. It is not that the people are ignorant, but there are certain factors which have failed to link the people, especially of the most remote and backward areas, to the local news. Before we mention the limitations, it is necessary to analyze the extent of people’s interest in reading newspapers and the kind of knowledge they acquire. The greatest facility has been the establishment of Gramin Pustakalya (village library) in the GPs. Except for Lower Ecchey GP under Kalimpong I Block, the rest of the seven GPs have a library. Let us understand the Gramin Pustakalya as a sub-section.

8.1.1. Newspapers: Community Reading

Usually, a small house, comprising of a single large room, makes the library. A librarian and an office assistant have been appointed to look after the same. Besides the local Nepali newspapers the libraries also have books. The percentage of Nepali books is greater as compared to English. Himalaya Darpan and Sunchari are the two local Nepali newspapers that can be found in the library.

The readers may be mostly male but it does not mean that all men of the villages are members. Illiteracy, lack of interest, poverty, preoccupation with work and time factor seem to be the common reasons for the lesser presence.

Himalaya Darpan and Sunchari are daily newspapers and the people residing in the towns can read fresh news everyday but the same cannot be said of the people of the rural areas. Sitamaya Chettri (67), office assistant of Seokbir Library informs that the
market is very far from the village, so they face difficulties in getting the daily newspapers. Generally they collect the newspapers of the entire week at a time.

The facility has been provided by the government but there is mixed response from the people. Dilbahadur Rai (68) of Chongtong GP, DP Block likes to read newspapers but his house is far from the library and takes around one hour only to reach. This problem is faced by a majority of the local rural people who have the interest so there is a tendency to stay away from participating in the facility provided.

Illiteracy, to reiterate, is another factor that leads to the lower level access to newspapers. A common argument of the people is, “We are not educated, so we cannot read the newspaper and books, all we can think of is hard work”.

4.14: Gramin Pastakalaya- Seokbir GP Kalimpong I Block

8.1.2. Newspapers: Personal Circulation

The newspapers also have personal circulation in the villages but it is few in number and obviously confined among the literates. As mentioned above, illiteracy and poverty keep the people away from reading. However, the literate among the local people, are interested to keep up with the latest news and do buy newspapers (only Nepali) when they are in the market. At the same time we cannot ignore the existence of few graduate readers of newspapers in the GPs, most of whom are aspirants for government service. There are a few, like Sushila Dahal (69) of Lower Ecchey GP,
Kalimpong I Block, who regularly read the Nepali and the English newspapers (70) for information on employment.

No less important, FGDs reveal that an individual may have no education but a number of them show the interest in knowing what is in the newspaper. Visual images in newspapers also attract their attention. Wangden Lepcha (71), with his fellow villagers, shares his opinion, saying that he is not educated but he likes to know the latest news while his fellow neighbours occasionally read newspapers. As the researcher enters the remote villages, inaccessible by vehicle, newspapers become more and more scarce. It is not that all the rural people are illiterate but lack of proper roads, prevent the delivery of newspapers. The situation is worse in GPs like Nayanore and Samtar where the people hardly find occasion to see a newspaper as they are without a motorable road.

It is obvious that the use of newspapers and other forms of print media will depend upon the extent of literacy prevalent in the rural society. But literacy alone cannot be the reason because even if people are literate, they do not get the opportunity to use this medium for communication. As explained, scattered villages, poverty, lack of motorable roads, irregular transport service, distance of the main market, lack of government initiatives are the few factors that come to light, which impede even the educated segment of the concern GPs from accessing the print media.

8.2. Radio
The essence of radio is reflected when it acts as the most appropriate instrument for reaching to the people at the grassroots level. Generally information, education and entertainment form the basis of radio. They can greatly facilitate the process of spread of information and messages at a relatively low cost, specifically to the rural population. The channel is recognized as the means by which the message gets across from the source to the receiver. Radio gives a wide coverage and its usage and availability are more in the rural areas because it provides localized information.

P.R.R. Sinha in his book has mentioned the Farm Radio Forum first started in Canada as "an education for action to improve the economic and social conditions of rural people". He also discusses the introduction of the same in India in 1956 (72).
Radio in the rural development context serves as a medium to:

- Broadcast information and messages
- To elicit awareness and knowledge on rural based issues
- To communicate new agricultural device and practices to farmers
- To mobilize the rural community to handle rural issues.

It forms the mainstay and a potential tool for disseminating information and beefing up motivation. Despite the fact that the radio acts as an effective contributor for enhancing the interest and consciousness of the people in programmes planned to bring about change and development, it also falls short of perfection. The major problem is that it cannot establish a two-way process of communication. In other words, prompt feedback cannot be procured from the audience who are unable to send back messages whenever required. There is no room for instant queries. Consequently, certain issues go unanswered and unexplained, which make a negative impact.

The introduction of Community radio (73) can minimize the problem to some extent. Its adoption can enhance efficient and effective participation for the people and by the people. It gives the rural poor and the marginalized the opportunity to engage in the identification, discussion, formulation and presentation of rural-based programmes. Therefore, “Community radio, in the ideal situation, is the by-product of participatory processes of consultations, reflections, discussions and action that form part of the wide-ranging development activities within the community” (74). It serves as a platform for the people to voice their views and opinions, participate in decision making and take on the role as a contributor to the programme based on their daily activities that reflects the phases in the life of a rural individual. In one of its publication AMARC states “The historical philosophy of community radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, the mouthpiece of oppressed people (be it on racial, gender or class grounds) and generally as a tool for development (75)

8.2.1. Radio Communication

“Radio reaches communities at the very end of the development road—people who live in areas with no phones and no electricity. Radio reaches people who can’t read or write” (76). The use of radio by the rural masses of the respective GPs has also been studied and analyzed. The study reveals that the availability of radio in a family
is directly related to the 'income factor'. Not all households in the village own radio. Many cannot afford to buy radio which can be regarded as a luxury for them.

Interviews with the people reveal that they use radio primarily for listening to news, rural programmes mostly from AIR stationed at Kurseong and for entertainment. Manju Rizal (77) of Dara Goan, Chongtong GP, DP Block says, that life in the village is difficult, we have to work the whole day, and I listen to songs in the radio to relax. For those who cannot afford television radio acts as their informant and entertainer. The latest trend is to listen to Frequency Megahertz (FM) radio and it is evident particularly among the youth. The majority of the poor live in the remote and backwards areas, they are illiterate and scope for entertainment is limited.

Latest agricultural innovations and techniques, beneficial methodologies for growing various crops like potato, ginger, squash, green vegetables etc, local remedies and solutions to avert crop maladies, programmes on animal husbandry, health and hygiene issues and other information are provided by the radio. For instance Goanje Sabha (Farm and Home) is aired by AIR Kurseong every day at 6.10 p.m. (79) and Agricultural Hymns every day at 7.05 a.m. (80). But to what extent they are put to use by the people in their daily life is a different question. It is a situation where the radio acts as the tool for disbursement of useful information in the local language with an objective to reach the people at the grassroots level to improve their lives and environment. But the information does not always reach those who need it.

We find that the local rural people only occasionally listen to rural based messages and news. Kavita Moktan (81) of Gairi Goan Nayanore GP, DP Block points out that the busy schedule keeps her away from the radio. However, she does try to listen to Gar Sansar (Rural Women Programme) aired by AIR Kurseong every Tuesday at 3.30 p.m. (82). However, there is difference of opinion. Rajesh Basnet (83) of Phewa Basty Upper Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I Block, makes a regular effort to listen to agricultural related information, which he “tries to use it in the fields”. Like him Durga Prasad Khatiwada (84) of Lower Ecchey GP seems to take interest in another programme called Krishi Paramarsa (Live Phone-In) also transmitted by AIR Kurseong every last Friday of the month at 6.10 p.m. (85). He tells me about his experience where he has spoken to experts regarding agriculture. This programme
seems to be liked by many as it seems to create space for two-way communication but again the question is how many can afford to call.

Another kind of view was expressed by Poonam Gurung (86) of Yolk Seokbir GP, Kalimpong I Block. She agrees that the radio provides various information but she cannot put it in practice because the information is provided at a time when she has either already sown the crops or when the season is over. Despite the problems faced by the people, radio does act as a communicative channel for people to interact amongst themselves. We have come across instances when local people get together in the evening to listen to the radio. However, such ‘group listening’ is not a routine. It occurs in most cases when the people find themselves in such act when one among them bring a radio in the sites of discussion. Paras Chandra Allay, Transmission Executive of AIR Kurseong (87) highlights that the radio station has also been harnessed for publicity for natural disaster warning message. This can be regarded as crucial as it allows the people to move to safer places and save their lives, property and animals. But because not everybody possesses radio, there is no assurance that the information will reach every household in the villages. Thus, the radio has not been able to make sufficient progress as a tool of PRDC in the areas of study.

8.3. Television

Field study was also undertaken for evaluating the role of television in the life of the rural people of the selected GPs. The television acts as a powerful medium for development communication. However, with weak electricity coverage, it has not been as effective as it could be. In the eight selected GPs only around 25% to 30% from the rural population own a television. As mentioned earlier, not every individual belonging to the middle income group can afford a television. The situation is worse for the poor and the marginalized as one proceeds towards the remote and backward villages. They can neither afford a television nor have electricity.

Hence, the survey in the selected GPs does not show substantial availability of television. Most of the available ones are black and white and only few can afford a colour television. Interview with the women of the villages show that they are interested to watch only the soap operas (88). Sabita Sharma (89) of Rai Goan Lower Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I Block opines that agricultural rural work keeps her busy but she takes out time whenever possible to watch the entertainment programmes.
Doordarshan a National Public Television is a government-owned network that also telecasts programmes that are rural based. This channel provides the rural audience with several information on agriculture, animal husbandry, education, health, women and child care etc. As mentioned in Chapter I Grameen Bharat is one of the programmes for the rural people. It has been seen that people face problem as most of the programmes are in Hindi and the programmes are not compatible with the lifestyle of the Hills. However, general programmes for instance on health are viewed. In 2001 Doordarshan opened up its Development Communication Division (90) which is yet to reach the local rural people of the Hills.

Ramesh Bujel (91) has seen the free distribution of pesticides for preventing diseases in oranges and other crops in the television. He is disappointed that the government has not provided them with the same benefit. He further adds that compared to them the farmers of the plains are given greater benefits. Interviews with the local activists reveal that they are interested to watch rural news with the expectation that they will be able to learn new things which will help them to improve living conditions. But they reiterate that the information generation on television is designed for the plains making it ‘irrelevant’ for the Hills. The people therefore, do not show great enthusiasm and eagerness towards these programmes. They watch news and other entertainment programmes broadcast by Doordarshan, and few who can afford it get access to the cable network. For the poorest of the poor, television is a distant dream. In fact the situation is so extreme in some cases that people in places like Sherpa Goan, Batasia and Lungchakro (92) have heard about it but have not got the opportunity to see what it looks like.

Incidentally, India’s Seventh Five-Year Plan (93) declared that the television would act as a “vehicle of education and extension,” with focus on the remote and backward areas with an objective to bridge the gap between the urban rich and the rural poor. But are such changes really taking place in the rural areas? The answer is ‘no’ for Darjeeling Hills. Thus, television in the study areas could have been harnessed for facilitating PRDC. It has not been given the due importance as a channel for dissemination of information and messages on gramin bikash (rural development programmes). While the Indian Government, especially the Ministry of Rural Development, has taken the initiative to telecast various programmes on Doordarshan to catch the attention of rural masses in Hindi and in ten regional languages (94) with
the explicit objective of utilizing its power and reach for mobilizing the people of the grassroots level, the field reality is starkly different.

9. Role of Local Political Parties

The role of local political parties as a channel of communication is important. The political parties have the primary goal of organizing and mobilizing people. In the Hills as mentioned in Chapter II GNLF has been the dominant party at the grassroots level in the concern GPs of Kalimpong I. Under DP Block, Jhepi GP is affiliated to CPM, Chongtong GP to CPR-M, Nayanore to GNLF and Relling GP to GNLF. To add, Relling also has a pocket of CPM supporters, particularly in Lower Relling ward. They are supposed to play a major role in local development initiative.

Majority of the local rural people are poor and illiterate and they look upon the local leaders (95) for assistance, be it personal or collective. Binod Syangden (96) states that demand for construction of water tanks, motorable roads, and electricity is often placed by the people to them. Field visits show that a section of a people who are rich and influential work in alliance with the local political leaders. This is evident from the contracts (97) they undertake at the villages. However, there are two sides to it: one that it brings some degree of development to the villages; the other is that the educated unemployed youth get some sources of earning. This is because they either get ‘sub-contracts’ or get work in the projects.

The political parties act as key channel of communication as they can reach remote and underdeveloped areas. But they are not much active in fostering people’s participation in the rural development programmes. While the rural people in the Hills tend to trust their leaders and the political parties the leaders hardly make visits except during the time of elections. In the GNLF-dominated scenario the situation was no better as Subash Ghising never reached out to the people. A public audience was rare and the people never got the opportunity to see their leaders and to talk to them. Our respondents pointed out that the councillors and other local leaders also followed the same path of indifference.

Interestingly, the political parties tend to become hyper-active during the occurrence of natural calamity. In rushing in to provide assistance to the affected families they sometimes overdo it. For instance, the local leaders put pressure on the Disaster Management Department at the Block to release more relief materials like tirpal and...
blanket for their supporters who have been affected by the disaster. It becomes difficult to handle such situations as the leaders from different parties place the same demand. It becomes all the more unmanageable as the relief materials are not in sufficient number. In many cases, those close to the local leaders get the benefit. The party activists also have a tendency to create ‘ugly scenes’ that add to the problem of local administrators.

The existence of several political parties at the GPs does not create a healthy environment as most leaders harbour biased attitude. A senior and active member of the CPI-M (name withheld on request) (98) belonging to Jhepi GP feels that they have to work for the interest of the party. This kind of attitude affects the democratic spirit of the PRDC. The respondents have disclosed that many of them are not aware of the programmes and schemes or even of Sansad or Sabha meeting dates while their ‘politically connected’ neighbours have the information. At the same time the local political leaders and the ‘haves’ have the tendency to overshadow the poor in the community meeting. Sometimes the GP staffs also face interference from the local branch committees of political parties and they are compelled to work ‘under their guidance’ when it comes to implementation of local development programmes and distribution of benefits.

The local political parties can do much better to encourage the people at the grassroots level to participate in rural development activities to improve their socio-economic status. By virtue of having a strong local base they have the potential to make contribution for the welfare of the people and hence become effective instrument of bikash. By overlooking their role as a powerful ‘organic’ channel of communication the political parties in the Hills are undermining their own potential and legitimacy.

10. Missionary Organizations

The missionary organizations here refer to the christian organizations that have made their presence felt in the Hills. Their stated objective according to Sister Shanti is “to support and assist the people to break free from poverty and neglect and lead a decent life in the village” (99). They provide the rural masses with some kind of platform to participate in the decision-making process that affect their lives. Our study refers to two prominent missionary organizations of the concerned areas.
10.1. Sisters of Notre Dam

It is located at Jhepi GP. Established in 1985, it has made good progress in the sense that it runs an English medium primary school, a dispensary and a vocational training for SHG members. The organization is situated at Upper Sumbuck which is 1km from the GP office. Its premises constitute a school with a playground and a big two-storied building that comprise the Sisters quarter, the dispensary and a hall for the SHGs. The Sisters themselves teach but they have also given the local educated unemployed the opportunity to earn a living. One of the Sisters, by the name of Annette, is a trained nurse who looks after the dispensary.

SHGs are an important part of the missionary organization, which have made much contribution. There are greater numbers of SHGs under their care as compared to those formed otherwise. There are twenty two SHGs under their wing. The missionaries motivate the women of the villages, explaining the benefits of joining the group. Thereafter they provide guidance on group formation, book keeping, bank transaction, group management and give suggestion for the business to undertake. Moreover they provide training to the women members on various subjects like soft toys, pickles, bags, curtain holders etc. The monthly meetings of the SHGs are also held at the institution in the presence of the Sisters. Kamala Thapa (100) of Ramitae Goan, Jhepi GP DP Block is univocal about the guidance they receive from the Sisters.

Face-to-face communication is well developed in this specific context as the Sisters have learnt the local language, thus making interaction easier with the people. Sister Jaishila (101), head of the organization, is well-versed with the language and according to her, “It is better to speak in their language as the local people cannot understand Hindi properly, and the use of English is out of question. They are much comfortable and free in Nepali and it is the best way to understand them, which also makes them active participants”. Thus, language has broken all communication barriers and the local people, especially the women, have developed the willingness to openly interact with the Sisters.

Sister Sunanda (102) foresees people’s participation as vital but qualifies it by stating that “they need constant motivation to move forward”. The women members of the
SHGs have more faith and trust in the Sisters and feel that they have done a lot more than what the GPs have done for them.

Despite the fact that the organization is working to bring about a socio-economic change in the live of the rural masses, it does encounter problems. Sister Jaishila would point out the difficulties faced by them.

- The women are irregular in the meetings and the most common excuse is preoccupation with domestic work and the opposition of alcoholic husbands who do not like their wife going out regularly.

- Local political leaders do not intervene directly but they have a tendency to influence the people by providing them with wrong ideas about the SHGs and the missionaries.

- Some sections of the general public too have a wrong notion that the missionaries are only interested in preaching Christianity and making forcible conversions.

The work of the missionaries in Jhepi GP has significance. The Sisters have taken the initiative to work for the masses, which they usually do by covering even the most remote and backward villages. They seek to create awareness among the rural masses about health and hygiene, education of children, the benefit SHGs and other social and cultural activities.

10.2. St. Joseph Convent

This convent, established in 1963, has been contributing to the welfare of the people belonging to Samtar GP Kalimpong I Block. It works under the guardianship of the Sisters. Since it is situated in Suruk it is also locally called Suruk Convent. Some of its major activities include mother and child health care, immunization, education, counselling on domestic problems and formation of SHGs. It has also been running a home for the under-privileged and sick children. It also runs the Suruk Convent Primary School (English medium). It also has a dispensary which is looked after by two Sisters who are trained nurses.
The Sisters have been working at the local level for several years. Sister Miriam Thapa (103) who has been there for the past ten years feels that face-to-face communication not only gets them closer to the people but also enhances people’s participation in the development activities. This ‘consciousness’ of the sisters has also led them to be involved in the meetings of the GP. For example, they always participate in the meets of Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha.

Cluny Sisters (104) Anugalaya (105) and Prema (106) are the missionaries working in Kalimpong. The Cluny Sisters are based at Pudung (107) and they also impart training to SHGs on various skill development programmes relating to the making of soft toys, catering, bakery, pickles, phenyl etc. Anugalaya and Prema are Christian missionary organizations, registered as NGOs under Societies Registration Act XXVI 1961, West Bengal. They have headquarters at Darjeeling town but their work is spread all over the district. However, in terms of our study areas their activities are more in the Kalimpong subdivision. For instance, Anugalaya has been working with the local rural people of Seokbir and Samtar GPs under Kalimpong I Block on Disaster Management and organic farming. But again their activities are not spread all the villages of the GPs.
The missionaries also undertake various awareness-generation programmes on HIV AIDS, trafficking, drug abuse, organic farming, women and child health, child and adult rural education, adoption of economic activities, to mention a few. While their target is to reach the ‘most deprived and poor’ in the remote and backward areas they also work in urban areas—undertaking programmes like waste management. Their presence is not seen in every GP but they are involved in an endeavour to improve the life of the rural people as they work right in the villages with involvement of the people of the concerned localities.

These organizations thus are an important channel for communicating with the people at the grassroots level. Notwithstanding the constraints they to some degree help the people to become better participants and improve their socio-economic condition. Lack of fund and lack of co-operation from government agencies sometimes limit their activities. Conversion to Christianity is something that is practised not without its quota of controversy. Such organizations though are not equipped to bring about large-scale economic development but they do act as a sort of support-structure. They help to maintain a linkage between communication and development as they have the skill and the will to reach at the very grassroots. The local government too can make an effort to work with them through coordinated planning and implementation of rural development programmes which involve the people.

In this chapter I have made an analysis and study of the local rural people in PRDC with special reference to the emerging and existing local channels in facilitating the involvement of the rural people in their own socio-economic development. In this scenario, as hinted, among all other channels SHGs has emerged as the most effective variety as they have a platform for sustainable development. The SHGs have provided, particularly the weaker sections, an opportunity to become a bit more self-reliant and some degree of confidence to improve their individual lives and that of the community. Hence a more elaborate study has been made of the SHGs in the following chapter.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The rural people's livestock mainly includes cows, pigs, goats and poultry. It is also a source of income for the people.

2. The tea gardens engage mostly the women folk to pluck the tea leaves. The women make brisk but careful plucking (two leaves and the bud in between), which they gather in a bamboo weaven basket locally know as doko, slung over their back. The money is paid according to the weight of the leaves plucked. They too work in the factories only in the tea packaging section.

3. The tea gardens engage the men to work in the factories where they handle the huge machines for producing tea. They also work in the gardens, monitoring the women workers, spraying insecticides and inspection on tea bushes.

4. The Hindus here refer to the Hindu-Nepali community. They worship the Hindu gods and practice all rituals, ceremonies, culture and traditions attached with it. Brahmins, Chettris, Pradhans, Gurungs and Mangars are some of the castes. The scheduled castes are also Hindu-Nepali. They belong to the lowest caste.

5. In the rural areas, people belonging to the Christian Community are mostly converts than born Christians. The Nepali Hindus, because of some reason get converted, mostly because an ailing in the family has been healed by the prayer of the community or a chronic alcoholic has been freed of his habit or poverty compels them.

6. Field visits were made to the villages of the selected GPs of Kalimpong I Block and DP Block. Individual-based interviews and FGD were conducted with the local people. A set of questionnaire and a recorder was also utilized. Observation was also made of the kind of life lead, the type of houses, the village environment etc.


Himalaya Darpan is one of the local daily Nepali newspapers, popular among the people of Darjeeling Hills. The newspaper covers national, international, sports news as well as local news of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Dooars, Kurseong and Sikkim. It is published from its head office located at Siliguri, from where it is distributed to the respective places.


13. Binita Gurung: Age: 27, Gender: Female, Education: Class VIII, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Hindu, Caste: General, Profession: Home Maker and Member of Surya Jyoti SHG. Interview taken at the end of the weekly
meeting held at her house at Dilbir Dhura, Chongtong GP, DP Block on June 03, 2006.


18. The interview was taken at the respondent’s house at Horn Dara, Relling GP, DP Block on December 04, 2005.


20. The interview was taken at the chamber of the BDO, Sonam Bhutia at the Block Development Office on November 18, 2005. Age: 35, Gender: Male, Education: BA, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Buddhist, Caste: ST.

21. The houses are scattered and so are the villages and the children mostly walk to schools usually for more than a kilometer. This is a tradition in all the
GPs. So it is common for the villagers to send messages or khabar with the children, sometimes written, sometimes verbal as they pass through the villages to reach school.

22. Verbal communication is prominent amongst the villagers, for sometime they have to walk up to the villages even if it is far away to convey important messages like Gram Sansad and Sabha dates, SHG meetings and other important programmes.


25. When a Samaj Ghar is formed, mostly the male of the village, who are elderly, better off economically are appointed as the office bearers. Thus, there is centralization of powers in the few executive members. They comprise of the President, Vice President, Secretary, Joint Secretary and Treasurer.

26. Sarau is a kind of financial help generally given during social ceremonies like marriage and death ceremony. Members from a Samaj Ghar have a specified amount, ranging from ten to thirty, which has to be compulsory contributed when the occasion calls. Besides this the people in general also contribute according to their wish and capacity.


29. The sound system owned by Youth Clubs generally comprise of microphones, big size sound boxes, amplifier and the audio player and the musical instruments mainly include guitar, drum set, congo, madal.

30. The Youth Clubs organize musical programmes during festival times. Such programmes are therefore seasonal. For instance at the time of Dashera and Diwali They start their practice usually two months before the commencement of the festivals and the club members participate in singing, dancing and playing the instruments. They sing local Nepali songs accompanied by a few Hindi songs and perform Nepali dances and the objective is fund collection for the club.


34. Shri Satya Sai Baba is a spiritual god head and incarnation of the Supreme Being and can be regarded as an inexhaustible reservoir of pure love. He lives at Puttaparthi, near Bangalore City in the state of Andhra Pradesh and his numerous projects includes free hospitals, free schools and colleges, free drinking water supply and free housing. The organization has a presence in over 167 countries in the world and members undertake group service activities that benefit the immediate community.

35. The cellular phone is put to use by the local rural people. However it is not necessary that every individual will own a cellular phone in the village. The
GP usually contacts the influential persons in the villages over the phone, who in turn disseminates the same information or messages to the rest of the people in the village. It has become an easy source of communication as emergency meetings or messages can be easily conveyed.


39. Lidya Thapa: Age: 48, Gender: Female, Education: Class VI, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Christian, Caste: General, Occupation: Home maker and Member of Kalyan SHG. She spoke during the Sansad held at Samaj Ghar of Thari Goan, Lower Relling, Relling GP, DP Block on November 22, 2005. Lidya Thapa is better off than her neighbours as her husband is in government service. Her experience also tells me that being part of a SHG has made her out-spoken. While her neighbour (Phul Maya Rai is a widow with a handicapped daughter) who is poor is hesitant to talk, she explains why she is in urgent need of the IAY scheme and that they should be kept in the priority list.

40. Jagat Man Rai: Age: 37, Gender: Male, Education: BA, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Hindu, Caste: OBC, Occupation: Secretary of Relling GP, DP Block. He conducted the Gram Sansad along with the Ward Member Meena Rai and Gram Sahayak Anjeev Pradhan on November 22, 2005 at the Samaj Ghar, Thari Goan, Lower Relling, Relling GP, DP Block.
41. His name has been withheld on request and the comment was made during the Gram Sansad held at the Gairi Goan Primary School, Gairi Goan, Nayanore GP, DP Block on May 19, 2007.

42. The percentage of people who have not seen or have not visited the Block Development Office was taken at the time of field visits of the areas of the eight selected GPs.


44. West Bengal Panchayat Act XLI of 1973, Kolkata: Government of West Bengal, Section 16 A, Subsection 6 (c) p. 27.

45. Name withheld on request. The interview of the Executive Assistant was taken at the GP, Nayanore GP DP Block on December 03, 2007 during field survey.


47. A body of voters who elect a representative for their area is a constituency. The elected representative is known as a Councillor. He/she is responsible to DGHC for all its functioning. In Relling GP too the people had placed applications with their councillor S.K.Lama on the necessity to reform the agricultural department but it always fell on deaf ears.

48. Co-operative societies are known as *Sahakari Krishi Unnayan Samiti*. The organization primarily deals with rural agricultural credit and comes under the state government. The sub-branch functions from the villages. Their head office is known as District Central Co-operative Bank which is located in Kalimpong town. A nominal fee of Rs.10/- is charged for membership. The members have to deposit a minimum of Rs.20/- as share. Sometimes these shares can reach as high as Rs.3000/-.. The co-operatives provide loans against the share deposited on an interest of 8 to 9 %. The loans also depend
on the type of crops sown. For example for ginger, usually around Rs.25000/- is released. This is a short term loan for a period of one year as ginger can be sown and sold within a year.


50. Farmers Club is a regional organization of the rural marginal farmers opened in association with NABARD which will help the members by providing financial assistance and training. It will lend the farmers loans up to Rs 50,000/- at lower interest rates.

51. Himalayan Farmers Front is a regional organization that spreads through North East India. It started in Kalimpong in 2006. It is an independent union of farmers particularly the local marginal farmers with no affiliation to any political party. It is an open forum where farmers can join irrespective of the party they belong to. CMD, a well known NGO of Kalimpong also supports the organization. Their major objectives are:

- Awareness generation of government schemes and programmes to the farmers, who most of the time remain unaware.
- Facilitating better communication between the farmers and the government.
- Providing agricultural based training to the farmers.
- Helping the farmers to get their rights and benefits.
- Campaign and pressure for change in policy level. There should be a different policy for the farmers of the Hills.

52. Programmes are often held at Kalimpong for the local rural people comprising mostly of rural farmers. Mention can be made of programmes hosted by the Krishak Kalyan Sangatan of Kalimpong (Organization for the welfare of the farmers) where they demanded the launch of the NREGS in the hills at the earliest and demanded reasons for the delay in its implementation (Source: Himalaya Darpan, May 06, 2006), the District Silk Board organized a programme for the farmers engaged in sericulture, with
the objective to provide information on how to improve the silk industry, what are the benefits provided by the government, development in the production procedure and the avenues for marketing (Source: Himalaya Darpan, March 23, 2007).

53. A booklet prepared for their annual meet titled Himalayan Krishak Adhiwasen was given to the researcher by Nayan Pradhan, President of Himalayan Farmers Front at his residence. Age: 45, Gender: Male, Education level: BA.

54. Himul known as The Himalayan Co-operative Milk Producer’s Union Limited was formed in 1973. Himul has opened up its milk collection centre in most of the GPs, where the people of the villages come to deposit the milk and are paid per litre on a monthly basis. The collected milk is brought to the processing unit, packaged and sold in the market.


56. NABARD has been set up by the government of India. It is an apex development bank with a mandate for facilitating credit flow for promotion and development of agriculture, small scale industries, cottage and village industries, handicrafts and other rural crafts. It also has the mandate to support all other allied economic activities in rural areas, promoting integrated and sustainable rural development and secure prosperity of rural areas. It operates through its head office at Mumbai, twenty eight regional offices situated in state capitals and 391 district offices at districts.


58. Hill Social Welfare Society is a registered NGO (2000) under Societies Registration Act XXVI 1961, West Bengal based at Kalimpong. Their programmes include women and child development, reproductive child and health, HIV and AIDS, trafficking, skill development training, income
generation programme, formation of SHGs and general health care support. Their funding agencies include NABARD, Government of India and Government of West Bengal. They target the neglected, remote and backward villages. They also provide employment to the educated rural women as field health workers who are trained to provide information to would be mothers and on family planning, health and hygiene, nutrition, immunization and distribution of free medicine. The organization also provides rehabilitation to the destitute and impoverished women.

59. World Vision is a National NGO and a Christian Organization working to create lasting change in the lives of the children, families and communities living in poverty and injustice. They also work with the poor in Kalimpong.

60. Disha is a Christian based NGO and their work is focused on people’s organization, health, youth and women empowerment.

61. Leadership is a training provided to the SHGs and this training is given to the group leader and cashier. It basically focuses on how to conduct meetings, and how to run and manage the group. BOP is a training provided to any five members of the SHG. They include the aims and objectives of SHGs, concept of SHG, bank proceedings, selection of economic activities, inter-lending and why it is necessary. Skill Development Training is training provided to the SHGs to enhance their source of income. They include training on poultry, piggery, dairy, goatery, bakery, mushroom farming (oyster and button) and other agriculture related training. SMVG training is made compulsory to all the groups so that they will be able to grow green vegetables throughout the year both for home consumption as well as for sale. The health of the people has been taken into consideration for this training as green vegetables can help to eradicate night blindness.


65. The role of programme communication is to provide strategies and means of effectively communicating directly with families about the need to adopt hygiene practices and sanitation interventions. The focus areas for communication directly with families will be:

- A national and state-level mass media campaign involving television, radio and print media.
- Interpersonal communication tools and implementation of effective interpersonal communication activities.
- A rational approach to the design, production and dissemination of appropriate outdoor media (IEC materials).
- Identification and training of effective volunteers and local motivators who come in direct contact with families and communities. This level of inter-personal communication will be critical in engaging families in a constructive dialogue about the need to adopt hygiene practices, including toilets.


67. Sitamaya Chhetri: Age: 30, Gender: Female, Education: Class XII (Pass), Marital Status: Married, Religion: Hindu, Caste: General, Occupation: Library Office Assistant. The library was visited during field visit of Seokbir GP, Kalimpong I Block and interview taken on June 14, 2007.

68. Dil Bahadur Rai: Age: 45, Gender: Male, Education: Class X (Pass), Marital Status: Married, Religion: Hindu, Caste: OBC, Occupation: Primary Teacher of Lower Chongtong Primary School. Interview taken at the end of
the Gram Sansad held at Salla Bari, Chongtong GP, DP Block on May 14, 2006.


70. The English newspapers commonly read by the people in Darjeeling are Statesman and The Telegraph which have their head office at Kolkata, West Bengal and their branch office at Siliguri.


People in the villages particularly the male gather at central points like a village shop or a small eatery. It is a casual gathering where they discuss local rural issues. One such gathering was observed at Lower Sumbuck, Jhepi GP, DP Block on November 28, 2005 after attending the Gram Sansad of Bahun Goan, Lower Sumbuck, Jhepi GP, DP Block.


73. A community radio is a type of radio service that caters to the interests of a certain area, broadcasting material that is popular to a local audience but is overlooked by more powerful broadcast groups. It is usually established by the efforts of a specific community, operated by the community and for the community’s welfare. Community radio is not-for profit and acts as a device for facilitating individuals, groups, and communities to tell their own diverse stories, to share experiences. In many parts of the world, community radio acts as a medium for the community and voluntary sector, civil society, agencies, NGOs & citizens to work in partnership to further community development as well as broadcasting aims.


78. Frequency Megahertz is a radio station. The programme content of this channel is mainly popular Indian (also Nepali) and Western music. It is usually compered in a vivacious and contemporary style and highly popular among the youths. News bulletin are also broadcasted from these channels.

79. Goanle Sabha (Farm and Home) locally called is a rural based programme broadcasted by AIR, Kurseong everyday at 6.10 p.m. for half an hour. This programme comprise mainly of agricultural news and weather forecast. Sometimes guest speakers are also invited to talk on agriculture and livestock based issues. Some of the speakers include progressive farmers, veterinary doctors and experts from Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya (North Bengal Agriculture University).

80. Agricultural Hymns is another programme aired by AIR, Kurseong everyday at 7.05 a.m. for five minutes. Locally it can be called kheti pati bare salla or plain information on the latest techniques in agriculture or about seasonal crops.


82. Gar Sansar is a rural programme for rural women also aired by AIR Kurseong. The time slot is 3.30 p.m. every Tuesday for half an hour. The programme mainly deals with problems of rural women, health care, child care, education etc accompanied with folk songs.


85. *Krishi Paramarsa* (Live Phone-In) locally called is also broadcasted by AIR Kurseong, at 6.10 p.m. for half an hour on the last Friday of every month. During this programme the local rural people can call and make interactions with the concerned guest speakers. Here too speakers include veterinary doctors, Senior Officers of Department of Agriculture, experts from agriculture universities like Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya and others.


88. Soap operas usually are serialized programmes usually dealing with sentimentalized family matters that are broadcasted on television. Hindi operas from the National network and Nepali operas from Nepal channel are commonly viewed by the people.

90. Development Communication is one of the important divisions of Doordarshan. One of its communication strategies has been to make stakeholders accountable in live shows. "Kalyani" is the most popular programme or rather a pioneering initiative in health communication in India based on policy guidelines of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Government of India. It caters to nine of the most backward and populous states of India like Patna, Orissa, Bhopal etc. The focus is on the different issues on health, girl child, education, women and child care etc.


92. Sherpa Goan is a village in Relling GP, DP Block and is remote, backward and tribal dominated. Batasia is also the most remote and backward village of Jhepi GP, DP block. Lungchakro is also the most remote, backward and tribal dominated comprising mostly of Subbas. These three villages do not have motorable road and electricity.


94. The IEC division in the Ministry of Rural Development Government of India New Delhi also broadcasts over Doordarshan rural programme in the ten Regional languages through the ten Regional Kendras. The languages are Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Gujarati and Assamese.


95. The local political parties also have their respective executive bodies that represent the area to the parent political party. They undertake and implement all political activities as per the direction received from the head office. The committee consists of the President, Vice President, Secretary, Joint Secretary, Treasurer and a few executive members. They are appointed from amongst the members affiliated to the party.

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97. Local contracts includes construction of village roads, water tanks, village main roads, protection walls, culverts, small bridges and repair and renovation of roads and walls.

98. The respondent's interview was taken at the GP, Sumbuck, Jhepi GP, DP Block on December 20, 2007.


100. Kamala Thapa: Age: 37, Gender: Female, Education: None, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Hindu, Caste: General, Occupation: Home Maker and Member of Asha SHG. Interview taken at the Sisters of Notre Dam Institution, Upper Sumbuck, Jhepi GP, DP Block during their monthly meeting with the sisters on May 10, 2006.

101. Sister Jaishila: Age: 42, Gender: Female, Education: BA, Marital Status: Single, Religion: Christian, Caste: General. She is the senior most and the administrative head of the Sisters of Notre Dam, based at Upper Sumbuck, Jhepi GP, DP Block. Her presence has been seen from the day the institution started way back in 1985 and she hails from Kerala. Interview taken at the premise of Sisters of Notre Dam, Upper Sumbuck Jhepi GP, DP Block on May 09, 2006.

102. Sister Sunanda: Age: 33, Gender: Female, Education: BSc in Nursing, Marital Status: Single, Religion: Christian, Caste: General. She has been in the institution from 1998 and looks after the dispensary of the institution, providing medicine, attending to the sick of the village and maternity care. Interview taken at the premise of Sisters of Notre Dam, Upper Sumbuck Jhepi GP, DP Block on April 18, 2007.

104. The Cluny Sisters is a missionary organization with their head office at Tamil Nadu. Imparting education to girls has been their major goal. In Kalimpong too they have been working for more than seventy five years. They also undertake social activities like women and child care.

105. Anugalaya is a registered NGO (2001) under the Societies Registration Act XXVI 1963, West Bengal, India. It is a Christian organization with the head office at Darjeeling. They work in both the urban and rural areas but much importance is given for the local rural areas of Darjeeling. Their main objectives are:

- To restore human dignity of the oppressed, exploited and marginalized people of Darjeeling, through a process of empowerment
- To mobilize local resources
- To facilitate, promote and support of people’s organization
- To undertake capacity building of partners of organization

106. Prema too is a Christian based NGO with the head office at Darjeeling. Their mission is to build sustainable human communities in the Darjeeling Hills and the adjoining areas by promoting people’s participation, gender equality and living in harmony with the environment. Prema has also focused their work on organic farming with appropriate technology, developmental and environmental education with educational institutions and community based organizations and support to other organizations to undertake research, development and dissemination. They work in both the urban and rural areas but prime focus on the marginalized and the poor of the rural areas.

107. Pudung is also a GP that is situated next to Lower Ecchey GP and falls under Kalimpong I Block. It is around six km from the Block. CMD and Cluny Sisters are located within the Pudung GP area.
CHAPTER V
THE EMERGING CHANNEL OF PRDC: SELF-HELP GROUPS

1. The Indian Initiative
As stated earlier, the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, has recognized SGSY as the Self Employment Programme for rural India since April, 1999. Programmes like Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Supply of Improved Toolkits to Rural Artisans (SITRA), Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) to name a few, could not succeed in achieving the larger goals of poverty alleviation in the rural areas. They largely focused on the economic upliftment of the poor rather than their all-round development. These programmes were reviewed and in their place, SGSY was born. Thus, SGSY is regarded not only as "catalysts of resource mobilization, watchdogs of proper utilization but also agents of social and cultural transformation and advancement leading to an accelerated social uplift" (1). The target of the government was to alleviate the lives of the downtrodden and the marginalized, and help them to rise above the poverty line. Under this programme, the poor at grassroots level are socially mobilized to organize themselves into SHGs. It ascertains capacity building, training, income generation with assistance from bank credit and government subsidy. Credit plays a pivotal role with subsidy as the booster element. The emphasis has been laid on group approach with the belief that through appropriate support and organization, the group members can become self-sustaining and independent.

The importance of SHGs as a channel of communication has so much increased that the IEC division of the Ministry emphasized on “Mobilizing SHGs as a strategy of empowerment of poor, the group dynamics of SHGs and the areas of intervention in the rural social fabric and economy” (2). Today the Indian rural people are needed to be viewed not as a "burden" but as a "resource", whose "ideas and experience are now an integral part of the development strategy" (3).

Micro-finance/ micro-credit seem to be the key word in the formation of SHGs. "The micro-finance paradigm rests on the ‘borrower knows the best’ premise. It aims at building people’s asset through participation, sharing and collective action with the
goal of empowering them to fight poverty and become empowered” (4). In 1984 the Federal Ministry of Economic Co-operation and the Agency for Technical Co-operation of the Federal Republic of Germany had organized workshops on rural finance in the developing countries. Here it was accepted that SHGs need to be prepared as a financial intermediation between rural poor and financial institution, on the one hand, and micro-enterprises, on the other. The Asia and Pacific Regional Agriculturist Credit Summit in 1986 agreed on a joint programme to boost the linkage between banks and SHGs. This was basically to mobilize rural savings and provide credit facilities to the rural poor.

The Government of India, since the financial sector reforms in 1991, has taken up the policy of promoting and strengthening the SHGs with links to the formal banking system. In this context four distinguished linkage models comes in view.

**Model I:** Banks provide micro-finance to the NGOs for lending to SHGs and finally to the micro-entrepreneur.

**Model II:** Banks provide finance directly to SHGs for on lending to micro-entrepreneur.

**Model III:** Banks provide finance directly to SHGs for on lending to micro-entrepreneur with the intervention of NGO as social mobilisers and facilitators.

**Model IV:** Banks provide loans directly to individual members of the SHGs upon recommendations of the SHGs and the concerned NGOs. Here the NGO is to assist the bank in monitoring and recovery of loans (5).

In India two important SHG networks can avail of institutional credit. One is NABARD - sponsored SHG-Bank Linkage Programme which was integrated with the banking system in 1996. Here the SHGs can avail of group loans from the banks. SGSY is the other network. Group approach has been adopted here whereby the poor form SHGs through social mobilization. The Indian Government has given the responsibility of implementing the programme to District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) along with the Panchayati Raj institutions, the NGOs and the Banks. DRDA is known as DRDC in Darjeeling Hills.
2. Strategy of SHGs

The plan of action of SHGs differs from the conventional modes. It is unique because it is formed with “thrift and credit” (6) that give the poor the platform to enhance and improve their income level. The attainment of success by a SHG will depend upon the selection of activities, specifically based on local resources, skill as well as ability of the members, with right marketing channels as its part and parcel. The first six months of a SHG is the formation stage in which the groups are motivated and nurtured. They begin with their savings which can be a minimum of Rs.50/-, sometimes even less if the members of the group cannot afford. The group is also expected to undertake social activities within the village during this phase.

The SHGs generally pass through three levels in the development process:

- Formation of the group which includes establishment of the group, growth and strengthening them to become independent systems at the grassroots level (See Annexure V-A)
- Capital formation through revolving fund and skill development.
- Undertaking economic activities for income generation.

The SHGs have to follow specific guidelines in their functioning:

- The members of the group must be from the BPL category. A few members (upto 30%) who are apparently poor but not in the BPL list are also allowed to join the groups. The group must have only one member from the same family and the same person cannot be a member of more than one group.
- The group shall comprise of a maximum of ten members.
- Formulation of a code of conduct by the group members. This should be in the pattern of regular meetings (usually four meetings in a month) operating in a democratic mode that will allow participation of the members in the decision making process as well as exchange of opinions. They also decide on the time of the meeting.
- Agenda should be fixed for every meeting and the discussions should be strictly according to the prepared list of matters.
- Regular collection of savings from amongst the members. This savings shall remain the principal fund of the group, the fixed amount of which shall be decided by the members.
• Maintenance of attendance register, minutes book, cashbook, general register, bank passbooks and other important ledgers by the group.
• Development of financial norms which includes procedures for loan sanctions, fixation of rate of interest, strict refund procedures and dealing with defaulters.
• Participation of the members in the decision making process with regard to all loaning procedures.
• Operation and maintenance of the group account with the concern bank.

3. Modus Operandi

3.1. Relation with the Bank and Grading
“The SHGs mobilize their own savings, transform them into loans to members and plough their earnings from interest income back into equity” (7). Thus, on this base of operation the bank and the SHGs enter into a transactional relationship or rather an agreement (See Annexure V-B). During the group formation stage the members are introduced with the local banks with regard to the opening of their saving bank account. The banks are selected according to their service- area. In the process the members learn the procedures of the banking system and the bank gets the
opportunity to acquaint themselves with the groups. The bank has such an important role to play that in one of the booklets of DRDC it has been said, “Dearth of capital is the single biggest constraint faced by the poor and therefore, the most important service that banks can possibly render is to provide timely and adequate capital to SHGs. This can invigorate their growth, prosperity and sustenance” (8).

When the stipulated period of first six months is completed grading takes place. Representatives from the bank, Block, GP and DRDC together make the observation. They usually follow the marking system where a group has to qualify with 60% marks (See Annexure-V-C). Relationship amongst members, communication, regularity of meetings, minute book, and savings are some of the important observations made by the officials. Immediately after the group passes the first grading the report is sent to DRDC. Having scrutinized the report revolving fund (RF) (9) is released by DRDC against the savings. The fund can reach a maximum of Rs.5000/- and a minimum of Rs.3000/-. Thus, cheques bearing the names of groups reach the respective banks. It is then that the banks provide the groups with cash credit facility (CCF) (10). The banking procedure and grading work simultaneously. This is known as the First Grading, the objective of which is to recognize the flaws and help them to overcome their weaknesses to nurture into better groups. Basically it is an evaluation of their strength and weakness.

It is now that the groups start to utilize money given by their respective banks for purchase of either raw materials, marketing or to build their infrastructure to undertake economic activities with the sole aim to generate income. The same fund can also be borrowed by the individual members for their own personal use, with the realization that they will follow a prompt and regular repayment. The interest has to be paid on the amount borrowed. As they continue to use the CCF they have to yield financial gain.

3.1.1. Second Grading

A group is once again subjected to second grading after a period of six months. The official’s measure how effective they have been in their functioning and whether they are capable of taking heavy economic activities through bigger capital investments. At this juncture the bank too has to be satisfied with the work of the concern group.
During the second grading several factors are taken into consideration, for the group to advance. The steps are as follows:

- Adoption of effective plan of action for enhancing the participatory skills of the group members.
- Realization of the responsibility of the members for their active co-operation in the management of the group activity. This includes cash book maintenance, clear banking transactions, social activities, regular savings etc.
- The extent of self-management with regard to the various activities of the group including financial proceedings and the degree of the group’s dependency on the facilitating agency for its functioning.
- The magnitude of training received by the members and its practical usage at the field level.
- Steps undertaken by the members of the groups to overcome the difficulties in their impoverished lives and adopt alternative means to rise above the poverty level.

By the time the people are through with the second grading there lives seemed to have taken a new turn. In the words of Palden Lama, BWO of Kalimpong I Block “It has helped the people to change from I to WE- We are here to develop the villages” (11).

3.1.2. Third Grading

A group undergoes the third grading after the completion of six months. Here the official’s scrutinizes the performance of the group. Transaction with the bank, timely repayment of the loan with interest, economic activities and group co-ordination are some of the important observations. Having passed this grading the group is provided with credit linkage (12). At this stage the groups can take up large scale projects.

A unique arrangement in the process is the creation of the Federation. This can be formed only when each GP of the entire district has a cluster which has been explained in the following sub-section. The work of the bank now ends here as the Federation starts to operate as a mini bank for the SHGs. It is to be noted that this organization has the capacity to work at the grassroots level.
3.1.3. Cluster

Before we discuss the term ‘cluster’, also locally known as *sangha*, it is necessary to reflect on ‘sub-cluster’. The sub-cluster works at the village level. A GP is divided into wards. The SHGs of every ward under the concern GP will come under one fold to form a sub-cluster. Group leader and treasurer of each and every group will be the ordinary members of the sub-cluster. Consequently, these members will choose among themselves a President and Secretary. The main function of the two elected to this post is to monitor the groups at the village level. The absence of money transaction leaves them without a treasurer.

A cluster is formed at the GP level when all the Presidents and Secretaries of the sub-cluster become the ordinary members of the cluster. They select five office bearers (13) from among themselves. The main function of the cluster is complete supervision of all the SHGs in the concern GP (14). Secondly, there is monetary transaction (15). They also conduct monthly meetings. DRDC also provides fund for construction of cluster house from where they can work independently. For instance, holding of monthly meetings.

![Image of Project Director Doma Sherpa presenting a cheque for the construction of cluster house to cluster President (Relling GP DPBlock)]
3.1.4. Federation

A Federation is locally known as *Maha Sangh*. This organisation is formed at the district level when a cluster is formed in each GP. The clusters of all the GPs will come together to form the federation. The work of the bank ends here because the federation now starts to function as a mini bank. Finally, the SHG members become ‘independent’ as they now have their own ‘bank’, which they have set up with their own money, with the capacity to work at the grassroots level. Besides, it also takes responsibility for the growth, progress and problems of all the SHGs under its fold.

4. Provision for Training

The SGSY project recognized that for “success of self-employment endeavours and also for their sustainability, the required skill to successfully run the enterprise is a pre-requisite” (16). This has been undertaken with the objective of elevating the capacity of the individual members in the group activities. The training module of the government also includes session “to enhance the understanding and efficiency in communication for the participants” and “enhance the facilitation skill of the participants” (17).
The government has laid down certain objectives to highlight the need for training:

- Demonstrate the process of organizing themselves into SHGs
- Explain the role and responsibility of SHGs and individual members in group
- Identify the micro enterprises suitable for the members of groups
- Identify the possible social initiative to be taken by SHGs
- Explain the role of SHGs in the entire rural development process
- Explain the mechanism for getting services offered by different government departments (18).

In this context, two types of training have been recognized for their development:

4.1. **BOP**

BOP is provided to the SHG members as the first grading begins. The objective is to provide extensive information on the working of a SHG and their duties towards its functioning. The training will also include classes on book keeping, maintenance of accounts, banking procedures, minute books and management of other general registers.

The training period is of short duration, usually lasting between seven to eight days. Besides this, leadership, cluster, resource person (19) trainings are also conducted. It incurs expenses like food, lodging, travelling of the members, training materials etc, which is borne by DRDC from the SGSY training fund. However, no stipend is provided to the trainees. This training can be regarded as an opportunity to help the members understand their talents and capacities.

4.2. **Skill Development Training**

The training is rendered to the SHG members with the sole objective of arming them with new skills so needed to enhance their economic activities. The government has selected suitable programmes that can help to upgrade their poverty stricken lives. Generally such training is imparted by government institutions or NGOs. This programme assures that the trainees will acquire the Minimum Skill Requirement (MSR) (20). It is also important to mention here that the bank will take into account the level and the number of skill- training undergone by the members. It is one of the criteria for disbursement of loan.
Several kinds of training are imparted to the members with the intention that the new skills will help them to generate income. Training on piggery, goatery, bee-keeping, dairy, catering, pickle, jam, jelly making, SMVG, bakery etc. are imparted to the SHG members. Thus, training has been a whole new experience for the SHG members which have been discussed in the latter half of this chapter.

5. **The Implementers**

The SHGs today is in the limelight as it has become the flagship poverty alleviation programme to reach the millions of India’s rural poor, particularly the women. The poor are always prone to hazards, but within a group she/he feels protected. Although the programme aims at self-dependency the government has appointed various agencies to help the deprived and impoverished to lead a better life. They are supposed to work in close proximity with the groups, in order to achieve success.

The responsibility of co-ordination and implementation of the programme rests with DRDC. It is also the funding agency, and its function is vital in the constitution of the groups and their capacity building. At the same time, it also keeps coordination with other organisations like banks, training institutes, NGOs, missionary organizations and other departments concerned with the working of the SHGs. DRDC also has the duty to look into and provide guidance and assistance with regard to the SHGs marketing activities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the adoption of IEC methodology has been given lot of importance in this regard.

At the village level, the responsibility of assisting the SHGs has been allotted to the Block and GP. The GP initially worked for the identification of BPL families, guidance in group-formation, maintenance of records of groups, active monitoring, arranging monthly meetings and fund related work. The Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad also have a crucial role to play in the SGSY programme. However, the situation is not the same for the Darjeeling Hills which has a single-tier panchayat system. The SHGs depend on the GP, Block Office and the DRDC for its entire official proceedings and execution of all the concerned programmes.

Banks too cater to the requirements of the SHGs. As implementers they have an extremely important role to play. The credit-cum-subsidy facilities are, therefore, provided by the banks. In fact they are closely associated with the groups, from the
time they start with their savings. At every stage of the day-to-day functioning of the SHG, the banks are to play a key role.

NGOs too have a pivotal role to play in the SGSY programme. They provide various kinds of training mentioned earlier in this chapter. Their contribution too starts from the very beginning because without training the groups cannot move forward. The government, must however, take into consideration the quality and capability of the NGOs that will be able to support and implement the programme. Good NGOs can be immensely helpful in nurturing the SHGs while the bad can be harmful.

Thus, when all the implementing agencies work hand-in-hand for the accomplishment of the success of the SGSY programme, then the SHGs can become a “forum for the collective voice of the poor against common oppression and exploitation, to understand individual and common problems and improve their skills and capacities to manage resources” (21).

5.1. Monitoring
Monitoring is critical for the groups to function smoothly. The objective is to examine whether the people have crossed the poverty line or are reeling under abject poverty. The duty does not end in granting credit and subsidy, there is a need for a continuous follow up. The DRDC, Block, GP staff and bank have to keep an eye on the way the groups are managing, utilizing their loans, the extent of income generation and the right selection of their economic activity. The progress report of each SHG shall also be scrutinized by the officials every month which is one of their agenda in the monthly meetings held.

The SHGs are not without problems. Therefore, it is important to listen to the difficulties faced by the group members and make provision for their solution. Interactions with the members reveal that they place their problems with the government agencies, which in many cases remain unresolved. The GPs which can communicate and facilitate better participation have been lacking interest.

6. West Bengal Government Initiative
SGSY, a central government scheme was launched in April, 1999. Generation of income by the rural poor with the help of micro-enterprise has been its aim. The state launched the programme in the same year. According to their Annual Administrative Report 2004-2005, the programme is “oriented to collectively work towards their own
socio-economic development as well as to ensure reaching due benefits of various government programmes targeted...and the poor in particular...” (22).

The central and state governments have taken the responsibility of funding the programme in the ratio of 75:25. This special project also aims at improving the quality of lives of the poor rural woman. The state government has, therefore, laid emphasis on the ‘empowerment of women’. The SGSY began primarily as a self-employment scheme but today it is taking the shape of a mass movement.

Capacity building and training are another important agenda of the state government for the development of SHGs. Training of group members are being undertaken in the districts. Resource persons have been appointed for supervision and management of the groups, NGOs and other institutions have been selected for providing skill development training. The importance given on training is evident from the fact that during 2004-2005, the expenditure on training was 11.1%, in 2005-2006 it was 14.5% and in 2006-2007 it was 19.4% (23). The state government has also involved the GPs to intensify the activities of the groups with the intention that it will help to facilitate participation of the groups in the various development programmes.

In 2005 an important initiative was undertaken by the state government. It was the inauguration of Department of Self Help Group and Self Employment headed by a Minister of State. This has been specially set up for promotion of activities of the SHGs and coordination by the respective government departments, banks and NGOs.

The table below highlights the progress in the formation of SHGs under SGSY in the state from the time of its inception.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No of SHGs Formed</th>
<th>No of SHGs Passed Grade-I</th>
<th>No of SHGs Passed Grade-II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>3314</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>4480</td>
<td>2220</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>29386</td>
<td>7085</td>
<td>679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>58708</td>
<td>27129</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>78985</td>
<td>40357</td>
<td>2532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>149896</td>
<td>95106</td>
<td>6595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>186486</td>
<td>137226</td>
<td>9826</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. **SHGs under DGHC**

The SGSY programme started in the Hill areas of Darjeeling only in the year 2003. There were a total of 812 groups in the year 2003-2004. The programme is implemented by DRDC under DGHC.

7.1. **Introduction**

Twenty years since the formation of DGHC, the political disturbance being as the aggravating factor, development is at a snail’s pace. As repeatedly stressed by us, the worst hit is the rural areas of Darjeeling. However, the SGSY has emerged as a relief to some extent. It is a good opportunity for the rural poor to rise above the poverty line and improve their socio-economic condition. It can thus be regarded as an important emerging channel in PRDC in the concern area of study.

An intensive study has been made of the SHGs in the four selected GPs respectively DP Block and Kalimpong I Block. Information and data received from DRDC reveal that the SHGs under Kalimpong I are in a better position than the groups from DP. The details of the SHGs of the select areas follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block</th>
<th>No of SHGs</th>
<th>No of SHGs Passed Grade I</th>
<th>No of SHGs Passed Grade II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DP Block</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalimpong I Block</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The information has been procured from the office of Doma Sherpa, Project Director, DRDC, Lewis Jubilee Complex, Darjeeling District.

7.2. **Who make up the SHGs**

Before we start to analyse the pivotal role played by the SHGs, it is important to provide information on the background of the members comprising the groups. The maximum number of groups belongs to the Hindu-Nepali community followed by the ST and Christians (24). There are also groups that comprise members belonging solely to a particular caste or tribe. There are also groups comprising of only Christians. But generally the groups have members who belong to the different castes and religion.
92% of the members of the SHGs belong to the BPL category and the rest 8% comprise members who are either wives of primary teachers, retired army personnel, rich farmers etc. There are also circumstances where the extremely poor, for whom this programme is particularly targeted, cannot participate. A sad scenario for which they have an honest explanation, “We work as khetala, sometime it becomes difficult even to get two squares meals. We don’t get the time to attend the meetings and neither can we afford the monthly saving amount”. They have the urge to join the groups but poverty pulls them back. Illiteracy too acts as a disadvantage.

There is general urge among the group members to improve their socio-economic condition and share the expenses of the household. This kind of enthusiasm has mostly been noticed among the individuals belonging to the BPL category. However, at times there aspirations are cut short by the inconsiderate behaviour of their husbands and immediate family members (mostly mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law). The situation is worse with alcoholic husbands. They prevent the wives from going regularly for the meetings or sometimes even for the trainings, but will not hesitate to demand money to spend uselessly. Sometimes the cooperation from the family is so negligible that the mothers have to bring their children to the meetings.

Another important aspect is the presence of the male members in the groups. The total number may not be much (see Table below) but we cannot overlook their presence.

Table 28: Table showing the presence of Male SHG Members in the four GPs under Kalimpong I Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Name of the Gram Panchayat (GP)</th>
<th>No of Groups with a few male members</th>
<th>No of Groups with only male members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Upper Ecchey GP</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Seokbir GP</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Samtar GP</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Lower Ecchey GP</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 29: Table showing the presence of Male SHG Members in the four GPs under DP Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Name of the Gram Panchayat (GP)</th>
<th>No of Groups with a few male members</th>
<th>No of Groups with only male members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Chongtong GP</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Jhepi GP</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Relling GP</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Nayanore GP</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The data for the GPs of Kalimpong I Block has been collected from their respective resource persons. The data for the GPs of DP Block has been collected from their respective resource persons.

7.2.1. Background

7.2.1.1. Education

Education is an important factor needed for the smooth and democratic functioning of the SHGs. Proper management of the groups is crucially dependent on the level of education. It has also been seen that the illiterate, or the ones with primary education, always look upon the more literate in the group for running the show. However, it has its disadvantage. There are a few among the educated members who have a tendency to exert shrewd or devious influence within the group. This is one of the important causes for the group to split.

The number of literates in each group in the study areas is minimum thereby making the situation complex. Amongst the members only 1% has education up to the graduation level, 3% have education up to the 12th standard, 5% have education up to the 10th standard and another 10% have primary level education or no education. This is the general scenario in the GPs undertaken for study with information from the GP (25).

7.2.1.2. Occupation

In all the eight GPs, 95% of the women members are homemakers, engaged in domestic chores. Life in the rural areas is not easy so they are highly dependent on agricultural and livestock, which is their income source as well as for home
consumption. In some cases, the women members also work as khetala. 5% are also involved in domestic work but run small business within the villages, such as, grocery stores or small eateries. Wives of government school teachers, retired army personnel and rich farmers are also in this list and they usually do not work fulltime in the field. The time factor is important to them because they are engaged in the household activities and at the same time they have to do agricultural work as well as attend to their animals.

The occupational pattern of the male members' show that they are mostly engaged in agricultural activities. They are depended on agriculture and livestock for their livelihood which also includes the educated unemployed youths. 10% are engaged as carpenters, blacksmiths, mistry, baepary and college and school students.

7.2.1.3. Age Group

The age- groups have been segregated in the following manner: 18-27 years, 28-38 years, 39-49 years and 50 years and above.

Table 30: Age wise segregation of female SHG members in the four GPs- DP Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of GP</th>
<th>18-27</th>
<th>28-38</th>
<th>39-49</th>
<th>50yrs &amp;s above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jhepi</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>59.02%</td>
<td>28.20%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relling</td>
<td>27.02%</td>
<td>52.05%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayanore</td>
<td>18.08%</td>
<td>32.22%</td>
<td>12.20%</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongtong</td>
<td>21.22%</td>
<td>46.42%</td>
<td>23.09%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 31: Age wise segregation of male SHG members in the four GPs- DP Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of GP</th>
<th>18-27</th>
<th>28-38</th>
<th>39-49</th>
<th>50yrs&amp;above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jhepi</td>
<td>05%</td>
<td>6.05%</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relling</td>
<td>12.05%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayanore</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>10.03%</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongtong</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9.07%</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 32: Age wise segregation of female SHG members in the four GPs- Kalimpong I Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of GP</th>
<th>18-27</th>
<th>28-38</th>
<th>39-49</th>
<th>50yrs&amp;above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samtar</td>
<td>32.33%</td>
<td>61.32%</td>
<td>30.26%</td>
<td>7.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seokbir</td>
<td>28.29%</td>
<td>42.32%</td>
<td>20.30%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Ecchey</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>58.23%</td>
<td>10.11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Ecchey</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>59.05%</td>
<td>30.04%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The information has been collected jointly from the resource persons and the GP staff of the eight selected GPs.

Table 33: Age wise segregation of male SHG members in the four GPs- Kalimpong I Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of GP</th>
<th>18-27</th>
<th>28-38</th>
<th>39-49</th>
<th>50yrs&amp;above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samtar</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21.06%</td>
<td>12.34%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seokbir</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16.26%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Ecchey</td>
<td>12.25%</td>
<td>16.405%</td>
<td>5.05%</td>
<td>4.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Ecchey</td>
<td>14.32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10.56%</td>
<td>6.04%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4: All Women SHG- Amar Jyoti SHG, Jhepi GP DP Block

Table 33: Age wise segregation of male SHG members in the four GPs- Kalimpong I Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of GP</th>
<th>18-27</th>
<th>28-38</th>
<th>39-49</th>
<th>50yrs&amp;above</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seokbir</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16.26%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Ecchey</td>
<td>12.25%</td>
<td>16.405%</td>
<td>5.05%</td>
<td>4.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Ecchey</td>
<td>14.32%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10.56%</td>
<td>6.04%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The information has been collected jointly from the resource persons and the GP staff of the eight selected GPs.
The women members in the age group of 28yrs-38yrs are in majority. Generally they are married, have children and face financial constraints. They have a common explanation for being part of the SHGs, “We have been able to save, meet children’s expenses and fulfill the other unforeseen expenditure in the house”. Most of the women interviewed, have developed the urge to be financially independent.

Members in the age group of 39yrs-49yrs also show the enthusiasm to work. The percentage is less because most of them have little or no education. At the same time we cannot overlook the percentage of the members who are above 50years. They are eager to join and earn money. Young members in the age group of 18yrs-27yrs display less enthusiasm simply because they are either studying, or their mother or elder sister or the sister-in-law is already a member of the SHGs. Many young women get married and move to another place.

An analysis of the male members shows that the members belonging to the age-group of 18yrs-27yrs and 28yrs-38yrs are greater in number. Members in the age group of 18yrs-27yrs are young, with a few attending college or in the twelfth standard. But not all the members are educated as there are a number of members who have little (maximum class V) or no education. The latter usually work in their own land, work as khetala or labourer under NREGS, road or house construction.
The members in the age-group of 28yrs-38yrs are mostly married. Most of them are small farmers. But there are members who work as mistry, blacksmiths or carpenters. The male members in the age group of 39yrs-49yrs and 50 years above are less and according to the finding of our field survey the membership is greater in the selected study areas of Kalimpong I Block than in DP Block. The economic activity of these members relates mostly to floriculture and ginger cultivation.

7.2.1.4. Activities of the Groups

Social activities have been part and parcel of the SGSY programme. Accordingly, the SHGs undertake social activities for the first six months. This involves group action where they work for their respective villages. The members come together providing man-power for any occasion that arises in their village, mostly at the time of marriage and death. The social activities have to a substantial degree opened up communication among the people, which was limited before. As they communicate they participate in the local social activities and vice versa.

The SHG members also undertake cleaning of village footpaths and village temples, care for the sick and the old, extending help at the time of a natural calamity etc. The members also help one another, thus generating a ‘we group’ feeling. The groups are also used by the GP office for any event or programme. For example, the members prepare lunch for the staff during the meets of the Gram Sansad or Gram Sabha, for which they are paid.
However, the activities do not end here. They continue even after the first grading is over but observation shows some decrease in social activities as the time rolls by. The enthusiasm is particularly evident during the first grading. But as they get more and more preoccupied with their economic activities, the urge for social activities tends to slow down. Sometimes the groups depend upon other groups in the goan to undertake the social activities. Despite the drop in their day-to-day social activities the SHG members come together to work when the situation demands. The importance of such ‘rally’ in the face of necessity cannot be underestimated.

5.7: Economic activity: Poultry – Srijana SHG Chongtong GP DP Block.

8. Why SHGs are a Turning Point

The poor, particularly the rural people of Darjeeling Hills, have long been deprived of their basic needs. The wait is excessively long as development programmes reach, if at all, the grassroots level. The SGSY programme too was launched only in the year 2003 in the Hills though of late the programme has elevated the life of the rural masses. This ‘people- centered approach’, based on micro-level income generation, has enabled the rural poor to some extent to free themselves from the clutches of abject poverty and destitution. Besides, the programme has also given them the platform to at least address inequality, exploitation and gender discrimination.

Amidst the development stagnation in the Hills the programme arose, giving some scope to the rural masses, particularly the rural women, to fight odds. A common
response that has been observed amongst many SHG members is that the 'group life' has, to some extent, generated self-confidence and the need to become financially independent.

Interactions with the people at the grassroots level as well as with government officials reveal that the SHGs have emerged as a potential channel for facilitating PRDC. It has given them an opportunity to look beyond their set ideas. Communication has become easier with the SHGs around, which can not only enhance people's participation in development programmes but also in reaching the poorest. Thus, the SHGs constitute an important channel to be seriously taken by the stakeholders of development.

8.1. The Changes

To reiterate, the initiation of SHGs has brought opportunities in the lives of the rural poor in Darjeeling Hills. The change may not be tremendous but it has helped them to go a bit further. Kamala Tamang (26) has very little education but she has found confidence in her work-binding broomsticks. She has learnt to utilize the earning and the importance of saving. She has also become 'mentally elevated' as a member of the group. Kumari Limboo (27) studied only till class VI but the group, she claims, has changed her life. She feels there has been a lot of improvement as she has learnt to speak up, undertake bank work and recognize the local government officials.
Narmada Pradhan (28) too points out that she has learnt group solidarity and has understood the value of Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad.

5.9: Interaction with a SHG member- Kumari Limboo, Chetna SHG Samtar GP Kalimpong I Block

Thus, with several interviews taken with the group members of the four GPs each of Kalimpong I Block and DP Block the researcher has observed the following as the most commonly felt changes in the developmental scenario in Darjeeling Hills.

- A number of SHG members have at least learnt to write their names.
- The members today are in a comparatively better position to recognize the GP and the Block officials than before.
- The most important change the members amicably point out is their ability to speak. Earlier they would ‘shiver at the thought of raising their voice’. Now, to some extent, they have developed the confidence to speak at the village community meetings like Gram Sansad, and with government officials and bank officials.
- The saving habit of the members has also improved to an evident degree. It has helped them to ‘see money in own hands’ as well as meet the unforeseen expenditures of their houses. Consequently, the frequency of going to their neighbours or mahajan/sahu to borrow money has become less frequent (29).
- Unlike before there has been some change in the social activities at the village community level. The members have become ‘one another’s support’ at times of need and make every effort to ease the person’s burden.
The SGSY is like a light at the end of the dark tunnel. In this regard a comment made
by a SHG member, Ram Lal Acharya (30), cannot be overlooked, “We don’t get
anything from the government, but being a part of SHG has at least helped me to
understand the prevailing conditions and given me the courage to undertake work”.

The changes have not been drastic because they are mainly confined to the SHG
members. Yet, it is no less important. One can observe the enhanced participation of
the SHGs in the development process of the locality. To some extent, their level of
consciousness has increased, which can be observed from their active participation in
village meetings. For instance, at the Gram Sansad meet, the SHG members not only
place the problems of their areas but also speak on behalf of others. Compared to rest
of the villagers, they seem to be more aware of their rights and the schemes. It has
helped them to become bolder and prepared them to undertake work for the
development of their village, supported by frequent visits to the Block office, GPs and
interaction with the officials.

However, 85% of the SHG members of the study areas have mentioned that they had
never done any transaction with banks. They have an explanation that their financial
condition was too low to think of a bank as they were not in a position to save. Today,
however, the SHGs have not only made them familiar with the bank proceedings but
also given them the opportunity to save, draw loans at a very low rate of interest,
independently fill application forms (See Annexure V-D), interact with the bank staff
etc.

It is also pertinent to mention the few but visible ‘associated’ social trends that are
taking place with the emergence of the SHGs:

- Greater awareness on health, hygiene and nutrition
- Increased awareness on the necessity of sending children to school
- Reduction in the exploitation of women (31).
- Increased help to the poor and needy, the sick and the old (32)
- Reaching out at the time of a natural calamity, particularly landslide.

9. The Gender Angle in SHGs

“Empowering of women is a concept enabling women to make their own decision and
set their own priorities in shaping the course of their lives” (33). This is exactly what
the programme has set as its objective. Thus, according to its norm, 50% of the groups formed in each Block should be solely for the women. The state government also has given utmost emphasis on organizing the SHGs of women.

Field visits and interviews with the SGH members reveal that the presence of the male members cannot be overlooked. Though their strength is less as compared to the women members it is crucial to understand the kind of role they display.

It is to be noted that in all the eight selected GPs there are SHGs which purely comprise of male members. The number may not be huge but a table showing the same has already been given earlier in this chapter. Villages like Sherpa goan and Upper Samsu of Relling GP are backward and remote, being largely inhabited by the Sherpa tribal community (34). Lack of motorable road (two hours walk from the GP office) and electricity, indifference of government officials, illiteracy, poverty and conservative norms are a few crucial elements that have also delayed the formation of SHGs. Here the groups have been formed recently while in the other areas of the GP the SHGs had already been formed in 2003 (35). The notable feature is that there groups are composed mostly of male members. A maximum of only two female members were seen in the groups. A few instances can be mentioned like Dolma SHG comprising only of ten male members, Puspanjali having nine men and one woman, Sahara having eight men and two women and Sangam having nine men and one woman.

5.10: Puspanjali SHG comprising of one woman and nine male members- Sherpa Goan Relling GP, DP Block
Illiteracy and backwardness induce men to prefer womenfolk only in domestic chores. The women in these two villages are shy as is evident from their meetings (36). They sit in one corner and generally do not articulate. In some cases, the presence of drunk men acts as a deterrence to women’s articulation. The GP staff also do not show any kind of concern for this kind of serious situation.

At Lower Ecchey GP Kalimpong I Block the SHGs comprise of both men and women. Among the four GPs selected for study, Lower Ecchey has the highest number of men. The reason possibly could be the caste factor as the area is mostly inhabited by the Chettri and Brahmin communities. Interaction with the men in the group indicates the reason; the men opine that survival is difficult in the rural areas. SHGs have helped to ease their burdens to some extent and they have joined particularly to improve their socio-economic condition with “easy- pay off loans” (37). Most of the men in the groups hold either the post of the group leader or cashier. However, Meena Adhikary (38), a woman member of Surya Jyoti SHG, feels that it is either the case that the male member is the most educated among them or is ‘cleverer’. There are several cases in which the men have tried to dominate the women members or have simply ignored or underestimated their abilities. For instance, in Samtar GP Kalimpong I Block the Cluster Secretary is a young boy of 22 years, studying Bachelor of Science (BSc 2nd Year) at Kalimpong College (39). But the women members are not happy with this decision as most of the time he is at Kalimpong studying, and they want somebody preferably a literate woman with experience to manage the cluster. Surprisingly, the secretary always keeps the cluster files and registers with him, thus giving no opportunity to the cluster President, Ms. Manumit Lepcha, to examine the same.

In Seokbir GP all the twenty two groups have at least two male members. Groups like Social SHG have equal number of male and female (5:5) members, Amar SHG have eight male and two female members, Sewaro SHG have seven male and three female members. This GP too comprises mostly of tribals like the Subbas, Tamangs and the Lepchas. However, the condition here is better than the villages of the GPs under DP Block. It is not that they don’t face difficulties but they have been able to come out from their houses and participate in the rural development schemes.
Our study also shows that across the study areas, the women have no problem in inducting male members as they generally feel that most of the rural people should get an opportunity to rise above poverty. It is also felt that it is easier to send the men to the bank as most of the villages are situated very far. This shows a mix of sense of gender equity and practical considerations.

However, the consumption of alcohol is so high in the Darjeeling Hills that it makes an adverse affect on the SHGs. Our study shows that the alcoholic husbands are not interested to send their wives out or take part in any activity. There is a tendency among them to doubt their wives if they stay out for too long and this is when the trouble starts. Thus, some of the women join the SHGs facing great hurdles.

Gender has an important impact on the working of SHGs. In some areas men have a tendency to dominate and in some men and women work together. There are also groups in which men just remain members with the women managing the affairs. The caste factor and level of education have also made much impact within the group.

Recently, the government with an objective to increase the number of women has made it mandatory that the President and Secretary at the sub-cluster level should be women. Such a rule will naturally lead to their majority in the cluster in times to come.
10. Training: A New Experience

This programme meant for the rural poor can be utilized for effecting the voluntary organization of the poverty-stricken women so that they come together to improve their socio-economic condition. ‘Empowering’ the women to direct their own lives, improve their livelihood and take greater control in the decision making process are the aspects that have been taken into consideration by the government to introduce training for SHG members.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the training session is divided into BOP and Skill Development Programme. The former is crucial for the local people to understand the concept of SHG and gather knowledge on the methodology, principal pattern of the programme, banking procedure etc. Here the training is divided in various modules. Group Leadership Training/ Facilitator/Resource Person/ Gram Panchayat Level Trainers Training (GLTT)/Cluster /TOT/ Capacity Building/ Book Keeping are a few that need mention (40).

Besides, the SHG members are also provided with Skill Development Training. This is mostly based on income-generation activities and the members go for training in rotation, which, is particularly meant to improve the economic activity they undertake. It gives them more experience and knowledge, and improves the quality of the work undertaken. A major portion of the training is conducted by CMD based at Kalimpong, and a few is also undertaken by the Cluny Sisters at Pudung (41).
It is accepted that training has been an overhauling experience for the local rural people. In fact, to a considerable degree, it can be considered an important channel for enhancing the participation of the members in the group activity as well as bridging the communication with the outside world.

Banu Pradhan (42), a respondent, is happy that she got an opportunity to take part in the leadership and book keeping training. She has learnt to speak up without hesitation and has developed the confidence to take responsibility of the group. Like her, Narmaya Thapa (43), who is illiterate and 68 years old is thankful to the authorities for the training on goat rearing, which has given her a steady income. But she laments that she is yet to receive buro bhatta from the government.

Interaction with the SHG members indicates that 90% of them have undergone training on various subjects. There are, however, a few who are yet to participate and the reasons are mostly personal. Generally the husband, or the mother-in-law in particular, does not allow them, or it is because they have to look after the children. In other words, they have domestic compulsions which bind them even if they have the interest to be a part of the SHGs. There are also cases where some of the members have repeatedly gone for training and the ‘illiterate, innocent, timid’ are left behind. The SHGs of Kalimpong are at an advantage as most of the training centers are located in the vicinity. There is an absence of the same centers at DP Block and the local people have to come all the way to Kalimpong.

However, the women members of Jhepi GP can also avail of the training conducted by the Sisters of Notre Dam in the village itself, which has already been explained in the previous chapter. Here the training may not be on a variety scale yet it has helped to bring about a change in their ‘monotonous’ life. It has been a gradual process of confidence-building by which they have learnt to speak their mind, learn and see new things. Thus, Ratna Limboo (44), a respondent, had never visited Kalimpong but the training not only gave her the opportunity to see a new place but also to gain knowledge in a better way to undertake poultry as an economic activity.

Training can be regarded as a platform for building the capacity of the ordinary rural people to perform. It helps to improve not only their own lives but also those of their families and of the community. Training on catering, pickle-making and bakery have...
given them the opportunity to experience new things, so different from their grueling and toilsome routine.

When the members undertake training to understand the concept of SHG and the associated social and economic activities with their duty and responsibility, communication becomes swift. The members come back armed with the information and knowledge which they disseminate among the rest of the group. As they continue to interact not only within the group but also with other SHGs they become better communicators which also give them some degree of confidence to speak before the government officials and other visitors. We could find instances of the uneducated persons and those with very little education coming back with the belief that they are capable of achieving their goals. People’s participation in such trainings, therefore, helps to mobilize them for collective action. As they participate they communicate and as they communicate they develop the ability to interact effectively with others.

In the life of a SHG member, training is the ‘commencing point’ for the individual’s dynamic involvement in dialogue, sharing, expressing, implementing and decision-making. The training itself is based on nurturing the communication skills of the participants so that they can approach the other group members in a simple and lucid manner.

Training provides them with opportunities and creativity but it too comes with its own flaws. Sometime it so happens that the participants with very little education recede to the background as the educated and smarter ones tend to dominate the show. Interactions with the members reveal that they are happy with the training and the experience they gained, but at the same time they add that the more privileged ones would always make them feel neglected. The trainers would also sometime continue with sessions without caring for the fact that they are also ‘laggard’ participants. Palmu Lepcha (45) is happy with the training on catering and the new experience she gained. However, some of the basic infrastructure necessary for setting up a catering business cannot be availed easily. Absence of kitchen appliances like microwave, variety of spices and containers adds to their problem. Catering being a seasonal activity with only a few who can hire is also another serious obstruction. Investment is high but the return tends to be sluggish.
The same is echoed by those who underwent training for pickle, jam and jelly making. Besides the unavailability of the raw materials the SHG members also face marketing problems. Till date they are yet to avail a smooth channel for marketing their products. Sometimes they feel that the training ends from where it started as they are unable to give justice to the economic activities they undertake.

Despite the hurdles, the participants are eager to learn, to understand and take a break from their humdrum life. The officials too are of the opinion that the concept of training has proved to be useful in ‘illuminating the minds’ of the local rural people, making them pro-active and providing a platform for better communication.

11. SHGs: Communicative Power

The SGSY programme provides a fresh orientation as it moves towards bottom-up and grassroots level communication. It is gaining greater importance in rural development and is working its way into PRDC. The SHG has become a tool for ‘empowerment’ and socio-economic change. It is a channel in which we can observe the people at the grassroots level participating in the development programmes and acting as the conduit between them and the government. The women who form the majority in the group are in the process of participating and addressing the issues that affect their life and others in the community.
The SHGs have become an effective vehicle of communication, by which the people, even the poorest of the poor, and particularly the women, have the opportunity to organize themselves for the betterment of their socio-economic condition. The local rural people feel that the SHG has become the medium to gather knowledge on the development programmes, their rights, their due benefits and to interact with the government for articulating their grievances and problems. The SHGs connote “comprehensive participation... in all phases of development endeavour” (46). As revealed in the preceding discussion, many SHG members recollect the ‘neglected and monotonous life’ they led before they became a part of the SHGs. However it is worth mentioning again that the SHGs have to struggle even harder to translate ‘change’ into ‘transformation’.

11.1. Working with the Government

The SHGs in the rural areas of Darjeeling have a very important role to play at the grassroots level. Unlike other organizations they share a specific relation with the GP office. In fact, the GP is always in dire need of the SHGs which can extend help and co-operation. Compared to the non-members (47), the SHG members share a different kind of rapport with the officials of the GP and the Block. The GP staff of all the eight GPs agrees that the SHGs have become an important medium of disseminating information to the masses and reaching to the poorest of the poor. Most of the activities and programmes in the villages are undertaken with the help of the SHG members (48).

In the study areas, the SHGs have become the conduit of communication. The GP staff working at the rural level are highly dependent on the SHGs for any kind of work to be implemented. Balbir Yonzon (49) of Upper Ecchey GP Kalimpong I Block is of the opinion that SHGs have become a part and parcel of the GP and they cannot think of working without them. Such reliance continues to grow. However, this has also given the SHG members the opportunity to understand the working of the GP and the kind of programmes that come for the welfare of the rural population.

The GP acts as the representative of the people and in the prevailing milieu the SHGs have emerged as the ‘bridge’ that has brought the local rural people closer to the government. Self-reliance and improvement of the socio-economic condition have been the major goals of the SHGs. However, in the study areas the SHGs play a
broader role in emerging as the vital channel for facilitating PRDC. Let us now explain the point in greater detail with some specific instances/cases.

11.1.1. Communicating with the Block

Besides the GP, the SHGs have also developed a rapport with the Block Office. Earlier the SHG members had no interest in this office, the frequency of the visits was less, and they were apprehensive as to what to say, how to say and when to say. In fact, they were not even familiar with the local officials. The rural women in particular had no experience with the Block, and worse still, they had no idea about its location. But today the situation is not as desperate as it was till a few years back. The SHGs have given them the opportunity to get familiar with the Block Office, thereby facilitating their participation and increasing transparency in the form of communication between the two sides. It has given the SHG members the confidence to place their problems and gain knowledge about the functions of this office.

The visits of the SHG members are mostly related to the groups' work, which have also given them the advantage to enquire and gain awareness of other programmes and benefits intended for the rural areas. Though the development programmes are hard to come by at the Block level with DGHC controlling the same, the rural people, courtesy the SHGs, at least get the opportunity to understand the functions of the Block, what kind of problems can be solved here, and the kind of assistance they can receive. This acts as a 'cycle' as the same is circulated by the group members amongst other people in the villages.

Palden Lama, BWO (50) of Kalimpong I Block Development Office agrees that the implementation of SGSY has opened up avenues for improved communication with the rural lot. He also admits that today they are in a better position to reach the ordinary people of the far flung villages through these groups. Sujata Chamling (51) whom I happen to meet at Kalimpong I Block Office, expressed 'deep satisfaction' as ordinary villagers like her has got the chance to come out from the four walls of their house to see and experience what the outside world has in store. Sometimes, she adds, that the GP officials and the staff show little botheration and evince their irritation. Initially they 'succumbed to their tantrums' but as the group grew in strength they learnt to handle them. There are several like her who have lived through the highs and lows of interacting with the government agencies.
Despite the odds, the SHGs have opened up avenues for a better two-way interaction. The steady visit to these administrative offices has helped them to mature, shed their fear and gain knowledge on rural development activities. With time the group members have acquired the confidence to speak up with the officials and place their demands. This is the turning point because as they speak they become better communicators not only among themselves but also vis-à-vis the officials and the ordinary local rural people of their respective villages.

11.1.2. Linking the local rural people

It has been observed that not all the villagers are a part of the SHGs. Yet the initiation of this programme has helped to create a liaison that stretches beyond the groups. Earlier the environment was different, in which people remained largely aloof from one another. Poverty, pre-occupation with their work, conservatism, illiteracy, ignorance could be the factors, which no doubt are still alive today but a gradual change can be seen by which the people, 80% of whom are women, have given themselves the opportunity to work together not only for themselves but also for their community.

Rajdeep Dutta (52) calls it a “social revolution”. This is true to some extent as a social environment has been at least initiated that trains the ordinary villagers for a less oppressive social life. The ‘distance’ has started to melt as communication becomes steadier. SHGs have in some instances taught them to unite, help the needy, the poor and raise their voice for themselves, for the weak and for the society. The communication barrier that once stood is now slowly melting down. It has also been observed that the people to some extent have become more communicative and open.

The SHGs have developed a relation with the other rural people and most of the time they work hand in hand. Suk Maya Tamang (53), a 69 year-old woman, has little substantive knowledge on SHG but she remarks that they are more helpful than the GP. This is because one of the groups in her village (54) has helped her to get her buro bhatta. Rita Gurung (55) too is thankful as the groups of her area provided tremendous assistance while she was critically ill. Instances like these are several as narrated by villagers who are not members. Interactions with the local rural people reveal that the SHGs are their strength and can depend upon them for any kind of information. Though the developmental situation continues to take a back seat this
programme seems to provide some kind of relief. “So much to learn from them” and “Learning Experience” were the most common responses noticed in all the eight GPs.

Observation also shows that the communication develops steadily as the groups continue to participate in the activities in the areas. The pace has so much increased that even the far-flung villages which have always been ignored and uncared-for, harbour some optimism with the groups around. For instance, villagers of Upper and Lower Dong in Samtar GP, under Kalimpong I Block express their expectations from the SHGs. Mary Lepcha (56) may not be a member of a SHG but with the groups around she has learnt a lot on health and hygiene. People of remote goans like Upper Kizom of Nayanore GP, Rawali and Ramitaie of Jhepi GP both under DP Block also show their attachment with the SHGs. This is observed in the manner the SHG members talk with the villagers, whether to convince them to form new groups or to explain the necessity of having personal toilets or the necessity of sending their children to school.

However, this SHG-centric communication process is also facilitated by the low level of communication that exists in the respective GPs. In this context the SHGs of the selected four GPs under Kalimpong I Block are in a comparatively better position than those compared to the concern GPs under DP Block.
In relation to the SHGs most of the group members and the other villagers are active participants, eager to learn from one another and communication is more transparent. Despite the political disturbances and the stagnation in the implementation of development schemes the villagers of the GP areas under Kalimpong I Block have made effort to rise from deprivation.

Several advantages like close proximity to training centers, presence of pro-active missionaries and NGOs are also contributing to the development of the communication skills of ordinary villagers. Kalimpong is also the headquarter for organizations like Himalayan Farmers Front, Farmers Club, Co-operative Society etc. Thus, the people there get the exposure which has helped them to reach a better understanding and co-operation among themselves. Factors like these have changed to some extent the attitude of the local rural people. One cannot expect an enormous transformation overnight but the trends are definitely having a positive impact. Let us refer to a concrete case.

Sujala Subedi and her younger sister (57) of Allay Dara Relling GP had little hope after their parents died in 2005. They had a difficult time, with little government help.

However, the women of the locality came to their rescue convinced the sisters to join a group. Members of SHGs like Sangam and Kalyan counselled the sisters and...
showed them their alternative means of livelihood. They undertook economic activities like goatery and poultry. Today, they are self-reliant, thanks to the initiative of the local women. Sujala is overwhelmed with emotions as she narrates her past and remarks, “Had it not been for the SHG we would have been working as maids in some rich man’s house”

Our study finds that the women SHG members are mentally prepared to speak up for the poor, needy and weak. It is perhaps a manifestation of the realization that all these years they were deprived of even their basic rights. However, not all the SHG members have developed the ability to speak. There are members who are shy, timid and diffident and it has been observed that they do coax the others to speak on their behalf. This is usually seen during the Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha meetings. But whatever the shortcomings, the SHG has developed as the channel to motivate the people, encourage their participation, lend them their voice and help the ordinary rural people to come out from their poverty stricken lives. The change may be sometimes slow, sometimes ‘petty’ or sometimes scattered, but it has made its mark. One can state with some confidence that the SHGs have made PRDC a reality in some rural segments of Darjeeling Hills.

11.2. People as Better Communicators

One of the greatest experiences of the local rural people who have made themselves a part of the SHG programme has been the ability to speak. One cannot of course find the same and equal degree of change in all the eight GPs (We shall discuss the point subsequently). Nor is it the case that the change has taken development to new heights. Nevertheless it has shown the villagers the path to demand their rights and benefits. Thus, preparing a ground for democratizing development.

During the interview sessions the question “What have you learnt from the SHG?” was put to the members. The most common reply was, “We could not earlier speak, we were apprehensive about even uttering a word in any community meeting or in front of the officials. But with SHG we have at least learnt to speak and to interact with the authorities. Indira Poudyal (58) barely literate but today she has the capability to speak not only with her group members but also with the government and bank officials.
The earlier situation was such that particularly the women members were not interested in attaining Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha meetings. They remained ignorant and stayed away from such kind of meetings. The confidence level was too low to give them the opportunity to mingle in public. The matter was made worse with factors like poverty and illiteracy. However, today the necessity of attaining community meeting has been realized. To some extent it has also kept the GP officials on their toes.

Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, the communication level has not been the same for all the groups in the eight GPs. It is accepted that SHG has made them better communicators but the degree some what remains different. For instance, in few villages like Sherpa goan of Relling GP, Thapa goan, and Rawali goan of Jhepi GP, Ananden Basty of Nayanore GP, Dong in Samtar GP, Primtam in Seokbir GP the people who are part of the SHGs are still timid and rely on other members to speak for them or they have to be cajoled to speak out. This was mostly seen during the time of the community meetings like Gram Sansads or even during their monthly and cluster meetings.
The researcher has found out certain factors that may have affected the communicating skills of the local rural people in the above mentioned areas. Most of the villages here are extremely remote and thoroughly under-developed. It is very rare for the GP and Block staff to make visits here. Lack of interest on the part of the resource persons to mobilize the groups, absence of regular training are the key obstacles.

11.2.1. Political Role

The political scenario in the Darjeeling Hills has always been disturbed. The sorriest state observed during the rule of Subash Ghising. The fall from grace of this GNLF supremo and the birth of a new political party GJMM has witnessed the participation of the women particularly from the rural areas. We can observe that the GJMM’s women’s wing, locally known as Nari Morcha, was present in the political scenario since the formation of DGHC. But during that period their activities remained passive. Neither did the political leaders show a keen interest in bringing them into active politics.

However, a gradual change was observed when the ordinary villagers started to be a part of the SHGs. Today, significantly, Nari Morcha comprises an overwhelming
number of SHG members. Interactions with the members show that their level of understanding has increased to some extent. For example, the necessity of a separate state, the injustice and the betrayal by GNLF have become part of their political awareness. They would mention that being part of SHGs has motivated them to become a part of *Nari Morcha* and fight for the cause. Today they have become an active part of GJMM.

Here face-to-face communication helps to bring the local rural people together. The SHGs have given the local people the opportunity to come out from their homes. As they continue to interact with one another the political issues also become a part of their everyday discussion. This has paved the way for their greater and more intense participation in political activities.

11.3. Vital Role of Resource Persons

11.3.1. Who is Resource Person?
The resource person is chosen by the cluster from among the SHG members within their GP area. Usually two persons, preferably women from each GP, are appointed for this post. Dynamic nature, smartness, ability to speak, education and activeness are some of the factors that are taken into consideration at the time of selection. The DRDC under which the appointment has been made also pays a monthly remuneration of Rs.500/- to the selected individuals. Some of the functions are as follows:

- Formation of new SHGs in their respective GP areas
- Guidance to the newly formed groups
- Counselling to the defunct and break away groups with the aim for revival
- Maintenance of accounts and pass book of all the groups of its GP area
- Collection, compilation and submission of monthly reports of all the groups to the Block Office
- Attaining of monthly meeting at the Block Office along with the Executive Assistant. They bring back information of the government to the rural people like training sessions, schemes, activities to be undertaken etc.
Undertake field surveys as and when the situation and the project arrive. For example, current field survey relates to TSC.

Training is also provided to the resource person which helps them to gather knowledge on their functioning. At present, CMD has been providing the training that lasts for about eight to ten days. Such training is called TOT (59) where the individual gets back to the village to train and guide the people.

11.3.2. Resource Person: Communicative Function

The appointment of resource person from amongst the local people has been an important step for the development of the SHGs as well of the villages. Being 'local' is an advantage as the person is well acquainted with the people and the area. At the same time people are also comfortable interacting with them and can easily approach them any time for assistance. In this respect communication becomes easier and transparent. The resource person receives a paltry sum of Rs. 500/- per month. But they have to work harder than the Executive Assistant who draws a salary of more than Rs.8000/- per month. The Executive Assistant, as the staff of the GP, also has been given responsibility for the management of SHGs.

The resource person plays an important role in the dissemination of information to the rural masses. The greatest advantage has been that the individual belongs to the concern GP, is familiar with the local villagers, even with those who live at the far end of the villages. Consequently they are able to communicate better. It has also been seen that their work goes beyond that of the SHGs. Sometime they are utilized, mostly by the GP staff to send messages to the people. The messages can be anything from issues relating to buro bhatta to information about community meeting dates or photo session for voter identity cards.

In Upper Ecchey GP, Kalpana Adhikary (60), the resource person, has been allotted the responsibility of undertaking survey for TSC. She seems to have gained a lot of experience from this task. Interaction with her provided me with much information. Basically her task was to move around the entire GP area, to create awareness on health, hygiene and the necessity of having a toilet. Having convinced the persons the next task was to collect their names and Rs.20/- for the scheme (61).
Here we see the utilization of interpersonal *communication* for which the surveyor has been trained for door-to-door campaign with a clear focus on verbal information. Posters are also used by her (provided by CMD) (62) to give the people a clear-cut understanding of the scheme. Appointment of local persons has been favourable for the local rural people as they can easily reach to her for any kind of feedback and further queries.

Thus, the resource persons can be looked upon as one of the most important source of communication. Usually the resource persons diligently carry out the assigned tasks. But she/he realizes the enormity of the work. As she/he grows with experience she/he however realizes that Rs500/- is a pittance compared to the labour invested. However, the government officials are yet to realize that the resource persons can be of great help. For instance, Kalpana Adhikary is yet to get paid from the month she joined (September, 2007). She continues to perform her duty but all pleas for the release of allowance (informal and formal) have fallen on deaf ears. It seems the government is only concerned with the work but not with the payment they deserve. As the field survey continued the number of delayed non-payments to the resource persons came to light in each selected GP. We can also take the instance of Gopal Lama (63), the resource person of Relling GP, who was appointed way back in 2007. However, it
was only in May 2009 that he received a measly amount of Rs.960/-, for less than the arrear he was entitled to receive from 2007. Under such circumstances the resource persons lose the interest in work and as a result a vital scope for PRDC is affected. The resource person is and can be an effective bridge to take the SHG programme to the villagers. The people who earnestly want to be a part of the new groups may not be getting the right kind of guidance and they may not be in a position to approach the GP every time. The situation is graver for the poor and the illiterate. There are also instances where we find that when some of the groups are falling apart the resource persons, appointed by the government, comes to the rescue and contribute to their revival.

![Reseacher interacting with Krishna Kumar Acharya, Resource Person of Lower Ecchey GP Kalimpong I Block](image)

One cannot overlook the fact that the resource persons have a pivotal role to play in the given conditions in initiating and encouraging people’s participation in the rural development programmes. Local residence, local dialect and knowledge of local community give them the advantage of making close interactions with the people. They can also bring those people residing in most remote under-developed areas under the SHGs, which can in turn, make the SHGs more effective with greater reach.
At the same time, the government, particularly the GP office, should understand the worth of the resource persons and help them to get what they deserve.

Nilima Pradhan (64), resource person of Seokbir GP, says that she has learnt and gained lot of experience from this job but is disappointed in the way she has been treated. The resource persons have been working without their remuneration for months despite the hard work they undertake. She further adds that they have to walk up to the villages, some for more than two hours, which do not necessarily elicit positive response. Transport costs are also borne by them while going to the Block Office for monthly meetings. They have to maintain the records of each SHG group of their GP, which is also time consuming. Sometimes extra work is also assigned to the resource persons.

The need of the hour is to understand the value of the resource persons with the realization that they can be moulded to act as the liaison between the implementation of the SGSY programme and the local rural people. Their continuous presence with the people has been instrumental in increasing the level of the people’s participatory activities.

12. Challenges and Constraints

The initiation of the SHG programme in the Darjeeling Hills is a landmark venture for the development of the local rural people. Lata Maya Subba (65) of Nayanore GP, DP Block, welcomes the SGSY programme as it has brought ‘solace’ in her life. She states that in the ‘chaotic situation’ of under-development and ignorance SHGs gave her the ‘hope and opportunity’ to fight poverty and injustice. Narratives like these are there but at the same time we cannot undermine the difficulties that stand in the way of greater success of the SHGs.

12.1. Level of Literacy

Sometimes the literacy factor itself tends to put barrier across the members of the groups. Though it has not been experienced by all the groups, it has been a major cause of fallout in the groups. There are groups in which the literate members have the inclination to dominate and take decisions without consulting the rest. Groups like Ashirbad of Lower Relling, Relling GP are on the verge of collapse as all the group members have little or no education except for the group leader who has
studied till the tenth standard, and the cashier who is a young boy studying in class X. It is found that only few meetings were held, the cashier is barely visible and the members are not happy with the group leader. The members also conceded the fact that there was misuse of fund by their group leader who ‘can manipulate things because she can read and write’.

12.2. Banking
Banking transaction has been a ‘new experience’ for the SHG members but if only the banks were in close proximity to the villages. In general the banks are at least ten kms away from the GPs. Although the banks have fixed the days for the SHG consultation, it is not necessary that the members will get their work done or meet the in-charge on the specified days. When the work is delayed they also lose a day’s work in their field. Sometimes the SHG members have to go many times before their work is done. Language also acts as a barrier as most of the bank staff, including the managers are non-Nepali (Hindi or Bengali speaking). This is a difficulty which all the SHGs of all the eight GPs have been confronting. Their counter-question was, “Where is the time and the money to go to the bank several times?”

12.3. Poverty
Poverty too does not allow the SHG members to lead decent lives. Chagen Lhamu (66) gives a practical explanation that because most of them are poor they cannot afford to attend four meetings in a month. Like her, Rupa Chettri (67) also accepts the fact that SHG has improved her economic condition but at the same time she cannot afford to neglect the agricultural work which has always been the means of sustenance. Extreme poverty also makes them helpless on occasions as they are not even able to contribute a paltry amount (minimum of Rs.20/-) as their monthly savings.

12.4. Role of GP
Our study also shows that the GP staff have not been committed enough to the task of upliftment of the local rural poor through the SHGs. One of the basic reasons is the lack of scope for fund misappropriation. They usually don’t take the trouble to go to the remote villages to promote this programme, though they have been given specific responsibilities. The appointment of the resource persons has made their work lighter. There is an expectation among the villagers that matter’s would have been better.
the GP staff taken greater initiative and interest. But all the GP staff want is to manipulate the group members for their work in and around the GP areas.

12.5. Inadequate Marketing
As mentioned, the major objective of the SGSY programme has been to improve the socio-economic condition of the local rural people. They have been encouraged to make new items (68) which can be sold for a profit for which training has also been provided. However, the SHGs face a huge problem when it comes to marketing the products. This has veritably been a genuine problem and the matter is worse for the people of DP Block. This is because it is not possible to sell all their products at Bijanbari which is the market place for these GPs and Darjeeling town is too far for them. They are also affected by prohibitive transport costs. Even if their merchandise reaches Darjeeling town the cost is too high.

Regarding training, cutting and tailoring (69) could have been a lucrative activity but the members of Prayatna SHG (Lower Ecchey GP), Surya Kiran SHG (Relling GP) Maichang SHG (Chongtong GP) had their hopes sunk to the doldrums when they found that there is no provision of certificates for training. Marketing is a difficult venture and the SHG members are yet to see any permanent solution. Selling their products door-to-door has been one of the alternatives, but it is extremely difficult to move on carrying the heavy load, walking long distance, that too leaving small children behind. They also face difficulties with packaging as they do not have the necessary raw materials to make their products look attractive. They also face huge loss in the case of perishable goods. The high cost of packaging and production also make their goods over-priced.

A small shop (70), rather an outlet, has been opened just besides the Block Office at Kalimpong where the SHGs can keep their products for sale. But here too they face problems, especially if they are perishable and take a long time to sell. It has also been observed that the durable products too take a long time to sell thus blocking their money. A same outlet had been opened at Bijanbari market but the sale was so poor that it had to be closed down. The limited marketing facilities have, therefore, pulled back the SHGs, income which has evidently affected their socio-economic improvement. It has not been easy even to expand their market to close places vibrant centers like Darjeeling town, Sikkim or Siliguri.
Thus, with marketing at a snail’s pace it has made a negative impact on the capital transaction, skill, effort and socio-economic upliftment of the local rural people. The SHG members have placed their plea to the government officials but till date it seems to have fallen on deaf ears. The members themselves have no idea as to how and where to take their goods. As a result they are compelled to switch over to other economic activities.

Still the fact remains that despite the difficulties they confront right from the grassroots level to the higher authorities, the SHGs have come a long way in terms of being initiated to the ‘participatory culture’.

13. Future Directions

It is accepted that the SHGs in their own little way have helped to build up the lives of the local rural people of Darjeeling Hills. Challenges and problems are there, yet the SHGs can be regarded as one of the emerging channels for PRDC. Our study shows that a little more initiative from the government, primarily of the local level agencies like the GP and the Block, could be good for building social connections.

The SHGs have great potential to be a ‘salient’ channel of PRDC. Based on her study, the researcher can identify the factors that can alleviate the SHGs to a point where they can see themselves playing an important role in development. Specifically, better communication not only among themselves but also with the stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, is a sine quanon. To increase participation in the rural development programmes, certain points need to be taken into consideration:

- The village-level administration i.e. the GP needs to be conferred with greater functions and responsibilities. This can always bring more efficiency in the working of the SHGs. Such initiative can bring healthy communication between the GP and the SHG members, which in turn can lead to pro-poor participative ambience. Thus, a more crucial and serious role needs to be played by the staff of the GP. This can be regarded as a vital pre-requisite for PRDC. The greatest advantage is that the GP staff function at the local level. Such an advantage should be well utilized by the higher authorities for better communication. Thus, there is a great urgency to motivate the GP to enhance their sincere contribution to the upliftment of the SHG members.

- The feeble role played by the media, if strengthened, can become effective channel for better access to knowledge and information on SHGs. There is
marked absence of the mass and traditional media. A concerted effort towards
the utilization of such media would definitely move the people to increased
participation in the rural development programmes. This would help in the
increase of the number of people joining the SHGs. Moreover, initiatives
through visuals like posters and placards should be given greater importance.

- The SHG members have the ability and talent to produce a variety of products.
  It can be anything from locally-grown flowers to flavoured pickles to hand-
  stitched garments. But the question is where to market the products? The
dearth of local marketing channels has adversely affected the spirit of the
people. The district administration is yet to come up with a strategy that can
enable the SHG members to sell their products in a proper way.

- The public sector and cooperative banks which play an important role in
  providing financial assistance should be motivated to take greater interest in
  the SHGs. Disbursement of fund, including all paper work, should be
  completed by the banks within the assigned time. This will definitely boost the
  morale of the local rural people in general and the SHGs in particular.

It is accepted that SHGs have opened up new avenues for communication and
participation in the local development programmes. There has also been a rise in
awareness on issues like the necessity of monthly savings, signature learning,
children’s education etc. Yet, the poor are yet to see a drastic change in their living
standards. Poverty continues to rule over them and well-being is still a distant dream.
The lack of interest shown by DGH in the upliftment of the SHGs has been a huge
hindrance in this context.

As a researcher indulging in participant observation I have been able to feel the
potential of the SHG members to make the groups a channel for communication that
can serve as a link between the stakeholders and the people at the grassroots level.
When people at the grassroots level participate in the development programmes,
facilitated through rural communication it can definitely help them to make some
improvements in their poverty stricken lives. But such a scenario is possible only
when the governmental authorities understand the necessity to harness the SHGs not
just as they are conventionally visualized but as a communication channel. The SHGs,
as the preceding discussion reveals, are ready to cooperate and participate but they
can surge forward only when the concerned authorities are ready to harness their
potential.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


7. Dr. P. Krishnaiah, op.cit, p.351.


9. Every group that has completed the first period of six months and has presented the potential of a workable group receives RF. This fund is provided to increase the group corpus which will enable more members to avail the loan. It enables the SHG members to undertake micro-credit activities on a bigger scale. Imparting credit discipline and financial management skills to members is another objective.

10. The RF is sanctioned to the SHGs by the Banks as CCF. As the RF increases the SHGs mobilizes the money they receive as loan from the bank. The money that they receive as loan is used as credit by the groups. The money is utilized to undertake economic activities. CCF allows greater facility for carrying out day-to-day operations of a business unit.

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12. Credit Linkage begins after the third grading. The release of loan depends upon the type of project selected by the group and also on its viability. It can be anything from floriculture, diary to readymade garments. Subsidy is also provided to the groups provided they pay back the loan. For example the group will receive a subsidy of Rs.50000/- if they have repaid their loan of Rs.1,00,0000/-. 

13. The cluster is managed by office bearers who are SHG members and are selected from among themselves. They include the President, Vice President, Secretary, Joint Secretary or the Assistant Secretary and Treasurer.

14. The cluster has the responsibility of monitoring and supervising all the SHGs within the GP. It provides guidance to new groups, takes initiative to revive sick groups, hears out their problems, checks the registers and accounts, conducts monthly meetings with the groups etc.

15. Money transaction here means inter-lending. The monthly savings deposited by the groups with the cluster can be used by the group members as loans.


19. Various kinds of training are provided to the SHG members. Group leaders and treasurers of SHGs are provided with leadership training like how to conduct meetings, how to manage the group etc. Cluster training is for the cluster office bearers where they undergo training for management of the cluster. Resource persons are provided training for book keeping, supervision of groups, strategies for creating new groups, communication with groups etc. A maximum of two resource persons are appointed in a GP.
20. MSR is related to training. The SHG members are provided various kinds of training which can arm them with some kind of skill. Such a skill can at least provide them with the basic knowledge and experience to take up the economic activity.


24. The SHG members mostly comprise of people belonging to the Hindu-Nepali community like Pradhan, Bujel, Gurung, Chettri, Brahmin, Mangar, and Rai. SC are also present who are also Nepali Hindus but belong to the lower caste. SHG members also belong to the ST category. They are mostly Subba, Tamang, Sherpa and Lepcha. There are also Nepali Christians mostly converts.

25. The information has been collected from the selected GPs of the study area. There are four GP each from Kalimpong I Block and DP Block.


during the monthly meeting at Bara Suruk, Samtar GP Kalimpong I Block on March 03, 2008.

29. SHG has helped them to become financially independent. The local rural people are now able to cope with several expenditures, such as, children’s school fees, medical expenses, expenses relating to social functions, marriage etc. The most important lesson they have learnt is to save. They have realized that by saving, they can fulfill some of their needs. Thus, it has helped not only giving a boost to their economic activities but also to utilize the savings in times of crisis and emergency. It also gives them some kind of psychological support.

30. Ram Lal Archarya: Age: 51, Gender: Male, Marital Status: Married, Education level: Class VIII (Fail), Occupation: Farmer and Group Leader of Kalpa Briksha SHG and Cluster President. Interview taken during the quarterly meeting of the Cluster held at Jyoti Junior High School, Seokbir GP Kalimpong I Block on January 02, 2007.

31. Exploitation of women in the Hills is not as prominent as in the rest of India but at the same time it cannot be ignored. In the rural areas life is difficult, where the women have to do household work, work in the fields, attend to the animals and look after the children etc. Liquor is one of the major sources of domestic trouble. Heated arguments are common. Physical assault is also prevalent. However, with the launch of the SHGs, pressure on the women is gradually decreasing and the women are making an effort to ‘fight back’.

32. The local rural people are in a better position to help the needy, sick and old in their villages. They usually collect money (depending on the ability of the individuals as they themselves are poor), arrange food from among themselves as well as from the rest of the villagers. Sometimes they also take the sick to the hospital and provide support and care to the old. As SHG members, many of them feel they can do a lot for those who are in need.

33. *Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana- Guidelines, op.cit, p.35.*
34. Sherpas originally are an ethnic group from the most mountainous region of Nepal, high in the Himalayas. They have also migrated to India places like Darjeeling, Kalimpong and the Indian state of Sikkim. Sherpa goan and Upper Samsu are the most remote, far-flung, and backward areas under Relling GP Bijanbari Block. The major elements of under-development include lack of motorable road, electricity, water supply and lack of literacy.

35. The SHGs in the above mentioned villages are only two to three months old. This is not only because they have been slow to understand the programme but also because the GP staff have not shown any interest to create awareness among them. The staff are not willing to take the trouble to walk for one to two hours to the interiors and spread the information on the advantages of joining the group.

36. By nature the rural tribal women are shy and timid as compared to the rural women belonging to the Chetri-Brahmin community. They are also illiterate and poor. But they are also very hardworking, mostly engaged in their domestic chores. They have more children and consumption of liquor is also high among them.

37. This was a common opinion given by the members of Jyoti Prakash SHG. All the ten members are male and the interview was taken during field visit on January 15, 2007 of Mandal goan, Lower Ecchey GP Kalimpong I Block.

38. Meena Adhikary: Age: 30, Gender: Female, Marital Status: Married, Education level: Class VIII, Religion: Hindu, Caste: General, Occupation: ICDS Worker- cooks food for the children at the center (Rs.11/- per month) and member of Surya Jyoti SHG. Interview taken at the ICDS center on January 15, 2007 at Mandal goan, Lower Ecchey GP, Kalimpong I Block.


40. Members of the SHG are imparted training on various subjects It is also not necessary that all will undergo the same training. For instance, members
selected as group leaders or cashiers are provided with the relevant training, in leadership and cash handling apart from skill development training. The ordinary members are also sent for skill development training to enhance economic activities. Every group is given the opportunity and a kind of rotation is followed.

41. CMD imparts training to the SHGs. Basic Orientation Programme/Leadership/Facilitator/Resource Person training and skill development training to undertake economic activities are provided. There are also other institutions like the Cluny Sisters (missionary organization run by the sisters) located at Pudung (Pudung is a GP which is next to Lower Ecchey GP Kalimpong I Block). They impart training only to women members on catering, soft toy making, phenyl making, bakery, tailoring etc. NGOs like Anugalaya also give training on how to grow organic vegetables, preparedness during natural calamity etc. They give training to the other villagers besides the SHG members.

42. Banu Pradhan: Age: 29, Gender: Female, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Hindu, Caste: OBC, Education level: Class VIII (Fail), Occupation: Home maker and Group Leader of Suna Khari SHG. The interview was taken during the monthly meeting on January 28, 2007 at Siresae, Chongtong GP DP Block.


44. Ratna Limboo: Age: 30, Gender: Female, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Yumaism, Caste: ST, Education level: Class VII (Fail), Occupation: Home maker and member of Limboo goan SHG. Interview taken during the monthly meeting on December 01, 2005 at Limboo goan, Relling GP DP Block.

45. Palmu Lepcha: Age: 36, Gender: Female, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Buddhist, Caste: ST, Education level: Class V, Occupation: Home maker
and member of Khamri SHG. Interview taken during the monthly meeting attended by the researcher on January 29, 2007 at Upper Kizom, Nayanore GP DP Block.


47. In this context by non-members, they are the local rural people who are not a part of the SHG. Certain factors are responsible for not being a member—

- They find themselves too old to be a part of the group.
- The husbands do not allow them to join.
- They are extremely poor and show no interest.
- Ignorance.
- Some of the well-off in the villages do not find it necessary.
- Lack of initiative and motivation from the SHGs.

48. It has been observed that most of the activities and programmes in the villages of all the eight GPs are undertaken with the help of the SHG members. The SHGs are involved in the preparation of lunch and snacks during community meetings, celebration of national events like Independence Day or 26th January, cultural programmes like dance competition, musical event, sports meet etc.


51. Sujata Chamling: Age: 38, Gender: Female, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Hindu, Caste: OBC, Education level: Class VII (Pass), Occupation: Home maker and cashier of Smriti SHG. She is from Bujel Basty of Samtar GP and had come to the Block Office with some work of her group. Interview was taken at Kalimpong I Block on February 28, 2007.


54. SHG has helped the members to become aware of their rights and benefits. Social activities have always been in their agenda.


57. Sujala Subedi: Age: 25, Gender: Female, Marital Status: Single, Religion: Hindu, Caste: General, Education level: Class III, Occupation: Farmer and member of Kalyan SHG. Interview taken during the monthly meeting attended by the researcher on November 11, 2005 at Allay Dara Relling GP DP Block. Sujala Subedi has a younger sister who is twenty three years of age. They are orphans so they have to look after themselves. They don’t have much land but they grow seasonal vegetables and rear chicken, goat and cow for their living. They also work in other land as agricultural labour. Life is difficult for them. However, the SHG has helped them to a great extent.

58. Indira Poudyal: Age: 30, Gender: Female, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Hindu, Caste: General, Education level: Class V, Occupation: Home maker group leader of Kamal SHG. Interview taken at her residence during FGD
attended by the researcher on November 02, 2005 at Rai Goan Upper Sumbuck Jhepi GP DP Block.

59. TOT plays an important role in the dissemination of information at the grassroots level. The resource persons undergo training for the various activities they have to undertake with the SHGs. These trainings enhance their knowledge and experience which they can easily apply as they work in the villages.


61. The resource persons working for the SHG have also been allotted the task of awareness generation on TSC. As they convince the local villagers for the necessity to have a toilet, they also collect Rs.20/- from every household. However, this may be retained by the resource persons for the hard work they have undertaken to convince the villagers. They also take the trouble of walking to the far off villages.

62. Posters have been provided by CMD for the implementation of TSC. These posters are used by the resource persons to create awareness on health and hygiene and on the necessity to stay clean. These posters are usually big size picture charts, written in the local language Nepali for showing pictures of washing hands after using the toilet, taking bath with soap, brushing one’s teeth, cutting nails and diseases caused due to open defecation etc.

63. Gopal Lama: Age: 33, Gender: Male, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Buddhist, Caste: ST, Education Level: Class X (Pass). Interview taken during the cluster meeting on January 05, 2008, Relling GP, DP Block. The GP Secretary, Jagat Man Rai of Relling GP later gave information on the payment of his arrear.

64. Nilima Pradhan: Age: 35, Gender: Female, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Hindu, Caste: OBC, Education level: Class VIII, Occupation:
Home maker, resource person and cashier of Tribeni SHG. Interview taken on April 3, 2008, Seokbir GP Kalimpong I Block.

65. Lata Maya Subba: Age: 38, Gender: Female, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Yumaism, Caste: ST, Education level: Class VI, Occupation: Home maker and member of Sagar SHG. Interview taken at her house during the monthly meeting attended by the researcher on April 16, 2006 at Lungchakro Nayanore GP DP Block.

66. Chagen Lamu: Age: 40, Gender: Female, Marital Status: Married, Religion: Buddhist, Caste: ST, Education level: None, Occupation: Home maker and member of Sagar SHG. Interview taken at the monthly meeting attended by the researcher on April 16, 2006 at Lungchakro Nayanore GP DP Block.


68. Skill development training has helped the SHG members to make new products that can be sold in the market. The local rural people have learnt to make items like potato chips, pickles, dried meat, noodles, phenyl and soft toys etc.

69. The SHG members underwent training for cutting and tailoring. There were taught the art of stitching garments keeping in mind the local needs. Ladies top, night dress, salwar suit was given preference.

70. DRDC has opened up a small shop rather a counter just besides Kalimpong I Block office in the heart of Kalimpong town. The counter is managed by SHG members who belong to the nearest GPs. It is difficult for the groups of the far-off and remote areas to keep their products here because of lack of opportunities.