

ESTABLISHING LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRUST: A CASE OF WOMEN'S GROUP FROM NEPAL



Reimagining the feminist initiative in climate resilience would not have been possible if it were not for the women's agencies refusing the role of “passive beneficiaries” and collectively choosing to dismantle patriarchal barriers to rewrite their own climate realities.

“
*If this women's group
are able to do any
environmental work, I
will cut off my ears.*”

That was the official response from a local Ward Chairperson when **Sahayatra Nepal**, a newly formed women's organization of Ilam Municipality in the eastern part of Nepal, first attempted to engage in local climate governance. The deeply entrenched, siloed patriarchy that prefers to interpret women as passive victims of climate change. That was then. Today, the narrative has completely changed.

The same municipal authorities are not just listening to Sahayatra Nepal; they are legally mandating them to co-govern local climate policy. The rise of Sahayatra Nepal from a marginalized collective facing open hostility to an indispensable political force offers a masterclass in civil society engagement.

Building power, trust and governance: A 360 approach to accountability

Sahayatra Nepal recognized early on the strategy to combat systemic exclusion. Alongside **Prakriti Resources Centre (PRC)**, they built a **Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP)**. This was not just another community meeting; it was a strategic move that involved fragmented community voices from forest user groups, farmers, marginalized citizens, to media personnel into a unified bargaining bloc.

FIGURE 1: 360-DEGREE ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL

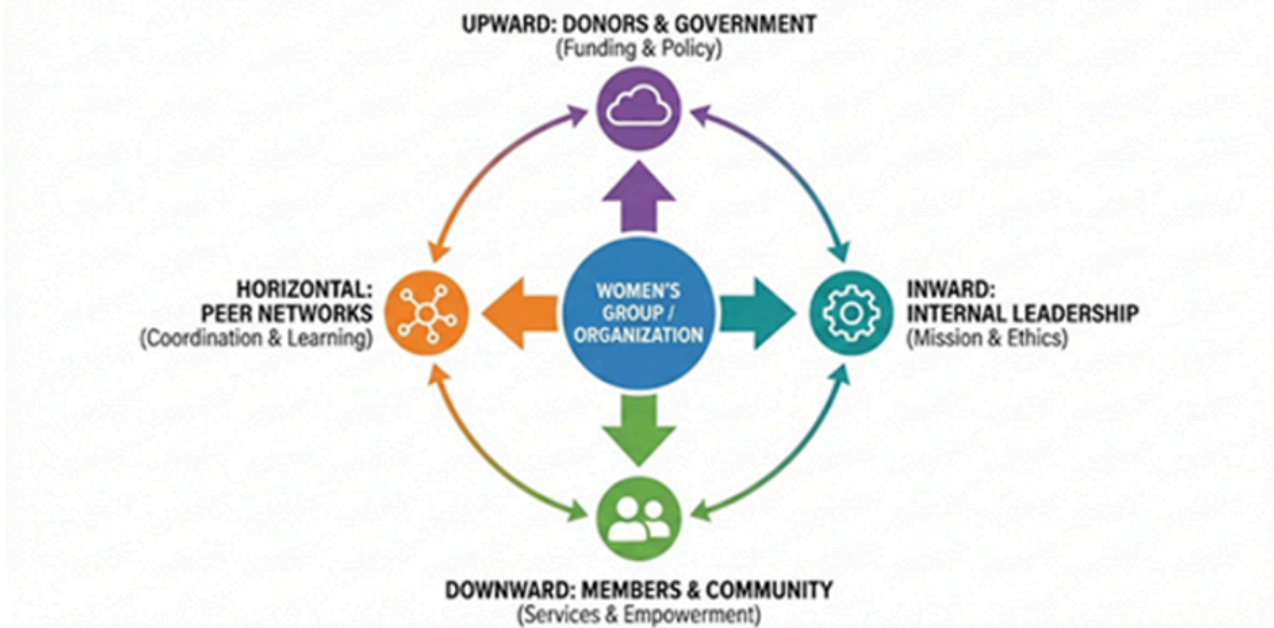


Figure 1: 360 Degree Accountability Model

Accountability and Communication Flowchart

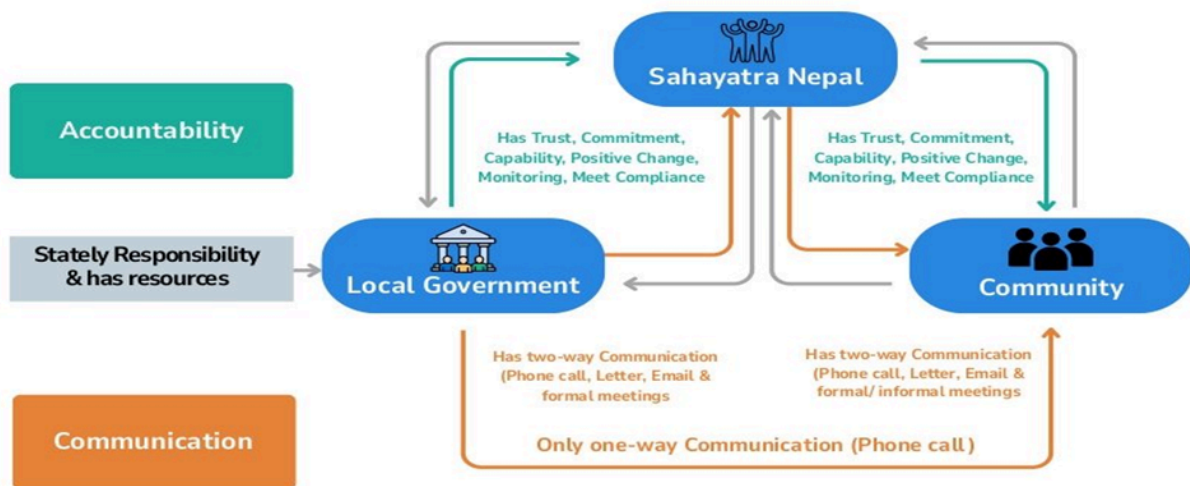


Figure 2: Accountability and Communication Flowchart.

They held the local government to its statutory responsibilities and matched grassroots demands with undeniable technical competence, encouraging local leaders to engage. They did not just demand, they dismantled and rebuilt it further; it perfectly fit in with the **framework of 360-degree accountability**.

While standard development interventions often hold rigid system of **"upward accountability"**, Sahayatra Nepal's success is rooted in a panoramic approach to trust and governance. They operate in four directions simultaneously:



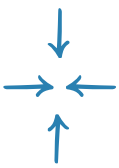
Downward (to the Community):

Climate plans must serve the most vulnerable. Sahayatra encourages the [MA1] inclusion of indigenous, elderly, and marginalized populations in ward-level consultations. They conduct public social audits and maintain open complaint mechanisms to guarantee the community actually benefits. [MA1]Suggest : encourages, supports, facilitates or another softer word



Horizontal (to Peers):

Through the MSP model, they maintain transparent, constructive dialogue with other local stakeholders, ensuring their interventions like water conservation benefit the entire local economy, including agriculture and forestry.



Inward (to Mission and Ethics):

Their foundation is built on strict internal discipline that the women established for themselves. Rather than adopting outside templates, the group authored their own by-laws and norms. Furthermore, structurally designed to prevent elite capture, they enforce strict term limits (no one serves as Chairperson for more than two terms) and maintain absolute political neutrality.



Upward (to Government and Funders):

They proved they could speak the language of the state. Their financial reporting, transparent budgeting, and technical master planning earned the ultimate institutional currency; trust.

Tangible impacts from sustained efforts

This comprehensive accountability framework yielded unprecedented policy breakthroughs. In a landmark deviation from top-down planning, Ilam Municipality formally requested Sahayatra Nepal to lead the formulation of its Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA), permanently institutionalizing this partnership in the fiscal year 2023/24 municipal **"Red Book."**

The ultimate proof of this reversed power dynamic occurred when the culturally significant Uttari Pokhari wetland faced severe ecological degradation. Instead of women pleading for help, the local Mayor actively solicited Sahayatra Nepal to intervene. In response, they took a systemic action as the women group imposed mandatory municipal co-financing and guaranteed women's leadership.

The tangible impacts are staggering.

- ◆ The establishment of an NPR 4,000,000 (USD 26,246.11) Municipal Climate Fund.
- ◆ A mandatory municipal policy requiring sectoral departments to allocate at least 2% of their budgets to environment and disaster management.
- ◆ The mobilization of 15 environmental conservation groups comprising 230 members across the district.

They then successfully delivered the Uttari Pokhari Conservation Master Plan, integrating complex Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) measures like bio-engineering and groundwater recharge systems.

What this means for how we fund and implement climate action?

Sahayatra Nepal phenomenon is a direct challenge to how climate adaptation initiatives typically approach accountability. Expensive, complex monitoring software and upward reporting chains were not what made this work. What made it work was clear, transparent, "clear, community-owned rules" that are written, owned, and enforced by the community itself. That is what locally led adaptation actually looks like in practice.

When development frameworks provide enabling spaces and trust women to lead, women transcend the beneficiary trap. They prove themselves as trustworthy and capable governors of climate finance. The practical next step is shifting from patronizing rhetoric to a genuine partnership that enables women to directly govern climate finance. Sahayatra Nepal has already shown what happens when you do.

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