Gender issues in Uttarakhand Disaster of June, 2013
A case study

Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre
(An Autonomous Institute of the Department of Disaster Management, Government of Uttarakhand)
Uttarakhand Secretariat, Dehradun - 248 001
Gender issues in Uttarakhand disaster of June, 2013: A Case Study

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Disasters leave behind a trail of devastation and human misery, but then disaster managers have to dig out lessons from every disaster and try to improve the system so as to minimize human sufferings and losses in the next disaster that looms large across the horizon. This study entitled Gender issues in Uttarakhand disaster of June, 2013 is an attempt in this direction. Rather than general post disaster assessments, this study is aimed at assessing specific impact of June 2013 disaster, particularly on women.

Though carried out on a micro-level based on qualitative data collected from 13 villages of Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand that were worst affected in many aspects during June 2013 disaster, attempt has been made to review the impact of disaster on women from different perspectives. The study at the same time attempts to assess the post-disaster damage and rehabilitation needs of women.

This study is envisaged to bring forth awareness amongst the masses as also policy makers on this important but often neglected issue, that should rightly be addressed during every disaster event as also in post-disaster rehabilitation process. Hope it is useful for all concerned.

We, at DMMC, encourage you to share, discuss and use the results of this study so as to bring forth awareness amongst the masses on this highly important and pertinent issue. We welcome comments and queries on this report and we value both.

We are grateful to Professor R. S. Goyal of Raman Development, Ahmedabad / Dehradun for carrying out this study for Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre and we thank Shri Rajendra Jani and Shri Ketan Gandhi, senior officials of Raman Development who facilitated the smooth conduct of the study. Ms Saroj Dhayni and Ms Monika Nautiyal are thanked for data collection and data analysis. Search and rescue instructors of DMMC Shri Jagmohan Makhloga and Shri Vijay Prakash Kapruwan, are thanked not
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only for facilitating movement of the field party but also for organising logistics support. Ms Sweta Rawat and Shri Govind Rautela are thanked for review, typesetting and design.

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All the colleagues at DMMC are thanked; but for their commitment, support, cooperation and encouragement this work would not have been possible.

Last but not the least, thanks are due for all the participants who have given their time and inputs for this report.

10\textsuperscript{th} August, 2014
Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre
Uttarakhand Secretariat
Dehradun

(Piyoosh Rautela)
Executive Director, DMMC
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Entrenched patterns of social relationships cause certain groups of people to suffer more than others (Singh and Suraj Mal, 2009) during all phases of disaster management cycle. This is particularly pronounced during and after the disasters. It is recognised worldwide that people's vulnerability to a large extent depends on the assets they have. Owing to the manifestation of existing gender inequalities in most societies, women often tend to have limited access, in comparison to men, to assets; physical, financial, human, social, and natural capital such as land, credit, decision-making bodies, agricultural inputs, technology, extension and training services. These limit their capacity to adapt to difficult circumstances. Consequently, women tend to experience far adverse consequences in the wake of natural disasters. Gender-specific effects of disaster could be broadly understood and captured by indicators that include i) post-disaster mortality, injury, and illness rates which are often, but not universally, higher for girls and women, ii) economic losses which disproportionately affect economically insecure women, e.g. agricultural losses of women farmers, destruction of women's home-based businesses, limited or reduced access to post-disaster financial and other assistance, iii) work load changes which suggest that disasters increase women's responsibilities in domestic sphere, paid workplace, and community, iv) post-disaster stress symptoms which are often, but not universally, reported more frequently by women, and v) increased rates of sexual and domestic violence against girls and women in the aftermath of disaster.

Gender perspective has however not been adequately addressed in disaster research, planning and management. Enarson (2000) has rightly argued that if addressed at all, gender has been integrated into disaster research and practice as a demographic variable or personality trait and not as the basis for a complex and dynamic set of social relations. Further, women's actual and potential roles in disaster risk reduction have often been overlooked. Only a few existing disaster risk reduction related policies and projects fully recognize the skills and capacities of women.

Despite significant progress in integrating gender issues analytically and in the field, neither governmental agencies nor NGOs have as yet fully integrated gender relations as a factor in disaster vulnerability and response.
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Uttarakhand disaster of June, 2013

In June, 2013, the state of Uttarakhand witnessed one of the worst disasters of Indian history that caused widespread loss of human life and property. 15 June is a bit early for monsoon to reach Uttarakhand, but in 2013 it reached early and started with abnormally heavy incessant rainfall all over the state, particularly in the higher reaches. This is attributed to the convergence of southwest monsoon trough and westerly disturbances, resulting in the formation of dense clouds over the Uttarakhand Himalaya.

According to Tropical Rainfall Measuring Mission, in the period of five days between 14 and 18 June, 2013 Uttarakhand received approximately 2,000 mm of rainfall which is more than what it receives throughout the whole monsoon period. Percentage deviation in rainfall from normal in various districts of Uttarakhand, according to IMD records, was more than 100 percent between 5 and 12 June, 2013 and more than 997 percent between 13 and 19 June, 2013. Like other parts of the state, Mandakini valley also received heavy rains during this period and the precipitation was particularly high on 16 and 17 June, 2013.

Heavy rainfall took place when there was still snow on the mountains and valleys. Abnormally fast melting of snow and ice due to heavy rains added to the discharge of hill torrents and streams and almost all the major rivers of the state crossed danger levels. Recorded level of Mandakini on 17 June, 2013 at Rudraprayag was 633.5 meters as against the danger level of 626.0 meters. Prolonged heavy precipitation saturated the valley slopes and the pore water pressure crossed threshold limits. With this intermingling of heavy rainfall and rapid melting of snow stage was set for large scale flooding and slope failure.

Devastation in the Mandakini valley took place in two flood events on 16 and 17 June, 2013. The former event that washed off Rambara in the late evening of 16 June, 2013 was caused by the blockade of the course of Mandakini in close proximity of Kedarnath. This flooded Kedarnath, forced water into the abandoned eastern channel of Mandakini also called Saraswati and ensured that enough water was impounded to devastate Rambara.

These have not, at the same time, engaged women as equal partners in disaster mitigation and community-based planning.

Seeing disasters “through women's eyes” raises issues for planners, identifies critical system gaps, and brings gender centrally into all development related policies and works, as also in all disaster management related works. Some specific issues that are required to be addressed are being summarised below.

- What social indicators best predict the relative impact of natural disasters on women and men?
- In diverse environmental, socio-economic, political and cultural contexts, how do gender relations differently shape the impacts of natural disasters and (often) induce varying responses from women and men to these? What cross-hazard and cross-cultural patterns can be identified?
- How and to what extent socio-economic development affects women's and men's vulnerability to hazards and their relative ability to recover from disaster impact? How can these patterns be assessed in specific contexts?
- To what degree has higher vulnerability of women to hazards been included in the design and implementation of emergency response, relief, and reconstruction policies? What has been the effect of the same?
- What are the specific short-term needs (in the context of their particular vulnerability) of girls and women in specific contexts? What are women's long-term interests in reconstruction?
- What are women's short- and long-term needs as primary household preparers, long-term care-givers, employees and volunteers?
- What organizational or other barriers limit response to these needs, under what circumstances, and with what effects?
- Are women (which women?) at the table in the development of disaster-resistant communities?

This study is an attempt to seek answers of these important questions and it is expected that this publication would help policy makers in fine tuning all disaster management related policies according to the needs of the women.
In June, 2013, the state of Uttarakhand witnessed one of the worst disasters of Indian history that caused widespread loss of human life and property. 15th June is a bit early for monsoon to reach Uttarakhand, but in 2013 it reached early and started with abnormally heavy incessant rainfall all over the state, particularly in the higher reaches. This is attributed to the convergence of southwest monsoon trough and westerly disturbances, resulting in the formation of dense clouds over the Uttarakhand Himalaya.

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were cross-checked and verified so as to provide death certificates together with other benefits to the next of kin of these persons.

Besides this there was massive loss of public infrastructure and property (Fig. 1). Basic civic amenities were hard hit by the disaster. Electricity supply was disrupted in 3,758 habitations while 968 drinking water supply schemes were damaged or destroyed. Connectivity was disrupted all across the state and vehicular traffic was disrupted along 2,070 roads and 145 bridges were damaged or washed off.

The timing of this disaster coincided with the peak season of the Chardham Yatra. The affected region being located in the country’s most important pilgrimage circuit people in large numbers from across the country and abroad were present in the state. Disruption of road connectivity resulted in grave hardships and more than 1.5 lakh persons were stranded at different places across the state.

Resources from all the quarters were mobilized to ensure safe evacuation of the stranded persons and the rescue and evacuation operations continued for around three weeks.

The latter flood event was associated with the breach of Chorabari Tal. Continuous rains caused the level of water in Chorabari Tal to rise and the moraine barrier could not withstand continuously rising hydrostatic pressure. Stage was thus set for a major disaster in Kedarnath and the lake breached around 0700 hrs on 17th June, 2013. The volume of water was enormous and it carried with it huge glacial boulders, debris, silt, sand and other material that choked the channel of Mandakini to the west of the temple and the flow of water and debris got diverted towards Kedarnath township that was thus ravaged. There was absolutely no warning and most people were taken by surprise and had no time to respond. Besides Kedarnath this event caused devastation in Rambara, Gaurikund, Sonprayag and other places (Rautela, 2013).

Flood in the Mandakini valley caused heavy loss of human lives and property and took everyone by surprise. Losses were however not confined to Mandakini valley. Heavy rains caused massive damage throughout the state even though the losses in Mandakni valley were mainly highlighted by the media.

169 persons were killed in these incidences while 4,021 persons went missing. It was with great effort and diligence that the details of these persons

![Fig. 1. Washed off bridge on Mandakini river.](image-url)
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Aftermath of the disaster

More than a year hence the disaster, the residents of the disaster affected villages and towns in Uttarakhand are still braving the odds and struggling to bring normalcy in their lives. Vast tracts of agricultural lands were either washed off or covered with thick pile of debris and silt, their homes were either damaged or destroyed, their cattle were lost, their savings were carried away in the deluge and after the disaster of June, 2013 many were left with very little or no money.

Further, majority of the families in the disaster-affected region depended on tourism, pilgrimage and subsistence farming for their livelihood. Despite efforts from different quarters pilgrim and tourist inflow has not been significant. Adverse weather conditions, frequent road blockades and negative media reporting further discourage people from venturing to higher reaches. Revival of both pilgrimage and tourism in the area is therefore certainly going to take some time. Income from agriculture being too meagre to support the family, hardships are sure to haunt the masses for a long time to come.

Women have been larger sufferers of the flash floods. Besides economic and physical losses, many have lost their husbands and children in the prime of their youth. This dual tragedy has shattered the lives of these women and trauma of bereavement is writ large on their faces.

Though, aggregate estimates of the loss of life, cattle head, physical assets and infrastructure such as roads, bridges, markets, houses, schools, hospitals and the like have been made available by different governmental and other agencies, an in-depth analysis of the effect of disaster, particularly on women, was desirable so as to add to the knowledge base and also, to supplement the rehabilitation efforts being put in by government and other agencies.

This micro level study was designed to fill this void. It attempted at examining some of the concerns raised earlier, by taking June 2013 disaster as a case and by specifically focusing on the issues that include, i) in the environmental, socio-economic, political and cultural context of
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Uttarakhand, what was the relative impact of June 2013 disaster on women and men?, ii) how did gender relations shape the impact of this disaster and response of women and men to it?, iii) what cross-hazard patterns could be identified?, iv) to what extent and how the development patterns in the region affected women's and men's exposure to disaster impact and losses and, their relative ability to recover and cope with the disasters?, v) to what extent the particular vulnerability of women to disasters was recognised and included in the emergency response, relief, and reconstruction programmes? What was the effect thereof?, vi) what were women's short and long-term needs as the primary homemakers, long-term care-givers, livelihood earner and the others in disaster situations? Were these addressed in emergency response and rehabilitation programmes after June 2013 disaster?, and vii) whether the women (which women?) were at the table in the development of disaster-resistant communities?

This study addresses some of these issues but some have remained partially answered or unanswered. It is expected that this study would pave way for research initiatives that better address these questions.
Methodology

Villages taken up under this study have been chosen from amongst those in Rudraprayag district that have suffered major losses in terms of human life, cattle, houses and agricultural fields, in June 2013 disaster. List of such villages were obtained from Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre (DMMC) and the district administration of Rudraprayag. Detailed account of human and other losses in every villages along with compensation (relief) paid by the government to the victims and their families was also provided.

On the basis of this information, villages in study universe were divided in three broad categories; i) villages which have primarily suffered human loss, Fig. 2. Details of the villages taken up for the study.

...
ii) villages which have suffered loss of houses, land and property, and iii) villages which have suffered all kind of losses. Four villages each were selected from all the three categories for the purpose of this study (there was one case of twin villages and both were taken in the sample; Table 1, Fig. 2).

Further, as this study was primarily based on qualitative data collected from the primary stakeholders i.e., women, participatory assessment and appraisal methods were used for data collection in the community setting and, in-depth interviews in one-to-one interactions. In addition, some case studies were also carried out.

The importance of community-based participatory assessment and appraisal approaches is now generally recognised in the field of disaster preparedness and mitigation and, increasingly, also in disaster response and recovery. The rationale for using participatory approach in disaster risk assessment is well known and is justified based on the following:

i) Local communities living in disaster prone areas often have good understanding of the hazards in their area together with the risks to which their community is likely to be exposed. Clubbed with scientific and socio-economic data, these assessments could portray a picture that is very close to reality.

ii) Top-down disaster risk reduction programmes often fail to address specific vulnerabilities, needs and demands of at-risk communities. These can best be identified through a process of direct consultation and dialogue with the concerned communities as they are more likely to have a better understanding of the ground realities than the external experts.

iii) Even the most vulnerable community possesses skills, knowledge, labour and other capacities that can be effectively utilised for managing disasters. These assets are often overlooked and thus remain underutilised and, in some cases, these are even undermined by external actors.

Over the previous two decades, diverse range of community-level risk assessment (CRA) methods have been developed and field-tested. The influence of participatory action research (PAR) and community development methodologies, such as participatory rural assessment (PRA) and rapid rural appraisal (RRA), is evident in many of these risk assessment methods.

Primary purpose of the CRA is to provide data to ensure better and informed local decisions on planning and implementation of risk reduction measures. An effective CRA is envisaged to contribute to better understanding of i) the
nature and level of risks faced by vulnerable population groups, ii) source of these risks, iii) relative vulnerabilities of the people in the community, such as who is likely to be worst affected, iv) means available at different levels to reduce the risks, and v) the initiatives that could be undertaken to reduce the vulnerability and to strengthen the capacities of people at risk.

CRA identifies specific vulnerable groups/individuals, based on key social characteristics such as gender, age, health status, disability and ethnicity; either through the checklists or through situational analysis. The process also includes an analysis of patterns of population density, livelihood security and occupational activities that could increase the vulnerability of certain households and communities. Capacity assessment aims at identifying a wide range of resources that include coping strategies, local or traditional knowledge, leadership and institutions, existing social capital which may contribute to risk reduction efforts, skills, labour, community facilities, preparedness stocks and a local evacuation plan. An additional and often overlooked aspect of a participatory risk assessment is local perception of risk that can play a key role in deciding on mitigation measures.

The process of carrying out participatory assessment and the ensuing action planning is of as much importance as the tools that are adopted to collect and analyse data on vulnerabilities and capacities. This process ensures partnership and active long-term engagement with communities in defining their problems and identifying solutions thereof. This process also enables communities to analyse and better understand their capacities and strengths and to build collective self-confidence. As such, CRA is both an assessment tool and an organising and capacity building process.

Another advantage of the participatory approach lies in the fact that if conducted with mutual respect, the trust that is likely to develop, improves chances of 'outside' knowledge being assimilated with 'inside' wisdom. The result is a form of hybrid knowledge that is very robust and effective in reducing risk. This hybrid knowledge due to its genesis is also easily acceptable to the masses.

For studying individual perception and experiences, in-depth interviews were conducted with pre-identified women. These respondents were selected through an attrition process zeroing-in on women who had either lost a family member or incurred loss of property, source of livelihood, or was a key informant. In addition, some case studies of the women victims of disaster were also conducted.
Uttarakhand is a relatively less developed state of the Indian Union. Poverty level (people living below poverty line) in the state is 39.6 percent which is significantly higher than the national average of 27.5 percent (PHD Research Bureau, 2013). Despite poor economic status, the state however ranks higher than many other states of the country in terms of status of women assessed on the basis of indicators that include employment status, education, age at marriage, fertility and autonomy.

Socio-economic life in hill districts of Uttarakhand that are overwhelmingly rural (about 90 percent), is largely dependent on agriculture, tourism and remittances from the people employed in army, police or other occupations away from the home.

Though most households in the hilly districts of the state own house and land, landholdings are very small and plots are scattered far and wide. Further, agriculture is largely rain fed. Consequently, agriculture is of subsistence type and the yields are barely sufficient for the household alone.

Secondary sector of economy is just non-existent in the hill districts. As an offshoot, even blue-collared employment opportunities are very limited and a good number of people choose to migrate to other places for earning livelihood and for better economic prospects. Defence sector has traditionally been one of the largest employer for the people of this region. Remittances thus support a large number of families in this area and the economy of the region is often dubbed as money order economy.

Rudraprayag, Chamoli and Uttarkashi districts of the state house sacred Hindu and Sikh shrines that include Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri and Hemkund Sahib that are visited by over one million people every year; pilgrim inflow being at its peak during May and June. Religious tourism has consequently emerged as a major contributor to the economy of these hill districts, as well as the state. It is estimated that the religious tourism annually contributes over Rs. 150 billion to the state exchequer and at the same time sustains livelihood of more than 2,00,000 families (PHD Research Bureau, 2013).

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employment. By and large women in the hills are hard working and toil for long hours. Apart from routine household chores, they take care of agricultural pursuits as well. A women in a rural household typically works for 12 hours a day, of which 3.5 hours are spent in gathering fodder and fuel from the forest, 3.5 hours are spent on livelihood related works that include agricultural works that are largely managed by women, and 4.75 hours are spent on routine household related works (Chopra and Gosh; 2000).

In June 2013 disaster, major loss of human lives and property was incurred to the settlements in Rudraprayag district, particularly to those villages which are located around Kedarnath shrine and on the banks of Mandakini river flowing down from Kedarnath (Fig. 3).

![Fig. 3. View of damage incurred to houses along the bank of Mandakini river](image-url)
Study tools and data collection

Separate study tools were developed for participatory appraisal, in-depth interview and case study. Participatory appraisal tool was developed to map women's (as a community) vulnerability to disaster, manner in which they faced it (June 2013 disaster) and impact of the disaster on them. It also sought opinion on women's status and gender dynamics in the community. The participants further discussed about the women's particular vulnerability to disaster. Deliberations were also held on emergency relief and support received by the people from different agencies to overcome the impact of disaster and, its usefulness for them. As a part of participatory appraisal, participants also drew maps of their villages identifying areas that they considered particularly vulnerable to disaster.

In-depth interview tool was a semi-structured instrument designed to collect information on the impact of disaster on women on different aspects. The purpose was to learn about experiences of women as an individual, as a family and as a community before, during and after the disaster. Besides, their background information relating to age, education, family, occupation was also collected.

In the case studies, information was collected on specific experiences of women during and after the disaster.

All the tools were pre-tested and translated in the local language; Hindi with inputs of Garhwali dialect and words, before putting the same to use. Necessary ethical safeguards were adopted to ensure right of respondents to refuse to participate in the study, refuse to give answer to any question, confidentiality of information and the like.

The data were collected by a team of two female researchers with long experience in qualitative data collection. They were familiar with the local culture and language. Both the investigators were given two days orientation training on different aspects of the study and field data collection. The project coordinator himself spent a considerable amount of time in the field with the research team, to lead the team to ensure quality, and to get a feel of the ground situation.

In every village, one participatory appraisal was organised. Though these were largely attended by women members of the community, men were also
Findings

The Village Community

As indicated earlier, the study is based on interactions with village community, particularly women, in Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand. All the 13 villages taken up under this study are located in the zone of Kedarnath shrine (Fig. 2) and have been somehow or other, affected by the June 2013 disaster (Table 1). Except for one or two villages, all others are at 2 to 4 kilometers of trekking distance from the approach road. Except for a school and an occasional Ayurvedic dispensary, none of the villages have any other facility like post office, bank and the like. In the name of market there are a few shops providing almost everything of daily use.

In almost every village, more than 80 percent houses were observed to be pucca houses with indoor toilet facilities. A pucca house is being described out here as the one constructed with permanent material; bricks, stone, wood, tin and the like. Its walls, roof and floor are also permanent. On the other hand in a kuchha house the building material used is perishable like mud, thatch and the like.

All the villages were observed to have electricity. Though, these had access to cooking gas, wood was observed to be preferred by large proportion of families for cooking. Further, almost every household in these villages owned some agricultural land, but the landholdings were very small and scattered. At most places agriculture was rain fed.

Despite being the mainstay of village life, agriculture was not the main source of livelihood for these villages. Due to small and fragmented landholdings and rain fed nature of agriculture, crop yields were reportedly low and barely sufficient for a few months for the households alone. The people were thus required to have a secondary source of income to sustain them. In the study area, Kedarnath shrine provided this opportunity.

In more than 70 percent of the villages taken up under this study, appreciable proportion of the families were observed to earn their livelihood by providing services of various kinds to the pilgrims coming to Kedarnath. While some were priests at the temple, others operated lodges, hotels, restaurants and shops in and around the temple and, also en route. Some were also engaged in providing pony and porter services.

Fig. 4. Data collection session in progress in the field.

women represented average cross-section of rural community who had directly or indirectly faced the disaster in some form or other. A total of 4 case studies were conducted of such women who had directly faced the brunt of disaster. The data collection was carried out between 22nd March and 5th April, 2014.

The data were edited in the field itself. Anthropack, a qualitative data analysis software package, was used to analyse the information. A non-intrusive and gender sensitive approach was followed for collection of data. Confidentiality of information norm was strictly adhered to.
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Though the period of employment in services related to the temple was short (4 months only), the incomes were good and the same was observed to be reflected in their standard of living. Other secondary avenues of employment were defence services, jobs in the government or business in the city.

In line with the tradition in the mountain areas, women in the study villages were observed to be the mainstay of the community. Besides taking care of routine household chores, fetching fodder and fuel-wood from the forest, they were also observed to manage agricultural fields. In line with the observation made earlier, a typical woman in these villages was observed to work for a minimum of 10 to 12 hours every day. Despite the hard work put in, their contribution was however not accorded any particular recognition. Due to hard work and lack of nutrition, ageing of women was observed to be early and rapid. No complaint was however heard regarding this from any quarter.

Women's engagement in wider socio-economic and political activities was relatively less in the studied villages. Only in three villages, women were elected as Pardhan (head of village Panchayat). This too could be attributed to legislative compulsion, as one-third seats in the Panchayats are reserved for women. Of the three, two were however active and played important role

**Shrimati Vijay Laxmi Nautiyal, Gram Pardhan, Gavni**

*Shrimati Vijay Laxmi Nautiyal is Pardhan of Gavni Panchayat. She is an active person and has played an important role in rehabilitation of people after the June 2013 disaster.*

*Though there were no human losses, a number of families in her area (~ 34) had lost their houses and belongings in the flash floods. Not waiting for outside assistance she took the lead and organised their temporary stay in the homes of other villagers.*

*She also worked with administration and donor agencies to ensure that all the affected families receive adequate support and timely compensation for their losses. She even motivated the administration to cover the families who had lost their houses under World Bank assisted rehabilitation program. The beneficiaries have thus been provided house reconstruction grant of Rs. 5.00 lakh in addition to Rs. 2.00 lakh already provided out of SDRF / PMRF. These houses are being reconstructed and some are certainly better than the earlier ones.*
in helping people after the disaster. The lady Pardhan of Trijugi Narayan was reportedly instrumental in arranging shelter and food for more than 2000 people who reached her village following an alternate hilly track after escaping from Kedarnath tragedy. The third Pardhan (Silli village) was however overshadowed by her husband in decision-making process.

Women of the villages were observed to have organised themselves in self-help groups (termed as Mahila Mangal Dal). These, however, were observed to function as co-operatives; collecting monthly contribution from members and providing small loans in the hour of need.

Despite being located in a relatively remote area, almost every household in the study villages had at least one mobile phone. Use of radio/transistor was, however, observed to have gone down and mobiles were being used for listening to the music. About two-third of the households of the studied villages owned television.

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Table 1: A comparative profile of studied villages in relation to losses suffered during June, 2013 disaster.

Impact of Uttarakhand disaster of June, 2013 was not confined to Mandakini valley or Rudraprayag district. The disaster caused major loss of human lives, livestock, property and infrastructure across the state and five districts were hit particularly hard. These include Pithoragarh, Bageshwar, Chamoli, Uttarakashi and Rudraprayag.

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<td>3.</td>
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(Nali is the local measure of land area. 1 Hectare = 50 Nali)
A close look at Table 1 shows that the villages chosen for the present study were of all dimensions and population sizes and their total population ranges between 90 and 1700. It is however important to note that more than two-third of the studied villages were dependent on Kedarnath shrine for their livelihood. In 5 villages, pilgrimage to Kedarnath temple was the main source of income for more than 90 percent of the families.

Amongst the 13 villages 9 have suffered human losses during the June 2013 disaster. It varies from 3 in Railgaon and Damer to 54 in Dewali Bhanigram. It is important to note that all the dead were males, including boys. This is linked to the tradition of the region whereby women do not accompany their husbands/family members to Kedarnath when they work there. Interestingly, in Badrinath area, there is no restriction on women companying their men folk to work.

This practice was discussed during the participatory appraisal meetings and, several reasons were put forward to explain the same, which include, i) harsh weather conditions of Kedarnath that make long stay difficult, ii) difficult access to the area, and iii) limitations put forth by availability of accommodation at Kedarnath. As compared to this there is a proper village in Badrinath and most people providing services and carrying out business at Badrinath, have their houses in the village.

Fig. 5. View of devastation caused by June, 2013 floods.
All the boys who died in the calamity were in 12 to 15 years age group. These boys had accompanied their fathers or family members to Kedarnath for assisting them in their work. Their schools were closed for summer vacations and they had no other work at home. This was reported to be a general practice for the boys in this area. Many boys also worked as casual workers at Kedarnath to earn money during the pilgrimage season.

The loss of houses and agricultural land was observed largely in the villages located on the riverbank or hit by the landslide (Fig. 5). The lost ponies were in service at the time of disaster and were washed off in the flood.
Emergency relief and compensation for the losses

Disasters are not something new to the region and it has been routinely devastated by disasters of differing magnitudes. June 2013 disaster was however the worst tragedy to hit the region and the losses inflicted by it clearly outnumber those by previous tragedies on every count. This event having occurred at a place that was routinely visited by people from across the country as also abroad had distinct long term impact on the economy, not only of the affected area but also of the whole state. Repercussions of the same were noticed in the form of highly reduced tourist traffic, not only in the disaster-affected areas but also in the areas that were untouched by the disaster. Even after passage of one year the tourist and pilgrim inflow had not even reached normal level (Table 2) and the same was a cause of concern for the local masses.

As happens after every major disaster, national and state governments, NGOs and other organisations rushed in after June, 2013 disaster with assistance, supplies and others to provide emergency relief to the affected people. If the stories narrated by the people are to be believed, so many supplies were provided and stockpiled by the people that these could easily cater to the requirement of every family of the affected areas for 6 to 12 months. Even during the course of the fieldwork for this study in April 2014; 10 months after the disaster, supplies were observed to be pouring in. Though there were usual complains of misappropriation, loss in transit, not reaching the right people and the like, it must be accepted that every affected family in the region received more than adequate emergency ration and other supplies. Most importantly, the emergency support system became operational, within two-three days of the mishap.

The second important component of post-disaster relief relates to the compensation (relief) provided by the government for various categories of disaster induced losses. The word compensation as used here should not be taken by its dictionary meaning. No amount of money can compensate the loss of a family member. The financial assistance is just a token of support and given to help the family members to overcome the tragedy and difficult times being faced by them. Similarly, it is not possible for any government or...
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other support agency to fully reimburse the losses incurred by people in natural calamities. The financial assistance is generally a token of support to overcome the difficult time and meet the immediate needs. The prime motive behind giving financial support (relief) is to demonstrate solidarity with the affected people in difficult times.

Importantly, in a very short time, all the lives lost were accounted for, verified and significant compensation (Rs. 7.00 lakh) was paid by the government to the next of kin of the deceased. It needs to be appreciated that the compensation (relief) was expeditiously provided even to the next of kin of the persons who had gone missing in the disaster. In most cases the beneficiary was observed to be the wife of deceased person. Besides this, reasonable compensation was also provided for other disaster induced losses that include animal loss and loss of houses as also agricultural lands.

Reconstruction of all the damaged houses in one of the villages, Gabni, was observed to be carried out under World Bank assisted project. Here the beneficiaries have been provided reconstruction grant of Rs. 5.00 over and above Rs. 2.00 lakh provided by the government for the loss of house. The beneficiaries were also being provided on site technical assistance so as to ensure that the new structures were earthquake safe.

Several other organizations and individuals also provided cash and other support to the families who have lost a member. In Dewali Bhanigram, where 54 people died, support poured in like anything, even though it was an affluent village. Sulabh International, a Delhi based NGO, has adopted all the affected families of the village and is providing them a monthly stipend.

Further, all the damaged schools had been repaired, either by government or NGOs. These became functional within 2 months after the disaster. Government wisely extended the summer vacations by one month to ensure that the schools were repaired by the time students get back to studies. Some schools were also being rebuilt by NGOs.

Roads are the lifeline of the people in the mountains. There was major damage to roads due to flood and landslides. Importantly, manageable road/trolley/ropeway connectivity was re-established in all the areas in a very short time. It would however take a while to bring roads to their earlier shape, as there are challenges of weather, topography, budget, ownership and others.

In subsequent analysis it would be brought forth that all these emergency support, supplies, compensations, reconstruction and the others had a significant bearing on women's ability to withstand the impact of the disaster.
Participatory Appraisal

As stated earlier, a total of 13 participatory appraisal sessions were held; one in every village to elicit desired information from the community. About 12 to 15 women participated in each discussion session; there were men also, but the focus was on women. Average age of these women was 40 years and all of them were married. Large majority of these women were lowly educated. It was noted that wherever village males had regular jobs/occupation or village's economic condition was better, women's educational level was also higher. This pattern was observed in Gabni, Nakot and Dammar villages. Except Nakot, in all other villages, more than 85 percent women were agriculturists.

Except Damar and Nakot villages, most of the men, including husbands of women participants, were dependent on the Kedarnath shrine for their livelihood. Their engagement/employment was observed to be governed by

![Participatory appraisal session in progress.](image)

Except Damar and Nakot villages, most of the men, including husbands of women participants, were dependent on the Kedarnath shrine for their livelihood. Their engagement/employment was observed to be governed by
their caste background. Brahmins were priests and hotel owners, Rajputs and others were hotel and shop owners while dalits were operating ponies and doing other menial jobs.

With respect to status of women, it was noted that women play an important role in decision making related to family or household. However, when it came to decision making or expressing opinion on matters related to village or wider community, they had very little say. Women were observed to enjoy relative freedom of movement but with the consent of husband or elders in

### Shrimati Moli Devi, Damar village

*Shrimati Moli Devi is a widow aged 55 years. She is from a poor family and lives in a two-roomed kuchha house. The house does not have a toilet and water connection within the premises. Before June 2013 disaster she had a large family consisting of two married sons, their spouses, three granddaughters and one grandson. Both her sons and the grandson who used to operate ponies lost their lives at Kedarnath. Two of her granddaughters are very young aged 3 years and 1 year only.*

*After the disaster she was forced to vacate her house as it was heavily damaged by landslide. She temporarily shifted to a rented house for 4 months. After undertaking some repairs she has returned to her old house. The same is however not fully safe.*

*Government has paid compensation for the dead members of the family to the daughters-in-law. They have received compensation for their lost ponies as well.*

*Shrimati Moli Devi however only received the relief for the damage incurred to the house. She also received house rent for the period of her stay in the rented accommodation.*

*After receiving compensation for the loss of her husband one of her daughters-in-law has decided to move out and live separately. She is now building her separate house. Other daughter-in-law is however living with her.*

*After the disaster the family does not have any regular source of income. Shrimati Moli Devi is not content with the government policy and argues that she should also get a share of the compensation paid for the loss of her sons and grandson. If not, the government should have resorted to some alternative arrangement as she has become penniless after the disaster.*
the family. However amongst the under-privileged sections of the society, women were dissuaded from going out alone.

Alcoholism and wandering around by menfolk were two major problems reported by women in the study villages. It was noted that in a year for nearly eight months men were free as their engagement at Kedarnath was for around four months only. They thus often spent their time in non-productive activities.

Life of women who head the households was observed to be particularly hard; especially when these women were lowly educated. They faced extra hardships because along with their regular agricultural and household work, they had to work extra to generate income for sustaining their families.

At the hour of crises, fairly good bondage/community spirit was reported in all the villages. Others supported families who had lost a member. Wherever, a house was washed away or destroyed, other families provided shelter, food and clothes to the affected people. However, in villages inhabited by Brahmins and Harijans, the two castes looked after their own people only.

Women took major responsibility of looking after the family immediately after the disaster. Along with their regular work, they were also pressed in to collect emergency supplies provided by the government and other agencies.
At times they had to walk for long distances to collect these goods. Women headed households or the women who had lost their husbands faced more hardships in this respect.

One of the most serious fallout of the June 2013 disaster was that all the people who were earning their livelihood from Kedarnath shrine, suddenly became unemployed. They neither have other employment skills nor opportunities in the hills. They at the same time do not want to move out for alternate employment as there is hope that business and employment opportunities around the temple would revive soon.

Men sitting idle, without any income and with an uncertain future have become a major challenge for the women. The compensation provided by the government and other agencies was also reportedly diminishing fast and with this, financial crisis for women looms large in near future.

There were also incidences, where families had migrated, leaving their older parents behind. In such families, the condition of women (old women who have been left behind) was observed to be particularly difficult.
Key informant's interviews

A total of 42 women from 13 villages were interviewed to learn about the impact of June 2013 disaster on them, their families and the wider village community. More than three-fourth of these women were in the age group of 30 to 50 years. One third of them were widow and also the head of their household. About 43 percent had nuclear families while the rest were either from joint or extended families. Two women had only one person household; they themselves. Average family size was 4.3 persons.

Further, nearly 70 percent households were living in pucca houses. 57 percent houses had 1 to 3 living rooms. The rest of the houses were even larger. 95 percent houses were also electrified. About 85 percent houses had separate kitchens. It was also noted that the dependence on wood for cooking was relatively less; 26 percent households were using gas only, 53 percent wood and gas and 21 percent wood only. Further, 83 percent households had separate toilets in the house. About two third households had water supply within their premises. All the households had mobiles while landline telephone connections were very limited. 71 percent had a television in the house.

![Figure 9](image-url)  
**Fig. 9.** Figure depicting main occupation of the households in studied villages.
Of their working time to various agricultural works. As mentioned earlier, income from agriculture had never been sufficient to support the families. It was therefore given that the menfolk would be responsible for generating extra resources for sustaining the family. In the studied villages, Kedarnath shrine provided good employment opportunities for men. More than two-thirds of the men from studied households were engaged in providing services to the pilgrims; running hotel and providing pony, porter and priest service. The rest either had shops in the village (16 percent) or were employed (17 percent) outside the village.

With respect to past experience of disaster, a little less than half of the women (48 percent) could recall some history. Most recalled incidences related to earthquake, cloud burst and landslide. Only physical losses were reported in these disasters. In June 2013 disaster, 40 women (out of 42) reported physical losses to their property or ponies. Twenty nine percent women had lost a member of their family.

Further, 79 percent women reported that the major source of their livelihood was agriculture. Shrimati Rami Devi, Silli Village

Shrimati Rami Devi is a widow aged 62 years. She had three sons. The eldest son ran away from the house a long time back. Second son is in police service and his family lives in Dehradun. Third son and his family used to live with her. She had a shop and a house by the riverside. Her youngest son was helping her in the business.

Both her house and shop were washed away in the flash flood. Following disaster, her family took shelter in a local temple where they were housed for two weeks and provided food, clothing and other amenities.

After the disaster her youngest son decided to move to Srinagar with his family to start a new business. She has thus been left alone in the village.

Government has paid her a compensation of Rs. 2 lakh for the loss of her house. But she does not have land to build the house now. She cannot build house at the earlier site as it has become unsafe and a portion of her land has also been washed away. She now lives in a roadside tin shed, built by an NGO. She does not know how to continue.

About 57 percent of respondents were literate with 23 percent having high school or higher education. With respect to occupation, almost all the women were agriculturalists. Their landholdings were however very small and the cultivation methods, very old. Most women were devoting about one-third

Fig. 10. Diagram depicting impact of disaster on the households in the study villages.
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**Shrimati Manorama Thapaliyal, Village Nakot**

*Shrimati Manorama Thapaliyal* belongs to a well to do business family. She has a joint family consisting of her husband, a married son and a daughter-in-law.

*For 20 years she had been running business of wool spinning, weaving and stitching. Her husband and son also used to work with her. Rent from two other houses that she owned used to supplement the familial income.*

*Her business and houses were washed away in the flash flood. She is now living in a rented house in the village along with her family.*

*Government has paid a compensation of Rs. 2 lakh for her houses and business. According to her it is hardly adequate for starting afresh. Her family is in a dilemma and has no source of income. They are exploring means of re-starting their old business or starting some new business.*
was adversely affected in the wake of disaster, either due to death of the breadwinner or loss of means of livelihood.

Women reportedly played a major role in handling the situation after the disaster. They ensured that the children, particularly the young ones were protected and provided for. They kept the kitchen running and provided food to everybody. More importantly, they shouldered the responsibility of collecting relief supplies, sometime by trekking long distances. About 40 percent women stated that they have received support from wider village community, particularly where their houses were washed off.

Almost all the women reported to have received adequate supply of ration from the government and other sources to overcome difficult times. Ninety percent families have received more than two weeks' ration. In case of 40 percent families, supplies lasted for more than a month. 81 percent women observed that these supplies were adequate for their needs. Only complaint was that they had to walk long distances as distribution was resorted to at fixed locations. About 19 percent women complained that the distribution of supplies was not equal. It was also noted that no special provision was made for women in distribution of relief material. They received the same treatment or facilities as were extended to men.

It is often reported that under distress conditions, women are more vulnerable to exploitation; particularly sexual exploitation. No such incidence was
however reported by any of the respondents. Loss of source of livelihood was termed as the major adverse impact of disaster by most women (79 percent). Because of loss of income they were finding it difficult to run the household (78 percent). Loss of household goods was also cause of concern for 14 percent of the women. About 12 percent women were still scared of rains and lived with constant fear of things going wrong once again. Loneliness and deterioration in emotional security were also reported by about 10 percent women; particularly by those who either lost a family member or whose menfolk moved out for alternate employment. In addition, for 7 percent women, migration of men in search of employment was also a cause of concern.

Fig. 12. Diagram depicting the impact of disaster on women.
Analysis of the information collected from the study area creates a scenario (of women) that is quite different from what is normally observed in most post-disaster settings. Though, it is true that in this disaster, both men and women have suffered, but they have suffered differently. The specific vulnerability of women in post-disaster situations as often reported in the literature, was, by and large not observed in the study area. Gender specific impact of disaster was also observed to be moulded differently.

In the sections below specific findings of this study are being reviewed to reveal the possible explanation for the phenomenon observed in the area. In the hills of Uttarakhand, particularly so in rural areas, two parallel economies are operational; one controlled by women and the other by men. Except for tilling the land women in the hills take care of almost all agriculture and animal husbandry related works. They produce food and thus contribute significantly towards running the household. Close scrutiny reveals that the women in the hills are actually self-employed and not wholly depended on their husbands for economic upkeep. Their men either run small business in the same or neighboring places or work outside and send remittances.

Except for the villages where agricultural land was washed off, economic losses incurred by the women (occupation wise) in June 2013 disaster in the studied villages were relatively small. Most women in the area were observed to continue with their usual occupations.

### Table 2: Monthly details of the pilgrims visiting Kedarnath.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>Average (2011–13)</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>Number of persons visiting Kedarnath</th>
<th>Percentage reduction in 2014 against the average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>2,45,821</td>
<td>2,98,182</td>
<td>1,49,689</td>
<td>2,31,230</td>
<td>13,823</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>2,49,386</td>
<td>1,96,830</td>
<td>1,82,551</td>
<td>2,09,589</td>
<td>14,091</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>2,97,216</td>
<td>2,77,712</td>
<td>2,28,434</td>
<td>2,51,356</td>
<td>8,987</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Analysis of the information collected from the study area creates a scenario (of women) that is quite different from what is normally observed in most post-disaster settings. Though, it is true that in this disaster, both men and women have suffered, but they have suffered differently. The specific vulnerability of women in post-disaster situations as often reported in the literature, was, by and large not observed in the study area. Gender specific impact of disaster was also observed to be moulded differently.

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<td>28,464 3,041</td>
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In contrast to this, the men in the study area were observed to have suffered heavily. Prior to June, 2013 disaster most men were engaged in the business of providing services of various kinds to the pilgrims and others visiting
Kedarnath. With the disaster, pilgrimage has literally come to stand still and even after more than one year of the disaster there seems no respite (Table 2).

The disaster of June 2013 thus totally dried out the very source of income of overwhelmingly large proportion of the menfolk of the region and that too in one sudden cruel stroke without any warning. These men unfortunately do not have any other vocational skills. The development pattern in the hills has also not created other employment avenues for them. This disaster has therefore not only exposed their economic vulnerability but has also brought forth a dilemma. Thanks to spiritual nature of our community, the pilgrimage to Kedarnath is sure to revive and braving odds of travel and weather people from across the country have already started to show up. Attaining the previous count is however sure to take quite some time.

The over enthusiasm of the state government to extend all possible support to whatever little number of pilgrims that are tickling in, that too free of cost, has left little or no incentive for these men in trying to revive their lost business. Shut down hotels, dhabas and tea stalls are therefore a common place in the region.

Thanks to women's agricultural activities, the families may not starve, but for long-term sustenance of the family, men would have to find alternate employment soon. There is definitely a desire amongst menfolk to explore alternate avenues, but nobody seems to know what and how of it.

In the study area only men have lost their lives in Kedarnath disaster of June 2013. The answer could probably be found in the culture or lifestyle of the people. Either due to pre-occupation of women with agriculture, or due to culture or due to lack proper familial accommodation in Kedarnath, or due to harsh living conditions, women did not normally accompany their men to Kedarnath. Consequently, only men (from the villages covered by present study) have died in Kedarnath disaster.

Loss of menfolk has however shattered the lives of a large number of women in their young age. As widow re-marriage is not prevalent in the area, it is sure to add to their misery.

Despite odds the scenario is however not bereft of silver lining and the same has saved these females from total devastation. Firstly, the women's engagement in agricultural activities keeps them occupied and gives economic stability. Secondly, the compensation (relief) paid by the government for the loss of their menfolk was swift and reasonable and most importantly, the money was particularly paid in the wife's account only. It allows them to maintain a second source of income and also live a life with adequate means. Thirdly, they were not alone in their sorrow. From every
village, several women were widowed at the same time and in the same tragedy. Most importantly, whole society and nation stood by them. Adoption of all the widowed women in Dewali Bhanigram by Sulabh International is an example of such a support. This support (providing economic stability) also serves an important long-term need of women affected by the disaster.

Women's social and physical vulnerability at the time of disaster was neither reported nor observed in any of the villages taken up for the study. Perhaps it has much to do with the culture of the people in the hills, where women are given their due status and in all probability this is the fruit of hill women's tireless labour. No incidence of sexual exploitation linked to disaster was reported in any of villages or in nearby areas. Women were not even prepared to discuss about it. However, traces of emotional distress were still noted amongst widowed women (about 10 percent).

Supply of ration and items of daily needs is an important short-term measure at the time of disaster. In the study area, timely and ample supply of relief material in all villages and to all the families played an important role in bringing life to normal soon after the disaster. It was largely helpful and appreciated by women. Perhaps, until unless warranted, special provision for women in emergency relief supplies distribution may not be necessary.

It was observed that normally women are not involved when it comes to disaster management and mitigation planning and implementation. But there were examples which show that given the opportunity, women are capable of effectively responding to emergencies (case study of Shrimati Manorama Nautiyal). Further, women were also at the forefront in collecting relief supplies from relief distribution centers.
Recommendations

In a study based on qualitative data it is rather difficult to generalise the findings and come out with policy or programme implications, yet certain patterns have emerged distinctly in this study and the same can be considered as recommendations.

Timely payment of compensation (relief) to the women, who lost their husbands in June 2013 disaster, has significantly helped in reducing their economic as well as social vulnerability. The compensation extended for the loss of other assets was also quite swift. Though many people were not satisfied with the amount received, yet all the affected people were reached and the same was recognised by the people. This system should be maintained, and if possible, should be made more responsive.

It has been noted that in the study area, women (particularly as home maker and care giver) did not have many specific post-disaster needs. Most of their needs were common with men or children and effectively addressed by emergency and rehabilitation support provided by the government and other aid agencies. Therefore, it can be argued that until and unless particularly warranted, a separate provision for women may not be needed.

Several women who have lost their husbands in June 2013 disaster however continue to be emotionally strained. A tailor made counseling program could be evolved to help these women to overcome the grief and carry on with their lives.

The relief support after the June 2013 disaster in Uttarakhand is a classical case of overkill. So much supply was dumped on the people that it literally lasted for several months. On humanitarian ground it is good, but from the program point of view it calls for streamlining the relief distribution mechanism.

The study notes that there has been equally effective post-disaster management of affairs by women. Their involvement in disaster management related planning could be formalised and the Panchayat or village level disaster management planning could be one such possible mechanism. Though mandated in the Panchayats' terms of reference, it has never been effectively implemented. Perhaps, lesson could be learned now.
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Self-employment of women in agricultural pursuits has proved to be an effective buffer that helped them withstand the adverse economic effect of disaster. In view of high disaster vulnerability of the region, it is desirable that women's agricultural skills are further strengthened and opportunities to earn more (from the same field) are created. This would effectively contribute towards reducing economic vulnerability of women in disasters.

In the study area, more than two-third of the men were engaged in occupations related to the Yatra. With the magnitude of the Yatra significantly reduced after June 2013 disaster, they have literally become unemployed. Owing to slow pace of reconstruction activities and prevailing fear psychosis, it may take a while for normalcy to return. In the existing development pattern in the mountains there are very limited employment potential in secondary or allied sector due to topographical constraints and others, and there is limit to men's engagement in the primary sector. Moreover if men venture in this area, they would only displace women, who are doing well with the existing means.

These men are left with very few options. They could migrate and look for alternate employment elsewhere. But with limited skills, their struggle could be long drawn with bleak possibilities of success. Alternatively, government and development agencies could explore avenues of self-employment for these men in the hills itself by creating necessary eco-friendly infrastructure, linkages with the industry and market, imparting vocational skills and the like. These ventures could also be used to strengthen disaster preparedness.

During the Yatra season of 2014 state government is providing various services to the pilgrims visiting Kedarnath, mostly through tourism sector infrastructure. These include lodging, boarding, refreshment and the like and all these are being provided free of cost. Though a welcome gesture of the state, it is discouraging the locals who are struggling to restart their lost enterprises. It would be more appropriate if the ownership of these facilities is passed on to the locals. Besides providing economic opportunities to the people this would at the same time improve quality of the service being provided to the pilgrims.
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Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre
(An Autonomous Institute of the Department of Disaster Management, Government of Uttarakhand)
Uttarakhand Secretariat, Dehradun - 248 001