

Role of Unorganized Women labour force in Economic Development of Assam: (A case study of Sivasagar and Dibrugarh Districts).

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Abstract

Active participation of women in nation building process is very important. Women Empowerment and Female market participation are the two major determinant factors for all round development of a nation.

Assam is a major state of North-Eastern Region (NER) of India, located in the south of the eastern Himalayas. The state is comprised of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley and the valley of Brahmaputra is generally known to the Assam proper.¹ For administrative convenience, the state is divided into 33 districts. Out of 33 nos. of districts Sivasagar and Dibrugarh districts are significant due to their diversity in labour markets.

In Assam most of the work forces are under the unorganized sector. Due to lack of employability to the women workforce in Assam, most of the women workers are easily entered in the unorganized sector and try to find out the subsistence level of livelihood. According to NECUS report of 2013-14, in the state of Assam 91.4% women were in the unorganized sector. But, the socio-economic condition of this large section worker is not improving up to satisfactory level. There are ample opportunities to find out problems and prospects of unorganized labour force of Assam. This study is an attempt in this direction.

Key Words: Unorganized Labour Market, Women Empowerment, Market Participation, Assam, Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, NECUS, Problems, Prospects.

Women Empowerment and Female market participation are the two major determinant factors for all round development of a nation. Without active participation of women in nation building process the benefits of development would not reach to the vulnerable section of the society as well as the pace of the development process would not reach the satisfactory level. When a society is in transition it becomes necessary to change the image of women to suit the needs of those who hold the reins of change in their hands. Nehru emphatically wrote "If you want me to tell you what a nation is like, or what a social organization is like, tell me the position of women in that country". Last five decades witnessed tremendous change in the study of women empowerment and their market participation. The changing structure of economy and increasing rate of women market participation is enhancing their purchasing power as well as making them very active in household's decision making process. An employed woman not only contributes for the present economic condition of the family but also intergenerational impact on their earning capabilities and employability. The perception and self-confidence of an income earner woman is higher than an unemployed and dependent woman. Researchers also found that the level of domestic violence against employed women is less than unemployed women. So, to improve the image of women in a society and empowered them it is very essential to increase their market participation. But, shame for the society is that most of the female workforce still remains unrecognized, underestimated and undervalued. To accelerate the growth process of a country it is very essential to enhance women work participation rate and their ownership in the productive activity with dignity.

Amartya Sen makes a compelling case for the notion that societies need to see women less as passive recipients of help, and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation, a view strongly buttressed by a body of evidence suggesting that the education, employment and ownership rights of women have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment and contribute to economic development.

As per the UNO (1995), New York women constituted one-half of the total world's population, performs 2/3 of the world's work and market over 3/5th of the world's food. Moreover, women represent 3/5th of the world's total literatures and occupy 1/10th of the world's income and less than 1/100th of the world's property. So, men receive the major share of income and recognition for their economic contribution, while most of women's work remains unpaid, unrecognized and undervalued. According to the Global Employment Trends for Women (2012), preliminary estimates of female employment-to-population ratio stands at 47.8%, while male employment-to-population ratio is 72.7%. The report shows that the global gender gap in employment is increasing rapidly.

¹ Goswami, H.: Socio-Economic Condition of Assam (Akshana Publishing House, New Delhi).

Due to lack of diversification of women economic activity and adequate employment opportunity in the organized sector most of the women workers easily entered in the unorganized sector. Again lack of skill and proper training of women workforce it is very hardship to them find employment in organized sector. Besides these, society's attitude towards women workers, easily accessibility of unorganized sector employment and economic pressure compel them to be an unorganized sector prone workforce.

In India, the condition of women work force is even worse than most of the developing countries of the world. Even after 72 years of freedom of India, more than 1/3rd of the total population still continues to live in abject poverty and out of this 70% are women. Woman's poverty in India is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources, including credit, land ownership, inheritance, and lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision-making process. Various other manifestations of women's poverty in India include hunger and malnutrition, ill health, homelessness and inadequate housing, unsafe environments and their social discrimination and exclusion from the main stream.

In India, most of the women workforce is in the unorganized sector. According to NSSO report in 1990, out of total 123.81 million women workers, 118.86 (96%) million was in unorganized sector. In 2004-05, out of 148.54 million women workforce 143.53(96.63%) million was in unorganized sector. Again in the year 2009-10 out of total 129.49 million women workforce 123.65(95.49%) million was in unorganized sector. According to Deloitte Report, 2019 titled Empowering Women & Girls' in India for the fourth Industrial Revolution, 195(95%) million women are in unorganized sector.

The following tables show distinctly the women workforce in unorganized sector.

Table - 1.1

Size of women workforce in Organized and Unorganized sector(PS+SS) in India since 1999 -2000 to 2019
(in million)

Year	Organized Sector	Unorganized Sector	Total
1990-2000	4.95(4.0%)	118.86(96%)	123.81(100%)
2004-05	5.01(3.37%)	143.53(96.63%)	148.54(100%)
2009-10	5.84(4.51%)	123.65(95.49%)	129.49(100%)
2019	10.3(5.0%)	195(95.0%)	205.3(100%)

Note: To estimate the magnitude of unorganized workers residual method is used.

Source: Computed from NSSO 55th, 61th, 66th and 68th round LFS and quarterly Employment Review of March 2000, March 2005, Annual Employment Review of DGE & T. Deloitte Report on Empowering Women & Girls' Revolution, 2019.

Area of the Study:

Assam is a state of North-Eastern Region (NER) of India, located in the south of the eastern Himalayas. The state is comprised of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley and the valley of Brahmaputra is generally known to the Assam proper.² The Valley comprised of long alluvial plain areas situated between 90⁰ and 97⁰ East longitudes and 26⁰ and 28⁰ north latitudes. The river Brahmaputra has been flows through its entire length from East to Western direction as if an artery, with 117 nos. of tributaries either side. Assam is bordered by six of the other seven sister state of NER; Viz., Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya and its shares international borders with two countries Viz., Bangladesh and Bhutan. Geographically NER including Assam is connected to the rest of India via a narrow strip of land in West Bengal called the Siliguri corridor or

² Goswami, H.: Socio-Economic Condition of Assam (Akshana Publishing House, New Delhi).

Chickeneck.³ The attachments of culture and people of Assam with South East Asia are important elements in India's Look East Policy (now Act East Policy). Assam became a part of India after British occupied the region following first Anglo-Burmese war of 1824 to 26, with a geographical area of 78,438 sq. kms. i.e., about 2.4 percent of the country's total area and comprised 2.6 percent of the country's population.

Administrative Set-up:

For administrative convenience, the state is divided into 33 districts; there are 80 Sub-divisions, 219 Development Blocks, 145 Revenue Circles, 214 Towns and 2202 Gaon Panchyats. Out of 33 nos. district of Assam, Sivasagar and Dibrugarh districts have potential natural and human resources and are playing significant role in the economy of Assam. Yet, most of these resources remain underutilized. From the secondary data, it is evident that most of the workforces in these districts are working in unorganized sector, without proper social security and benefits.

State-wise female WPR reveals that southern states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Kerala have participation rates higher than the all-India level. Wide inter-state disparities are observed with respect to female WPR for rural and urban females. Assam is a state of poverty ridden and most of women workforce is in unorganized sector. Due to lack of employability to the women in Assam most of women workers easily entered in the unorganized sector and try to find out the subsistence level of livelihood. According to NECUS report of 2013-14, in the state of Assam 91.4% women were in the unorganized sector. In the national level, the percentage was 95.9%.

Table - 1.2
Percentage of total women work force of Assam under Organized and Unorganized Sector

Year	Organized	Unorganized	Total
1999-2000	18.77	81.23	100
2004-05	13.66	86.34	100
2009-10	16.41	83.59	100
2013-14	8.6	91.4	100

Source: NSSO Report and NECUS Report

Work participation rate of women labour force in the survey area is found to be very low. Out of total 494 total nos. of women workers only 182 nos. (36.84%) are participating in labour market. Out of total 182 nos. of women workers 171 nos. (i.e., 93.96% of total women workers) are in unorganized sector. In the Table 1.3 it has seen that in the district of Sivasagar 93.55% women workers in unorganized sector and in Dibrugarh district 94.38% women workers in unorganized sector.

Table - 1.3

Sector-Wise Employment of total women workers of Sivasagar and Dibrugarh District of Assam				
Sl. No	District	Organized/ Formal Sector	Unorganized/ Informal Sector	Total
1	Sivasagar	6(6.45%)	87(93.55%)	93(100%)
2	Dibrugarh	5(5.61%)	84(94.38%)	89(100%)
3	Total	11(6.04%)	171(93.96%)	182(100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2016

³ http://www.Wikipedia.org/wiki/assam#cite_note-2

According to different occupations of unorganized sector women labourers of the sample areas it has found that there are basically five categories of workers viz., Self-employed cultivators, Agricultural Labourers, Self-employed Businessman, Households Industry Workers and Casual Labourers. From the Table – 1.4, it has seen that most of the unorganized sector labourers are engaged in the agricultural sector. Out of these five category workers Self-employed Cultivators are dominant work group (28.07%) followed by Casual Labourers (22.81%).

SL. NO.	Occupations	Sivasagar	Dibrugarh	Total
1	Self-Employed Cultivators	25(28.74%)	23(27.38%)	48(28.07%)
2	Agricultural Labourers	16(18.39%)	16(19.05%)	32(18.71%)
3	Self-Employed Businessman	14(16.10%)	17(20.24%)	31(18.13%)
4	Households Industry Workers	11(12.64%)	10(11.90%)	21(12.28%)
5	Casual Labourers	21(24.14%)	18(21.43%)	39(22.81%)
6	Total	87(100%)	84(100%)	171(100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2016

In the area-wise distribution of the unorganized workforce of the survey area it is found that most of portion of the workforce of this segment from the rural area. It has seen that due to lack of skillfulness of the rural workforce of the sample areas, they are easily entered in unorganized sector and try to find out the minimum livelihood income. Engagement of rural workforce in unorganized sector is found to be higher than urban areas. In case of urban areas due to high rate of migration, the dimension of unorganized sector increasing rapidly. Rural workforce migrated to urban areas to find out the better engagement but due to lack of proper skill and training and also high rate of competition they are derived out from the hope of organized sector engagement and bound to engage in unorganized sector and try to find out subsistence level of income in unorganized sector. From the above Table – 1.5 it has seen that the engagement of rural workforce in the unorganized sector of the survey areas is higher than its urban counterpart. The aggregate percentage of engagement of unorganized sector in rural areas of Sivasagar district (67.82%) is found to be higher than the Dibrugarh district (60.71%).

TABLE- 1.5

Area-wise Distribution of Unorganised Women Labourers Under Different Occupations

SL · N O.	Sivasagar District							Dibrugarh District					
	Area s	Self- Employe d Cultivat ors	Agricultu ral Labourer s	Self- Employed Business man	Househo lds Industry Workers	Casual Labourer s	Total	Self- Employe d Cultivat ors	Agricultu ral Labourer s	Self- Employed Business man	Househo lds Industry Workers	Househo lds Industry Workers	Total
1	Rura l	22(25.29 %)	11(12.64 %)	6(6.90%)	7(8.04%)	13(14.94 %)	59(67.82 %)	17(20.21 %)	13(15.48 %)	8(9.52%)	2(2.38%)	11(13.10 %)	51(60.71 %)
2	Urba n	3(3.45%)	5(5.75%)	8(9.19%)	4(4.60%)	8(9.19%)	28(32.18 %)	6(7.14%)	3(3.57%)	9(10.71%)	8(9.52%)	7(8.33%)	33(39.29 %)
3	Total	25(28.74 %)	16(18.39 %)	14(16.09 %)	11(12.64 %)	21(24.14 %)	87(100.00 %)	23(27.38 %)	16(19.05 %)	17(20.23 %)	10(11.90 %)	18(21.43 %)	84(100.00 %)

Source: Field Survey, 2016

In the state of Assam, female workers have much lower participation rates than their male counterparts and hence comprise a marginalized section. The share of rural women in the workforce is much higher than those in urban. However, women in rural India are clearly in an inferior position in the labour market vis-à-vis their urban counterparts. In the sample survey areas most of the rural women are in unorganized sector and have to work long hours in poor working conditions. This is evident from the fact that most of the unorganized sector rural women workers are predominantly engaged in low-paying agricultural work. On the other hand, the higher proportion of urban women engaged in agriculture work in 'services' sector. The wage differentials between rural and urban women are also striking. Rural women earn considerably lower wages than urban women, and the disparities have not shown any tendency to decline.

2. Education and Women Work Participation Rate:

The literacy rate of the sample population is 76.92%, which is higher than the State's average of 72.19% and national average of 74.04%. The illiteracy rate of the sample population is found 23.08%. Out of total 770 literate people in the sample, 406 are males and 364 are females, with male literacy rate of 79.14% and female literacy rate is 74.59%. This is higher than the State's male and female literacy rates of 77.85% and 66.27% accordingly.

From the study it has found that the lower educational attainment of women means higher participation in unorganized sector labour force. Because, higher educated women get less time to work. Besides this, higher educated women by hook and crook manage an organized sector job and manage to a decent living. It has been observed that both in urban and rural areas, Work Participation Rate (WPR) are higher for illiterate females than for females with higher levels of education in general. This implies that a lesser number of educated and skilled women and others are getting work in low paying unskilled jobs.

3. Per Capita Income and Women Work Participation Rate:

Per capita income level of unorganized sector women labourers of survey area is found to be very low and it is not enough for comfort livelihood. Average income level of male unorganized labourers in survey area has been found Rs. 5510 and average monthly income of female unorganized labourers are found to be Rs. 4890. Average monthly income of both male and female unorganized sector labourers has found to be Rs. 5200. Such low level income is not sufficient for subsistence level of consumption. Due to such low level and irregular income the savings level of unorganized sector labourers of the survey areas are very low which is the major cause of low capital formation. High level capital formation is a pre-requisite condition for investment. Again, within the unorganized sector labourers large scale disparities existed between urban area and rural areas. The monthly average income level of the unorganized rural labourers is Rs.4935 which is much lower than urban areas Rs.5460. Most of the unorganized sector labourers of the rural areas are engaged in the agricultural sector as self-employed cultivators and agricultural labourers and their low income level, uncertainty of income and their large size family makes their livelihood more pathetic. In the survey most of the household of the unorganized labourers are in indebtedness in the hand of Self-Help Groups, Money lenders, Non-Banking Financial Institution, Regional Rural Banks etc. In the one hand low level income and on the hand indebtedness make them financially very weak. So, they could not afford proper education and health care facilities to their children which are more important for Human Resource formation. In case of them one quotation is more appropriate that "A country is poor because she is poor."

Table - 1.6

Monthly Income, Consumption, Savings and Indebtness Level of the Unorganised Labourer's in Sivasagar and Dibrugarh District.														
Sl. No	Occupations	Areas	Monthly Income			Monthly Consumption Level			Monthly Savings			Level of Indebtness		
			Male	Femal e	Averag e	Mal e	Femal e	Averag e	Mal e	Femal e		Mal e	Femal e	Averag e
1	Self-Employed Cultivators	Rural	4650	4350	4500	4300	4150	4225	350	200	275	3050	3100	3075
		Urban	5400	4950	5175	5000	4700	4850	400	250	325	2700	2550	2625
		Averag e	5025	4650	4838	4650	4425	4538	375	225	300	2875	2825	2850
2	Agricultural Labourers	Rural	4800	4350	4575	4550	4250	4400	250	100	175	3300	3150	3225
		Urban	5400	5100	5250	5100	4900	5000	300	200	250	3500	3200	3350
		Averag e	5100	4725	4913	4825	4575	4700	275	150	213	3400	3175	3288
3	Self-Employed Businessman	Rural	5400	4500	4950	5100	4250	4675	300	250	275	2550	2800	2675
		Urban	6300	5850	6075	5800	5500	5650	500	350	425	2700	2680	2690
		Averag e	5925	5175	5550	5450	4875	5163	400	300	350	2625	2740	2683
4	Households Industry Workers	Rural	6000	5100	5550	5650	4800	5225	350	300	325	3400	3700	3550
		Urban	5100	4500	4800	4700	4300	4500	400	200	300	3250	3300	3275
		Averag e	5550	4800	5175	5175	4550	4863	375	250	313	3325	3500	3413
5	Casual Labourers	Rural	5700	4500	5100	5500	4350	4925	200	150	175	2890	3100	2995
		Urban	6300	5700	6000	6050	5500	5775	250	200	225	3350	3250	3300
		Averag e	6000	5100	5550	5775	4925	5350	225	175	200	3550	2860	3205
6	Average Level		5510	4890	5200	5175	4670	4923	330	220	275	3098	3062	3080

Source: Field Survey, 2016

4. Political Participation and Women Empowerment:

According to Mahatma Gandhi "Full and balanced development of the nation is possible only when women participate actively and fully in the political deliberations of the nation". The active political participation rate among the unorganized women labourers has to be found very low. Only 6% unorganized sector women are found as active political stakeholders and rest of the women workers are only participating voting process. Again, most of them used as rubber stamp either their male family members or the political big house for their benefits. Illiteracy and economic dependency are the root causes for the less political participation of women labourers.

5. Access of Multi-media and Women Empowerment:

Among the unorganized sector women labourers the percentages of multi-media assess are very low. It has found that due to ignorance and illiteracy they are not interested to access multi-media. Again, hard physical labour makes them far away from multi-media. They used very few device of multimedia for amusement basically television and radio. Now a day, the social media like facebook, whatsapp, twitter, blog etc. are little bit increasing their assessment of social media.

Conclusion:

Women play a pivotal role in a balanced nation building process. For well being of a family as well as a society role of a woman is very important. Last few decades witnessed the sea change in the study and policy implication on women. But in case of country like India where gender inequality existed in a large number position of women is not changing significantly. Assam is an under developed state of India still lagging behind in the area of women empowerment and women market participation. In Assam, more the 90% women workers engaged in unorganized sector and most of them under abject poverty. To accelerate the growth process of Assam it is not possible without changing the economic condition of this large section populace of unorganized sector. In Assam, Government effort and people perception towards the women workforce are still not improving up to satisfactory level. The key factor for increasing women market participation as well as their empowerment level is their self-realization about their potentialities and role in a society. Other-wise no one can make them empowered and economically active participator. Again

Government effective and dynamic policy implication in time to time is very essential to reduce gender inequalities. Other-wise beti will killed in labour room by the gender biased people. After all, it is high time to recognized, valued and accept the potentialities of women workers in a nation building process. Otherwise half of the work potentialities of this globe going to be waste and inclusive growth will be become a vain only.

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