

## **Choosing Partners: a transparent, participatory method for selecting project villages**

*Rural development projects that focus on poverty reduction through community-based interventions are often faced with the dilemma of how to select target communities. Unless the selection is made in a fair and equitable manner, projects risk arousing local jealousies and future political interference. This paper describes an approach developed and tested by the Aajeevika Project in Uttarakhand, which involved transparent and participatory consultation with all stakeholders and resulted in a wide consensus on villages to be targeted by the project for poverty-reduction interventions.*

### **The Aajeevika Project**

The eight year Livelihoods Improvement Project for the Himalayas (LIPH), more commonly known as “Aajeevika”, commenced work in Uttarakhand in October 2004 under funding from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Government of Uttarakhand. The project is managed by the Uttarakhand *Gramya Vikas Samiti*<sup>1</sup> (UGVS), supported by a parallel Uttarakhand *Parvatiya Aajeevika Samvardan* Company (UPASaC) to provide investment services and funding. The Project’s primary objective is to improve the quality of life and incomes of disadvantaged households in remote hill villages in a sustainable manner, through the promotion of improved livelihood opportunities and strengthening of local institutions that relate to livelihood and social development.

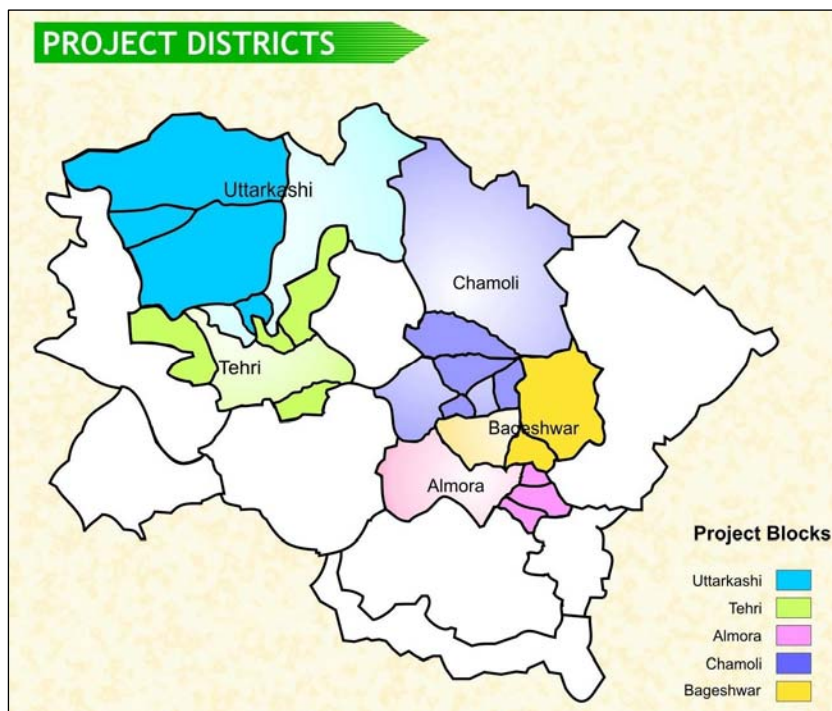
Specific objectives are to:

- Promote a more sensitive approach to the design and implementation of development interventions.
- Enhance the capabilities of local people to select appropriate livelihood opportunities, to access required financial resources and to manage new technologies and institutions at the village level.
- Increase incomes through more sustainable income generating cultivation systems and non-farm enterprises at the micro- and small-scale levels.
- Establish effective and appropriate delivery systems for inputs and for maintenance of assets and resources, with emphasis on thrift, savings, micro-finance and micro-insurance, along with access to business development services that will link household-based livelihood activities with the larger economy.

<sup>1</sup> A company registered under the Companies Registration Act, comprising members of the Government of Uttarakhand and representatives of community-based organizations, supported by a Project Management Unit, District Management Units and Facilitating NGOs.

The project design<sup>2</sup> selected five districts (Almora, Bageshwar, Chamoli, Tehri & Uttarkashi), within which the 17 most remote and under-developed Blocks<sup>3</sup> were identified for intervention (Figure 1). These included 2,980 Revenue Villages. It was envisaged that approximately 40% of villages in each Block, comprising some 42,700 households, would be selected for project interventions. The target groups for participation would be households that fell below the poverty line, as well as those that hovered just above poverty levels.

**Figure 1 Project Area**



Within this broad framework, the project was to target the poorer households by:

- Selecting the villages that have relatively high incidence of poverty and a higher ratio of Scheduled Cast/ Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) populations.
- Facilitating integrated assistance to encourage more productive use of available natural resources, through appropriate small-scale interventions in agriculture and agriculture-allied enterprises, adopting affordable technologies.
- Encouraging non-farm micro-enterprise developments through business development services and investment funds.

<sup>2</sup> IFAD (2004). Livelihoods Improvement Project for the Himalayas: Appraisal Report. IFAD, Rome

<sup>3</sup> Bageshwar, Bhainsia-Chhana, Bhilgana, Dasholi, Devprayag, Dewal, Dhauladevi, Dunda, Ghat, Jaunpur, Kapkot, Lamgara, Mori, Narayan Bagar, Naugaon, Pratapnagar, and Purola.

Some of the tools that would be used to achieve this were Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods for poverty mapping, identification of self-targeted activities and intensive sensitisation programmes through self-help groups.

## **Challenges in selecting target villages**

In Uttarakhand there is a high level of political awareness amongst the rural communities: they are sceptical of government programmes and particularly the process of selecting villages for intervention. The project staff appreciated that there could be future political repercussions unless the selection process was transparent, fair and accepted by all stakeholders.

Three specific challenges arose:

### **How to cope with population increases since project design when selecting villages in each block?**

The project Appraisal Report envisaged targeting approximately 40% of villages in each block, stated to be a total of 1,162 villages with a combined population of some 42,700 households. This had been used for project design and budget estimates. However, populations of villages vary significantly within and between Blocks. Therefore, the total number of households to be targeted could not be determined until after the target villages had been selected. Moreover, the population of the villages of the pre-selected blocks had increased by an average of 22% since the 1991 census, the data of which was used in the appraisal report calculations. Consequently, the inferred target population in the 1,162 villages had risen to 67,000 households. As project staffing, logistics and budgets were based on the Appraisal Report estimates, the target of 42,700 households was retained and the project proceeded with village selection. In the event, the target for households was achieved in 959 villages.

### **How to identify the poor and disadvantaged?**

Most government schemes target the below poverty line (BPL) category of persons. The parameters and processes of selecting BPL households are controversial and subject to criticism: selection can be subject to political influence, there is no provision for temporary poverty and the qualifying households have remained unchanged since 1998. Moreover, the Appraisal Report had identified three layers of poverty (ultra poor, hardcore poor and moderately poor), posing a further conceptual challenge for the project staff. For these reasons, a more innovative approach was required for selecting target villages, one that was not restricted to the standard BPL criteria used by the government. Such an approach has been incorporated into the methodology described in this paper.

### **How to satisfy the expectations of all sections of the community in the selection process?**

In a vibrant democracy, having a high level of political and social awareness across all sections of society, a fully transparent, objective and equitable method was required to select the target beneficiaries. Moreover, a method was required that involved all stakeholders and which obtained their joint approval, to minimise future

political reactions. This represented the greatest challenge for selection of target beneficiaries.

Project staff undertook an intensive brainstorming exercise, which resulted in the concept of 'Zoning' villages. The principles of the methods developed and the results are discussed in this paper.

## Methodology for Village Selection

As the Appraisal Report had pre-selected the project area as 17 Development Blocks, the starting point for the village selection exercise was the Block. Within each Block, a method was needed to identify qualifying Revenue Villages. However, given the large number of constituent villages (75-475 per Block), their dispersed nature and often remote locations, the Block personnel would not be fully conversant with conditions in all villages: the knowledge gap between Block and village was too wide. Therefore a staged selection process was needed. Discussions with villagers revealed the existence of the Nyay Panchayat, a traditional grouping of villages. With 5-20 Nyay Panchayats in each Block, they were therefore accepted as the first step in the selection sequence. For the second step, within each Nyay Panchayat, Clusters of revenue villages<sup>4</sup> were identified (1-4 per Nyay Panchayat), based on social affinities and contiguity. In the final step of the process, the individual villages within the Cluster (12-32) were analysed for selection. Four processes were used (Box 1) to achieve selection at each level.

### Box 1. Processes for Selection

- **Resource Mapping:** at each level, stakeholders prepared maps of their socio-economic resources, to compare the features of each component unit. At Block level, information was cross-checked against secondary data.
- **Matrix Scoring:** stakeholders used their own criteria to analyse the livelihood assets at each level (social features, natural resources, infrastructure etc).
- **Adversity Ranking & Participation Potential Scoring:** using scoring criteria developed by the project, stakeholders assessed the poverty, infrastructure effectiveness, institutional base and, at Cluster level, the participation potential of each village.

An orientation programme was organised for all key staff of the District Management Units (DMUs) and Facilitating NGOs (FNGOs) to refine the entire sequence of conducting the Zoning exercise.

## Sequence of Selection Exercise

The following procedure was defined:

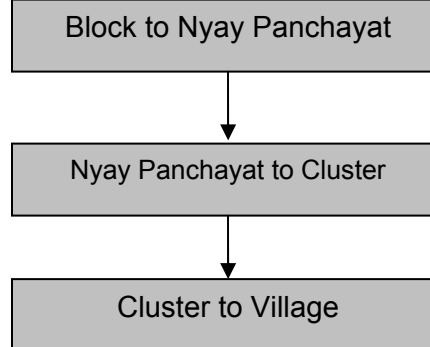
- **Secondary data collection and compilation.** Data was collected from the Block Office statistics departments and compilation carried out by the respective DMUs. Parameters such as demography, land use, infrastructure

<sup>4</sup> For practical and logistic reasons, the Clusters often overlapped with Nyay Panchayat boundaries.

status and presence of banking institutions were used for comparative analysis of blocks and Nyay Panchayats.

- **Organisation of workshops at Block.** Workshops were organised by involving all sections of society, including representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Van Panchayats (VPs), Self-help Groups (SHGs), Mahila Mangal Dals (MMDs), NGOs and Government Organisations (GOs). Indicators were developed during these exercises and used for matrix scoring, adversity ranking and resource mapping by identified stakeholders.
- **Process for selection.** This was undertaken through a series of participatory interactions with the concerned stakeholders from each level, in the sequence shown in Box 2.

#### Box 2. Village Selection Sequence



### Criteria for Analysis

- **Step 1. Block to Nyay Panchayat.** Resource and social mapping was carried out with the identified stakeholders to locate Nyay Panchayats of the Block that were poor and vulnerable, and to identify the natural resource base. This was supplemented by adversity ranking exercises. The PRA tools used included:
  - Resource Mapping: spatial mapping of the socio-economic resources of the constituent Nyay Panchayats.
  - Matrix Scoring: to identify pockets of poverty, degraded natural resources, inaccessible areas and institutional strengths (Box 3).
  - Adversity Ranking: to decide on the level of poverty, food security and drudgery faced by various Nyay Panchayats. Criteria used were food supply from agricultural land, income from cash crops, forest resources, transportation, electricity, communication, marketing and infrastructure facilities, status of development works etc.
  - Triangulation: Cross-checking of information with secondary data.

#### Box 3. Matrix Scoring Parameters

- Human capital (settlement pattern, traditional skills, health and sanitation facilities).
- Social capital (barter arrangements, cooperation of community).
- Physical capital (road connectivity, infrastructure facilities).
- Natural capital (agricultural productivity, potential for natural resource-based enterprises, eco-tourism etc).
- Financial capital (savings and assets, market facilities).
- Vulnerability factors (damage by wildlife, land slides, unpredictable markets).

- **Step 2. Nyay Panchayat to Cluster.** Socio-economic resource and matrix scoring were undertaken to enable stakeholders to analyse and compare the status of each Cluster. Then they ranked the component Clusters according to adversity, to identify poverty-prone Clusters.
- **Step 3. Cluster to Village.** The participatory processes were repeated at Cluster level. The local stakeholders identified the most vulnerable and poorest villages using scoring guidelines developed by the project (Table 1), which enabled the degree of adversity as well as the potential level of participation in each village to be ranked. Only settlements with more than nine resident households were included.

### Rationalisation of Selection

The method enabled an initial identification of some 60% of the villages as potentially suitable for selection. These were then scrutinised in the field by project staff to remove those which were currently subject to interventions by other development projects and, for logistic and management reasons, to concentrate on villages that were juxtaposed. In this manner, the number of villages was reduced to around the target figure of 40% of villages in each Block, so as to conform with the project's budget provision.

On completion of the selection process, the stakeholders were asked to confirm their agreement and the final lists of selected Nyay Panchayats, Clusters and Revenue Villages were submitted to the respective leaders (Gram Pradhan, Block Promukh or Kshetra Panchayat representative and Block Development Officer) for formal authentication.

### Results

The first phase selection exercise was successfully completed in the five districts during 2005. The results for Chamoli District are presented here to illustrate the process and outcomes.

Of the nine Development Blocks in Chamoli District, four Blocks had been identified for the Project (Table 2).

**Table 2 Tentative Targeted Villages and Households, Chamoli District**

Block	Revenue villages	Households (HH)	Tentative Targeted villages (40%)	Tentative Targeted HH (40%)
Ghat	88	6,394	35	2,557
Dasholi	110	7,563	44	3,025
Narayanbagar	142	6,380	57	2,552
Deval	68	4,401	27	1,760
<b>Total</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>24,738</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>9,894</b>

Ghat Block is used here as an example of the selection process. This is one of the most backward and remote Blocks in Uttarakhand. It is 74 km from District headquarters (Gopeshwar) and 254 km from the state capital (Dehradun). It covers 10,393 ha and has a population of 33,576 (17,210 female, 16,366 male).



**Table 1. Scoring System for Village Selection: Adversity & Participation Potential Criteria**

Stage	Selection & Scoring Criteria	Scoring System
<b>Stage I</b>	<b>Select only those villages whose Household number is &gt; 9 (residing in the village itself).</b>	
<b>Stage II</b>	<b>Assess adversity &amp; participation potential</b>	<b>(Max 100 points, minimum 26 points)</b>
1.	<b>Poverty and deprivation</b>	<b>(max 40 points)</b>
1.1	(BPL HH/Total HH)*100= X (max 15 points)	If X >75% = 15 points, 50-75% = 10 points, 25-50% = 7 points and <25% = 4 points.
1.2	(SC+ST HH/Total HH)*100= Y (max 15 points)	If Y >75% = 15 points, 50-75% = 10 points, 25-50% = 7 points and <25% = 4 points.
1.3	(HH whose land area < 1 ha/total HH)*100 = Z (max 10 points)	If Z >75% = 10 points, 50-75% = 7 points, 25-50% = 5 points and <25% = 2 points.
2	<b>Infrastructural Effectiveness</b>	<b>(max 20 points)</b>
2.1	Distance of village from road-head (max 5 points)	If distance > 8 km = 5 points, 3-8 km = 3 points and < 3 km = 1 point.
2.2	Distance from road-head to nearest market (max 5 points)	If distance > 25 km = 5 points, 10-25 km = 3 points and < 10 km = 1 point
2.3	HH not electrified/total HH = A (max 5 points)	If A >75% =5 points, 50-75% = 3 points, 25-50% = 2 points and <25%= 1 point
2.4	Irrigated area/Cultivated area = B (max 5 points)	If B <5% = 5 points; 5-10% =4 points, 10-25% = 3 points, 25-50% = 2 points and >50% = 0 points.
3.	<b>Institutional Base</b>	<b>(max 16 points)</b>
3.1	(Active SHGs/total SHGs) = C (max 5 points)	If C >75% = 5 points; 50-75% = 3 points; 25-50% = 2 points; <25% = 1 point.
3.2	(Active Women SHGs/total SHGs) = D (max 5 points)	If D >75% = 5 points; 50-75% = 3 points; 25-50% = 2 points; <25% = 1 point.
3.3	(Van Panchayat area/total village area) = E (max 5 points)	If E >75% = 5 points; 50-75% = 3 points; 25-50% = 2 points; <25% = 1 point.
4.	<b>Participation and positive village characteristics</b>	<b>(max 25 points)</b>
4.1	Cohesiveness and participation in development (max 15 points)	As per marks entered in format
4.2	Positive cases (qualitative): (max 10 points)	If yes = 10 points and if no = 0 points
<b>Stage III</b>	<b>Select approximately 60% of villages in the Block based on combined scores.</b>	

High point scores favour selection

The development scenario of Ghat is dismal, with deteriorating services and infrastructure, including minimal access to public education, poor health, difficult transport access and few livelihood opportunities. The livelihood development indicators are low, due to poor transportation, absence of a proper marketing strategy and a lack of awareness among the people of potential livelihood interventions. Most public services and infrastructure are situated in the Block headquarters (Ghat village). The block is divided into four Nyay Panchayats, with principal characteristics as in Table 3.

**Table 3. Demographic Details**

Nyay Panchayat	No of Gram Panchayat	No. of Rev Villages	Total HH	Population			No. of BPL members	No. of SHGs
				Total	SC	ST		
Boora	10	21	1,456	7,914	1,561	16	1,470	23
Farkhet	11	15	1,206	6,289	1,431	16	1,445	53
Shema	14	28	1,796	9,044	1,903	168	1,580	30
Ustoli	11	24	1,936	10,329	2,024	162	1,610	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>6,394</b>	<b>33,576</b>	<b>6,889</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>6,105</b>	<b>178</b>

The project staff collected secondary data from the Block Office. This data later helped in cross-checking information generated through PRA exercises and in identifying possible villages for intervention on the basis of their SC/ST population, poverty and potential livelihood interventions.

### Block to Nyay Panchayat Selection

The Step 1 zoning workshop was conducted at Ghat in early 2005 over three days. A total of 26 people participated in the exercise, including representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Van Panchayats, Block Office, FNGOs, Community representatives and project staff (Box 4).

The basic objective of the Block zoning exercise was to understand the demography, the natural resource status and potential for livelihood opportunities, road connectivity and infrastructure facilities available in the block. Initially, DMU staff explained the project and then the stakeholders developed a socio-resource map of the block, using the above characteristics. A matrix-scoring exercise was then conducted.

The stakeholders comparatively analysed the characteristics of each Nyay Panchayat, generating their own 27 criteria, and scoring each out of 10 (Table 4). Later, the

#### Box 4. Participants at Ghat Block Workshop

Pres Sarpanch Sangathan. Ghat  
 Pres Gram Panchayat, Bheiti  
 Social Worker, Saiti, Ghat Block  
 Pradhan, Gram Panchayat Fali  
 Pradhan, Kumjug  
 Area Panchayat Syari, Bangali  
 Member, Village Banjagar  
 Gram Panchayat member, Kumjug  
 Gram Panchayat member, Dhargaon  
 SHG Accountant, Banjagar  
 Member, Village Sema  
 Member District Panchayat  
 Prabhari, Udyan Sachal Dal  
 Member, Zila Panchayat  
 9 members of FNGO SBMA  
 2 DMU Staff.

project team reviewed the stakeholder results against the secondary data collected and found that they closely matched. The participants then undertook an adversity ranking exercise, deriving 12 criteria for scoring the four Nyay Panchayats (Table 5).

Based on the matrix scoring and adversity ranking, Boora, Ustoli and Farkhet Nyay Panchayats of Ghat Block were identified for inclusion in the project and the next stage of selection (Table 6).

**Table 4. Matrix Scoring, Ghat: Block to Nyay Panchayats**

Particulars	Nyay Panchayats			
	Shema	Farkhet	Boora	Ustoli
Women's Awareness	6	6	4	7
Area under Agriculture	5	4	1	1
Forest Area	4	3	5	5
Number of Van Panchayat	7	7	7	7
Road Transport facility	5	6	4	4
Electricity facility	7	8	3	4
Communication facility	5	6	0	4
Area under cash crops	3	3	5	5
Area under Subsistence crops	7	5	5	5
Milk production	2	3	2	3
Goat/Sheep rearing	3	3	6	3
Fodder availability	5	5	5	4
Drinking Water facility	4	2	3	3
Education level	6	6	4	6
Health facilities	6	6	4	6
Political Awareness	8	6	7	4
Mutual Understanding	5	7	6	7
Schedule Cast Population	4	5	4	4
Schedule Tribe Population	3	2	0	1
Status of development works	7	8	5	6
Government Job (Army/Teacher)	6	5	4	4
Livelihood opportunities	4	3	5	5
Dependency on minor forest products	3	3	4	3
Agriculture Products	6	5	5	7
Tourism potential	2	2	3	2
Scattered population	6	6	8	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>115</b>
Poverty-prone pockets	(-) 4	(-) 3	(-) 4	(-) 3
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>112</b>

Note: 10 = Relatively high and 1 = relatively poor resources/facilities

**Table 5. Poverty/Adversity Ranking**

No.	Criteria	Shema	Farkhet	Ustoli	Boora
1.	Food supply for whole year from agriculture land	2	4	1	3
2.	Income from cash crops	4	3	2	1
3.	Transportation facility	1	3	2	4
4.	Electricity facility	1	1	1	2
5.	Communication facility	1	3	2	4
6.	Animal husbandry	4	3	2	1
7.	Forest resources (fuel, fodder, timber)	3	4	2	1
8.	Employment opportunities	4	3	1	2
9.	Marketing facilities	2	3	1	4
10.	Cottage industries	1	4	2	3
11.	Infrastructure facilities	1	2	3	4
12.	Status of Development works	1	2	3	4

Note: 1 = Low Poverty/Adversity, 4 = High

**Table 6. Selection of Nyay Panchayats**

Nyay Panchayat	Matrix score	Adversity ranking	Selection
Shema	128	4	X
Farkhet	127	2	✓
Boora	113	1	✓
Ustoli	121	3	✓

### Nyay Panchayat to Cluster Selection

Farkhet, Boora and Ustoli proved to be the poorest Nyay Panchayats in Ghat Block (Table 6). Ustoli is used here to illustrate the next stage of the process.

Some 15 days after the initial exercise at Ghat, a workshop was held within Ustoli Nyay Panchayat, comprising representatives of the constituent Clusters, FNGOs, government, project staff and others (Box 5). On the basis of demography, available natural resources and infrastructure facilities, the stakeholder group divided Ustoli Nyay Panchayat into two clusters – Banjbagar and Mokh. These are situated in two distinct valleys, separated by more than 10 km. The overall characteristics of the Clusters are summarised in Table 7.

#### Box 5. Example of Participants at Nyay Panchayat Workshops

Participant Affiliation	Number
PRIs	104
Government	15
NGOs	47
Project	8
Others	114

Number of Participants			
Meetings	Male	Female	Total
20	285	3	288

**Table 8. Characteristics of Ustoli Cluster**

Criteria/cluster	Mokh	Banjbagar
Number of revenue villages	10	14
Total population	2,861	6,932
SC population	Less	High
ST population	47	132
Settlement pattern	Scattered partially populated	Big villages moderate density
Distance from Block	More than 5 km	Near to block office
Enterprise potential	Moderate	High
Poverty prone pockets	Moderate	Moderate
Infrastructure facilities	Moderate	Moderate
Community cooperation	Poor	Very Good
Van Panchayat	8 (1,446.9 ha)	9 (2,068.8 ha)

Matrix scoring (Table 8), using 22 criteria derived by the stakeholders, and adversity and participation potential ranking exercises were then conducted. On the basis of matrix scoring (Banjbagar 122, Mokh 125) and adversity and participation potential ranking exercises, the Banjbagar cluster was found to have greater potential than Mokh for adoption by the project.

**Table 8. Matrix Scoring: Clusters of Ustoli Nayay Panchayat**

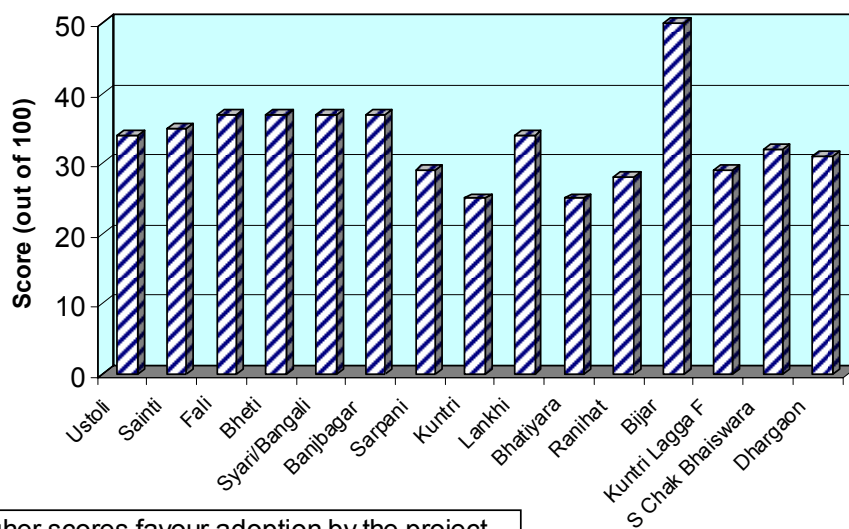
Particulars	Banjbagar	Mokh
Van Panchayat (Oak Mixed Forest)	6	4
Road Transport facility	7	7
Transportation by mule	2	4
Communication facility	6	8
Electricity facility	10	10
Area under Agriculture	4	5
Area under cash crops	5	4
Subsistence crops	7	8
Milk product	8	8
Goat/Sheep rearing	4	6
Scattered population	4	5
Market facility	9	8
Accessibility to different services	8	9
Scope for livelihood improvement	6	5
Agriculture productivity	7	6
Corporation in development works	6	6
Awareness level	6	7
Schedule Cast Population	7	3
Dependency on Forest product	5	6
Tourism based livelihood	1	1
Health facilities	7	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>129</b>
Poverty prone pockets	(-) 3	(-) 4
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>125</b>

Note: 10 = Relatively high and 1 = relatively poor resources/facilities

### Cluster to Village Selection

Subsequently, the project team visited Banjbagar Cluster. Participatory discussions were held with Block officials, representatives of the Nyay Panchayat, the villagers, and the FNGO team. The 15 constituent Revenue Villages were scored against the adversity and participation potential guidelines (Table 9). As all villages comprised more than nine resident households, they all qualified for consideration. Figure 2 summarises the scores of the 15 villages.

**FIGURE 2. BANJBAGAR CLUSTER:  
 Adversity & Participation Potential Scores by Village**



Note: Higher scores favour adoption by the project.

**Table 9 Village selection from Banjbagar cluster in Ustoli Nayay Panchayat**

Name of Revenue village	No of Hamlet	Points based on different indicators									Total Points
		BPL house holds	SC+ST house holds	Km from Road head	Km from nearest Market	Irrigated area/ cultivated area	Active SHGs	Active WSHGs	Van Panchayat area/ Total area	Participation in development works	
Ustoli	4	7	7	1	1	5	1	2	0	8	<b>34</b>
Sainti	2	7	4	1	1	5	2	1	0	12	<b>35</b>
Fali	3	4	7	1	1	5	1	2	2	12	<b>37</b>
Bheti	10	4	7	1	1	5	1	1	3	12	<b>37</b>
Syari/Bangali	7	4	4	1	1	5	1	1	5	13	<b>37</b>
Banjbagar	7	4	4	1	1	5	1	1	5	13	<b>37</b>
Sarpani	3	4	4	1	1	5	1	1	0	10	<b>29</b>
Kuntri Gwar	1	4	0	1	1	5	1	1	0	10	<b>25</b>
Lankhi	5	4	4	1	1	5	1	1	5	10	<b>34</b>
Bhatiyana	1	4	0	1	1	5	1	1	0	10	<b>25</b>
Ranihat	1	4	0	1	1	5	1	1	0	13	<b>28</b>
Bijar	2	10	10	3	3	4	1	1	3	13	<b>50</b>
Kuntri Lagga Fali	3	4	4	1	1	5	1	1	0	10	<b>29</b>
Sainti Chak Bhaishwara	2	7	4	1	1	5	1	1	2	10	<b>32</b>
Dhargaon	4	4	4	1	1	5	1	1	0	12	<b>31</b>

Note: See Table 1. for Scoring of Indicators. Higher scores favour adoption by the project.

## Final Selection of Villages

Project staff made further intensive visits to the potential villages listed in Table 9 and interacted with the local stakeholders. The list was rationalised, excluding those villages already subject to interventions by other projects (to reduce duplication of effort). Consideration was given to the practicalities of project adoption (location and reasonable juxtaposition of villages) in agreeing the final selection.

A report was generated (in Hindi) for the Block Development Officer, explaining the process of village selection, with a foreword written by the Block Promukh indicating acceptance of the methodology.

## Overall Village Selection

As a result of the selection exercises in each District, a total of 959 villages have been selected for adoption by the project to date (Table 10).

**Table 10. Details of Villages Selected**

District	Total blocks	Blocks under Project	Total villages	Total HHs	Villages selected		Target HHs of project	
					No	%	No	%
Tehri	9	4	879	50,380	126	14.3	5,737	11.4
Chamoli	9	4	408	24,738	121	29.7	7,541	30.5
Almora	11	3	546	26,155	115	21.1	5,335	20.4
Bageshwar	3	2	677	35,877	147	21.7	7,973	22.2
Uttarkashi	6	4	470	31,135	109	23.2	5,928	19.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>2,980</b>	<b>168,285</b>	<b>618</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>32,514</b>	<b>19.3</b>

Note: Status as of March 2007. For 2007/08, an additional 341 villages have been identified, to give a total of 959 villages. The aim in the additional villages is to select some 10,000 households to reach the targeted total of 42,700 households. Overall, this will represent about 32% of villages and 26% of households in the 17 Blocks.

## Discussion

The exercise represented a systematic and transparent process for selecting villages for project intervention, which is successfully being applied across 17 Blocks of the five project Districts. It was a time-consuming process (about 1-3 months per Block, depending on accessibility and numbers of villages) but subsequently there has been no political interference.

The credibility of the process has been substantiated by the elected representatives at Gram Panchayat, Kshetra Panchayat and Zila Panchayat levels, as well as by the Block Development Officers, who concurred with the data used in the exercise. An example of the letter received from the Kshetra Panchayat Promukh and Block Development office at Ghat is shown in Box 6. Moreover, satisfaction has been expressed by communities at grass-root level, who appreciated the process. Indeed, resolutions have been received from the Gram

Panchayats of the selected villages, requesting the project to take up activities in their respective villages. Villagers especially appreciated the resource mapping, saying that they had previously not been aware of the resources in their communities.

The staffs of the respective Block Development Offices were fully involved in the process. As the Block Development Officer reports through the Chief Development Officer to the District Magistrate (Collector), acceptance of the village selection by the District Administration was assured.

**Box 6. Example of Confirmation Letter** (translation from Hindi)

*The Livelihoods Improvement Project for the Himalayas followed a participatory approach for selection of the poorest and remotest revenue villages in three Nyay Panchayats of Ghat Development Block, Chamoli District. A total of 38 revenue villages have been identified by the project for implementation in the Block and the process followed by the project is commendable.*

*The process of village selection was carried out involving Panchayat representatives, Gram Pradhans, Block and village level officials, aware men and women of the Block, as well as representatives of non-governmental organisations.*

*We would like to welcome the project in Ghat Block and hope that the project benefits the poorest households of the identified villages of the Block.*

*We would like to give our best wishes for a meaningful and successful implementation of the project.*

Block Development Officer  
Ghat Block  
Chamoli

Head, Kshetra Panchayat  
Ghat Block  
Chamoli

Some of the lessons learned during the exercise included:

- Brainstorming and capacity building of field-level staff during the initial stages was an important part of the process.
- The data prepared by stakeholder analysis at Block level closely matched the data from secondary sources.
- The perceptions of the community members of their own world, and their place within it, were successfully incorporated in the context of prevalent conditions at each level in each Block.
- Rapport building was successfully achieved through close involvement with the stakeholders at each level and potential conflicts were resolved at each step during the selection process.
- Despite concentrated efforts by the project and FNGOs, it was difficult to involve adequate numbers of women as participants in the meetings.

A valid criticism of the method is that although it resulted in adopting areas (Clusters) where people are relatively poor and vulnerable, it inevitably excluded some poor villages within relatively richer Clusters.

On completion of the selection process, an analysis by the project revealed that the actual percentage of targeted households within villages ranged from 25% to 50%, with an average of 32%, compared with the 40% envisaged in the original Appraisal Report.

The sequential process for village selection offers a suitable transparent methodology for similar projects that need to identify villages for intervention.

The next step in the selection process was to identify the target households within the selected villages. This was achieved through an innovative, community-based wealth-ranking exercise, the results of which will be presented in the next paper in the *Ajeevika Reflections & Learning* series.

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