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## **NGOs as Catalysts for Women's Empowerment: Evidence from Haldwani Block, Uttarakhand**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Women's development has long been considered crucial for national progress, yet in India, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas, women face numerous disadvantages in terms of education, employment, health, and social status. This research paper examines the role of NGOs in promoting women's empowerment in Haldwani block of Uttarakhand. Using a mixed-methods approach, data was collected from 110 female beneficiaries through structured questionnaires, interviews, and secondary sources. A Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) was developed across six dimensions: economic, decision-making, social, psychological, political and awareness, and health and gender equality. In the current context, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have emerged as key agents in promoting women's empowerment, especially in contexts where government interventions have limitations. This study investigates the role of NGOs in enhancing women's empowerment in Haldwani block of Uttarakhand by exploring the relationship between the Women's Empowerment Index and NGOs. The findings indicate that NGOs effectively enhance confidence and awareness among women, but more targeted strategies are still needed to strengthen domestic decision-making and social participation.

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## **Introduction**

Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in India's socio-economic development by addressing the needs of marginalized groups often underserved by government programs. As voluntary and non-profit entities, NGOs work across sectors such as education, health, livelihoods, and rights, using grassroots approaches to reach women, children, minorities, Dalits, and tribal communities. Their flexibility allows them to design context-specific interventions such as microcredit, reproductive health awareness, adult literacy, and leadership training.

Over time, NGOs have gained importance in women's empowerment due to growing recognition of women as central agents of development. Improving women's access to education, health, and economic opportunities generates wider benefits for families and communities and aligns with India's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Organizations like SEWA, PRADAN, and CARE India demonstrate how integrating livelihood support with education and legal awareness can help reduce poverty and social exclusion.

Despite policy support, government programmes often face limitations related to outreach, rigidity, and implementation delays, making NGOs essential partners in last-mile delivery. This study focuses on Haldwani Block of Nainital district, Uttarakhand, where NGOs actively promote women's literacy, health, self-help groups, vocational skills, and legal and financial awareness. While visible improvements exist, women continue to face low employment, limited decision-making power, and persistent patriarchal norms.

The study is motivated by the need to assess the measurable impact of NGOs on women's empowerment in Haldwani. As a rapidly growing urban centre with rural and peri-urban characteristics, Haldwani presents unique socio-cultural challenges. Addressing the gap in localized research, this study aims to evaluate NGO contributions and identify areas requiring more focused and effective interventions.

## **Literature Review**

The role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in women's empowerment has been extensively discussed in development and sociological literature.

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**S.K. Bhandari (1998)** examined the historical progress of women's education in India and highlighted persistent gender and rural-urban disparities, emphasizing the role of NGOs in overcoming grassroots obstacles.

**Ranjani K. Murthy (2001)** focused on NGO-led self-help groups and microcredit initiatives, demonstrating that integrated economic and social interventions significantly improve women's confidence and decision-making power.

**Arun Goel (2004)** emphasized the role of NGOs beyond service delivery, highlighting their contributions to policy advocacy and gender justice.

**Talwar Sabanna (2007)** pointed to persistent gender inequalities in education and employment, particularly among rural women, and advocated for targeted NGO interventions.

### Research Gap

Existing studies mostly examine the role of NGOs in women's empowerment from an economic or macro-level perspective, with less attention given to empowerment as a multidimensional process at the grassroots level. Empirical studies using composite indices such as the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) are scarce, particularly in semi-urban areas like Haldwani Block, Uttarakhand. This highlights a gap in localized, index-based assessments that capture the full impact of NGO interventions.

### Statement of Problem

Despite the active presence of NGOs, women still have limited decision-making power and face numerous socio-cultural barriers. While NGOs promote participation and economic activities, their contribution to overall empowerment is not systematically assessed. The lack of dimension-wise evaluation limits informed policies and programmatic interventions, necessitating a WEI-based analysis of NGO impact.

### Objectives of the Study

- To assess the role of NGOs in promoting women's participation and engagement in social, political, and community activities.
- To examine the impact of NGOs on women's economic empowerment, including income generation, financial control, and household decision-making.
- To analyze the influence of NGO involvement on women's psychological well-being, self-confidence, and overall social status.

- To evaluate the contribution of NGOs in promoting health awareness, gender equality, and reducing gender discrimination in the community.

### Research Methodology

The study employs a descriptive and analytical research design using a mixed-methods approach. It was conducted in Haldwani Block of Nainital district, Uttarakhand. NGOs involved in women’s empowerment were selected through purposive sampling, and 110 female beneficiaries were chosen using stratified random sampling. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire based on women’s empowerment indicators using a five-point Likert scale. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews and focus group discussions with beneficiaries and NGO workers. Secondary data were drawn from NGO reports, Census of India, NFHS, government publications, journals, and literature. NGO interventions served as independent variables. Economic, social, psychological, decision-making, political, health, and gender equality dimensions were treated as dependent variables. A Women’s Empowerment Index (WEI) was developed to measure overall empowerment. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and MS Excel. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

### Analyses and Interpterion

Table 1: Demographical profile of respondent

S.N.			Number	Percentage
1.	Age	Up to 25Year	28	25.45
		26-35 Year	34	30.91
		36-45 Year	23	20.91
		Above 46Year	25	22.73
2.	Education level	Illiterate	05	04.55
		Literate	21	19.09
		Primary	27	24.55
		High school	13	11.82
		Intermediate	31	28.18
		Graduate &above	13	11.82

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3.	Monthly Household Income:	Up to 5000	27	24.55
		5001-10000	16	14.55
		10001-15000	17	15.45
		15001-20000	19	17.27
		20001+	31	28.18
4.	Marital status	Married	75	68.18
		Unmarried	27	24.55
		Widow	05	04.55
		Separated	03	02.73
5.	Type of family	Nuclear	64	58.18
		Joint	29	26.36
		Extended	17	15.45
6.	Occupation:	Homemaker	51	46.36
		Self-employed	15	13.64
		Daily wage worker	19	17.27
		Service	11	10.00
		Other	14	12.73
7.	Duration of NGO association	< 1 year	19	17.27
		1-3 years	32	29.09
		3-5 years	23	20.91

The study included 110 women affiliated with NGOs in Haldwani Block. Most respondents were aged 26–35 years (30.91%), with intermediate education (28.18%) being the most common educational level. The majority of households had income above 1 20,000 (28.18%), and most respondents were married (68.18%) and from nuclear families (58.18%). Occupationally, 46.36% were homemakers, and 32.73% had been associated with NGOs for over five years.

**Table 2: NGO Participation Indicators (Independent Construct)**

Variable Name	Statement	Response Category	Scoring used	Number	Mean Score
NGO1	NGOs provide opportunities for women's participation	Strongly Disagree	1	03	4.08
		Disagree	2	04	
		Neutral	3	13	
		Agree	4	51	
		Strongly Agree	5	39	
NGO2	NGOs organize training and awareness programmes for women	Strongly Disagree	1	05	3.95
		Disagree	2	07	
		Neutral	3	13	
		Agree	4	48	
		Strongly Agree	5	37	
NGO3.	NGOs have improved your knowledge about government schemes and rights	Strongly Disagree	1	04	3.88
		Disagree	2	09	
		Neutral	3	18	
		Agree	4	44	
		Strongly Agree	5	35	
NGO4	You actively participate in NGO-related activities	Strongly Disagree	1	03	4.04
		Disagree	2	05	
		Neutral	3	15	
		Agree	4	49	
		Strongly Agree	5	38	

The table shows women perceive NGOs positively. High mean scores for NGO1 (4.08) and NGO4 (4.04) indicate strong participation and engagement. NGO2 (3.95) and NGO3 (3.88) reflect effectiveness in training and awareness of schemes and rights. Overall, NGOs are seen as promoting social, educational, and psychological empowerment.

Table 3: Economic Empowerment Indicators

Variable Name	Statement	Response Category	Scoring used	Number	Mean Score
ECO1	You contribute to your household income.	Strongly Disagree	1	05	4.79
		Disagree	2	08	
		Neutral	3	21	
		Agree	4	37	
		Strongly Agree	5	59	
ECO2	You have control over your earnings.	Strongly Disagree	1	13	2.90
		Disagree	2	16	
		Neutral	3	59	
		Agree	4	13	
		Strongly Agree	5	09	
ECO3	You can make decisions about household expenses	Strongly Disagree	1	11	2.95
		Disagree	2	17	
		Neutral	3	59	
		Agree	4	12	
		Strongly Agree	5	11	
ECO4	NGOs have facilitated your involvement in income-generating activities.	Strongly Disagree	1	04	3.48
		Disagree	2	10	
		Neutral	3	48	
		Agree	4	25	
		Strongly Agree	5	23	

The table shows a mixed pattern of economic empowerment. High ECO1 (4.79) indicates active income contribution, but lower ECO2 (2.90) and ECO3 (2.95) reflect limited financial control. Overall, women's participation exceeds their financial autonomy despite moderate NGO support (ECO4, 3.48).

Decision-Making Empowerment Indicators

Variable Name	Statement	Response Category	Scoring used	Number	Mean Score
DEC1	You participate in decisions related to your children's education.	Strongly Disagree	1	11	3.06
		Disagree	2	16	
		Neutral	3	49	
		Agree	4	23	
		Strongly Agree	5	11	
DEC2	You participate in healthcare decisions within your family.	Strongly Disagree	1	10	3.27
		Disagree	2	13	
		Neutral	3	43	
		Agree	4	25	
		Strongly Agree	5	19	
DEC3	Your opinions are respected in family matters.	Strongly Disagree	1	11	3.34
		Disagree	2	13	
		Neutral	3	37	
		Agree	4	26	
		Strongly Agree	5	23	
DEC4	Joining the NGO has empowered you to make decisions.	Strongly Disagree	1	09	3.57
		Disagree	2	10	
		Neutral	3	29	
		Agree	4	33	
		Strongly Agree	5	29	

The table shows respondents have a medium level of decision-making power. Scores for DEC1 (3.06) and DEC2 (3.27) indicate partial involvement in children’s education and healthcare, with many neutral responses. DEC3 (3.34) reflects growing respect for women’s opinions, though traditional hierarchies persist. DEC4 (3.57) highlights the positive impact of NGOs in boosting women’s confidence in decision-making. Overall, women’s authority in household matters is improving gradually.

Table 4: Social Empowerment Indicators

Variable Name	Statement	Response Category	Scoring used	Number	Mean Score
SOC1	You can freely express your opinions in society.	Strongly Disagree	1	15	3.20
		Disagree	2	16	
		Neutral	3	31	
		Agree	4	28	
		Strongly Agree	5	20	
SOC2	You can move around freely outside your home.	Strongly Disagree	1	15	2.77
		Disagree	2	19	
		Neutral	3	31	
		Agree	4	16	
		Strongly Agree	5	19	
SOC3	You actively participate in social or community activities.	Strongly Disagree	1	14	3.31
		Disagree	2	17	
		Neutral	3	26	
		Agree	4	27	
		Strongly Agree	5	26	
SOC4	NGOs have improved your social status.	Strongly Disagree	1	10	3.58
		Disagree	2	11	
		Neutral	3	27	
		Agree	4	29	
		Strongly Agree	5	33	

The table shows a moderate level of social empowerment among respondents. SOC1 (M = 3.20) indicates that women can express their opinions in society, though many remain neutral. SOC2 (M = 2.77) reflects limited freedom of movement outside the home due to social and cultural constraints. SOC3 (M = 3.31) suggests partial participation in social and community activities. SOC4 (M = 3.58) highlights the positive impact of NGOs in improving

women’s social status. A notable number of neutral responses across indicators indicates gradual change rather than full empowerment. Overall, NGO involvement is enhancing social engagement, but traditional barriers persist.

**Table 5: Psychological Empowerment Indicators**

Variable Name	Statement	Response Category	Scoring used	Number	Mean Score
PSY1	You feel confident expressing your opinions.	Strongly Disagree	1	03	4.06
		Disagree	2	05	
		Neutral	3	19	
		Agree	4	38	
		Strongly Agree	5	45	
PSY2	You feel self-reliant and independent.	Strongly Disagree	1	05	3.90
		Disagree	2	07	
		Neutral	3	23	
		Agree	4	34	
		Strongly Agree	5	41	
PSY3	Your participation in the NGO has boosted your self-confidence.	Strongly Disagree	1	03	4.12
		Disagree	2	05	
		Neutral	3	14	
		Agree	4	42	
		Strongly Agree	5	46	

The results show a high level of psychological empowerment among respondents. High scores for PSY1 (4.06) and PSY3 (4.12) indicate increased self-confidence and agency through NGO participation. PSY2 (3.90) reflects enhanced self-reliance and independence.

Table 6: Political & Awareness Empowerment Indicators

Variable Name	Statement	Response Category	Scoring used	Number	Mean Score
POL1	You are aware of your political and legal rights.	Strongly Disagree	1	09	3.47
		Disagree	2	13	
		Neutral	3	34	
		Agree	4	25	
		Strongly Agree	5	29	
POL2	You vote freely and without any pressure.	Strongly Disagree	1	09	3.70
		Disagree	2	11	
		Neutral	3	19	
		Agree	4	36	
		Strongly Agree	5	35	
POL3	NGOs promote women's participation in local governance.	Strongly Disagree	1	05	3.80
		Disagree	2	07	
		Neutral	3	29	
		Agree	4	33	
		Strongly Agree	5	36	

The table shows a moderately high level of political and awareness empowerment among respondents. Mean scores for POL1 (3.47) and POL2 (3.70) indicate improving awareness and political autonomy, though further efforts are needed. The high mean score for POL3 (3.80) highlights NGOs' strong role in promoting women's participation in local governance.

Table 7: Health & Gender Equality Indicators

Variable Name	Statement	Response Category	Scoring used	Number	Mean Score
HEA1	You can make decisions about your healthcare.	Strongly Disagree	1	07	3.72
		Disagree	2	08	
		Neutral	3	28	
		Agree	4	33	
		Strongly Agree	5	34	
GEN1	You believe that women should have equal rights to men.	Strongly Disagree	1	07	3.76
		Disagree	2	08	
		Neutral	3	25	
		Agree	4	34	
		Strongly Agree	5	36	
GEN2	NGOs promote gender equality in society.	Strongly Disagree	1	10	3.59
		Disagree	2	11	
		Neutral	3	24	
		Agree	4	34	
		Strongly Agree	5	31	

The table shows a relatively high level of health and gender equality empowerment. HEA1 (3.72) indicates greater autonomy in healthcare decisions, while GEN1 (3.76) and GEN2 (3.59) reflect positive gender attitudes and NGO support. Overall, findings suggest growing acceptance of gender-equitable norms.

Table 8: Overall Impact of NGOs (Dependent Construct)

Variable Name	Statement	Response Category	Scoring used	Number	Mean Score
IMP1	The involvement of NGOs has improved your overall situation.	Strongly Disagree	1	08	3.60
		Disagree	2	12	
		Neutral	3	28	
		Agree	4	30	
		Strongly Agree	5	32	
IMP2	NGOs play a crucial role in empowering women.	Strongly Disagree	1	05	3.99
		Disagree	2	06	
		Neutral	3	17	
		Agree	4	39	
		Strongly Agree	5	43	
IMP3	NGOs have helped reduce gender discrimination in your area.	Strongly Disagree	1	11	3.56
		Disagree	2	13	
		Neutral	3	19	
		Agree	4	37	
		Strongly Agree	5	30	

This table indicate a **positive overall impact of NGOs** on women’s lives in the study area. The mean score for improvement in overall situation (IMP1, M = 3.60) suggests that NGO involvement has contributed to noticeable positive changes in women’s socio-economic conditions. A high mean score for IMP2 (M = 3.99) reflects strong agreement that NGOs play a crucial role in empowering women.

Further, IMP3 (M = 3.56) indicates that NGO interventions have contributed to reducing gender discrimination at the community level, though a proportion of neutral responses suggests that such change is gradual. Overall, the results affirm that NGOs have been effective agents of women’s empowerment, while continued and sustained efforts are necessary to achieve deeper and long-term social transformation.

**Table 9: Dimension-wise Women Empowerment Index (WEI)**

S.N.	Dimension	Indicators Used	Mean Score
1.	Economic Empowerment (EEI)	ECO1–ECO4	3.53
2.	Decision-Making Empowerment (DMEI)	DEC1–DEC4	3.31
3.	Social Empowerment (SEI)	SOC1–SOC4	3.22
4.	Psychological Empowerment (PEI)	PSY1–PSY3	4.03
5.	Political & Awareness Empowerment (PAEI)	POL1–POL3	3.66
6.	Health & Gender Equality (HGEI)	HEA1, GEN1–GEN2	3.69
Overall Women Empowerment Index (WEI)		Mean of all dimensions	<b>3.57</b>

**WEI Classification**

WEI Score Range	Level of Empowerment
1.00 – 2.00	Low Empowerment
2.01 – 3.00	Moderate Empowerment
3.01 – 4.00	<b>High Empowerment</b>
4.01 – 5.00	Very High Empowerment

**Finding**

The Women Empowerment Index (WEI) was constructed by aggregating six key dimensions of empowerment, namely economic empowerment, decision-making empowerment, social empowerment, psychological empowerment, political and awareness empowerment, and health and gender equality. Each dimension score was derived from the mean of its respective indicators measured on a five-point Likert scale.

The computed **overall WEI score was 3.57**, indicating a **high level of women’s empowerment** among the respondents. This suggests that NGO interventions have contributed positively to improving women’s empowerment across multiple domains.

Among the dimensions, **psychological empowerment recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.03)**, reflecting enhanced self-confidence, self-

reliance, and the ability to express opinions freely. This was followed by **health and gender equality (M = 3.69)** and **political and awareness empowerment (M = 3.66)**, indicating increased awareness of rights, participation in voting, and improved autonomy in healthcare decisions.

**Economic empowerment (M = 3.53)** also showed a relatively high level, suggesting that NGOs have facilitated women's participation in income-generating activities and household financial contributions. However, **decision-making empowerment (M = 3.31)** and **social empowerment (M = 3.22)** recorded comparatively lower scores, indicating moderate levels of women's involvement in household decisions and community participation.

Based on the index classification, the respondents fall under the "**High Empowerment**" category, confirming the overall positive impact of NGO involvement on women's empowerment.

### Conclusion

The study confirms the significant role of NGOs in enhancing women's empowerment, reflected in a high overall WEI score (3.57). Psychological empowerment emerged as the strongest dimension, indicating improved self-confidence and agency among women. Political and awareness empowerment also showed positive outcomes through increased rights awareness and participation in local governance. Economic empowerment was relatively high, though limitations persist. Lower scores in decision-making and social empowerment reveal enduring patriarchal and cultural constraints. Moderate social empowerment reflects restricted mobility and public participation. Overall, NGOs have made meaningful contributions to empowerment. However, sustained and targeted interventions are needed. Strengthening decision-making power remains essential. Enhancing social participation is crucial for balanced empowerment.

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