

Land and Rural Livelihood: A Case Study in Golaghat District of Assam

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Land play crucial role in rural livelihood. In Assam majority people livelihood sustain on agriculture. Farmers income, economic condition all are depends upon production and that determine by availability and size of land. Ownership over land make farmers economically sound and strong. Everybody has not good size of land in the rural area like Assam. Landlords, marginal and landless all are existing classes in rural areas specially in Assam. The main objective of this paper is to understand importance of land for rural livelihood and to know about the relation between land and economy of the people in the study area. The prime research question is how land play crucial role in rural livelihood. Methodologically this paper is based on both primary and secondary source of data. The findings of the study show that, land is inevitable for the livelihood of the rural people. Having land increase the opportunities of rural people for numerous income generation through land they can engage with agricultural activities, fishing, animal husbandry, small business etc. Concerning land and economy, land directly or indirectly assistances in economy by production, credit and debt. Those having small size of land they suffer more for their livelihood and enter into the cycle of poverty.

Key words: *land; rural; livelihood; economy; credit; debt*

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I. Introduction:

Land become essential component for rural livelihood and people's livelihood depends on it. It does not give only crops and increase production but also give economic security, credit accessibility and highly economic chances to the people. Ownership of a particular land provides numerous benefits to the owner by providing variety of sources of income. The land can be used for cultivation, fishing production, livestock farming, commercial purpose and credit purpose. Having good size of land gives prestige, honor and social security to the owner.

Land ownership, rights, shortage, tenure, fragmentation of land, conflict are the major land issues of Assam. Unequal land ownership creates stratification within the society. Having good size of land considered as powerful and honor in rural society. Used of land in rural society open the paths of income and helps in multiple sources of income.

In rural settings land means shelter, wealth, production, capital, income generator social and economic security. It comes under agrarian structure where land is considered as a main source of income and relation and production is generated through the use of soil. In capitalist mode of production land is used a commodity or commercial purpose in rural areas also.

Livelihood refers to the sources of sustainability of the people where they can secure their basic needs for day-to-day life. Livelihood denotes to the means and resources through which individuals or households secure the necessities of life, such as food, water, shelter, and income. It encompasses various activities, assets, and strategies that people employ to sustain themselves economically and socially. A livelihood is defined as a set of economic activities, including self-employment and wage employment, that enables individuals and households to meet their needs and improve their well-being. It involves access to essential assets such as land, labor, skills, education, capital, and social networks (Ashoka. R 2026, Dutta & Mistri 2013, Niehof, A & Price, L 2001, Singh, G & Mishra 2026).

Economy and livelihood and have close connection with each other and both are interconnected because livelihood helps in income generation and for sustainable livelihood there need economic strength. People's essential needs fulfill through this economy; all type of expenditure, investment, savings connected with livelihood.

Credit is essential for rural people to fulfill the essential needs. Credit means taking rupees for a particular purpose, particular time, interest or absence of interest with some rules and regulation. In rural society people needs credit for cultivation, farming, ration, productive and non-productive needs. For better livelihood needs more expenditure and investment and therefore credit become essential in rural settings.

Debt always plays crucial role in rural society, too much access of credit leads to debt when debtors unable to repay his/ her credit due to the poor livelihood. Lack of savings, income generation, poor economy unproductive expenditure leads to debt issue in rural areas.

In Assam, private land ownership, cash crops and land revenue all has been occurred at colonial period. The value of land is changing day by day, the value of agricultural land also increased. In Assam people used their land for agricultural and its allied activities. Although majority livelihood depends on agriculture or Assam is known as cultivating state still people are depending on monsoon for cultivation. Lack of irrigation facility become obstacle for the farmers for good production. Apart from that the ownership right and nature of ownership play dominant role in economic activity.

Everybody has not sufficient amount of land in rural society. Those have not enough size of land they have limited resource to utilized and that's disturb their livelihood. It is known that rural economy is based on agriculture and its allied sectors and all these depends upon on availability of land. To come out from the limited restriction land become inevitable particularly for rural people.

Credit is an essential element to deal with day-to-day needs and acquisition of credit also depends on size and nature of land ownership. For larger size of credit needs large size of land documents. Having land ownership helps to getting institutional credit and having large size of land helps in acquisition of non-institutional credit in rural area. People also selling, mortgaging and leasing their own land for their livelihood. Apart from that, people used their land to repay large and older debt. So, it can be said that, land become inevitable for rural livelihood.

Background of the Study:

Agrarian crisis, rural distress, poverty, debt issue, hunger and malnutrition are the main problem of rural society. Low production, market price, single cultivation, loss of crops, credit issues are the backbone of agrarian distress, poverty and indebtedness. These issues have close relation with livelihood and livelihood has connection with land. Migration, land fragmentation, mortgage, increase population leads land problem and that's effect on livelihood of the rural people. Problems in land reform, ownership right become barrier for rural livelihood. Various plans and program have been taken by Government to eradicate land issues and rural barrier for economic sustainability

Research problem:

In Assam 85.92 percent people live in rural areas (Economic Survey, Assam, 2012-13) where land ownership plays a special role. Everyone has not equal size of landownership and unequal distribution of land creates socio-economic stratification among the people. Land is considered as an important aspect for rural livelihoods and absence of land it is not easy to deal with day-to-day life especially in rural settings. So, these study wants to follow how land become essential for rural livelihood and what they do those have small size and no land ownership; how they manage their livelihood. How land is linked with livelihood is the main subject of the study.

Land and Livelihood:

- Land provides production through cultivation
- Land provides commercial and consumption crops
- Land provides shelter for animal husbandry
- Land helps in livestock farming
- Land has been used for credit acquisition
- Land has been used for commercial purpose (Shop, Rice mil, Nursery, Plantation)
- Land has been used for fulfillment of essential needs (By selling, mortgaging land)

II. Literature review:

The literature review has been based on land and rural livelihood. First discuss about land and then rural livelihood. This part is giving a clear understanding of the topic- land and rural livelihood.

In rural society, people basically engage in agriculture for economic and consumption purpose and land has been used for both as a productive force as well as source of livelihood (Bhadra, 1979). In agrarian society, the land ownership brings security to an individual and also provides socio-economic position in the society (Sharma, 1994).

In rural settings, size of land ownership regulates the class situation and relationship among the people (Beteille, 2007). Land is not only considered as an important element in rural society but also, from production, economic process land regulates the social, political position of rural people. Land has been utilized both for productive (cultivation/ agricultural) and economic (commercial/ investment, credit, land rent, sale/lease) purpose

(Raj 2005). Land has close connection with livelihood because in India, the landless people are considered as poor due to the absence of land (Hanstad, Haque, and Nielsen, 2008).

Radhika Kapur in the article (2019), “*Livelihood Opportunities in Rural Areas*” mention that, livelihoods provide the opportunities so that rural individuals can sustain their living conditions. Like other elements, livelihood also includes economic activities and the better enhancement of livelihood helps in poverty eradication, standard of living condition etc.

III. Methodology:

This paper is based on qualitative in nature and primary data have been used through case study method. The respondents have belonged to rural people and their livelihood is mainly based on agriculture and its allied sector. The respondents are selected purposefully to conduct case study. The study is conducted in Golaghat district of Assam where people have been primarily depended on agriculture for their livelihood.

Land system in the study area:

Within the Golaghat district some area having land ownership and some have not permanent land ownership. In Sarupathar co-district of Pranjan panchayat maximum people have not any kind of ownership due to the forest reservation. On the other hand, in Kuruabahi Panchayat people having paddy land ownership but not having ownership of riverside land called chapari. In Golaghat district of Kachupathar panchayat a smaller number of people having paddy land ownership and government have giving land ownership rights gradually. In Pachim Brahmaputra panchayat of Dergaon co-district some people have land ownership and some have not any land rights patta.

Significance:

This study is an important one because it deals with the issue of large section of the people who live in rural areas. Though agriculture is the prime sector of livelihood in rural settings huge number of people still fight for their livelihood. Landholding determine the source of income; chances of income and absence of land ownership restricted the income generational activities. Although people’s prime occupation is agriculture, they have been dependent on the government for ration which signifies pathetic condition of the rural area. People having good size of land are in a good position than marginalize and landless people. This study depicts importance of land for rural livelihood in Assam.

Analysis of the Objectives:

Now coming to the objectives, the following case studies shows the relationship between land and livelihood. Let’s see the case studies-

Case Study: I

A respondent of Bokakhat co-district of Kuruabahi Panchayat, belongs to the age of 45 years state that, I have 9 bighas of land and I used 4 bighas for temporary cultivation like seasonal crops pumpkin, oilseeds, potato and used 4 bighas for paddy cultivation. Firstly, I have cultivated my seasonal cultivation and used the profit in paddy cultivation thus I have managed my expenditure from one cultivation to another. During seasonal cultivation I have sell my paddy and taken credit from a village shop and repay it after the cultivation. I have managed my livelihood by cultivating multiple crops with my limited land.

Case Study: II

A respondent of Pachim Brahmaputra of Dergaon co-district of Golaghat district state that, I have 8 bighas of land and I have mainly done seasonal cultivation for commercial purpose. I am cultivating cabbage and sell it in to the market. I have taken credit from local shop and repaying after the cultivation. I have also taken credit from agricultural department namely KCC for this cultivation. I have cultivating 12 months with different types of cultivation that helps me to make up the loss from one to another. market price plays significant role; in the last year market price was down as a result I have to comes under the debt and this year market price is high and getting profit from my cultivation. This way I have maintain my livelihood.

Case Study: III

Another respondent belongs to the Sarupathar Co-district of Golaghat lives in Panjan Panchayat said that, I had 6 bighas of land and cultivating paddy for consumption purpose. I have given 2 bighas as mortgage to a man for getting credit. I also sell my 1.5 bighas land for repayment of older debt that I have taken from non-institutional source. I feel bad, due to the debt I have loss my land but on the other hand it helps me to repay the credit.

Case Study: IV

A respondent lives in Kachupathar panchayat of Golaghat district mention that, I have around 10 bighas of land and due to the economic crisis, I have sold my 5 bighas of land to an individual. The urgent need of money force me to sell my land and I also given mortgage of my 2 bighas of land for another important work. If I have not any land than I would not able to arrange the money. Availability of land helps me to deal with economic crisis

and also gives me paddy crops that I have sell to Mahajan and also taken advance from him. Thus, land helps me to deal with livelihood process.

Case Study: V

A respondent belongs to age of 48 years lives in Dergaon co-district; state that, land play crucial role in our livelihood, through this we cultivated more than two three types of cultivations. In our paddy land we have cultivated paddy rice and in winter we have cultivating seasonal crops like- oilseeds, pumpkin, potato, cabbage, pea beans and other vegetables. Through multiple cultivation, we can used our profit from one cultivation to another and able to generate profit and income. If we getting loss in one cultivation another cultivation would make up everything. The availability of land depicts the livelihood scenario of the rural people.

Case Study: VI

In Kuruabahi panchayat of Bokakhat co-district a respondent M. Das (Name change) said that, I have only 12 bighas of paddy cultivation land so I cultivating paddy very well. In earlier I had riverside land (Chapari) for seasonal cultivation but due to the river erosion I have lost my 4/5 bighas land. Now I have left my seasonal cultivation due to the high cost of sharecropping system. He said that, the high amount of expenditure in seasonal cultivation does not helpful for sharecropper. My economy becomes down due to the shortage of land and I have to give paddy to the shop owner instead of rupees that I have taken before the cultivation. I will not able to transfer my rupees from one cultivation to another cultivation.

Case Study: VII

A respondent belongs to Panjan panchayat of Sarupathar co-district state that, he has 52 years and not having any cultivable land he has taken others land as sharecropper as result, he has to give equal portion of paddy to the owner so he did not able to sell his paddy. As a result, he did not able to generate profit and income from the paddy cultivation. He only cultivates for consumption purpose. He also states that; due to the lack of land, I would not ably associate with livestock farming and my income become limited. To rearing cattle, goat and poultry he has not any space so he remained outside from the livestock farming.

Case Study: VIII:

Respondent belongs to Kuruabahi Panchayat having 2 bighas of land state that, he has cultivating less than two bighas of land and engage as a wage labour in others cultivation. The owner helps him and others who work under the owner when they need financial needs. They have taken credit from him and repay by providing their wage. He said that if I had enough land then I will be cultivated more and more. Absence of landownership force me associate as a wage labour.

The above case studies show the importance of land for economic emergency. People used their land not only for agricultural purpose, consumption and commercial purpose but also for credit acquisition, repay of older debt and to deal with economic crisis. So, it can be said that, land play important impact on rural livelihood.

Findings & Conclusion:

The above case studies show that, rural people of Golaghat district used their land for cultivation including consumption and commercial, livestock farming, credit acquisition, repaid old debt, fulfill the economic needs by selling or mortgaging it. Absence of land ownership become obstacle for agricultural activities and one type of cultivation unable to make up essential needs of the farmers. multiple cultivation leads to sound economy and limitation of land ownership prevent farmers to do multiple activities and that did not helpful for farmers credit repayment. It is land that primarily connected with rural livelihood.

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