

Information Needs and Access to Information: A Study of Members of Zila Panchayat in Nainital District of Uttarakhand

Farzana Azim

Research Scholar, DSB Campus, Kumaun University Nainital, India

Abstract: *The present study is intended to investigate the information needs and access to information of Zila Panchayat Members in Nainital District of Uttarakhand in the context of local level planning. In order to fulfil this aim, three specific objectives are identified. It is tried to understand the information needs of Zila Panchayath Members, the channels of communication among them, and the preferences in the use of information sources by them. The suggestions for improving the information base of local governance and for developing an information system to support Zila Panchayat Members in Nainital District are made on the basis of the study. The present investigation has achieved its objective in identifying the information needs and use of information by the members.*

Keywords: Information need, Information access, Zila Panchayat

1. Introduction

Today's society is an information rich society. There are two aspects of this phenomenon –both supply and demand for information has increased. The creation, growth, communication and use of information have accelerated due to the advances in technology, specifically information communication technology. The post-industrial society is characterized by an increased dependence on information in daily life. Information is a primary resource which affects society's access and use of other resources. (Menou, M.J., 1993)

In participatory planning and development, informed participation makes the participation meaningful. Therefore dissemination of information, access to information by the beneficiaries and ensuring people's right to information are very important for participatory development. (Mohammed, Shandana Khan, 2005)

People's true participation is essential for effective planning. When the planning is at the local levels people's involvement is necessary at all stages of planning, implementation and supervision. In local level planning all citizens have the right to participate in their governing, preparation of plans, implementation, evaluation and monitoring. This asserts the citizen's right to inform and to be informed.

It is being increasingly recognized that access to information is not only a human right but also an important right to promote good governance and fight corruption. Good governance has four basic elements- transparency, accountability, predictability, and participation. RTI (Right to Information) promotes transparency and accountability in the functioning of government institutions, which makes these organizations, function more objectively. Further, giving citizens information from the government enables them to participate in the democratic process. (Naib, 2011)

2. Literature Review

Shailendra and Prakash (2008) an investigation was made to find out information needs of the Members of Legislative Assembly in the capital city of India. **Sharma (2007)** worked on information needs and information sharing pattern among rural women of Gwalior district of Madhya Pradesh. **Pal, Rakesh Kumar (2006)** the present article gives an overview of the "Information needs of the faculty members and research scholars of the department of Botany of M.S. University of Baroda". **Khan, Shakeel Ahmad (2015)** discussed the user's perception of services quality provided by the Central Public Library of Bahawalpur.

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the present study are as follows:-

- To analyze the information use pattern of the Zila Panchayat Members of Nainital District of Uttarakhand.
- To find out the information needs of Zila Panchayat Members of Nainital District of Uttarakhand in context of local level planning.
- To identify the channels of communication among the Zila Panchayat Members of Nainital District of Uttarakhand.

4. Scope and Limitations of the study

The scope of the study is limited to the Members of Zila Panchayat in Nainital District of Uttarakhand. The elected representatives of Zila Panchayat constitute a very important group of the local level planners and they are supposed to be the decision makers in executing the plans and projects in the Zila Panchayats. Therefore their awareness of information plays a key role in the performance of Zila Panchayats.

Finding of the study may be applicable to the other Districts of Uttarakhand or not. So finding of the study cannot be generalized.

5. Questionnaire Survey

Structured questionnaires were prepared and administered to the Members of Zila Panchayats in Nainital District of Uttarakhand. 32 questionnaires were distributed but only 21 returned. The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain data from the Panchayat Members regarding their information needs in local level planning, their information use pattern, the information sources, the channels of communications, the barriers in getting information, the requirement of an information system that supports local level planning.

6. Significance of the Study

In the present study, data regarding the information needs, the sources of information, the use pattern of information and the awareness of information of the elected representatives of Zila Panchayats are collected and analyzed. The results of the study would help to design and develop an information system at the local level as well as to the state level, which will provide easy access to information at local level. It is in this context the present study is conducted.

7. Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed and findings were made using statistical methods. Analysis of data collected through the questionnaires, observation and personal interaction using both quantitative and qualitative methods provided the investigator the required results to fulfil the four research objectives. Simple percentage analysis was used to study the information requirements, the information sources, communication channels and the information support to the local level planning and governance.

Q.1 Distribution of Zila Panchayat Members in Nainital District of Uttarakhand according to the sectors in which they were engaged earlier-

Table 1

Sector	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Political Worker	09	43%
Teachers	03	14%
Others	09	43%
Total	21	100%

Above data shows that 43% of Zila Panchayat Members have political background and the political parties do make use of the services provided by the members to the people of the locality and thus achieve rapport with people. The members belonging to 'others' (43%) category are not active political activists but may include workers, traders, agriculturists, social workers, students, retired government staff, house wives etc. Very few only 14% are teachers.

Q.2 Gender wise distribution of Zila Panchayat Members in Nainital District of Uttarakhand-

Table 2

Gender	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Male	12	57%
Female	09	43%
Total	21	100%

The gender wise distribution of Zila Panchayat Members is given in Table-3. It is shows that 57% are male members and 43% are women members. In Nainital District, women enjoy reservation in Local Self Governments.

Q.3 Distribution of the Zila Panchayat Members in Nainital District of Uttarakhand according to their educational qualifications

Table 3

Educational Qualification	No. of Respondent	Percentage
High School	05	24%
Intermediate	04	19%
Graduate	06	28%
Post Graduate	05	24%
Others	01	05%
Total	21	100%

The educational background of the members has direct relationship with the extent of their involvement in different activities. The planning and governance capabilities are the result of formal education and the expertise acquired through socio-political activities. Classification of the respondents based on educational qualifications shows that 24% of the members have studied High School (Table-6). 19% of respondent are Intermediate, 28% are Graduate, 24% Post Graduate which is good and only 5% are others i.e. 8th passed only.

Q.4 Use of information by the Zila Panchayat Members in Nainital

Table 4

Use of Information	No. of Respondent	Percentage
To satisfy the personal needs	03	14%
To provide information to others	07	33%
To keep up-to- date in daily activities	10	48%
Others	01	05%
Total	21	100%

The analysis of data indicates that the high value is obtained for third option i.e. 'to keep up to-date in the daily activities'. Provide information to others 33%, 14% to satisfy the personal needs and 5% for others. This shows that the Members of Zila Panchayats require information mainly to keep up-to-date in the daily activities and then to provide information to others as can be seen from Table 4.

Q.5 Information needs of Zila Panchayat Members in Nainital

Table 5

Need of Information	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Political activities	06	28%
Planning activities	09	43%
Educational activities	04	19%
Occupational activities	01	05%
Other activities	01	05%
Total	21	100%

Table-5 indicates that the Zila Panchayat member's information need for 'Planning activities' is 43%. It is followed by 'Political activities' (28%); 'Educational activities' (19%), 'Occupational (5%) and other activities' (5%).

Q.6 Different sources for getting particular information

Table 6

Sources of Information	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Telephone	08	38%
Internet	02	09%
Print sources	05	24%
Colleagues	06	29%
Other Sources	00	00%
Total	21	100%

It shows that telephone (38%) is extensively used by the members to get information. The use of internet (9%) is less when compared to others sources. 'Colleagues' (29%) constitute a very important source followed by 'telephone' (24%). As these two sources are related with human elements, they may be treated as sources of interpersonal communication.

Q.7 Channels of Communication in providing Skills to the Zila Panchayat Members in Nainital-

Table 7

Channels of communication	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Print media	08	38%
Audiovisual media	01	05%
Government publications	03	14%
Resource persons	06	29%
Digital Media	03	14%
Others	00	00%
Total	21	100%

The above data shows that 'print media' is found to be the highest (38%). It is followed by 'resource persons' (29%), 'Government Publications' (14%), 'digital media' (3.56) and 'digital media' (2.91). The data shows to 'audiovisual' is very low (5%), and others is nil.

It is revealed that print media and resource persons are the main channels of communication through which the skills and expertise of imparted to local level planning.

Q.8 Opinion of the Zila Panchayat Members about their difficulty in communication-

Table 8

Barriers of communication	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Lack of ability in public speaking	04	19%
Lack of language fluency	03	14%
Complexity of technical terms	06	29%
Lack of formal education	02	09%
Lack of time	05	24%
Others	01	05%
Total	21	100%

Above data shows that, 'complexity of technical terms' is the highest percentage (29%). The other barriers in the decreasing order of are 'lack of time' (24%), 'lack of ability

in public speaking' (19%), 'lack of language fluency' (14%), 'lack of formal education (9%), 'and 'others' (5%). The presence of barriers in communication among the members indicates their lack of ability and confidence in local planning and governance.

It is found that 'complexity of technical terms used' in the deliberations and 'lack of time' are the major barriers in communication among the Zila Panchayat Members of Nainital District of Uttarakhand.

8. Findings

- 1) In Nainital District of Uttarakhand 43% of Zila Panchayat Members have political background and the political parties do make use of the services provided by the members to the people of the locality and thus achieve rapport with people. The members belonging to others category are not active political activists but may include workers, traders, agriculturists, social workers, students, retired government staff, house wives etc.
- 2) In Nainital District of Uttarakhand 57% are male members and 43% are women members. Women enjoy reservation in Local Self Governments.
- 3) The educational background of the members has direct relationship with the extent of their involvement in different activities. 28% members are Graduate and 24% are Post Graduate which is good.
- 4) Members of Zila Panchayats require information mainly to keep up-to-date in the daily activities and then to provide information to others as can be seen from Table-4.
- 5) Table-5 indicates that the Zila Panchayat member's information need for 'Planning activities' is 43%. It is followed by 'Political activities' (28%); 'Educational activities' (19%), 'Occupational (5%) and other activities' (5%).
- 6) Telephone (38%) is extensively used by the members to get information. The use of internet (9%) is less when compared to others sources. 'Colleagues' (29%) constitute a very important source followed by 'telephone' (24%). As these two sources are related with human elements, they may be treated as sources of interpersonal communication.
- 7) 'Print media' is found to be the highest channel of communication (38%). It is followed by 'resource persons' (29%), 'Government Publications' (14%), 'digital media' (3.56) and 'digital media' (2.91). The data shows to 'audiovisual' is very low (5%), and others is nil.
- 8) 'Complexity of technical terms' is the highest percentage for barriers of communication (29%). The other barriers in the decreasing order of are 'lack of time' (24%), 'lack of ability in public speaking' (19%), 'lack of language fluency' (14%), 'lack of formal education (9%), 'and 'others' (5%). The presence of barriers in communication among the members indicates their lack of ability and confidence in local planning and governance.

9. Conclusion

The elected members of Zila Panchayat in Nainital District of Uttarakhand need various types of information in their daily activities of local level planning and governance. The

lack of awareness of the majority of the members about the information sources and the scattering of information sources make it difficult to get the relevant information at the right time. An efficient information system is necessary to support any development activity in the society.

References

- [1] Khan, Shakeel Ahmad, (2015). "User's Perception of Services Quality of The Central Public Library Bahawalpur". *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal). pp. 1276. 6-29-2015 <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1276>
- [2] Menou, M.J. (1993). *Measuring the impact of information on development*, IDRC. Retrieved May 09, 2013 from <http://web.idrc.ca/openebooks/708-6/>
- [3] Mohammed, Shandana Khan (2005). *Representative decentralization vs. participatory decentralization: critical analysis of the local government plan 2000*. IN: L C Jain, Ed, *Decentralization and Local Governance: essays for George Mathew*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, pp. 275 – 301.
- [4] Naib, S. (2011). *The Right to Information Act 2005: A Handbook*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- [5] Pal, Rakesh Kumar (2006), "Information Needs and Information Seeking Behavior of the Faculty members and Research Scholars of the Department of Botany, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda". *NCIMDiL* 2006, pp.648-56.
- [6] Shailendra, K and Prakash, Hari (2008), *A study of information needs of members of the legislative assembly in the capital city of India*. *ASLIB Proceeding*. 60, 2; 2008; 158 -179.
- [7] Sharma, Arvind Kumar (2007). *Information needs and sharing pattern among rural women: A study*. *IASLIC Bulletin*. 52, 3; 2007; 159 – 167.