



Annual Report

THE YEAR 2023-2024

The Association for Rural Planning and Action (ARPAN) operates on the foundational principles of feminism, advocating for comprehensive social, economic, cultural, and political equality for women. Our commitment to sisterhood underscores the powerful force driving our work across various sectors and communities.

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"Working with rural and tribal communities needs extraordinary patience. Change emerges at institutional and community level in an organic manner. It is not immediate. When emboldened community starts taking action gradually. When engaged strategically the response from state to community rights starts to emerge – patience is thus the key to successful community & advocacy interventions"

Renu Thakur



CEO'S Note

Year 2023-24 - Throughout the year, ARPAN remained steadfast in its mission to support vulnerable populations, particularly children and women, across our operational areas. Our initiatives focused on providing essential services such as safe shelter, legal aid, and educational re-enrollment for children in need. For women, our efforts centered around combating domestic violence, offering temporary shelters, advocating for legal rights, and enhancing participation in community governance and agricultural cooperatives.

A significant achievement this year was the consolidation of our support for single women, empowering them through grassroots forums to address individual challenges effectively. Our advocacy for women's land rights garnered recognition within national networks and philanthropic circles.

Partnership Highlights - ARPAN concluded its impactful collaboration, Nai Peהל, with ActionAid Association, which significantly contributed to women's empowerment through campaigns on unpaid work and access to land for women farmers. Our partnership with the Women and Child Development Department, Govt. of India, providing child helpline services, also concluded successfully, ensuring the protection of over 1000 children.

Ongoing support from DASRA (Rebuild India) continues to bolster ARPAN's capacity in empowering single women and strengthening organizational capabilities. Additionally, our partnership with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung facilitated action

research aimed at enhancing the leadership of the indigenous Raji community.

Policy Highlights - A notable milestone was the development of the Draft State Women's Policy in collaboration with the State Women Commission and ActionAid, currently under review by the Uttarakhand State Government. Our research on the socio-economic status of the Raji Indigenous Tribe prompted proactive measures by the Hon'ble High Court of Uttarakhand, leading to improvements being made in housing, community facilities, and access to public services for indigenous communities in Pithoragarh district. The role of the District Administration, Pithoragarh and The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) is very significant. They are regularly monitoring implementation of measures directed by the Hon'ble Court.

Looking Ahead - One in every 5 person is an adolescent in India. India's demographic dividend of high adolescent and youth population presents both opportunities and challenges. ARPAN is committed to leveraging this demographic advantage by focusing on health, education, skill development, and employment opportunities for adolescents. Over the next five years, we will intensify our efforts in supporting women's economic initiatives, particularly those of indigenous and single women, through targeted action research and advocacy.

We express our sincere gratitude to all individuals, institutions, and government agencies whose support has been instrumental in achieving these milestones.

Renu Thakur
April 30, 2024

Program Overview

The year 2023-2024 showcased remarkable resilience among vulnerable rural women in the marginalized communities ARPAN serves, as they gradually recovered from the severe impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic exacerbated challenges, diminishing earning opportunities for rural women, particularly through closures of infrastructure projects like road development that traditionally provided significant employment in these areas.



ARPAN's grassroots efforts have expanded significantly, currently reaching 110 villages across Champawat, Pithoragarh, and Udham Singh Nagar districts. Our initiatives benefit over 12,000 women and 600 adolescents from socially marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes (especially vulnerable tribal groups-PVTG), Other Backward Castes (OBC), and economically weaker sections in the upper Himalayan region.

Our network, Sajha Manch, operates across 13 districts in Uttarakhand, focusing on combating violence against women. We prioritize community capacity building to enhance women's leadership and facilitate access to government services and entitlements. Our campaign aims to raise

awareness about social and constitutional rights issues pertinent to rural and indigenous tribal communities.

Notably, ARPAN is a leader in addressing domestic violence, both through direct intervention in individual cases and by strengthening civil society's capacity to combat domestic violence through networking and collaboration among various stakeholders.

Currently, ARPAN serves as the convenor and secretariat for Sajha Manch, leveraging evidence-based research to inform our programmatic strategies.

Our research initiatives, particularly on single women and unpaid work, have informed state policies for women developed during 2022-23. Moreover, our comprehensive study on the socio-economic status of the Raji indigenous tribal communities has been successfully concluded, contributing valuable insights for policy and intervention.



This period has underscored ARPAN's commitment to advancing women's rights and empowering marginalized communities through targeted interventions and strategic partnerships.

Thrust Areas



Women's Empowerment

Women are at the heart of ARPAN's initiatives. In the past year, our efforts have emphasized the role of women in climate action and bolstering their leadership in governance. At events like the World Social Forum and the Climate Justice Conclave in Shimla, we highlighted how climate change uniquely impacts hill women, advocating from a feminist perspective. These efforts are crucial as climate change discourse must address their specific needs and challenges.

We have intensified capacity-building efforts for women, conducting leadership trainings and workshops that benefitted 100 women farmers across 50 villages. These sessions focused on enhancing livelihoods and

raising awareness on gender equality and justice issues. ARPAN has also prioritized strengthening the capacities of 230 elected women representatives in 53 gram panchayats across three districts. This empowerment extends to planning development programs, interfacing with government departments, and addressing social issues like alcoholism through community initiatives; and also, development priorities, such as., school infrastructure development, accessing government schemes for village and community development among others. Furthermore, trainings for women elected leaders included a focus on access and control over natural resources (land, water and forests), especially van panchayats.



The impact of ARPAN's work is evident in tangible outcomes. For instance, a woman Sarpanch from Pali Gram Panchayat in Kanalichinna block successfully utilized government programs for livelihood support, empowering women through ventures such as fish farming, horticulture, bakery businesses, and event rentals.

Child Rights

Children in mountainous regions face unique challenges, often shouldering household responsibilities while one parent migrates for work. ARPAN has focused on

securing children's rights to education, protection from violence, and prevention of child labor. Children especially from the Raji indigenous communities have to trek 6-10 kilometers on the mountain's terrain. Many children drop out of school once they reach 8th standard. They join the informal labour force. ARPAN has been working to guarantee right to education, protection from violence and child labour. By working with the school management committees (SMCs) children are provided with support to continue their education at least till 12th standard.

Strengthening SMCs and motivating elected women's elected representatives in school management is a critical work of ARPAN. Issues of school repairs have been addressed with help from SMCs and panchayat women representatives.



Under a partnership with government of India, in Childline program, ARPAN has addressed the issue of children in need of care and protection. Through this collaboration, we have intervened to protect vulnerable children like 14-year-old Samir, ensuring they are rescued from exploitative labor situations and reintegrated into education.

Samir (changed name) comes from a poor family. Mother is a home maker, and father is laborer. Sheer economic necessity during Covid-19 pushed him to working in a vegetable shop in Jaakhni. Working in shop for long hours

deteriorated his health and affected his overall development. Working in the shop exposed him to bad influences. ARPAN's Child Line was informed about a Samir being engaged as child labor in Jaakhni area, requesting rescue. After speaking to the caller, the Childline, talked to the shop owner who explained the family's financial struggles. After explaining the legal implications of employing a minor, the owner agreed not to employ Samir anymore. Child Line then visited Samir's home and discussed the situation with his parents, and also counselled them about legal and health consequences of child labour on Samir and family. His parents agreed not to send him to work and promised to support him in his studies. Samir is now back to school. His mother supports him with his education.

Our initiatives extend to adolescent health and wellbeing, providing vital information on hygiene, bodily changes, and counseling to mitigate vulnerabilities to exploitation. Aim behind engaging with adolescents is to build their understanding on health, self-protection and making choices. In collaboration with Baala social enterprises, Delhi, ARPAN carried out two-months long campaign in schools and rural communities in 53 gram panchayats in Didihat, Kanalichina and Askot blocks for addressing menstrual stigma, discrimination and hygiene issues. Around 2000 Eco-friendly reusable sanitary pads were distributed to adolescent girls and women.

ARPAN has actively addressed cases of sexual abuse and exploitation among adolescents, advocating for their rights and providing necessary support through platforms like Sakhi one-stop crisis centers. In 2023, through the Child Line run by ARPAN a case of child abuse was addressed.

Kamla a child below 18 years. She is daughter of a Nepalese migrant near a village in Pithoragarh. Kamla was lured by a man promising marriage. She became pregnant and the man refused to accept the child as his. When contacted, child line with the help of the police initiated the case against the accused and had him booked under

POCSO. Kamla was referred to Sakhi one stop crisis centre. She was committed to a child care institute by the child welfare committee-CWC. Kamla delivered a girl child in few months. The mother and the child were been sent to institutional care.

Indigenous Peoples Rights

ARPAN works with indigenous communities – Raji and Bhotia along the Indo-Nepal and Chinese border. Raji community forms a large part of our work. They belong to particularly vulnerable tribal group-PVTG, as per government's classification. They are very few in population. Currently there are only 1075 families across three districts, and we work with them three districts: Champawat, Pithoragarh, and Udham Singh Nagar.

Access to forest rights, housing, health, water, and other government schemes and entitlements are ensured by building leadership of women and young people in the community.



An action-oriented study on Raji indigenous community was done by ARPAN to understand socio-economic and political vulnerabilities. The findings of the study received traction during the year. Findings of the study was shared with the Hon'ble Judge of the Nainital High Court during a hearing organized by the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) in Pithoragarh.

The submissions were converted into a public interest litigation, suo motto by the Hon'ble court. This judicial action has resulted in very effective response from government departments. Raji villages have now been developed – access roads, houses, and other infrastructure are being developed by various departments in more than 15 villages. Individual housing and multi-purpose centres have been sanctioned.

ARPAN continues to invest in development of women's leadership in the community. An exemplary case is Neema, a 20-year-old Raji tribal girl from Khatima block, Udham Singh Nagar, who has emerged as a community leader. Through ARPAN's support, she has mobilized her community, engaged with local authorities, and spearheaded initiatives that have directly addressed community concerns, such as securing a Public Distribution System shop in a remote village.

During the year, 85 families have been awarded with individual titles to land under the Forest Rights Act, out of 150 applications that have been made for individual claims and 25 applications for community forest rights were made and the outcome is awaited.

Land, Natural Resources and Agriculture

Women in hill regions play crucial roles in agriculture, animal husbandry, and horticulture. ARPAN has long championed women's land rights, especially among Raji women who traditionally possess minimal land holdings. Our initiatives have supported these women with seed capital aimed towards enhancing their economic agency and control over natural resources.

ARPAN collaborates closely with Van Panchayats to strengthen their governance

of forest resources, promoting sustainable management and raising awareness on community and individual forest rights.



Van Panchayats are legally accorded rights over forest management by village level forest management committees under the Indian Forest Act, 1927. They provide legitimate access to earmarked village forests under the Act to meet forest produce needs of the villagers. ARPAN has been working towards strengthening the Van Panchayat Samitis. Further, creating awareness and enabling local people's access to individual and community forest rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. Our engagements with the Forest Department include participating in greening and plantation campaigns, aligning with global environmental initiatives like World Environment Day.



Rights of Single Women

Single women, including widows, separated, divorced, and elderly without familial support, face significant challenges in accessing property rights and government entitlements. ARPAN has conducted surveys and mobilized single women across 60 gram panchayats, empowering them through leadership training and collective action. These efforts have not only restored dignity to widows but also enabled them to participate actively in governance and economic activities within their communities.

A survey of single women in Askot villages was conducted. The survey revealed the need for larger mobilization and building organization of single women. Together they make a formidable force. They have been trained in leadership and emboldened to take initiative in accessing their public services and land/property rights. During 2023, we have been able to mobilize, 159 single women in 5 panchayats in Kanalichina block of Pithoragarh district. Emphasis has also been given for restoring dignity of widows who suffer from social stigma. In our work strengthening women in governance, we particularly support single women.



Our focused work with Manju Joshi a single woman from Ghimali village in Didihat block was motivated through our community mobilization to become member of Gram Panchayat. Once she became the member,

we provided her with capacity building support which helped her to overcome her initial hesitation about her ability to take responsibility, perform her duties and especially in addressing stigma of being a widow. She has been a strong support for development work initiated by the Panchayat under the able leadership of another elected representative, Hema Patani. Together they have been able to mobilize women around self-help group initiatives for livelihood. Their role in developing village women's leadership is incredible. Together they have also addressed the issue of illegal liquor making in the villages.

An inspiring story is that of Aani Devi from Gana Gaon, who transformed her circumstances through ARPAN's support in forming a self-help group. She utilized microfinance to establish a successful goat rearing business, improving her financial stability and family well-being.

Aani Devi, residing in Gana Gaon is a single woman as after marriage her son settled with his wife as per Raji traditions and husband passed away. After the death of husband, her financial crisis deepened so much that sometimes she had to sleep hungry. Arpan motivated women in her village to form their self-help group. They began their saving with Rs 10 per month and took loan from the SHG on very low interest. Gradually, the situation changed. Aani Devi took loan of Rs 1,000 for goat rearing. Three months after purchasing, the goat gave birth to two kids. After some time, she sold the goat, earning Rs 2,000, from which she returned the loan and interest within a year. Now she is rearing and selling goats. At present she has seven goats, meaning a capital of nearly Rs 12,000. Today financial improvement in her family is visible. Her son has started helping her in the venture.

Disaster Management

ARPAN has been intervening in all major and minor disasters in the three districts that it is engaged in. Given its ecological fragility,

Uttarakhand hills have a per-disposition to natural disasters, land slide and forest fires. Over the last 26 years, it has intervened in all disasters, including the major floods and natural disasters in Uttarakhand in 2013, and throughout the Covid-19 period. We continued during the reporting year our efforts to support families recover from long term socio-economic impact of Covid-19. During harsh winters and rainy season ARPAN provides immediate relief to mitigate effects of weather to most needy families distressed by the harsh weather conditions, which includes distribution of blankets.

Collaborations and Networking

Over the last year, we have expanded our collaborations, with organizations and networks. WGWLO-Working Group on Women and Land Rights, MAKAM – Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch in furthering the agenda women and property rights. IIT Roorki collaborated with us in a study on PMKVY. Azim Premji Foundation (Pithoragrh) partners with us for immersion program of their university students and new employees.

We have a structured internship program aimed at mutual learning, mentoring and recognition of students in social sciences. This year we collaborated and participated in the World Social Forum in Nepal and have built connection with global networks with social formations.

With the Indian Institute of Management, Kashipur in Uttarakhand we have entered into an agreement to host their students for longer term internship from program year 2024. ARPAN is a resource organization for government other agencies in strengthening their POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) systems. Its engagement in this realm includes with the Border Security Force of India.



Institutional partnerships provide mutual learning opportunities contributing to ARPAN 's mission especially in strengthening women's agency and leadership .

Note on Donor Partnerships

ActionAid Association

ActionAid in India has been a longstanding partner of ARPAN, with a focus on the development of single women, Dalit women, children, and indigenous tribal communities. The partnership, set to conclude in early 2024, has been pivotal in addressing issues such as unpaid work burden on women from a feminist economics perspective. ARPAN's research collaborations with UNWomen and ActionAid have elevated discussions on these issues at local, state, and national levels.



Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-RLS

The RLS initiative aims to strengthen leadership and institutions within the Raji indigenous community, enhancing their engagement with government bodies. Through evidence-based research, RLS supports ARPAN in developing robust program strategies for impactful outcomes.

DASRA (Rebuild India)

In 2023, ARPAN joined hands with DASRA under its Rebuild India program. This partnership is characterized by trust-based, flexible funding aimed at strengthening ARPAN's organizational capacities over a five-year period. Focus areas include enhancing visibility, brand building, staff capacity, and leadership capabilities among single women to access property rights and public services, while also addressing social stigma surrounding widows.

Childline India Foundation - Government of India

The partnership with Childline India Foundation, supported by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, has concluded after contributing significantly to ARPAN's efforts in supporting thousands of vulnerable children, including those from neighboring Nepal.

Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiative (APPI)

ARPAN initiated a partnership with APPI during the Covid-19 pandemic, initially focusing on awareness generation about vaccinations. This partnership has evolved to include hosting students and employees from Azim Premji University and the Foundation through an immersion program. From June 2024, ARPAN and APPI will collaborate on an adolescent empowerment program across 60 villages in Didihat block, involving 600 adolescents from 3,000 families. This initiative aims to deepen ARPAN's engagement with adolescents and young people in the region.

Takeaways

Throughout its journey, ARPAN has benefitted immensely from these partnerships. Organizations like Oxfam, Ashalata Foundation, The Hunger Project, and governmental bodies such as the Government of India have provided critical support, enhancing ARPAN's programs, planning, financial and administrative systems, and reporting mechanisms.

Trust-based funding from partners like DASRA has enabled ARPAN to innovate and implement transformative projects, overcoming challenges unique to local organizations in remote Himalayan regions. These partnerships have not only expanded ARPAN's reach nationally and internationally but have also facilitated learning exchanges with civil society formations and campaigns globally.

ARPAN deeply values the trust and collaborative spirit of its donor partners, recognizing their role in driving organizational development and fostering impactful change in communities across the upper Himalayas.





ARPAN is deeply committed to strengthening local leadership of vulnerable communities. Also enabling their interface with the state is playing a catalytic role in their development.

About ARPAN

Genesis

Founded in 1996, Arpan (Association for Rural Planning and Action) is a grassroots voluntary organization located in Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand. ARPAN's mission is deeply rooted in addressing the needs of excluded and marginalized sections of society, with a particular focus on advancing women's human rights. The organization operates across Champawat, Pithoragarh, and Udham Singh Nagar districts, working to strengthen leadership and promote socio-economic development among scheduled caste, scheduled tribe (including Bhotia and PVTG Raji Tribes), and OBC communities.

ARPAN's **vision** is to build a society based on Gender Justice, Equality and Equity.

ARPAN's **mission** is to take forward women's human's rights through collective action by, **Facilitating** formation of women's collectives at different level, and **Strengthening** women's collectives and their leadership.

ARPAN's Objectives are:

- To create awareness among the rural community, by giving information on the holistic development of the region and people.
- To strengthen women under the Panchayati Raj system by disseminating information on the local self-governance structure.
- To disseminate information about various development schemes, welfare programs being run by the government to the rural community.

ARPAN has established partnerships with a range of organizations including Ashalata Foundation, ActionAid, Oxfam, The Hunger

Project, Find Your Feet UK, ORACLE, Skillshare, UNWomen, among others. Current key partnerships include Dasra (USA), Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (Germany), Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives (APPI), and IIM-Kashipur.

ARPAN functions as a grassroots feminist resource organization, renowned for its comprehensive engagement in:

- Grounded field action,
- Research and policy development,
- Internship and volunteering programs,
- Humanitarian interventions,
- Training and capacity building,
- Institution building across various domains such as livelihood, agriculture, natural resource management, children's education, health, and the POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) ecosystem.



ARPAN's commitment to these activities underscores its role as a credible force in driving positive change and empowerment within the communities it serves in the upper Himalayan region.



Independent Auditor's Report

CONSOLIDATED RECEIPTS & PAYMENTS A/C FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST MARCH 2024					
RECEIPTS	SCH	AMOUNT (RS)	PAYMENTS	SCH	AMOUNT (RS)
To Opening Balance			By Project Recurring Expenses		
Cash in hand		6,776.00	Child Line Foundation	A	493,189.00
Cash At Bank		820,381.62	Nai Palal -Indian Fund	B	1,440,204.00
			Women Led Rural Dev Project--		
			Rebuild India Fund	C	755,874.00
To Grant in Aid	F	3,329,199.00	Society Main Expenses	D	67,567.12
To Bank Interest	G	25,828.00	FCRA Main Expenses	E	864,570.02
To Membership Fee		3,000.00			
To Donation Receipts		45,000.00	By Closing Balance		
To Income tax Refund		8,650.00	Cash in Hand	H	2,190.00
			Cash at Bank	H	615,240.48
		4,238,834.62			4,238,834.62

(SECRETARY)

UDIN:24089918BKCBRS8322

PLACE : PITHORAGARH
DATED: 28TH MAY 2024

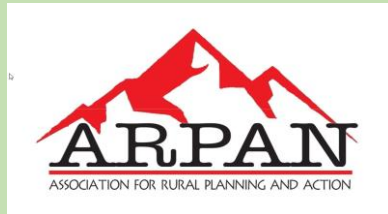
Governing Board

Our Governing Board consists of majority of women, and this is a conscious choice we have made, in building an organizational culture promoting women's leadership at all levels.

- Ms. Rajkumari Chand, Chair Person
- Ms. Renu Thakur, Member Secretary
- Mr. Khadyot Kumar Ojha, Treasurer
- Dr. (Ms.) Saroj Verma, Member
- Ms. Ganga, Member
- Dr. (Mr.) N. S. Dhariyal, Member
- Mr. Anand Prakash, Member

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