PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION AMONG THE MISING AND SONOWAL KACHARI TRIBES IN DIBRUGARH DISTRICT OF ASSAM

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Abstract

Tribal people have distinct problems and prospects on livelihood diversification based on demographic, socio-economic and geographical conditions. Diversification activities make greater contribution to generate cash incomes for poorer households and it is a key strategy by which people try to make ends meet and improve their well-being. Diversification is a continuous adaptive process whereby households add new activities, maintain existing ones or drop others, thereby maintaining diverse and changing livelihood portfolios. Livelihood in rural areas is very erratic and risk hidden. The Paper is analysis the problems and prospects of livelihood diversification among two tribes, the Mising and the Sonowal Kachari of Dibrugarh district of Assam. The importance of livelihood diversification activities is important in improving economic condition of rural farmers of the two communities.

Key words : Mising, Sonowal Kachari, Livelihood, Wokers,Diversification, Occupation

INTRODUCTION:

Rural tribal people have distinct problems and prospects on livelihood diversification based on demographic, socio-economic and geographical conditions. Diversification activities make greater contribution to generate cash incomes for poorer households and it is a key strategy by which people try to make ends meet and improve their well-being. Diversification is a continuous adaptive process whereby households add new activities, maintain existing ones or drop others, thereby maintaining diverse and changing livelihood portfolios. Livelihood in rural areas is very erratic and risk hidden. Agricultural and allied activities support livelihood of nearly 70 percentage of India's rural population. However land based livelihood of small and marginal farmers are becoming unsustainable in recent times due to surplus manpower and decrease in arable land. Due to inadequate income from on-farm activities to support family's needs, rural populations are forced to look at alternative means for supplementing their livelihoods. The Paper is analysis the problems and prospects of livelihood diversification among

two tribes, the Mising and the Sonowal Kachari of Dibrugarh district of Assam. The importance of livelihood diversification activities in improving economic condition of rural farmers of the two communities is studied. Variables determining livelihood diversification activities of two selected communities are also identified during the study.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

The main objectives of this paper are

1. To identify the pattern of rural tribal livelihood diversification,
2. To explain critically the problematic and prospective issues related to livelihood diversification strategies on selected rural tribal communities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The study intends to answer following research questions:

I. Does Livelihood Diversification translate into improved livelihoods of rural tribal communities?

II. What are the inherent and emerging constraints in relation to livelihood diversification?

METHODOLOGY:

The study is based on fieldwork conducted in Barbaruah Development Block of Dibrugarh district, Assam, during the months of July 2021 to August 2021. Before the commencement of fieldwork, a pilot study is conducted during the month of June 2021. During the pilot study, it is found that Barbarua Dev.Block of Dibrugarh district has the highest percentage of Scheduled Tribe population in the district. The same is confirmed through secondary data. Based on these primary and secondary data, Barbaruah Dev. Block of Dibrugarh district is selected for final study. Within Barbarua Dev. block, Six Sonowal Kacharis and five Mising community dominated villages are selected for the study. Using purposive sample of ten households with diverse socio-economic background was selected from each village. General surveys of the villages in those localities were done on the basis of available information with local bodies like Development Blocks or local level key-informants such as village head (Gaon Bruha) or village school teacher. Semi structured interviews are conducted with the villagers, local shop's owners,

teachers, youth. Special emphasis is given to take interviews of specific target group viz. agricultural laborers, landless people, unemployed youth and women. The villagers are interviewed to understand their perceptions towards the present source of livelihoods and their changing source of livelihoods. The scope of the interviews is wide covering different cultural practices and indigenous knowledge related to resource management. The household survey schedule is designed to capture the details of socio cultural and economic information of the villagers. This includes demographic details, educational status, occupational and income aspects. These aspects can be break down into micro data of landholding patterns, irrigated, and non irrigated field, sharecropping pattern, production of crops, source of livelihoods, migration pattern, factors affecting income generating activity, diversity of livelihood portfolios, experience of self help groups, contribution of diverse family members to household income, family perceptions of wellbeing and people's hopes for the future etc. Some special interviews are also held with small tea garden owners as tea growing is a new avenue of income for the tribal communities of Assam.

STUDY AREA:

The Dibrugarh district extends from 27° 5' 38" North to 27° 42' 30" North latitude and 94° 33' 46" East to 95° 29' 8" East longitude. Dibrugarh district covers an area of about 3381 sq. km which is 4.31 per cent of the total land of Assam. The Dibrugarh climate is humid subtropical climate with extremely wet summers and relatively dry winters. The soil of the district is mostly fertile, alluvial soil. The National Highway 37 is the major road running through the district. Tea and oil are the major revenue generators for the district. There are 144 tea gardens in Dibrugarh which supplies raw tea leaves to more than 85 Tea processing factories in the district. Dibrugarh is also known for petroleum industries. Headquarter of Oil India Limited in situated in Duliajan town in Dibrugarh. Three of the state government PSUs viz Brahmaputra Valley Fertilizer Corporations, Assam power generation corporation Limited and Assam Petro Chemicals Limited are situated in Dibrugarh district. Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited (Assam Gas Cracker Project), a mega petrochemical plant with investment of Rs. 10,000 crores is being commissioned in Lepetkata, Barbarua block of Dibrugarh. Out of the seven development Blocks of Dibrugarh district, the Barabaruh Development Block is selected for the study. This block is the nearest to district headquarter and has highest Schedule Tribe (17.19 percent) population.

Agriculture is the chief occupation of livelihood of the people in this area. Besides, there are also certain small tea growers which occupy three per cent of the total population. The construction of Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited (BCPL) in Lepetkata and Brahmaputra Bridge in Bogibil provided an employment opportunity to the people of the study area. The villagers are engaged in unskilled and semi-skilled works in these projects.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The significance of the study is:

1. This study helps to identify different impact of livelihood diversification strategies in the selected rural tribal communities and filled the gaps that have been yet addressed by researchers in a study.

2. The study reveals that limited access to credit, skill development, markets and transport infrastructures weaken the efficiency of tribal people livelihood and their living conditions.

3. Areas requiring further investigation, which emanated from the study, include impact of shifting from traditional agriculture activities to tea farming among Sonowal Kachari and how it has affected smallholder farmers.

4 . In Mising tribe, the study finds that youth has migrated to urban towns for employment opportunities and how flood prone Mising tribal communities sustain their traditional livelihood activities are significant for the study.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

Methodology limitations: Due to shortage of time, primary data collection is done within three months. In the study area during the period of data collection, flood occurred in most of the villages and hampers the data collection. Respondents are also scared about giving data about their production and income.

Study limitations: The study does not cover the political behavior (election, voting pattern, female participation in elections) of tribal people. The second limitation concerns about tribal health and hygiene issues (disease) and family planning (gap between children, contraceptive

use) perspectives. The third limitation is about tribal history, language, Marriage, dress, food habit pattern, etc.

ANALYSIS:

In this study seven mutually exclusive livelihood diversification strategies are identified. These include on -farm only, off-farm only, non-farm only, on -farm plus off -farm, on-farm plus non-farm, off- farm plus non-farm and on-farm plus off-farm plus non-farm. The independent variables that expected to affect diversification of livelihood strategies of rural tribal households head in the study area are age, gender, education level, land size of the household and total income. Demographic characteristics of household Head. Table.1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of households head. Demographic characteristics of households head such as age, gender, household size are important factors which determine the extent of livelihood diversification in the study area.

Table.1 Demographic characteristics of Household

Characteristics	Total	Sonowal Kachari	Mising
Total number of Household	110	60	50
Age of household head (in years)			
Below 30	4	1	3
31-40	23	9	14
41-50	19	8	11
51-60	27	20	7
61 & above	37	22	15
Household Head Average age (Median value)	55	58	48
Gender of the household head			
Male (%)	84	82	86
Female(%)	16	18	14
Gender distribution in the household			
Male (%)	52	49	53
Female (%)	48	51	47

Family Size			
2	6	5	1
3	8	7	1
4	36	18	18
5	19	10	9
6	18	13	5
7-9	14	5	9
10 & above	9	2	7
Average Household size	5	5	6

It is found that 33% of the household head age lies in 60 years above age bucket while average age of household head age is 55. This shows that majority of the households heads are in their old age and economically not active. This age group people are reluctant to venture into non-agricultural activities and not involved in livelihood diversification. Gender is an integral determinant of rural livelihoods. 84% of the households head in the study area are male. They provide majority of agricultural labour and is sole decision maker concerning agricultural activities. The role of the Family size is central in demographic analysis, because this unit is usually the locus of joint decisions regarding consumption, production, labor force participation, savings, and capital formation. Household's size has both positive and negative effect on livelihood. A larger household's size has more income generating activities than a smaller household's size. Minimum hired labour is required in larger household's size. However due to limited land holding, large families who solely dependent on agricultural activities are not able to fulfil food security for the entire year. Smaller families have children and old age parents as dependent members who may not contribute in agricultural activities. Majority of families in the study area consists of 4-5 members.

Household Total Population by age group, gender and tribes:

The distribution of the household population in this field survey data is shown in Table.2 by age groups, gender and selected two tribal communities. The 110 households successfully

interviewed in the July/August/2021were composed of 593 persons; 306 were men, representing 52 percent of the population, and 287 were women, representing 48 percent. The age structure of the population indicates that a larger proportion of the household population falls into the youth age groups for each gender in both Sonowal Kachari and Mising villages as a result of relatively high working population:

Table.2 Household Head Population by Age, gender, and Tribes Head

Age	Total			Sonowal Kachari			Mising		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1-10	49	44	93	25	19	44	24	25	49
11-20	56	50	106	15	22	37	41	28	69
21-30	58	81	139	25	34	59	33	47	80
31-40	57	44	101	25	25	50	32	19	51
41-50	36	28	64	12	19	31	24	9	33
51-60	25	18	43	20	12	32	5	6	11
60& above	25	22	47	14	15	29	11	7	18
Total	306	287	593	136	146	282	170	141	311

Socio-economic characteristics of Household Head:

Table.3 presents some selected socio-economic characteristics of household head. 97.3% of households are married showing that majority of the respondents are married and have families to care for.

Table .3 Socio-economic characteristics of Household Head

Characteristics	**Total**	**Sonowal Kachari**	**Mising**
Total number of Household	110	60	50
Marital status of respondents (%)			
Married	97.3	95.0	100.0

Unmarried 2.7 5.0	2.7	5.0	
Education level of Head (%)			
Never attend school (illiterate) Undergraduate 3.6 - 4 Graduate and above 0.9 3.3 2	19.1	15.0	24.0
Primary education	14.5	13.3	16.0
Secondary education	7.3	10.0	4.0
High School	46.4	51.7	40.0
Higher Secondary	8.2	6.7	10.0
Undergraduate 3.6 - 4	3.6	-	4.0
Graduate and above 0.9 3.3 2	0.9	3.3	2.0
Household Head livelihood Strategies (%)			
On-farm	46.4	48.3	44.0
Off-farm	3.6	3.3	4.0
Non-farm	14.5	18.3	10.0
Off-farm + Non-farm	0.9	-	2.0
On-farm +Non-Farm	27.3	20.0	36.0
On-farm+ Off-Farm+ Non-Farm	1.8	-	4.0
Household Head annual income			
Less than 30,000	9	8	1
1 From 31,000 to 60,000	51	24	27
More than 60,000	28	13	15
No income	22	15	7
Household Total Land			
Landless..	2.7	-	6.0
Less than 2 bigha	2.7	1.7	4.0
02 to 4 bigha	16.3	20.0	12
0 4 to 6 bigha	17.2	23.3	10
0 6 to 8 bigha	20.9	25.0	16
0 8 to 12 bigha	20.9	20.0	22.0
More than 12 bigha	19.0	10.0	30.0
Household agricultural land			

Landless..	2.7	-	6.0
Less than 2 bigha	11.8	8.3	16.0
02 to 4 bigha	29.1	45.0	10.0
0 4 to 6 bigha	28.2	38.3	16.0
More than 6 bigha	28.2	8.3	52.0
Households tea-garden land			
No tea garden land	70.9	48.3	98.0
Less than 2 bigha	11.8	21.7	-
2 to 4 bigha	8.2	15.0	-
4 to 6 bigha	4.5	6.7	2.0
More than 6 bigha	4.5	8.3	-
Households expenditure			
Food	13.6	15.0	12.0
Medical/Health	20.9	21.7	20.0
Rituals/Function/Marriage	35.5	36.7	34.0
Education	11.8	18.3	34.0
Household	8.2	6.7	10.0
Transportation	10.0	1.7	20.0

Most of the respondents had one form of formal education or the other with majority 46.4 % having high school education. The level of education of farmers is assumed to influence the level of awareness and ability to adopt innovation. Moreover, 19.1% of the households head no formal education, 14.5% had primary education, 7.3% had secondary education while 8 8.3% had Higher Secondary education. From the table above, it is seen that the literacy level of households head are relatively low in the study area. Furthermore, households head engaged in various income generating activities which can be on- farm, off-farm and nonfarm activities so as to make ends meet. The type of non-farm livelihood activities engaged by farm households greatly influences their participation in farming activities. Occupationally, 46.4% of the households have farming as their main occupation. 27.3 % have both on-farm and non-farm activities, and 1.8% have all on, off and non-farm activities as their main occupation respectively. The 51 household head annual income is come under category of 31,000 to 60,000. Total 22 households head is not

involved in directly income generation activities. The total land and farm land both are more in Mising comparable to Sonowal Kachari tribe. On the other hand Sonowal Kachari tribe converts their land into tea garden, but Mising tribe 4 to 6 bigha, 2 percent only using for tea plantation. Out of 110 families, 19 percent possess 12 bigha and above, where Mising tribe possess 30 percent more than Sonowal Kachari 10 percent only. But their cultivated fields are affected by floods in every year. Therefore now a day they cannot solely depend upon the agricultural production. The household expenditure is 35.5 percent shown highest in ritual and functions.

Education positively affect the diversification decision as more educated family members tend to look for off-farm labour opportunities as well as for a non-farm activities. In this study, information on educational attainment was collected for every member of the household. The households head having the highest level of education attained, according to background characteristics. There is a strong differential in educational attainment between the genders, especially as age increases

Table.4 summarizes farmers' land sizes, corresponding annual income levels, and number of farmers in each of the land size-income level cross tabulations

Table 4: Farmers' Land Sizes and Annual Income Levels

Farmers' Land Size	Household Annual Income Levels (Rupees)				Total
	Less than 50,000	50,000 to 1,00,000	1,00,000 to 1,50,000	More than 1,50,000	
Landless	1	2			3
Less than 2 bigha	2	1			3
2-4 bigha	3	14	1		18
4-6 bigha	4	12	1	2	19
6-8 bigha	2	6	5		23
8-12 bigha		10	12	1	23
More than 12 bigha		6	7	8	21
Total	12	61	26	11	110

Pattern of Livelihood Diversification: Pattern of livelihood diversification shows the various income generating activities of selected households. Some rural households engage in multiple activities and relied on diversified income portfolios. Most household's diversification is just on-farm. A common pattern is for very poor and the comparatively well off to have the most diverse livelihoods, while the middle ranges of income display less diversity (Ellis, 2000). The Table 5 below shows the contributions of various livelihood activities to the farm households. Farm income accounted for 65.5 percent of the total households income both on-farm and non-farm income generating activities. Only on-farm accounted for 8.2 percent of the total household's income. This shows that majority of farm households in the study area are more engaged in farming activities and non-farm activities. Also, all the households are farmers, and out of the 110 farm households interviewed, 54 are engaged in farming, 10 in Artisans, 13 in Salary Job, and 4 in other income generating activities (Table 6).

Table.5: Livelihood diversification strategies of the Total and selected communities

Livelihoods diversification Strategy	Total		Sonowal kachari		Mising	
Activities	**Number**	**Percentage**	**Number**	**Percentage**	**Number**	**Percentage**
On-Farm only	9	8.2	6	10	0.3	6.0
Off-farm only	10	9	-	-	12	0
Non-farm only	12	10.9	8	13	0.4	8.0
On-farm+ Off-farm	10	9	1	1.7	-	-
On-farm + Non Farm	72	65.5	37	61.7	35	70
On-farm + Off Farm+ Non-farm	7	6.4	3	5.0	4	8.0
Total	110	100.00	60	100.00	50	100.00

Table 6: Sources of Income of Household head by gender

Source of Income	Household head by Gender		
On farm	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Farming	44	1	
Vegetable	3		

Livestock	1		
Tea gardening	6		
Both tea gardening & Farming	1		
Co worker	3	6	
Off Farm			
Agricultural labour	4	1	
Non farm	13		
Salaried job (govt./private)	5		
Remittances (migration)	2		
Business	4		
Weaving/Handicraft	3	3	
Driving	2		
Making bamboo product	1		
Selling of product	1		
Dependent		6	
Total	93	17	

Reasons for Livelihood Diversification

In Table.7 result of this analysis reveals that 31 percent of the respondents reported limited agriculture income as their first priority for engaging in livelihood diversification, 20 percent considered available of non-farm opportunities as their second or most important reason, 15 percent reported to live well as their third reason. The finding shows that the main reason why rural people engaged in livelihood diversified activities was to raise household's income portfolio. This is because among the reasons for engaging in livelihood diversification, income had the highest percent as the first, against the other reasons for engaging in livelihood diversification.

Table 7: Reasons for livelihood diversification

Reasons for diversification (%)	**Sonowal Kachari**	**Missing**	**Total**

Limited agricultural income, large family	33.3	28.0	30.9
Large Family	5.0	2.0	3.6
Available of non-farm opportunities	15.0	26.0	20.0
Favourable demand of goods and services	8.3	12.0	10.0
To live well	15.0	16.0	15.5
Limited agricultural income and large family	13.3	4.0	9.1
Limited agricultural income, large family and Available of non-farm opportunities	10.0	12.0	10.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Prospects of Livelihood Diversification:

Agriculture growth performance very much depends on the use of farm power derived from skillful farm implements and their judicious utilization. On the other hand, the availability of tractors, pump sets, cold storage facilities, adequate supply of power, good rural-urban road network, efficient transportation and developed agriculture marketing and other technological advancement that maximize the benefits of the farmers. Pesticides are the mixture of substances which helps in preventing, destroying or controlling the pests of unwanted species on plants. Credit is the backbone for each sector of the economy. Credit is one of the vital prerequisite of the farmers, which facilitate them to meet the investment as well working capital requirements. The income earning portfolios are to be expanded in both tribal areas. Development of horticulture, food processing units, handlooms and textile sector can promote income earning opportunities. Cooperation of crop cultivation and animal farming like fishery, livestock, poultry, silk worm breeding etc based on the area must be encouraged to develop. Area specific opportunities are to be taken up with the cooperation of Government, private agencies and local residents. The market for pork is yet to be organized on an extensive and hygienic basis. There is, however, tremendous scope for marketing as well as exporting processed pork. Goat farming in commercial basis is also a good choice in less capital investment. Goats are self feeding animal while grazing without any particular care. Any husbandry selection of proper breeds is important factor. Now a day's cross-bred are also common. But very less farmers has only commercial livestock farming. To make the new opportunities successful proper training and

skill formation programme should be conducted by the Government Credit arrangement must also be facilitated simultaneously with the training programme. Vocational training must be encouraged specially in tea garden areas. The huge energy of the rural youth is to be trapped by understanding the potentiality of the area and involving them in the selected sectors. To stop the outflow of youths into urban areas it is essential to undertake a detail study on the strength and weakness of livelihood capitals of the area and accordingly make a strategic plan to utilize the resources at optimum level. There is enough scope for the development of nonfarm employment, if in rural tribal areas marketing facility and storage arrangement is improved, transport and communication system is forward, mechanization process is good. In the recent years the significance of market is gradually increasing. Livelihood activities have to be tuned up according to the market movements. Easy access to the information on 22 prices etc from markets can help farmers get to sell their produce in urban markets, with better prices. For the success of above measures the prerequisite requirement is infrastructural development and strong local organization. Power supply, good road and transport system are the basic requirement to make other measures successful. Local organizations must be encouraged to form and work in diverse areas. Most of the benefits provided by the Government schemes reach less to the deserving persons. A Monitoring Committee can be formed to keep an eye on the activities and problems faced by the self help group or local organizations. SHGs provided access to credit to their members that they used for purchasing farm inputs as a group; helped to promote savings and yielded moderate economic benefits; reduced the dependence on moneylenders.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

An individual's occupation choice is found to be influenced by several factors, such as level of education, assets of the household, land ownership, closeness to a town, households size, agriculture wage prevailing in the village and infrastructure facilities developed, as well as demand for non agricultural goods. Individual interviews and households' survey indicate that only a small number of villagers able to sell rice grain. It means people are engaged in paddy cultivation for subsistence only and their incomes come from the other crops and nonfarm sources. The Sonowal Kachari tribe expanded their bari (kitchen) gardens to tea garden. Their desire to diversify livelihoods is more important than just satisfying food needs. Rice cultivation is important in supporting the family for food and tea garden is for income generation. In Mising tribe, both livestock and vegetable garden crops are important besides the paddy cultivation. In

Misings, livestock is the base in diversifying the family economy, especially the pig. A "sustainable livelihood" for the Mising tribe is based on a diversified economy with livestock and vegetable farming as its core, but supplemented by cultivation and other possible sources of income. Ritual and ceremonial functions have been highest households' expenditure in both tribes, and the concerns expressed by cultivators with regard to their fields are purely pragmatic, flood havoc and lack of cash credit facilities. Given the isolated location, low agronomic potential and limited resources, indicate that migration is an important coping mechanism among households to secure livelihoods. Managing livelihood needs has always been a critical factor or challenge amongst the poor everywhere. Diversification in the livelihood in the present scenario has become the key word for better living and for being more resilient to shocks and stresses. 23

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