



Socio Economic Status of Farming Community of Char Area of Dhubri District, Assam

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

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The present study delves into the Socio-economic Status of Farmers of Char area of Dhubri district of Assam. The study was confined to the selected Char areas of the district, namely Faujdar Char, Simlabari and Bamunpara Part IV village. The quantitative study collected information using personal interview of each farmer through a semi-structured questionnaire. A multistage purposive cum random sampling design was followed for the purpose. A total sample of 150 farmers were randomly selected from the three indicated villages during 2021. This study revealed that farmers were of poor economic condition with low literacy and knowledge about agricultural methods. The farmers grow only rice, jute, summer and winter vegetables and without any awareness about their improved management practices. It is imperative that the introduction of modern agricultural technologies can uplift the present socioeconomic status of the farming community in the Char areas.

Keywords: Awareness; char areas; knowledge; literacy; socio-economic status.

1. INTRODUCTION

Dhubri District is the gateway of Western Assam happened to be in the past a meeting place of different racial groups which mingled together and formed a unique Cultural Heritage and Historical Background. The district is bounded both by inter-state and international border, for example West Bengal and Bangladesh in the west, Goalpara and Bogaigoan district of Assam in the east, Kokrajhar district in the north, South Salmara-Mankachar district and state of Meghalaya in the south [1].

Dhubri district is endowed with vast agriculture and forest resources. Main source of income is paddy with surplus production. Jute and rapeseed occupy the major share of cash crops along with summer and winter vegetables. The district has a total population of 1,327,929 with total number of 268,598 household. The literacy rate of the district is 70.92 per cent [1].

The Brahmaputra and other rivers of Assam are replete with numerous sandbars, which are locally called *Chars*. The Char areas are home to nearly 10 per cent population of Assam [2]. Severe floods adversely affect Char areas and further restrict their economic opportunities [3]. The Chars account for about 5 per cent of the total area of the state spreading across 14 districts, 55 blocks and around 2,300 villages [4]. The Char dwellers live a precarious life. Battered by recurrent floods and soil erosion, Chars have an impermanent existence. In western Assam, the Char dwellers, mostly belonging to the migrant Muslim community of East Bengal origin, live in backwardness and poverty. According to the Government of Assam records, the Char Chapori covers 3,608 km² of

the Brahmaputra basin, or 4.6% of Assam's area. Chars are river islands, while chaporis could be river islands or land mass formed by silt deposits on riverbanks [5]. There are 480 numbers of Char villages in Dhubri district covering an area of 64,767 hectare. Economic backwardness limits Char dwellers' livelihood options.

The researcher submits that data pertaining to the contribution of various economic activities among the farmers of Char area is mandatory for any economic development programmes. Though various studies on socio-economic conditions of farmers were carried out in India, studies are limited with reference to the Char area. The arable lands in the Char area are mostly low lying, scattered without irrigation facilities. The farmers are not accustomed with the modern agricultural input and practices. This study was undertaken to investigate the socio economic status of the farmers in the Char areas of Dhubri district with the following objectives:

- To appraise the socio-economic condition of farmers of Char villages
- To study the existing cropping and resource use patterns to locate the specific socio economic weaknesses in the farm production system.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The farmers of the Char areas are of poor economic status with low literacy and knowledge about agricultural methods. Economic backwardness limits Char dwellers' livelihood options. This study was undertaken to find out the problems of Char areas of the district and to improve their livelihood through sound agricultural background.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Selection of the Study Area

To achieve the objectives of this study; a preliminary survey along with a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) programme was conducted in association of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Assam Agricultural University, Dhubri during the first quarter of 2021 in Dhubri district of Assam. Based on preliminary information, three villages of the district, namely Faujdar Char, Simlabari and Bamunpara Part IV village were selected for the study and from each village, 50 numbers of farmers were selected randomly for this quantitative study. A multistage purposive cum random sampling design was applied in this study. A total number of respondents for the study was 150. A multistage purposive cum random sampling design was followed for selection of the respondents. The investigation was carried out with various problems faced by the farmers of Char villages of the district.

3.2 Period of Study

The survey for this study was conducted in the first quarter of the year 2021. Repeated visits were made for collecting necessary information.

3.3 Collection of Data

In this study, data were collected by the authors through personal interviews with the 150 selected farmers of Char area. A semi structured interview schedule was administered to individual respondents which were followed by group discussion to collect the relevant data/information pertaining to family income, land ownership pattern, asset values etc. The academic purpose of the study was clearly explained to the sample farmers prior to commencement of the actual interview. At the time of interview the researcher asked the questions systematically and explained wherever it was felt necessary. Some secondary data were

also collected from District Agriculture Office, Dhubri.

3.4 Analysis of Data

Data were analysed with a view of achieving the objectives of this study. The tabular analysis was applied to classify data in order to derive meaningful findings by using simple statistical measures like means, percentage and ratios, among others.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Limited studies have been conducted on the socio-economic status of the farmers of the Char areas. However, a study was conducted by Talukdar *et al.* [6] on crop suitability for Char areas of Nalbari district, Assam using remote sensing and Global Information System (GIS) for effective crop diversification. The researchers opined that cauliflower – knolkhol – summer rice cropping sequence was found suitable for Char areas of Nalbari district.

Goswami and Bhattacharya [7] also reported that 55.24% of the women folk derive their income from Sericulture as against 10% of the women who derive their income from agriculture in spite of the economy being dependent on agriculture.

Deka *et al.* [8] studied the socio-economic Status of Tribal Farmers of Tinsukia district of Assam. The study revealed that they are very poor farmers with low literacy and knowledge about agricultural methods and they grow only rice, tea and oranges and without any awareness about their improved management practices. By introducing facilities of modern technology, their socioeconomic standard can be increased.

Sericulture plays a vital role in socio-economic status of tribal population of Assam. Three Sericulture progressive villages were surveyed in Kokrajhar district of Assam in four sub-division namely Kokrajhar, Dotma, Gossaigaon and Parbatjora. The investigation revealed that among the three varieties of natural silks viz., Eri, Muga and Mulberry, Ericulture was performed

Survey Area

Serial Number	District	Village
1.	Dhubri	Faujdar Char
2.		Bamunpara part IV
3.		Simlabari

highest in the district and occupies the prime position (being 94%) compared to Muga (5%) and mulberry culture (1.3%). Out of the Sericulture population in the district, the highest percentage of Eri-rearers (74.81%), Muga (14%) and Mulberry rearers (68.71%) belongs to Scheduled Tribe categories. From the study, it can be revealed that sericulture can be a profitable income generating activity for the women folk of the district with a benefit-cost ratio of 3.1 [9].

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study represents a brief description of the socio-economic characteristics of the selected farmers of the Dhubri district of Assam. Decision making behaviour of individual is determined to a large extent by his socio-economic characteristics. Socio-economic environment also largely determines the nature and extent of participation of people in national development programmes.

From this study, it was observed that the farmers of Char villages are socio-economically backward. Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for the overwhelming majority of the farming community. To eradicate the problems of Char people, it is necessary for the policy makers to identify and quantify the socio-economic factors, which are inhibiting their growth and development. The farmers of Char villages owing to their life style and community habits and habitats have not been able to keep pace with the modern society. They are not as advanced as the people of rest of the State are. The base line information gathered as part of the study is included in Table 1.

From the conducted investigations it was observed that the total populations of Faujdar Char, Bamunpara Part IV and Simlabari are 598, 2200 and 3031, respectively. The majority of the farm families were nuclear in all the villages. The data on education status of the villagers reveal that the male literacy percentage was more compared to female in all the villages. The major occupation of the farmers were agriculture and livestock rearing. The land holding pattern is - landless 21.21%, 34.56% and 28.76%, Marginal 18.89%, 14.42% and 21.09% and Small 59.9%, 51.02% and 50.15% in Faujdar Char, Bamunpara part IV and Simlabari, respectively. The cropping pattern of the study area includes both rabi and kharif crops in a sequence of Early Ahu-Summer Vegetables- Summer Black gram/Green gram-Jute in which more than 50%

of the total area is covered by rice. More than 70 per cent households are electrified in all the surveyed villages. The river Brahmaputra is the main source of irrigation water for all the villages studied. Likewise, the livestock population in all the villages includes cow, poultry, goat and duck. The major source of agricultural information in the study area was extension staff, radio and relatives. The types of soil were observed as sandy loam to clay loam in all the villages. However, no soil testing was conducted from any agency or line-department. There were no sources of agricultural credit supply in all the villages. Use of pesticides and fungicides in higher dose was observed in all the surveyed villages to save the crops from pests and diseases.

5.1 Problems Faced by the Farmers

The farmers of the Char villages of the district faced several problems. However, it may be noted that problems confronted by the individual farmers were not identical for the entire farming community. The severity of different problems also varied. The most burning problems of the farmers have usually been facing are summarized and briefly discussed in the present study. The problem reported in this study is based on the opinions of the respondents. However, in this study an attempt has been made to identify some major problems of farmers of Char villages listed below:

- Sali paddy (winter rice) is damaged by flood every year
- Less acquainted with the developed/ improved agricultural practices
- Lower price of paddy and higher cost of production
- *Kharif* vegetables cannot be grown in later part of the season due to occurrence of flood
- Lower price of green chilli
- Due to poor economic condition the farmers could not purchase and use the agricultural inputs in time
- Ignorance about the accurate management practices of insect-pest and diseases
- Use of over dose of pesticides and fungicides.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that to improve the socio-economic status of the farmers some policies

and recommendations may be advanced which are likely to be useful for policy formulation.

Policy suggestions based on the findings from field study of Char farmers are presented for consideration. Educational facilities should be provided for the people. Good, reliable transport and communication facilities should be provided. Multiple cropping and intercropping should be actively encouraged. The government must make major moves to create permanent assets with farmers of Char and provide infrastructural support for meeting input, credit and marketing needs. Extension agencies must visit the villages and interact with farmers. Training should be provided in different income generating activities. If all the suggestions mentioned above are implemented in the Char villages, the development of those backward areas can be seen in near future. By introducing facilities of modern technology, their socioeconomic standard can be increased. Thus this weaker part of the society can be turned into the huge mass of human resource. However, there is a scope of further investigations in this regard.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Annexure A

Table 1. Base line information of Char villages of Dhubri District of Assam

Serial Number	Component	Results		
		Faujdar Char	Bamunpara part IV	Simlabari
1	Total number of households of the village	98	320	680
2	Total population of the village	598	2200	3031
	Male	312	1113	1605
	Female	286	1087	1426
	Children	116	354	831
3	Average family structure	Nuclear 70.3% Joint 29.7%	Nuclear 65.0% Joint 35%	Nuclear 70.3% Joint 29.7%
4	Literacy (%)			
	Male	73.88	65.60	75.34
	Female	60.24	58.24	63.49
5	Total area under crop cultivation (ha)	199.47	199.47	259.73
6	Average housing conditions	Kachcha 80 % Pucca 20%	Kachcha 90 % Pucca 10%	Kachcha 85 % Pucca 15%
7	Electricity facility	Electrified 85.05 % Unelectrified 31.94%	Electrified 70 % Unelectrified 30%	Electrified 75 % Unelectrified 25%
8	Source of water	Tube Well 18.05% Pond 4.16% River 46.68%	Tube Well 16.0% Pond 5.6% River 58.0%	Tube Well 20.5% Pond 3.2% River 50.25%
9	Mode of transportation	Two wheeler and Public transport	Public transport	Public transport
10	Major land holdings	Landless 21.21% Marginal 18.89% Small 59.9%	Landless 34.56% Marginal 14.42% Small 51.02%	Landless 28.76% Marginal 21.09% Small 50.15%
11	Source of irrigation	River	River	River
12	Farm mechanisation	Tractor 5% Pump set 8% Sprayer 56% Others 14%	Tractor 0% Pump set 6% Sprayer 43% Others 12%	Tractor 3% Pump set 5% Sprayer 67% Others 25%
13	Livestock	Cow, Goat, Poultry and Duck	Cow and , Poultry	Cow and , Poultry
14	Difficulties in agriculture improvement	Irrigation 40% Credit 20% Transport 15% Agriculture Knowledge 8% Labour 17%	Irrigation 32% Credit 30% Transport 22% Agriculture Knowledge 12% Labour 4%	Irrigation 20% Credit 26% Transport 18% Agriculture Knowledge 10% Labour 26%
15	Source of agricultural information	Extension staff, Radio and Relatives	Extension staff, Radio and Relatives	Radio and Relatives

Serial Number	Component	Results		
		Faujdar Char	Bamunpara part IV	Simlabari
16	Sources of credit supply	Nil	Nil	Nil
17	Cropping pattern	Early Ahu-Summer Vegetables-Summer Black gram/Green gram-Jute	Early Ahu-Summer Vegetables- Jute	Early Ahu-Summer Vegetables-Summer Black gram/Green gram-Jute
18	Plant protection	Use chemical	Use chemical	Use chemical
19	Marketing system of agricultural produce	Local traders Middle man Village market	Local traders Village market	Local traders Village market
20	Soil type	Sandy loam to clay loam	Sandy loam to clay loam	Sandy loam to clay loam
21	Use of pesticide	Over dose	Over dose	Over dose
22	Knowledge about Integrated Pest Management (IPM) (%)	3	2	1.5

Source: Researchers illustrations

Annexure B



Images. Glimpses of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and survey work in Char villages

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