



Empowering Marginalized Groups through Participation by Village Support Organizations (VSOs)

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Abstract: In order to learn how Village Support Organizations (VSOs) in District Swabi empower disadvantaged groups, researchers used an interview schedule to gather data from 384 participants in a cross-sectional study. Even after accounting for respondents' gender, the findings of the multivariate analysis reveal a misleading correlation between gender development and community happiness. Moreover, after adjusting for categories of educational attainment (primary to middle and above), a spurious and non-significant association was discovered between gender development and community satisfaction with the effectiveness of VSOs. A similar erroneous correlation between gender development and community satisfaction with the effectiveness of VSOs persisted even after adjusting for respondents' ages. For the inclusion of marginalized groups into the mainstream, it is needed that the VSOs should hire and train the local volunteers keeping in view the norms of the culture, so they can further sensitize the local community on gender related issues generally and women specifically.

Keywords: Defined Benefits, Defined Contribution, GoKP's, Pension fund, Pension liabilities

1. Introduction

Many rural communities in emerging countries have been striving for improvement for decades, with an emphasis on agriculture. There are several barriers to improving the socioeconomic situation of countries whose economy is based on agriculture. These little communities in the countryside are known for a lack of education, high unemployment rates, and low per capita income. According to Douangneune et al. (2005), forming community groups is vital for the country's economic development to progress more quickly. Furthermore, in many developing countries, village organizations play a significant role in decentralizing development strategy and execution. Programs based on local knowledge and resources are based on the notion that community participation and decentralization may lead to more effective, responsible, and transparent solutions for reducing poverty (Bardhan, 2002).

Development groups known as village support organizations (VSOs) are non-profit and do not have any ties to politics or ethnicity. Prominent development and humanitarian practitioners often head these groups, and they're all set on improving rural areas' social and economic conditions. Since these organizations plan and carry out a wide

range of humanitarian and development initiatives with the help of foreign donors and agencies, we may also call them implementing associations. What sets many of these rural organizations apart is their dedication to fighting poverty and advancing social justice by ensuring the continued existence of society's most marginalized and vulnerable populations. These groups are entirely volunteer-run and have a focus on improving the quality of life for those living in rural areas. Health care, environmental quality, educational opportunities, technological accessibility, resident agency, and community development are all areas that these groups aim to improve via supporting community activities and promoting fairness (Ravallion and Lokshin, 2010).

1.1 Justification of the Study

Developing nations are a focal point for VSO's global efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs]. Poverty, malnutrition, climate change, and gender inequality are among problems that Pakistan is tackling. But these challenges are different at the provincial level. The establishment of VSOs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa [KPK] has opened up an important new option for local beneficiaries and refugees affected by the war on terror or natural disasters. The number of non-governmental organizations in KPK has increased during the last decade.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender Development through VSO's

The liberation of oppressed women and the achievement of gender equality are crucial for long-term economic success, according to several research. Consequently, achieving gender parity is considered both a human rights concern and an indicator of success in the long run (Alvarez et al., 2013). But there are pervasive and long-lasting gender disparities in environmental, social, and economic factors (UN Women, 2014). The claim that the psychological, social, legal, cultural, economic, and environmental aspects of human society's long-term development need significant consideration is supported by Bossel's (1999) remark. Given that achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is a key goal of the Millennium Development Goals, research examining this issue within the framework of poverty reduction are very pertinent. Almost every facet of progress may be improved by investing in places where women and men are treated equally (OECD, 2008). In most societies, women put in more effort than males do, particularly when it comes to matters of the home and community.

The widespread belief that women should stay at home and raise children has helped keep gender inequality a global problem. Because of this, a lot of people still think women shouldn't have jobs outside the home. Also, women are hindered from achieving their full potential due to the many different forms of prejudice they face. When compared to men, women are more likely to work in non-traditional jobs. On a daily basis, women face a lesser salary, social risks and hurdles, an unwelcoming workplace, and restrictions on their capacity to voice their opinions and have a say in organizational decisions. Every good man and woman, every girl and boy, must have the opportunity to fully engage in life and reach their full potential if we are to create a society where everyone may succeed (Klugman, et al., 2014). Religious and societal norms in Bangladesh hold that women are inherently "physically weaker" than males. This means that fewer opportunities exist for women in Bangladesh to work outside the house and contribute financially.

There are a number of ways to empower women, according to Zulfiqar (2017). These include expanding educational chances, allowing women to participate in politics, distributing economic opportunities, and establishing microcredit programs. A variety of forms of empowerment may be necessary to meet the wide range of needs and expectations that women may have. Economic empowerment, enhanced well-being, and political empowerment are the three types of empowerment that Mayoux (2000) identifies. All three of these subcategories rely on each other. Many studies, particularly those in the area of development economics, have shown that empowerment is one of the main driving factors that might help end poverty. These results prompted the type to be subdivided.

Economic empowerment is the process of enabling women and men to take part in, make a difference in, and reap the rewards of growth processes by implementing policies that recognize their value, treat them with dignity, and pave the way for a more equitable sharing of growth's fruits. The ability for men and women to take part in, make a difference in, and benefit from development processes is known as economic empowerment (Eyben, 2004).

Women who are economically empowered have greater access to a variety of economic resources and opportunities, including paid employment, banking and other financial services, property and other productive assets, chances to learn new skills, and market-specific data. There can be no progress in women's rights, empowerment, and control over their lives and society as a whole, unless women achieve economic independence and actively engage in community economic life (Swedish ministry pertaining to foreign affairs, 2006).

3. Material and Methods

Through District Swabi, the research was conducted. The research used a cross-sectional approach to learn about the impact of VSOs on the growth of community disadvantaged groups (Olsen and George, 2004). The research region has a total of "177,254" beneficiaries registered with different VSOs, according to information from the Directorate of Social Welfare KPK (2019). Accordingly, 384 participants were chosen for the study based on the criteria laid forth by Sekaran (2003). Furthermore, each stratum, or Tehsil, received a proportionate share of the allotted sample size based on Bowley's (1925) calculation (see to table 1). Based on the factors provided in the study's conceptual framework, the recommended variables were quantified using a Likert scale technique (see table 2). Several statements outlining the different parts of the independent and dependent variables were created for this research based on the existing literature, personal experience, meetings with district social welfare officials, and conversations with CBOs, LSOs, and VOS members. The validity, reliability, and consistency of the inquiries and characteristics were assessed using a pre-tested structured interview schedule (Reynolds et al., 1993). Because of this, the suggested study's reliability might be better assessed using Cronbach's alpha. According to Nachmias and Nachmias (1992), Cronbach's Alpha values up to 0.6 are considered acceptable in the social sciences. So, for gender development, the Cranach's Alpha value is 0.61, and for community satisfaction, it's 0.70. The primary data was analyzed using SPSS version 26, which is a statistical package for the social sciences. The results were presented as frequency and percentage distributions at the univariate level. To determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, the chi-square test and T^b were employed. To determine the strength of the relationship between the dependent variable (community satisfaction with regard to the effectiveness of VSOs) and the independent variable (gender development), we adjust for three background variables: respondents' gender, educational status, and education. A chi-square test and a directional test, abbreviated T^b , were used to cross-tabulate all of the aforementioned variables.

Table 1: Details of the sample size for each Tehsil in the district of Swabi

Tehsil	Population Size	Beneficiaries	Sample Size
Lahor	264,748.0	34,113.0	74.0
Topi	275,317.0	38,358.0	83.0
Razr	557,775.0	72,651.0	157.0
Swabi	250,851.0	32,132.0	70.0
Grand Total	13,48,727.0	177,254.0	384.0

Source: Directorate of Social Welfare Khyber Puktukhwa (2019)

3.1 Conceptual Framework

Table 2: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Background variables	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
Age Gender	Marginalized groups' empowerment via involvement	Perceptions of VSO's effectiveness within the community

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Univariate Analysis

Community organizations (COs) or village organizations (VOs) have become commonplace in modern society as a consequence of decentralized, multi-sectoral, participatory development initiatives. Many in Pakistan's professional and political circles have first-hand knowledge of the successes and failures of programs like Integrated Rural Development, Basic Democracy System, and Village AID. Development groups such as the Agha Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP), and others followed a similar strategy in the 1970s and beyond when it came to improving rural communities. Using a new strategy called the "Participatory approach." These regional development associations have coordinated hundreds of VSOs and WOs. There are robust and long-lasting groupings among them, but there are also weak and scattered ones (Zeb, 2001). One of the significant goals of the participatory strategy was to organize rural communities via small village committees called village organizations (VOs) or village development committees (VDCs). The goal of creating these VOs was to facilitate local participation in rural development project management, supervision, evaluation, monitoring, and development actions. The main duty of the Rural Support Programs Network (RSPN) is to aid the Rural Support Programs (RSPs) that are members of the network in becoming more capable. The Gender and Development (GAD) section of an RSP works to make sure that the organization's policies, programs, and projects don't favor one gender over the other. Furthermore, the GAD department offers technical assistance for staff capacity building and gender sensitization, conducts development project and program analyses with a gender focus, hosts the Gender Resource Group (GRG) of RSPs, advocates for gender mainstreaming, and seeks out opportunities to further the GAD agenda. New approaches are being taken to address gender issues. The GRG is a good location to talk about potential new legislation, campaigns, policies, or interventions (RSPN Pakistan, 2022). According to the percentage distribution and frequency distribution in table 3, the following questions pertain to gender development under the scope of VSO in district Swabi, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Table 3 shows that most respondents (74.7% to be exact) believe that all community-based initiatives need a gender-specific approach, while just 25.3% disagree. From these results, we can deduce that in order to end discrimination based on gender and close the gender gap, development programs at both the national and international levels need to examine gender dynamics. Only then will inclusive development be possible. It is necessary to engage with parents, community leaders, individuals with power and influence in the economic, political, and social spheres, as well as girls and boys, in order to achieve gender equality, as stated in the UNICEF Gender Action Plan (2014-2017) (GAP 2018 – 2021). Equal rights, resources, opportunities, and safeguards for men and women, as well as for girls and boys, are also necessary for gender equality to be realized. Achieving gender equality requires resolving the challenges faced by girls and women, since power structures in most societies are biased in favor of males and boys. Still, men and boys alike are impacted by gender inequality, and it will need the combined efforts of the sexes to eradicate this injustice and achieve true equality in all areas of life. Gender equality movements call for changes to the underlying power dynamics that shape gender norms and relationships, as well as transformations in understanding and behavior. Scale, well-resourcing, expert-led, evidence-based, and creative programming are the five tenets of the current GAP (UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2018–2021).

Similarly, when asked whether VSOs get particular attention for women, 83.3% of respondents said yes and 16.7% said no. The data show that women constitute half of the population in the study region, with men accounting for about 50.2% and females for 49.8%. Although there has been a 36% growth in the population of the area in the last 19 years, the people who live there do not have the same fundamental needs as humans have (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company, 2020). Unfortunately, discrimination against women

may have occurred in VSOs in particular because patriarchal norms prevented women from asserting their fundamental rights and choices (Khan et al., 2018).

Furthermore, although 20.1% of respondents disagreed, the vast majority (79.9%) felt that women in our area had the autonomy to make their own choices. It is reasonable to assume that women in Pukhtoonwlaai gained agency due to increased access to education (Khan et al., 2018) and other forms of institutional change in politics (Khan et al., 2019), the economy, family matters, and personal freedom (Khan et al., 2019). On the other hand, women's empowerment was hindered in other areas, such as inheritance rights, poverty, patriarchy, forced or compensation marriages (Swara), bride prices (Walwar or Rasnama), men's uprisings (Ghag) to claim or occupy women for marriage against her will, honour killings to protect men's honor (Nang), and women without male relatives (Miratah) (Network and Bjelica, 2016; Sanaullah, 2020; Khan et al., 2020, Nisar et al., 2022). A secondary objective is to increase women's agency. It is valuable in and of itself since everyone should have the same opportunity to shape their reality, but it is also useful because it improves economic efficiency and has other major positive effects on progress. Additionally, institutions may be made to better represent different viewpoints and policy choices can be influenced by empowering "women as economic, political and social agents" (World Bank, 2011).

On top of that, although 30.2% of those polled were against women getting vocational training to start their own businesses, 69.8% were in favor of this idea. The globe is becoming a global village due to technology progress, and countries need to embrace contemporary ways of living if they want to stay alive. Half of the world's population is female, and ignoring them would ensure that they will never have a chance to compete economically. The fifth set of SDGs aims to empower women and girls and achieve gender equality. People need a high school diploma to get by, but they don't have the specialized training for high-paying careers. Technical and vocational education and training is defined as an educational program that focuses on providing students with the knowledge, abilities, and mindsets needed to succeed in any field of social or economic endeavor (Eze et al., 2013). These areas of study integrate theoretical understanding with hands-on experience and practical training. To be successful in today's society, you need to learn and adapt to a wide range of economic and everyday professions (Audu et al., 2013). People may better prepare themselves for the workforce and thrive in today's cutthroat business environment via technical and vocational education and training (Chijioke, 2013). World Bank statistics shows that women make up 48.5% of Pakistan's population, although their literacy rate is still low. Lower numbers of women seek out technical and postsecondary education. Abid et al. (2020) found that women's contributions to family income are likewise modest. Additionally, the best way for a nation to build its workforce's technical skills is via technical and vocational education. Giving women the opportunity to work in the field or launch their own companies is one way to empower them. Similarly, Chukwuedo et al. (2015) dug deeper and found that emerging nations do not have an issue with reducing unemployment. Vocational and technical training programs may help lower it. These initiatives lead to economic growth, employment opportunities, and a greener way of life (Audu *et al.* 2013).

In a similar vein, although 23.7% of respondents were against the idea that VSOs were engaged in creating training that only dealt with gender problems in the sampling region, 76.3% of respondents agreed with this statement. This data suggests that many organizations in the research region dealt with gender problems, especially those pertaining to women. This is especially true with VSOs. The fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) states that "reaching gender equality and empowering all women and girls with disabilities" and is a direct result of women's access to vocational and technical education and training. There is evidence that shows developing countries benefit from vocational and technical training programs. But there can't be a huge influx of trainees who are already working or running their own businesses into these types of programs. It is certain, according to a large body of research, that technical and vocational training programs may help eliminate gender disparity. But fair assessment criteria must be followed, and only the most seriously disadvantaged and destitute individuals should be selected. It is imperative that these training programs lead to job opportunities. Training programs should undergo needs evaluations (Abid et al., 2020).

The assertion that male VSO members do not encourage women to engage in management committees or activities was rejected by 80.5% of respondents, who constitute the clear majority. By contrast, 19.5% of those who took the survey agreed with the presumption. It is plausible to assume that women had fully accepted administrative responsibilities within VSOs and were treated similarly to males based on these figures. Aside from that, women

outperformed men as organizers in the studied area. Despite these results, Pakistan is not among the countries with a high concentration of female managers, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2005). The paper states that women's representation in management roles in Pakistan is hindered by many issues. There are several factors that contribute to the challenges faced by women in the workplace. These include an overly male-dominated corporate culture, pervasive patriarchy, an unsupportive work environment, negative gender stereotypes, an inflexible work schedule, and insufficient anti-discrimination and labor laws. The problem of women's underrepresentation at the highest levels of Pakistani society is exacerbated by the absence of positive role models for Pakistani women.

Similarly, although 8.1% of respondents agreed that women's engagement in VSO is crucial for the success of community-based programs, the majority of respondents (71.9% to be exact) denied the statement. This study's findings provide credence to the long-held belief in the examined domain that women are more susceptible to physical and mental harm than males. The idea that women participating in community-based initiatives are unable to achieve complete socioeconomic development at the local level was also debunked by these results. Women lose interest in senior occupations because of challenges such as their caring nature, stereotyping, gender discrimination, and home chores, according to Annis (2008) and Nelson & Levesque (2007), cited in Nisar et al., 2021. Many have postulated that women's biological clocks and professional clocks are one and the same. Attempts to manage work and home life throughout their lives significantly stunt their development (Hughes et al., 2009).

Along these lines, whereas 35.7% of us were active in community-level strategic and management-planning processes, 64.3% of us did not. These findings lend credence to the idea that women's contributions to community-level strategy and management have been underappreciated for a variety of reasons, such as the pervasiveness of patriarchal norms, gender stereotyping, discriminatory attitudes towards women, and a general lack of understanding and education in the region under investigation. The importance of women's involvement in community development to a society's well-being, however, cannot be overstated. It is believed by some sociologists that choices concerning healthcare, education, and culture—issues that impact a home's involvement in the community—are mostly made by the female head of the household. Participation of women in community development can help reduce gender disparity, meet the needs of families, and end centuries of discrimination against women in parts of the world where women's rights are still being established (Ellis et al., 2022).

In addition, although 65.6% of respondents believed that VSOs mobilized activists to empower rural women to take action at the local level and collaborate on rural uplift projects, 34.4% of respondents disagreed with this assertion. This research lends credence to the idea that grassroots rural projects cannot be successful without the participation of women in the region under investigation. The findings are in line with what the United Nations Women's Fund for Gender Equality (2022) found: rural women play a pivotal role in implementing the seismic shifts in economics, society, and the environment that are required for long-term sustainability. However, limited access to financing, healthcare, and education is only one of the several challenges they face. Problems in agriculture, the economy, and global warming only serve to exacerbate these already dire situations. Since women constitute a disproportionately big portion of the agricultural work force globally, empowering them is essential not just for the prosperity of rural communities, families, and individuals, but also for the expansion of global economies.

In a similar vein, 69% of respondents felt that local VSOs help bring attention to women's issues, such as ending child marriage, empowering girls through education, highlighting the significance of CNICs (computerized national identity cards), ensuring women are included in voter rolls, and receiving accurate marriage and death certificates, etc., while 31% disagreed. Based on these numbers, it was obvious that the region under investigation was slipping behind in terms of institutional growth and basic facilities, both of which had been absent since the establishment of the VSO. These results corroborated earlier research showing that UN Women actively encourages rural women to take the lead in shaping legislation, policies, and programs that impact their lives, including initiatives to increase rural residents' access to healthy food and better their economic opportunities. Humans have the potential to acquire new abilities and modify existing technologies by exposure to fresh information and practical experience. The Dalit Women's Livelihoods Accountability Initiative in India has assisted caste-marginalized women in enrolling in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee program, thanks to funding from the United Nations Women's Fund for Gender Equality. Their participation grew from 2,800 in 2009 to over 14,000 in 2011 across

eight domains. A large number of Dalit women are now actively seeking equality via unionization and political activism; also, they are financially independent (United Nation Women's Fund for Gender Equality, 2022).

Table 3: Perspectives on Gender Development (Inclusive Participation for Underrepresented Groups to Strengthen Their Power)

S.No	Gender Development	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	For community-based initiatives as a whole, the device requires a gender-specific approach.	287(74.7)	97(25.3)
2	Women are given the attention they require by the VSO's	320(83.3)	64(16.7)
3	Women in your neighborhood have the freedom to make their own choices.	307(79.9)	77(20.1)
4	Vocational training for women is strongly promoted so that they may start their own businesses.	268(69.8)	116(30.2)
5	Training programs that focus only on gender problems are developed by VSOs in the research region.	293(76.3)	91(23.7)
6	Male VSO members often push for women to join management committees or take part in other leadership roles.	75(19.5)	309(80.5)
7	The effectiveness of community-based programs greatly depends on the participation of women in your VSO.	108(28.1)	276(71.9)
8	Do you take part in management and strategic planning at the community level?	137(35.7)	247(64.3)
9	Through its activists, VSOs pushed rural women to take action on a local level and work together with other rural uplift programs to achieve their goals.	252(65.6)	132(34.4)
10	Locally based VSOs play an important role in raising awareness about women's concerns, such as the need to promote girls' education and discourage marriage at a young age.	265(69.0)	119(31.0)

Source: Author (2021)

4.2 Multivariate analysis

4.2.1 Using Respondent Gender as a Control, the Relationship Between Indexed Independent and Indexed Dependent Variable

Although the results are not statistically significant ($P=0.572$ & $P=0.161$), they do demonstrate a positive connection ($T^b=1.490$ & $T^b=1.077$) after adjusting for the respondents' gender (male and female), between gender development and community satisfaction with the effectiveness of VSOs (Table 4). Therefore, it seems from these findings that the elements in question were linked to an erroneous association.

Table 4: Relationship Between Indexed Independent and Indexed Dependent Variable (Keeping Respondent Gender in Mind)

Gender	Indexed Independent Variables	Indexed Dependent Variable	Chi-square, (P value) and T^b
Male	Gender development	Community Satisfaction towards the Efficacy of VSO's	7.625(0.572) 1.490

Female	Gender development	Community Satisfaction towards the Efficacy of VSO's	11.791(0.161) 1.077
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Source: Author (2021)

4.2.2 The relationship between the dependent variable and the indexed independent variable (while controlling for educational status)

Table 5 shows that while adjusting for respondents' level of education, there was a non-significant ($P=0.891$) negative correlation ($T^b = -.919$) between gender development and community satisfaction with the effectiveness of VSOs. Given these facts, it's reasonable to assume that the above variables were found to have an artificial association. Furthermore, when accounting for the three levels of education (primary to middle, matric and above), there was a positive ($T^b=2.724$; $T^b=0.424$) association among community satisfaction and gender development with the effectiveness of VSOs, which was not statistically significant ($P=0.413$; $P=0.695$ & $P=0.210$). After adjusting for three attributes—degree of education (primary to middle), gender development, and any other level of education—these results suggest that there is a spurious association between community satisfaction with the effectiveness of VSOs and gender.

Table 5: The Relationship Between the Indexed Independent and Indexed Dependent Variable (Controlling for Respondents' Educational Status)

Educational Status	Indexed Independent variable	Indexed Dependent variable	Chi-square, (P value) and T^b
Illiterate	Gender development	Community Contentment with VSOs' Effectiveness	4.291(0.891) -0.919
Primary to Middle	Gender development	Community Contentment with VSOs' Effectiveness	8.208(0.413) 2.724
Matric and Above	Gender development	Community Contentment with VSOs' Effectiveness	4.710(0.695) 0.401
Any other	Gender development	Community Contentment with VSOs' Effectiveness	8.410(0.210) 0.424

Source: Author (2021)

4.2.3: Association Between Indexed Independent Variable and Dependent Variable (While Controlling Respondents' Age)

Table 6 showed that when we controlled for the age group of 20–30 years old, we discovered a spurious association between gender development and community satisfaction with the effectiveness of VSOs, which was not statistically significant ($P=0.740$) but negatively statistically tested ($T^b=-0.328$). Although the association between gender development and community satisfaction towards the efficacy of VSOs was not statistically significant ($P=0.509$ & $P=0.584$), it was positive ($T^b=2.080$ & $T^b=1.973$) after correcting for age groups 31–40 and 41–50, respectively. After accounting for the aforementioned age categories, results indicating a link between gender development and community satisfaction with the efficacy of VSOs were found.

Table 6: Association Between Indexed Independent Variable and indexed Dependent Variable (Controlling Age of the Respondents)

Age	Indexed Independent Variable	Indexed Dependent Variable	Chi-square, (P value) and T^b
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20-30	Gender Development	Community Contentment with VSOs' Effectiveness	6.004(0.740) -0.328
31-40	Gender Development	Community Contentment with VSOs' Effectiveness	8.250(0.509) 2.080
41-50	Gender Development	Community Contentment with VSOs' Effectiveness	6.566(0.584) 1.973

Source: Author (2021)

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

It was concluded from the findings of the study that VSOs has adopted different strategies for the advancement and promotion of marginalized groups especially women of the community. However, most of the people believed that specific gender related strategies are necessary in all projects where women should get extra attention to address their issues. VSOs work for women empowerment through giving vocational trainings and enable them to start their own business, which further enable them to decide their matters independently. Moreover, VSOs tried to encourage women to take part actively in community development projects. Similarly, VSOs also works for the women rights and protecting them from child marriages, education etc. by sensitizing the community. However, it was noted that VSOs are to somehow failed motivate the male members to engage their women in committees, participation of women in community-based projects due to male dominance and patriarchal structure of the society. For the inclusion of marginalized groups into the mainstream, it is needed that the VSOs should hire and train the local volunteers keeping in view the norms of the culture, so they can further sensitize the local community on gender related issues generally and women specifically.

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