

A Case Study :

## Rural livelihood pattern of women of Assam and impact of training on human development

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India has a population of about 7.736 billion people and two-third of households live in rural areas. Even though overall growth in India has recently accelerated, it has largely bypassed rural areas and agriculture. It is agreed that the ratio of rural to urban poverty has increased. As a consequence, some of the marginalized groups in a society that is already characterized by a high level of inequality in opportunities and segregation along lines of gender, caste and social status are widely reckoned to not have benefited from overall growth. Moreover, farmer leaders have alleged that modern agriculture is not remunerative with the high cost for inputs like chemical fertilizers, pesticides, seeds and farm machinery. The policy makers thus face the problem of providing alternative sources of better livelihood options or strengthening the prospect of the existing livelihood options which are at subsistence level. To enable women and backward castes to expand their livelihood opportunities, a vast range of government programmes has been initiated and large amount of resources are being channeled to poor areas. In India women has extensive work loads with dual responsibility for farm, household production, and their work is getting harder and more time consuming due to ecological degradation and changing agricultural technologies and practices. For the upliftment of rural women and to improve their livelihood pattern, the women have to be sensitized and empowered. Keeping these in mind, the present study was undertaken with the following objectives : to study the existing livelihood pattern of rural women, to

improve knowledge of women relating to health and nutrition status through training, to provide scientific know-how related to post-harvest operations to achieve food security at household level, to train the women folk to develop a small scale enterprise for better economic development.

The study was carried out in 3 blocks of Jorhat district namely, Baghchung block, Dhakorgora block and Sipahikhula block covering around 900 rural women (300 from each block) belonging to different self-help groups. The existing livelihood pattern and income generated was studied. Different need based trainings on health, nutrition, post-harvest operations were given. Skilled oriented training on processing, preservation, biscuit making, cake making and preparation of confectionery items were also undertaken, so that the women on her own or as a SHG can develop a small-scale enterprise and improve their livelihood pattern.

To make learning more effective, the result-oriented 30 numbers of trainees were included in each training programme. Pre and post knowledge testing was done on different aspects before and after training, using a standardized interview schedule.

### Livelihood pattern of rural women :

From Table 1 it can be observed that out of 300 respondents from each block, the percentage involvement of rural women was different in respect to different activities under different blocks. Out of all the activities, it was found that highest percentage of involvement was in agriculture (30%), followed by weaving (26.7%), pickling (13.5%), confectionery and animal rearing (11.6%).

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### Key words :

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**Table 1 : Livelihood pattern of women**

Activities	% Involvement of women		
	Bagchung Block	Dhakorgora Block	Sipahikhula Block
Agriculture	(90) 30%	(85) 28.3%	(80) 26.7%
Animal rearing	(35) 11.6%	(33) 11%	(35) 11.6%
Weaving	(70) 23.3%	(75) 25%	(80) 26.7%
Pickling	(35) 11.6%	(40) 13.3%	(40) 13.5%
Jam making	(10) 3.3%	(8) 2.7%	(8) 2.7%
Confectionery	(35) 11.6%	(34) 11.0%	(35) 11.6%
Baked products	(10) 3.3%	(5) 1.6%	(5) 1.6%
Squash making	(15) 5%	(20) 6.7%	(17) 5.6%

(Figures in parenthesis indicate total no. of women)

### Evaluation of the impact of training programme :

Before exposure to the training curriculum, the knowledge level of the selected farm women was tested using a pre-testing proforma on different aspect of health, nutrition and post-harvest handling of fruits and vegetables. Before training, it was found that only 28% of the rural women had basic knowledge and information regarding different aspects of health, 26% on nutrition and only 12% on post harvest handling techniques. Altogether, 41 no. of peripatetic training was given on different areas on importance of balanced diet, low cost nutritious recipes, care of pregnant and lactating mother, women mother, hygiene, conservation of nutrients, child nutrition, diet during different illness and importance of nutrition garden covering 900 participants (Table 2).

**Table 2 : Training programmes**

Training programme	Total no. of participants	Number of trainings
Preparation of balanced diet	180	8
Preparation of low cost nutritious recipes and weaning foods	140	7
Care of pregnant and lactating mothers	90	5
Diet during different illness	100	5
Women health, hygiene, sanitation	120	5
Cooking methods to conserve nutrients	110	5
Nutrition garden	80	3
Child nutrition	80	3
	900	41

Altogether 37 nos. of 3 days skill – oriented training was also imparted to the farm women to train them to become self-sufficient in terms of money earning capacity

and also to develop some basic entrepreneurial skills. The farm women were also trained on packaging, labeling, cost analysis and marketing (Table 3).

**Table 3 : Skill-oriented training**

Training programme	No. of participants	Number of trainings	Duration
Pickling	250	10	3
Squash making	220	9	3
Jam and jelly	160	8	3
Confectionery items	170	5	3
Baked products	100	5	3
	900	37	

With the exposure to training programme definite improvement took place in terms of their knowledge, skill and adoption (Table 4). Before the training, most of the women (70%) were poor and 25% in fair category but after the training programme, 84% were in good category, 2% in very good category and 14% in fair category. This showed that the training programmes were effective in improving knowledge level of farm women.

### Peripatetic training:

On follow up intervention, it was observed that 80%

**Table 4 : Knowledge level of women on different aspect of health, nutrition and post-harvest handling of fruits and vegetables**

Knowledge level	Score (%)	Farm women	
		Before training	After training
Poor	0-20	70	-
Fair	21-40	25	14
Good	41-60	5	84
Very good	61-80	0	2
Excellent	Above 80	0	-

of the women had taken up production of savoury item as a small scale enterprise as a self-help group (SHG) or as an individual. 30% had taken up pickling, 80% weaving, 20% preparation of squash, 15% biscuit making and tailoring 20%. Around 18% of the women had not yet taken any income generating activity (Table 5). Most women engaged themselves in these income generating activities during peak season (Oct.-Jan.) and again in the month of April because during these months, there is lot

**Table 5 : Activities taken as small scale enterprise**

Activities	Percentage women
Production of savory items	80% (240)
Brinjal pickle	30% (90)
Chilli pickle	30% (90)
Squash	20% (60)
Biscuits	15% (45)
Cakes	7% (21)
Weaving	80% (240)
Tailoring	2.0% (60)
No activities	18% (54)

(Figures in parenthesis indicate number of women)

of festivities and trade fairs. Marketing is usually done at an accelerating rate during different trade fairs and Expos.

The knowledge of women on post harvest and handling of fruits and vegetables before and after training was also assessed. A noticeable gain in knowledge of women was observed in terms of consumption and post harvest handling after the training programme.

### Conclusion :

Understanding the context of household livelihood is necessary to ensure appropriate development strategies.

One of the approaches of improving rural livelihood is the need for effective communication and participation with beneficiaries. In order to ensure that participation is effective and meaningful, rural people particularly rural women need to have exposure, a stake in decision making process, able to voice their interest and at a stage in the planning process that allows their participation. It is essential that the processes of participants and the indicators for measuring the effectiveness of poor peoples participation are appropriate, clear and transparent. The key challenge is to ensure sustainability in terms of social empowerment, gaining technical skills, participation on a stronger footing.

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