

Saksham Chamoli – “Har Vote Jaruri Hai”

Life in a hilly district comes with a plethora of daily struggles- resources are scarce, connectivity is a challenge and basic services are nothing but blessings. With so less in hand yet so much to meet the expectations of general public and other stakeholders involved, the electoral management becomes an uphill task. The mountainous terrain has for long created a barrier among voters, especially Divyang (PwD) voters in realising the power of their vote.

In Chamoli - a remote border district in Uttarakhand, having nearly 3 lakh voters, around 1% (3101) were identified as PwD voters out of which 70 voted through postal ballot. District authorities in cognizance with the ECI’s goal of “No Voter to be left behind”, launched a campaign called Saksham Chamoli in the district on 31st January 2022, prior to the Vidhan Sabha General Elections,2022. The aim was to overcome the issue of accessibility of polling station for PwD voters.

Saksham Chamoli Volunteers interacting with Divyang Voters



Gairsain



Joshimath



Narayanbagar



Mandal

A team to volunteers consisting of NCC Cadets, Anganwadi workers and college students was deployed to reach out to all identified PwD voters across the district. With the help of BLO’s and local level officials, the volunteer team met with PwD voters to motivate and encourage them to cast their votes, information on any special assistance (like Dolis, wheelchairs) needed by PwD voters to reach to their respective polling station was also collected during these interactions. Based on this information a concrete strategy in terms of logistics and manpower was chalked out for the polling day. To propagate the message of Inclusive, Accessible and Participative elections, Election Commission of India’s PwD mobile App was widely

publicised among the PwD voters through SVEEP activities and Saksham Chamoli volunteers.

On the day of polling Saksham Chamoli volunteers with the help of District administration carried PwD voters from their homes to their polling stations in dolis and on wheelchairs through rocky, arduous and desolate terrain.

Election officials and Saksham Chamoli Volunteers working tirelessly in Polling Day



Gauchar



Karnprayag



Gadora



Joshimath



Dewal



Pokhri



Gairsain



Tharali

The success of this effort was in fact tremendous, compared to last elections where PwD voter turnout residing in the district stood at 42%, it rose to whopping 79.9% in the Assembly elections of 2022. Once again proving that determination of officials and people's faith in democratic process will always lead us into an inclusive and accessible tomorrow.

Dumak – A tale of organising elections in the one of the remotest villages of Uttarakhand

Located in the lap of Himalayas, in district Chamoli of Uttarakhand, Dumak is a small village with an electoral population of 246 voters. Situated at an elevation of 8258 feet, the village hosts the remotest polling booth in our state in terms of accessibility and conducting the polls successfully here becomes a great challenge owing to geographical constraints.

A team of polling officials equipped with EVM/VVPATs, medical kits, Covid kits (gloves, masks, sanitizers, thermal scanners, bins) and EVM compartments left for Dumak at 10:30 am on 12th February, two days prior to the polling day from Gopeshwar (district headquarters). Covering a distance of 32 kms by road, the polling team reached Pakhi, from where all the electoral equipment was loaded on mules and a tedious journey on foot began.



Going downhill to cross river Alaknanda, a steep uphill trek led the team to village Pokhni. By the time polling team reached their next stop (Unchogwad) it was already quite dark. The team continued their arduous journey following the foot trail using flashlights to reach their overnight stay point (village Kalgot) at 10:30 pm. The polling team trekked for over 20 kms on foot to reach this spot. The next day, at dawn, the team left Kalgot to cover the remaining 10kms of their journey to reach village Dumak by 10:30am.



Due to lack of network connectivity in Dumak, an intricate communication network was established using wireless network to share information from Dumak to Kalgot and from Kalgot it was forwarded to district control room. On 13th February, the polling team setup their booth at Government Higher Primary School, Dumak and on 14th February, polls were conducted in a peaceful manner. Out of 246 registered voter (Males-129, Females- 117), a total of 175 votes were cast with a polling percentage of 71.1%.



After a successful polling day, the team had their overnight stay at Dumak and left for Gopeshwar in the wee hours of 15th February and reached headquarters by 5:00pm, making them one of the last team to report to their respective Returning Officer.

The very nature of complete journey shows the will and perseverance of all the team officials involved and highlights the dedication of the whole election machinery to achieve the goal of “No Voter to be left Behind” in pursuance of accessible and inclusive elections.