

ANALYSING SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES AND UNDERLYING OPPORTUNITIES IN DEVELOPING RURAL AREAS OF HIMACHAL PRADESH, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to identify and analyse the significant socio-economic issues and underlying opportunities in the development of rural areas in the state of Himachal Pradesh, India. The study conducted a critical review of literature and survey-based interview with all the households of five selected villages in the rural areas of Himachal Pradesh. The study identified and analysed major socio-economic issues and challenges of rural areas development on the basis of significant factors like, population, education level, occupation pattern, schemes for rural development, livestock assets, land coverage, basic amenities and road connectivity. The study has been significant in identifying certain areas to pay heed to help and uplift the community like education levels, animal husbandry, agriculture products etc. The study emphasized on major challenges being faced by the rural areas and to create opportunities of gainful self-employment for the rural families, especially disadvantaged sections, ensuring sustainable livelihood, enriched environment, improved quality of life and good human values. continuous awareness campaign regarding state government and central government schemes and designing smart village project could be one step solution for all the challenging issues in the sustainable rural development. The study emphasised on the need for optimum use of resources available and the maximum benefit of schemes provided by the state and central government for the harmonious development of the villages covered under the present study. The overall development of rural areas may be achieved through future development research, effective use of local resources, extension of appropriate technologies and up gradation of skills and capabilities with community participation. Although the scope of study was limited to selected villages in rural areas of Himachal Pradesh, the study could be further applied and extended to other similar parts of the state and other states in north and north eastern part of India.

Keywords: Population, Occupation Pattern, Livestock Assets, Land Coverage, Animal Husbandry, Basic Amenities, Community Participation, Road Connectivity.

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Geographic Society “A rural area is an open swath of land that has few homes or other buildings, and not very many people. A rural area’s population density is very low.” As per 2011 census, India’s two-third of the total population and 70 per cent of the working population lives in villages, that is, 800 million people living in more than 600,000 villages, that makes India a rural country. Rural sector has a better female workforce participation rate of 30.02 per cent compared with 53.03 per cent for males. In rural, the state Himachal Pradesh has maximum female workforce participation rate i.e., 47.4. Workforce participation is more or less equal for rural and urban males, however there is a huge gap in rural and urban females’ workforce participation. Rural India has more than 50 per cent workers in self-employed category as compared to Urban India. The Government's policy and programmes have laid emphasis on poverty alleviation, generation of employment and income

opportunities and provision of infrastructure and basic facilities to meet the needs of rural people.

The government of India has started many schemes for the development of rural India. The introduction of Bharat Nirman, a project by the Government of India in collaboration with the State Governments and the Panchayati Raj Institutions is a major step towards the improvement of the rural sector. Some of the major schemes started by the State Government of Himachal Pradesh are mentioned below.

Community Development Programme: This program, aims at the development of community with the initiative and participation of the community itself. The grant -in-aid is being provided to the Panchayat Samitis under the head Social Education and General Education for developmental activities in the social educational fields. Funds are provided to the Blocks for the construction and completion of staff residential buildings and Gram Sewak huts. Besides, the funds are also provided for completion of on-going office buildings. The provision of the funds is made for providing staff salary of the employees posted at various levels. Grants are also provided for the promotion / strengthening of Mahila Mandals, incentive awards to Mahila Mandals and organisation of awareness camps for non-officials etc.

Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana: This Yojana is a holistic package covering all aspect of self-employment such as organisation of poor into Self Help Groups, Training, Credit, Technology, Infrastructure and Marketing. The beneficiaries under this scheme are called "*Swarozgaris*". The objective of SGSY is to bring the assisted poor families above the poverty line, by providing them income-generating assets. This scheme is a credit-cum-subsidy programme. Subsidy under SGSY is uniform at 30% of the project cost subject to a maximum limit of Rs.7500/-. In respect of SCs/STs and disabled persons the maximum limit is 50% and Rs.10000/- respectively. For groups of swarozgaris (SHGs), the subsidy is 50% of the project cost subject to per capita subsidy of Rs.10,000 /- or Rs.1.25 lacs whichever is less.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme: In the first phase, the National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme (NREGS) was introduced in District Chamba and Sirmour on 2nd February, 2006. In second phase NREGS was started in District Kangra and Mandi w.e.f. 1-4-2007. The third phase covered all the remaining 8 districts of the State under the scheme w.e.f. 1.4.2008.

Indira Awaas Yojana: Indira Awas Yojana is a Centrally sponsored scheme. Under this scheme, the assistance has been enhanced from Rs.27500/- per beneficiary to Rs.38500/- per beneficiary, and is being given to BPL families for the construction of new houses. Gram Sabha does the selection of beneficiaries under this scheme. This scheme is being financed by Centre and State Government on 75:25 sharing basis.

Atal Awaas Yojana: This scheme is being implemented on the pattern of Indira Awaas Yojana.

National Family Benefit Scheme: In case of the death of a breadwinner of a family living below the poverty line a financial assistance of Rs.10,000/- per family is provided to bereaved family.

Total Sanitation Campaign Projects: With a view to ensure total sanitation in the rural areas the department is implementing Total Sanitation Campaign Projects in 7 districts of the State viz Sirmour, Hamirpur, Kangra, Kullu, Kinnaur and Una. A new sanitation strategy for the State has been approved. This strategy aims at introduction of a holistic concept of sanitation, to have a demand oriented, outcome based approach, to generate awareness of a '*need*' for sanitation amongst people individually and as a community, involvement and ownership of the community, shift from individual subsidies to community incentives, local bodies undertaking responsibility for sustainable delivery of services, identifying appropriate institutional arrangements for delivery of services including partnership with NGOs/ CBOs and address interdepartmental co-ordination, emphasize on monitoring and evaluation to determine

success and outcomes. A key component of the new State Sanitation Strategy is a Reward Scheme to make awards to the cleanest gram Panchayat in each block, district, division and the State.

Mahila Mandal Protsahan Yojana: With a view to strengthen the Mahila Mandals and to ensure that they are involved in the process of development, the department during 1998-99 has introduced Mahila Mandal Protsahan Yojana. A sum of Rs. 65.00 lacs have been provided during 2004-05 to provide incentives to Mahila Mandals. The incentives being provided are based upon their performance in various fields such as Family Planning & Child Welfare, Promotion of Small Savings, Eradication of social evils and participation in literacy campaigns.

In addition to all these schemes started by the government, a flagship program Unnat Bharat Abhiyan (UBA) has been started by the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India, with the aim to link the Higher Education Institutions with a set of at least five villages by contributing their economic, human, technological and social resources to the area for their upliftment. The vision of this Unnat Bharat Abhiyan is to involve professional and other higher educational institutions of the country in the process of indigenous development of self-sufficient and sustainable village clusters in tune with the notion of “*GramSwaraj*” propounded by Mahatma Gandhi.

In this reference, the present study made an attempt to gain an insight into the rural area activities of the selected villages. The study is based on identifying socio-economic issues and underlying opportunities in the selected villages for devising systems for the smooth implementation of various Government Programs. The study further explores the use of existing resources and suggests methods for the optimum use of the available resources and schemes for rural areas development in the state of Himachal Pradesh. The study included cluster of five selected villages to effectively participate in their holistic development using eco-friendly sustainable technologies and local resources creating sufficient employment opportunities in the process, harnessing various Govt. schemes as well as the efforts of voluntary organizations. Further the study looks forward to reorient the ethos, the academic curricula and research programs in higher institutions to make these more comparable as per the need of nation including rural areas thus contributing to capacity building towards indigenous development.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to AnnepuYakanna (2017),

“Rural development is the backbone for any country's economic development and it helps the economy to grow and sustain. Rural development is the axis of the economy involving the labour ethics impacting the potential of business in big way. It is a popular belief that economic development takes place because of rapid industrialization”.

Kiran Mazumdar Shaw (2019) cited in his research paper that,

“The widening urban-rural divide is also evident in the inequalities in consumption, quality of life, and availability of physical and social infrastructure and to ensure inclusive economic economy to pull the maximum number of people out of subsistence farming and give them a much more remunerative role”.

A study by Dr. P. SRINIVASA RAO (2020) on Rural Development Schemes in India concludes,

“The dwindling literacy rates in rural India, especially for females, are a major matter of concern. There is a need for land and technical reforms. Modern technologies like organic farming should be incorporated

to improve outputs and profits. The people should be given access to easy credit and loans by improving the banking system in rural areas”.

In the research paper Rural Development Schemes in India with special reference to Impact of Mgnregs Vellore District in Tamil Nadu by V. Rajalakshmi, Dr. V. Selvam (2020) mentions,

“The key strategies of the government for rural development have always focused on poverty alleviation, better livelihood opportunities, provision of basic amenities and infrastructure facilities through innovative programmes of wage and self-employment. In order to facilitate an environment for job creation and employment generation in rural areas, various government programmes are in operation”.

As foreseen by Gandhi Ji in his seminal work, ‘*Hind Swaraj*’, the western developmental paradigm, based on centralized technologies and urbanization, has given rise to serious problems like increasing inequity (leading to crime and violence), and climate change due to rapid ecological degradation. To ameliorate these problems, it is necessary to promote development of rural areas in tune with Gandhian vision of self-sufficient ‘*village republics*’, based on local resources and using decentralized, eco-friendly technologies so that the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, health care, energy, livelihood, transportation, and education are locally met. This should be the vision of holistic development of villages. Presently, 70% of the population in India lives in rural areas engaged in agrarian economy with agriculture and allied sector employing 51% of the total work-force but accounting for only 17% of the country’s GDP. There are huge developmental disconnects between the rural and urban sectors such as inequity in health, education, incomes and basic amenities as well as employment opportunities - all causing great discontent and large-scale migration to urban areas. The imperatives of sustainable development which are being felt more and more acutely all over the world also demand eco-friendly development of the villages and creation of appropriate employment opportunities locally. Increasing urbanization is neither sustainable nor desirable. So far, our professional higher education institutions have largely been oriented to cater to the mainstream industrial sector and, barring a few exceptions, have hardly contributed directly to the development of the rural sector. The present study focused on the need for identifying socio economic issues in rural developmental and exploring various opportunities in this direction.

Research Design

The present study is based on village and household survey conducted in five selected villages namely Sargheen, Kiara, Dochi, Pajarli and Bhuliain in the rural areas of Shimla District in the state of Himachal Pradesh during the month of August to October 2020. The data have been collected through structured schedule design by the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India under Unnat Bharat Abhiyan. The collected data have been analysed on the basis of significant factors like, population, education level, occupation pattern, schemes for rural development, livestock assets, land coverage, basic amenities and road connectivity.

Objectives of the Study

1. Gaining an insight into the rural area activities in the selected villages of Himachal Pradesh.
2. Identifying the socio- economic issues and underlying opportunities for the smooth implementation of various rural development programs of the Government.
3. Identifying and selecting existing resources and suggesting methods for the optimum use of the available resources and schemes for overall development of rural areas.

Analysis and Discussion

The five villages selected under the present study stated an average population of 5 members per family Figure 1. Further the gender ratio shown in figure 2 in the five villages are almost equal, which indicates that there is no biasness towards a particular gender, however education for males and female till primary level is same but at higher educational level, a high number of dropouts in both genders and preferably more in females has been reported (figure 3). The disparity is clearly stated in the following figures, that education is free up to primary level in the government school of Himachal Pradesh, but as it started costing, the people are interested investing in education to only one half of the gender consortium. The cultural beliefs could be the important factor responsible for this. Providing education to girls in school is not only fundamental to achieving broader equality between the genders, but has significant positive ripple-on effects that could improve the wider well-being of rural communities.

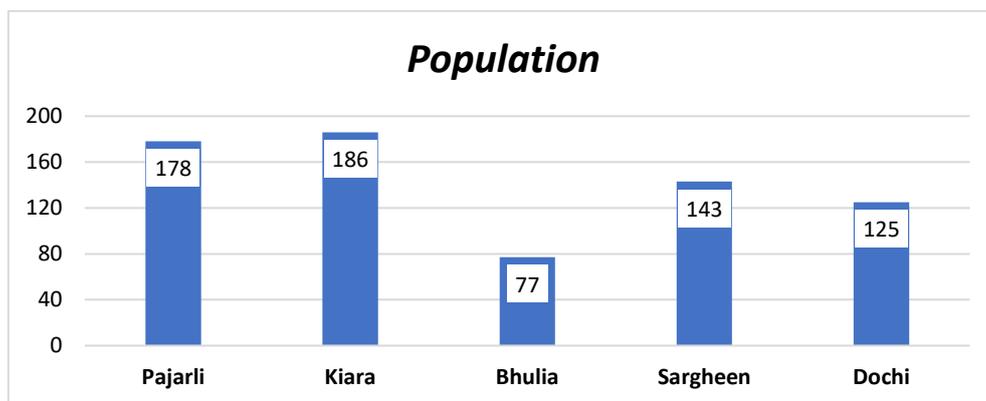


Figure 1
POPULATION VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

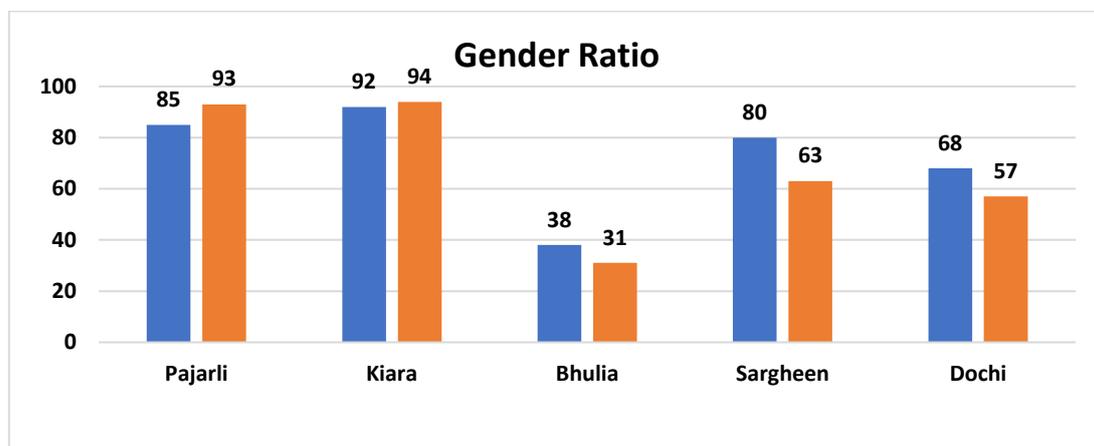


Figure 2
GENDER RATIO VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

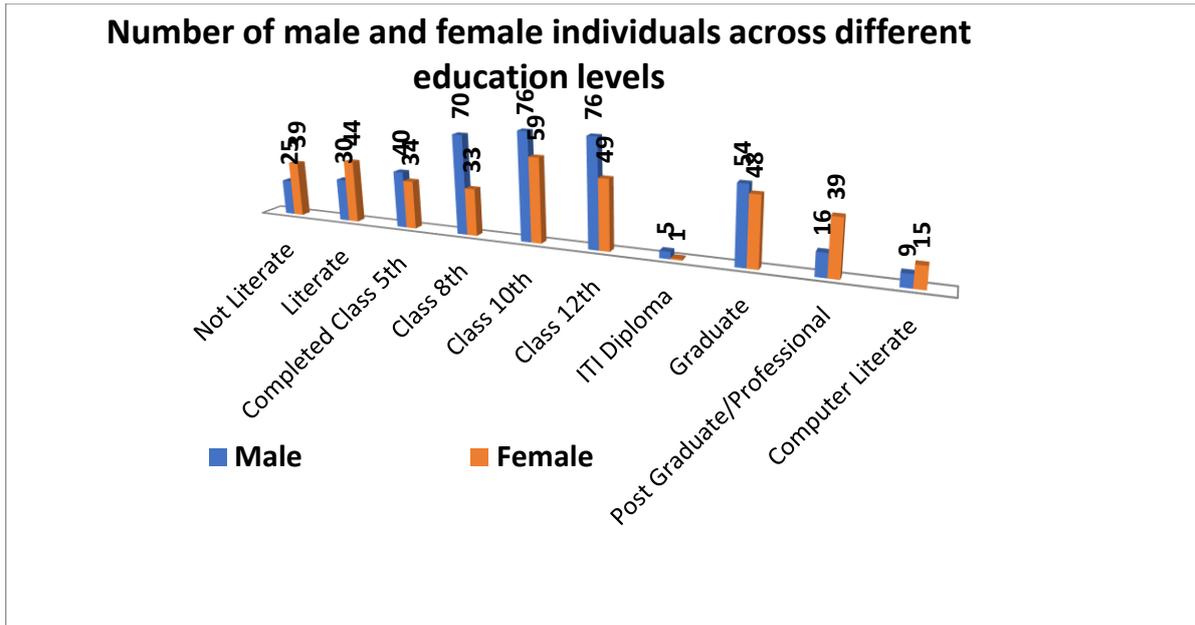


Figure 3
GENDER VS EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

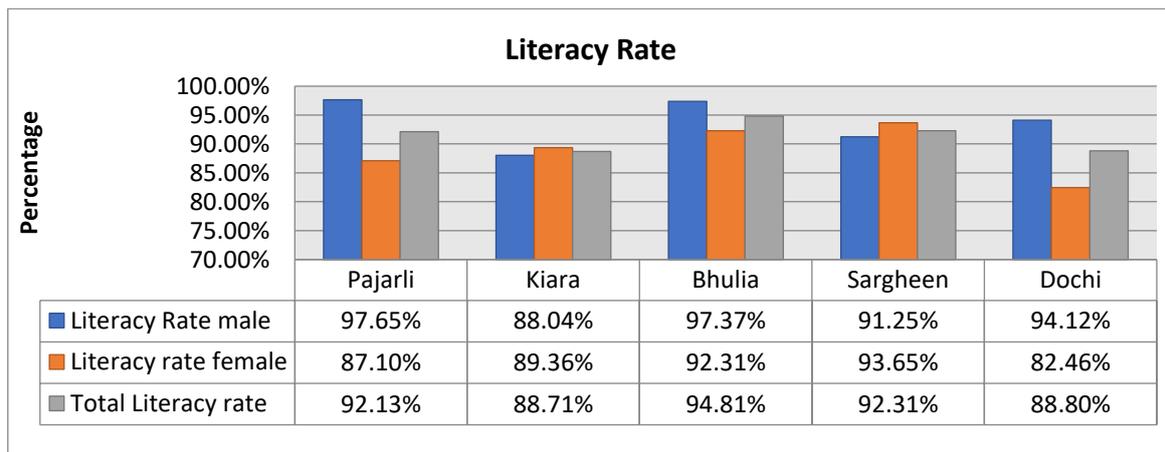


Figure 4
LITERACY RATE VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

Figure 4 above shows that male literacy rate is highest than that of the female literacy rate in the villages under study. It can be stated from this figure 4 that lowest literacy rate has been reported 88.71% whereas maximum literacy rate has been reported 94.81% which is higher than the average literacy rate in the state.

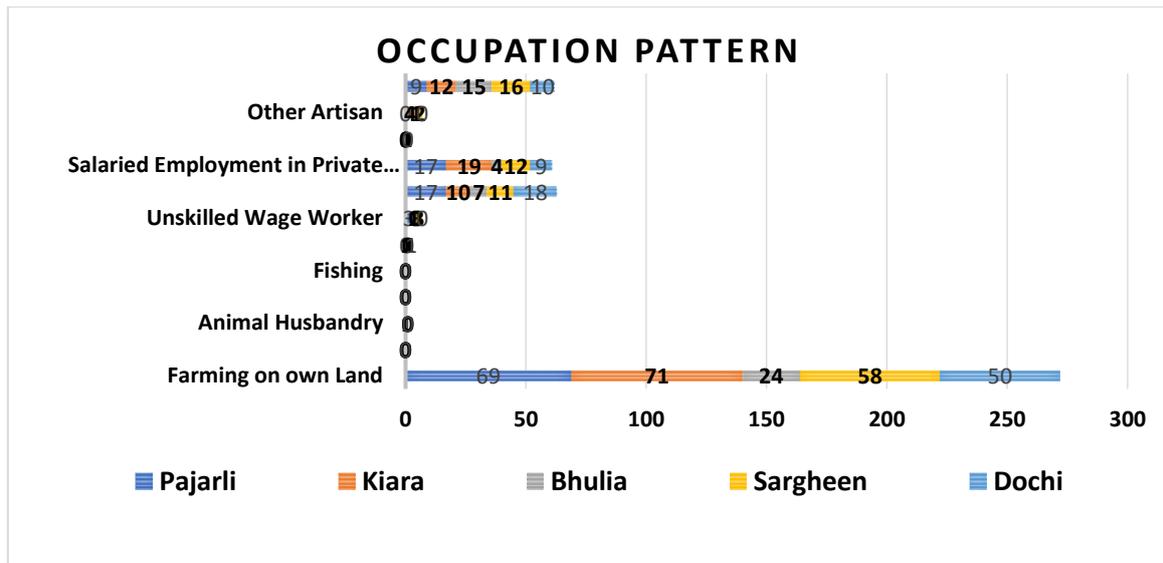


Figure 5
OCCUPATION PATTERN VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

Figure 5 indicates that majority of people in the selected villages having reported farming on own land as their major occupation. The other category of people has reported their occupation as working in private and govt sector and other trade and business etc. The Government of India and the state government in Himachal Pradesh lunched number of schemes for development of rural areas. The rural India facing the major problems of housing, absence of infrastructure in villages and towns to village connectivity by all-weather roads and absence of employment opportunities in villages. It can be stated that only two government schemes are being availed by the locals, that too only on an average 5% of the population per village Figure 6.

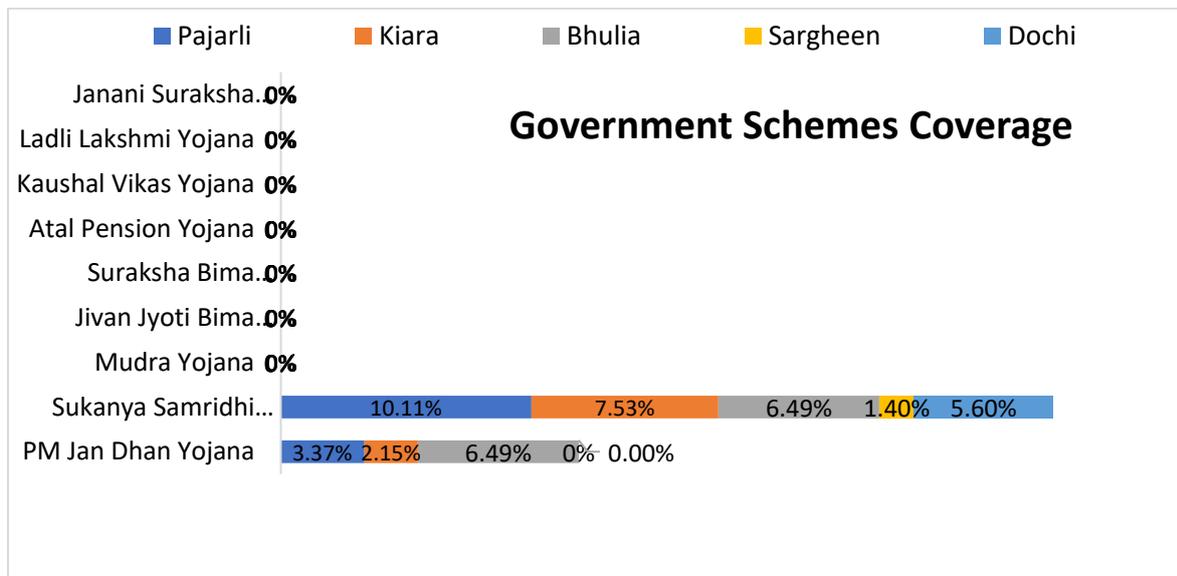


Figure 6
PERCENTAGE OF GOVT. SCHEMES COVERAGE VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

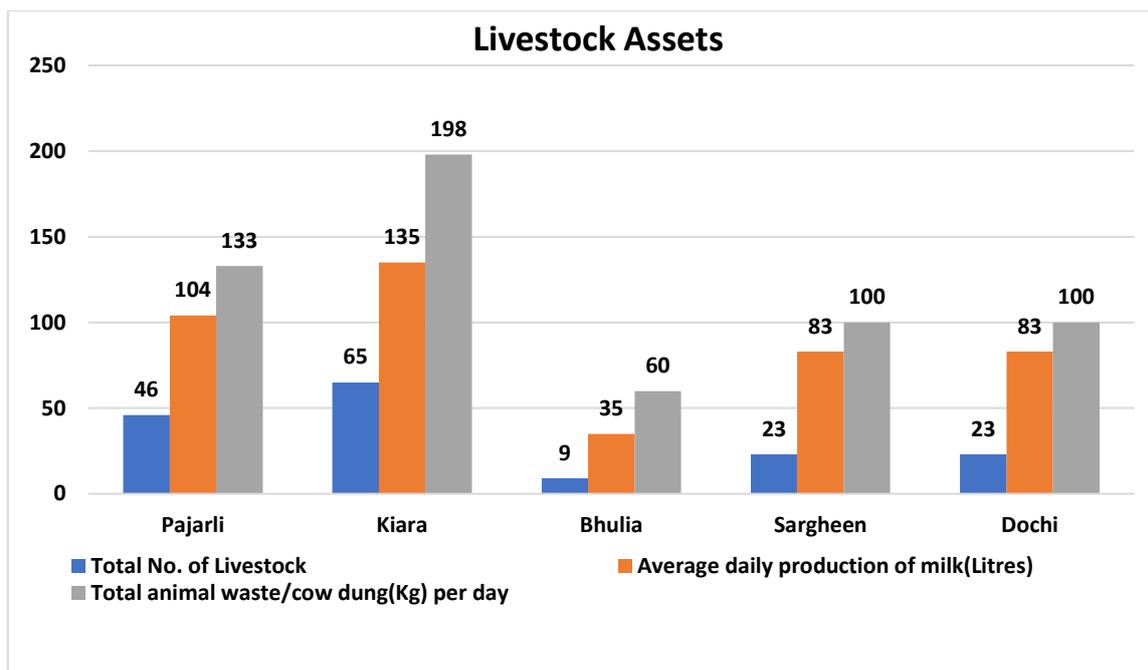


Figure 7
LIVESTOCK ASSETS VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

The majority of the population reported livestock assets namely cows, buffaloes, sheep, goats, etc. The Figure 7 states the average daily production of milk and animal waste, in the selected villages. The figure shows that as per available numbers of livestock, the production of milk is very low. The animal waste is also not used properly, since it could be helpful for generating biofuel.

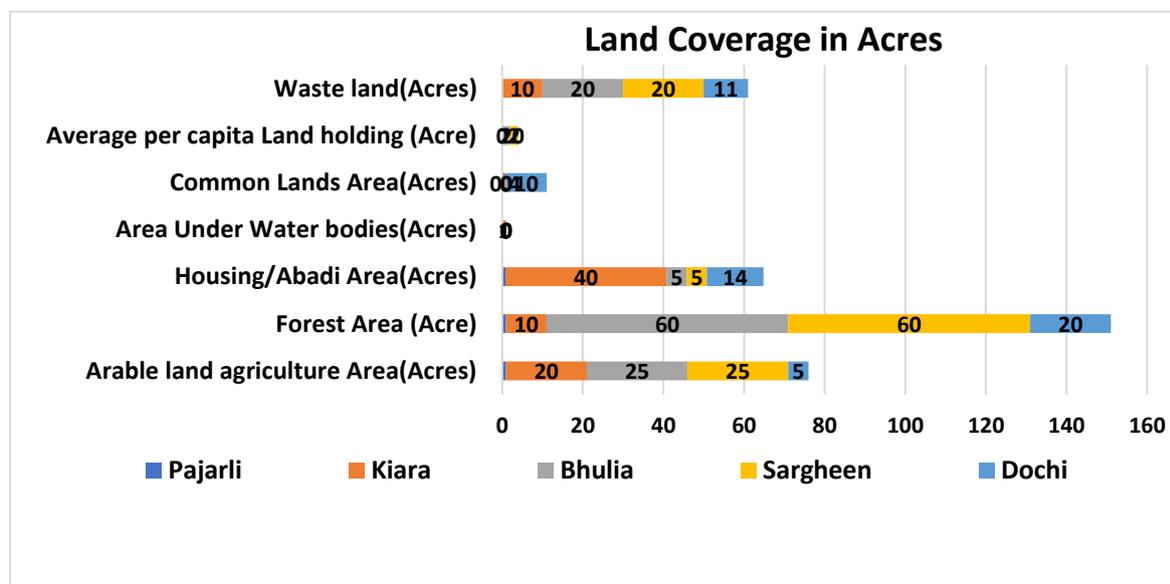


Figure 8
LAND COVERAGE IN ACRES VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

It can be observed from the Figure 8 that the available Forest land areas could be used for animal grazing and further could be helpful for increasing the benefits from livestock.

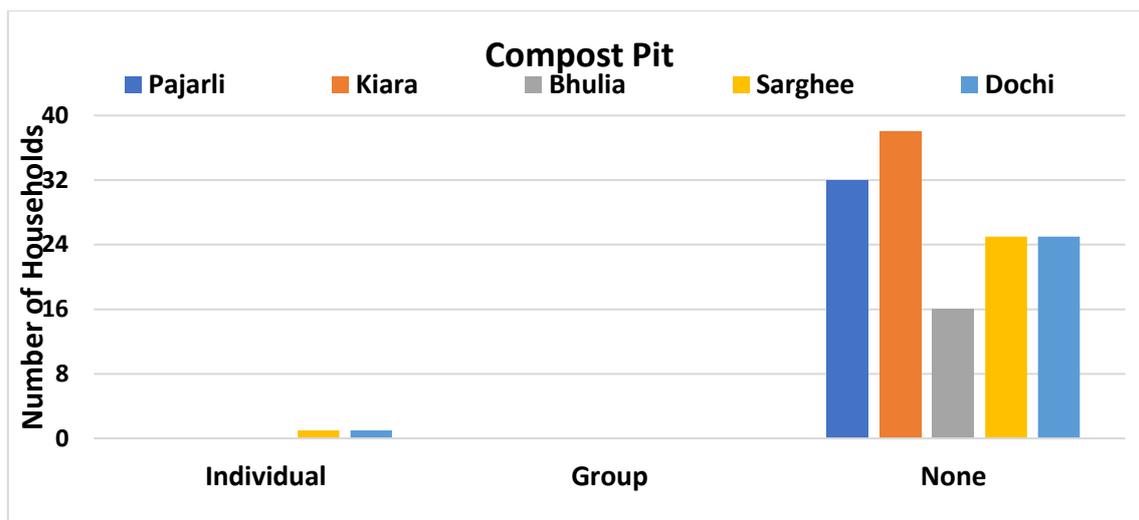


Figure 9
COMPOST PIT VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

Figure 9 indicates that no any selected village reported to have a compost pit or household waste collection system. Compost pit allows the recycling and reusing of the waste that helps in creating alternative resources and also maintaining the cleanliness. The main objective of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan or Clean India Misision is to keep India clean.

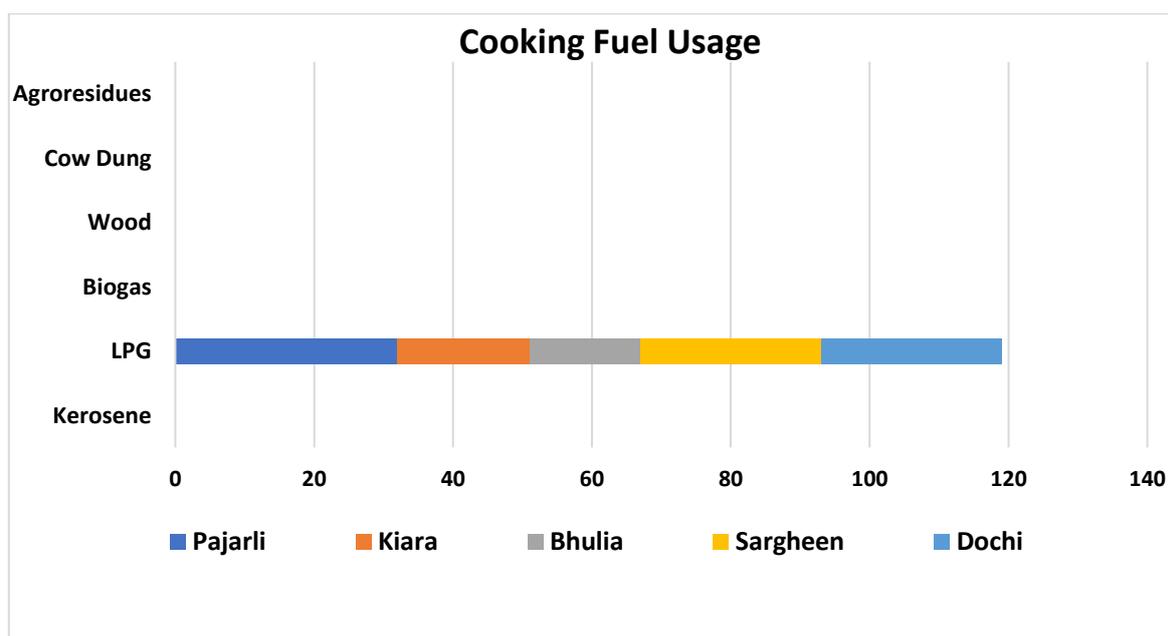


Figure 10
Cooking Fuel USAGE VS VILLAGE (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

In Figure 10 above it is stated that all the household reported to have the usage of LPG. LPG (Liquid Petroleum Gas) is being used in each household of every village, for cooking which states that locals are using cleaner fuel. However, people in selected villages only dependent on one fuel, since LPG is non-renewable gas, it is present in limited amount. The shifting of load to another fuel source for example, bio fuel as stated earlier could be the cleaner and renewable option for usage in rural areas. Further majority of people in one village reported to have usage of Traditional Cooking Chullah as shown in Figure 11.

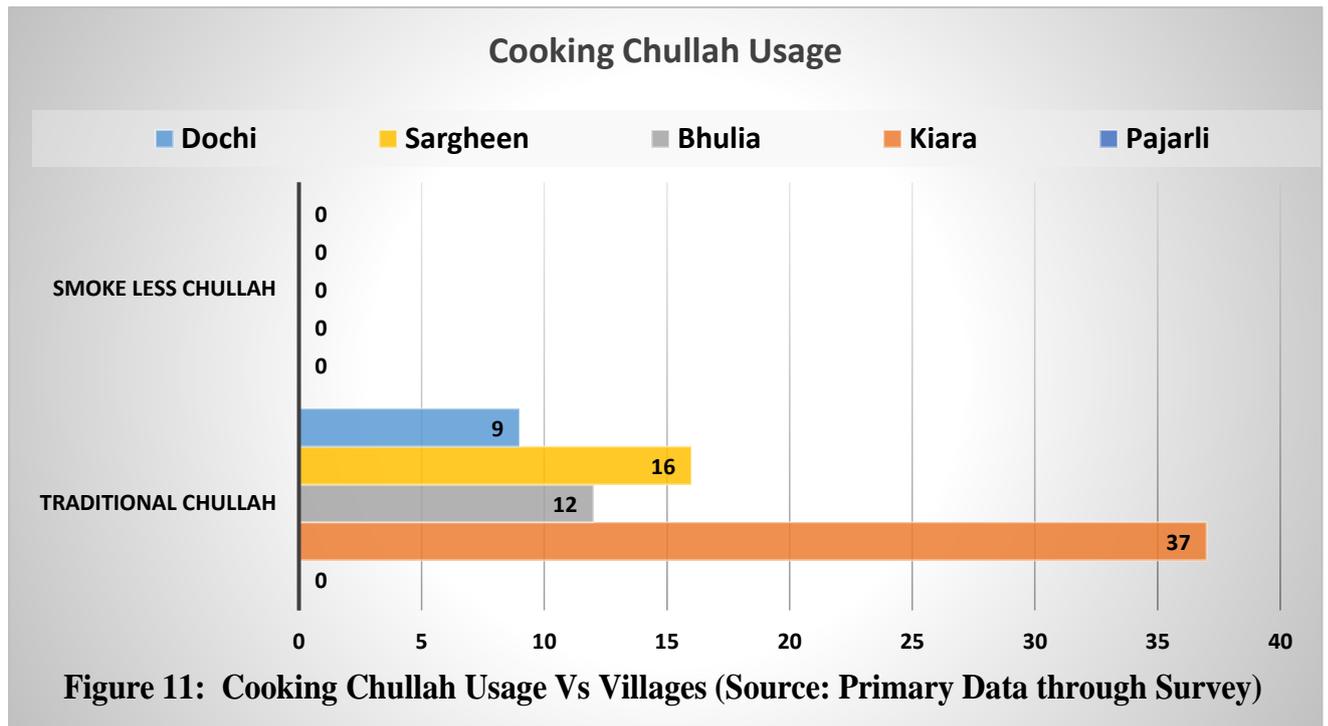


Figure 11: Cooking Chullah Usage Vs Villages (Source: Primary Data through Survey)

Figure 11
COOKING CHULLAH USAGE VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

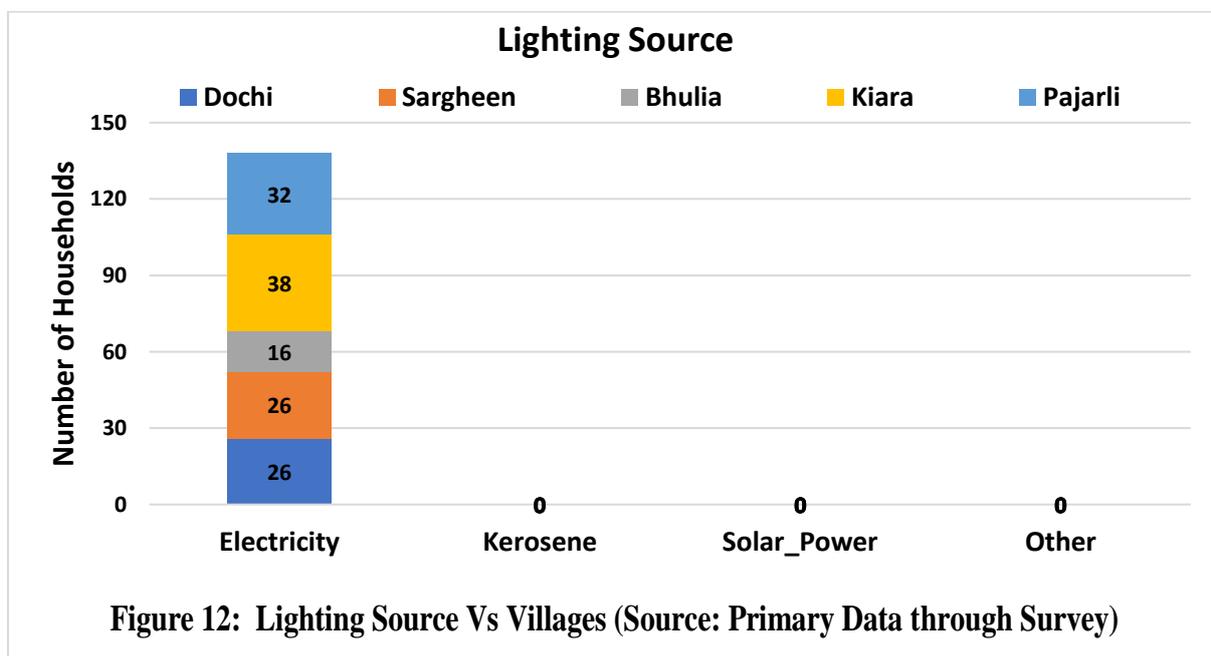


Figure 12: Lighting Source Vs Villages (Source: Primary Data through Survey)

Figure 12
LIGHTING SOURCE VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

All the households reported to have electricity as the lighting source (Figure12). For lighting; locals are only dependent on electricity. Awaking them about other resources besides electricity could be an important measure for shifting the pressure.

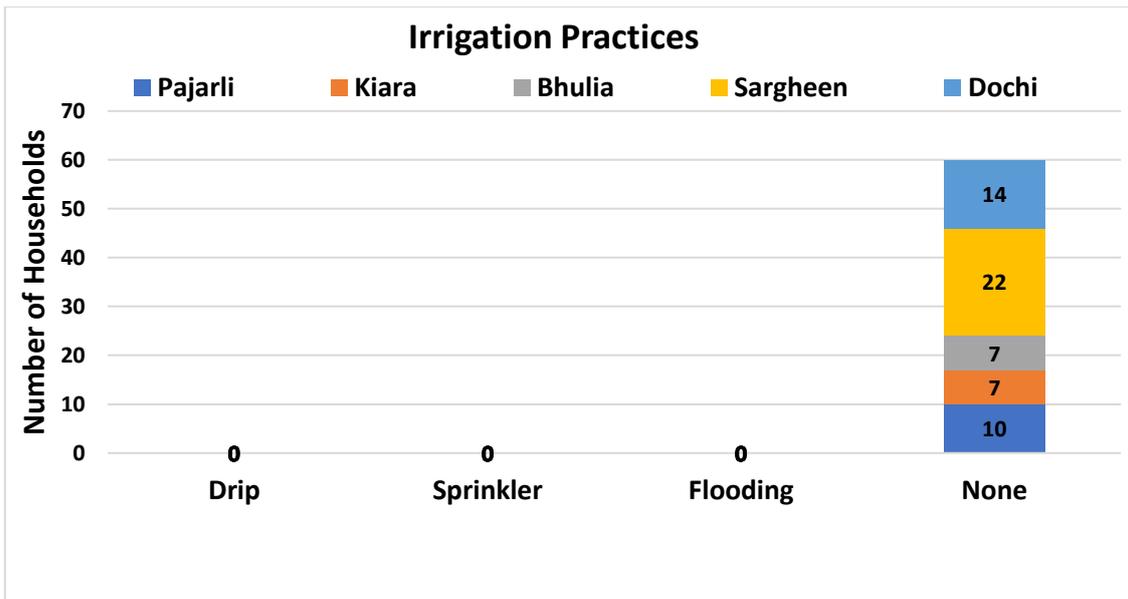


Figure 13
IRRIGATION PRACTICES VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

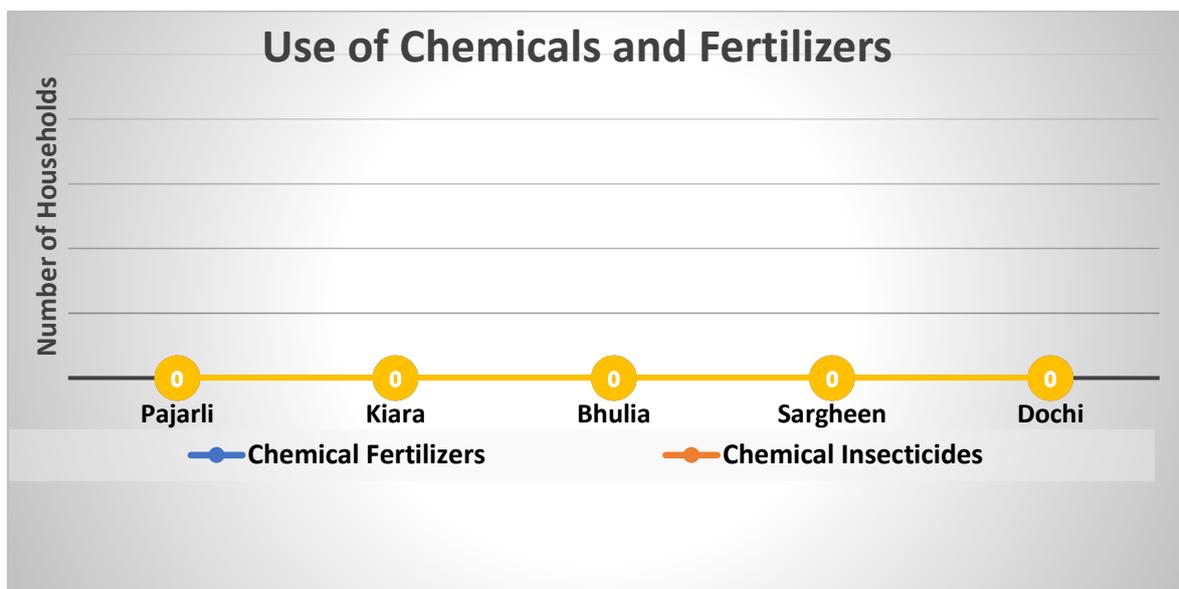


Figure 14
CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS USE VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

Figure 13 and Figure 14 state that people in the selected villages reported to have no irrigation facilities and not using any kind of chemicals or fertilizers. It can be stated that the people in the selected villages are totally dependent on rainfall for irrigation. The farming is totally organic in nature and further could be significant to scale this type of farming and farming products. The locals need to be assisted to adopt different type of irrigation practices so as to get maximum yield.

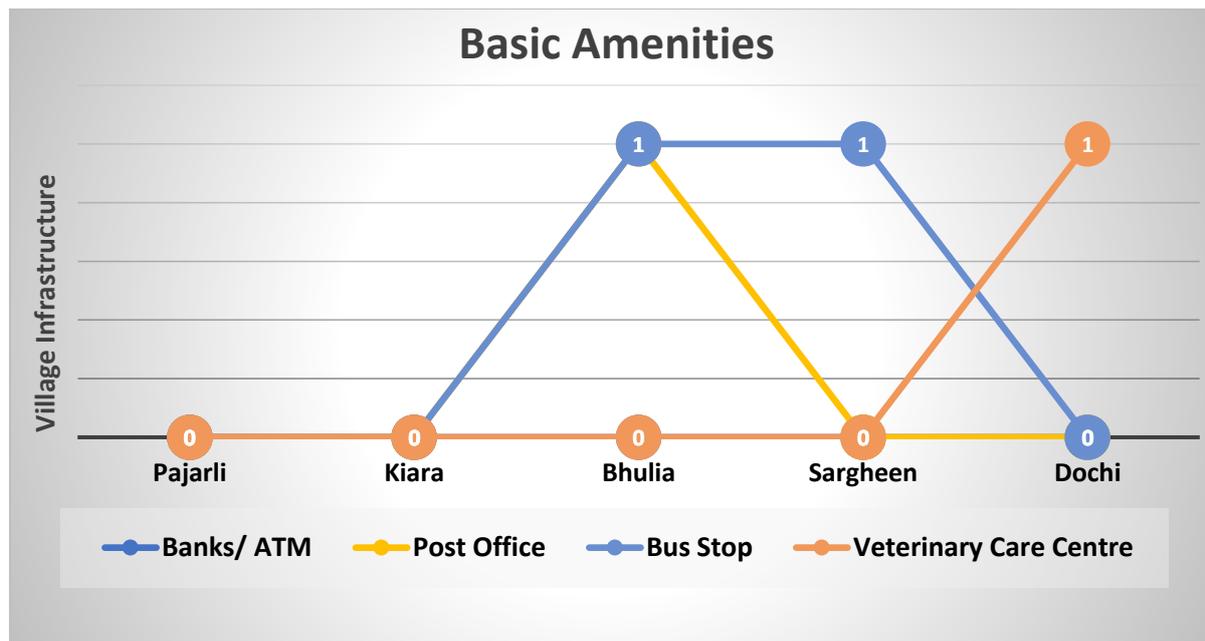


Figure 15
COMPOST PIT VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

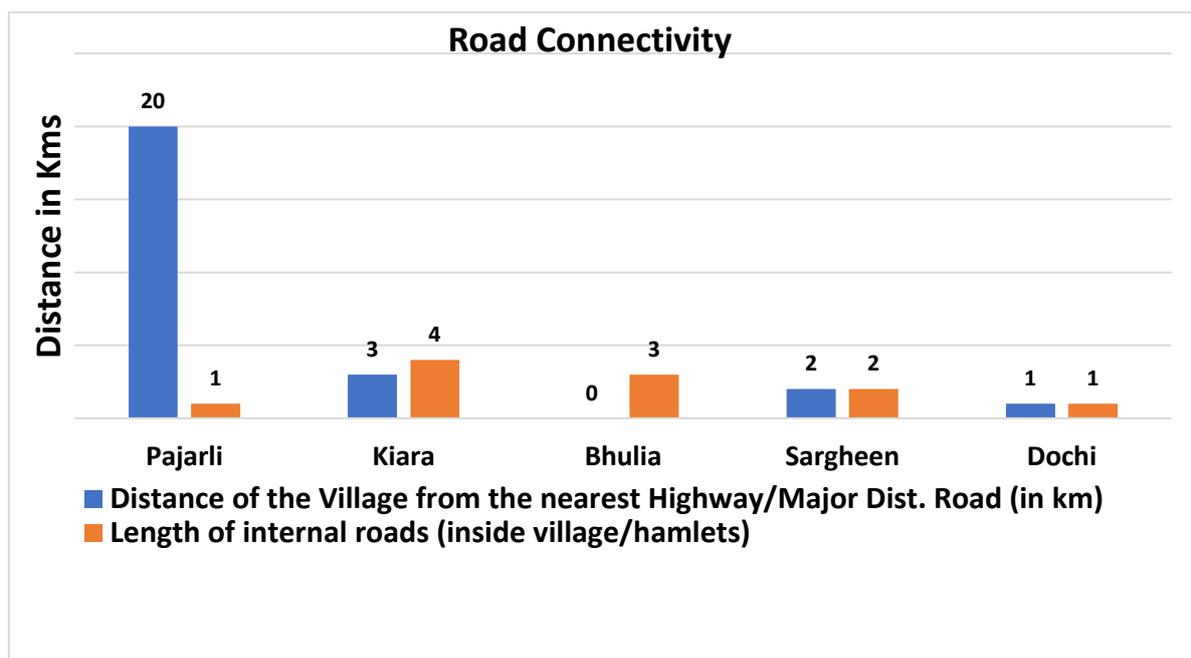


Figure 16
ROAD CONNECTIVITY VS VILLAGES (SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA THROUGH SURVEY)

The basic amenities considered to be essential to make life easier and more pleasant that consists of a post office, a bus stop, a veterinary care centre in the rural areas. Figure 15 indicates the basic amenities in the selected villages and Figure 16 states that for bank or post offices facilities rural people have to travel to city area.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that there are major socio- economic issues being faced by the rural areas like literacy rate, gender biasness, lack of proper use of resources and schemes due to people's lack of awareness and community participation. The study strongly recommended for the awareness campaigns to educate the locals regarding educating girl child, how to properly use the resources available, environment sensitization, available government schemes, The Government of India and the state government started many schemes for developing rural areas, but the major problem is people are not aware of these schemes, so the first and foremost thing is to make people aware about all the benefits that they can avail for improving the standard of living.

Further, the study stated many government schemes related to animal husbandry could help the locals, mostly females who are indulged in livestock raising, and they only need help so that they can have financial gains from this activity. The number of livestock assets could be increased since the forest areas and government areas adjoining the selected villages could be a significant place for animal grazing. The small-scale plant could be set up in these areas for the processing of agricultural products and rearing of animals.

The study reported no compost pit and no household waste collection system in any of the selected villages. Educating locals about all the harmful effects of degrading the environment, keeping surroundings clean can actually have significant impact on the locals awareness level towards the clean and green environment.

The study further concluded that the use of renewable source of energy and to make rural people aware about the bio fuel, solar power, irrigation practices may help in yielding the maximum output as well as to have better standard of living in the selected villages under study. Lastly the study observed the need for land and technical reforms. Modern technologies like organic agriculture should further be incorporated to improve outputs and profits. The rural people of the selected villages under study need to be aware of regarding easy credit and loans provided by the banking system for these rural areas. The economic development touches the life of people and integrates the people, process and technology.

Acknowledgement

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