



## **Socio-Economic condition of informal workers: A case study of riverside areas in Goalpara district, Assam**

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### **Abstract**

Informal or unorganized sector is that part of economy which is neither taxed nor monitored by any form of government. It provides critical economic opportunities for the poor and unskilled people particularly for women. Informal sector, also known as 'working for cash', has been expanding rapidly day by day and more than 90% women workers are engaged in this sector. It is observed that most of the people living on the bank of river or the riverside people are unskilled for which informal sector is the only way for their earning.

Therefore, the present study is an attempt to explore the forms of informal workers among the riverside people of Brahmaputra and their living condition in Goalpara district. The district is situated on the South bank of Brahmaputra river and the people residing at the riverside area are basically backward and unskilled for which engaged largely in informal sector. The study will reveal the different forms of informal workers living in a backward condition with no security for their livelihood, particularly the women workers.

**Keywords:** informal sector, riverside, women, unskilled and security

### **1. Introduction**

Indian economy is characterized by the existence of vast majority of people engaged in informal sector. Informal or unorganized sector is that part of economy which is neither taxed nor monitored by any form of government. It provides economic opportunities for the poor and unskilled people particularly for women. People are engaging in this sector increasingly due to its ease of entry, illiterate and unskilled labour force, absence of proper legislative provisions, low scale of technology, unregulated and competitive markets, free from governmental control, etc. Therefore, taking into consideration the significance of informal sector in our Indian economy, the present study has attempted to explore the forms and nature of informal activities, particularly of those people living in the river bank of Brahmaputra.

The Brahmaputra is called mighty river of Assam because it connects India with China and Bangladesh, and Hinduism with Buddhism. It is one of the major rivers of Asia possessing mythological importance as the term Brahmaputra means "son of Brahma" in Sanskrit. The Brahmaputra river of Assam is nature's gift to its people for their survival. Moreover, the river is connected by several districts of Assam and provided livelihood to its people as lives of many millions of Indian citizens are dependent on the Brahmaputra. It is about 6,00,000 people live on the riverine, mainly depends on the annual normal flood for bringing moisture to their agricultural lands.

However, Goalpara district of Assam is well-connected with the mighty river of Brahmaputra as the district is situated on the South bank of the river. Most of the people living on the bank of the river are backward and unskilled, and they find it easy to settle down after migrating from different areas for different opportunities in nearby urban areas. These people basically associated with a number of different informal activities for its ease of entry.

### **2. Objectives**

The present study has been done with the following two main objectives-

- a) To explore the forms and nature of informal activities engaged by riverside people.
- b) To study the socio-economic living conditions of riverside people of Goalpara district.

### **3. Methodology**

The methodology is an important part in any social research. The methodology part tries to explain the methods and procedures adopted in the study concerning the source of data. The research methodology used for the present study is descriptive and explorative based on primary and secondary data. The secondary data is drawn from books, journals, official records and other printed materials available related to the study. But to acquire in-depth information structured Interview Schedule has been used by taking 40 respondents from about 400 households as sample size residing nearby riverside areas of Goalpara town. Moreover, the application of observation technique is also used during the study.

### **4. Results & discussion**

#### **4.1 Informal Activities**

The different forms of informal activities engaged by riverside people and the nature of those activities are as

##### **4.1.1 Forms of Informal Activities**

When it comes to informal sector, it covers a numbers of different activities and the people residing nearby riverside area of Goalpara town are also associated with various informal activities. Therefore, in this study 20 male and 20 female respondents have been selected to find out the division in the forms of activities on the basis of sex also. The following two tables have shown the different informal

activities engaged by riverside people and it also reveals the differentiation in the forms of male and female activities. Out of 40 respondents, the majority respondents are engaged as labourers but the difference is that the male labourers are associated with daily-wage labourers, construction workers, carpenter, etc., and the female labourers are only associated with home-based domestic works. About 30% male are earned their livelihood by fishing from the Brahmaputra, followed by 15% handcart puller and 10% street vendors like selling fast foods or plastic products in roadsides. On the other hand, about 35% women are associated with making rice cake i.e. *pithas*, followed by 20% women selling tea as a way of earning and 5% as selling milk.

**Table 1:** Forms of male informal activities

Forms of Informal Activity	No of Male Respondents	Percentage
Labourers	9	45
Fishermen	6	30
Street Vendor	2	10
Handcart Puller	3	15
Total	20	100

Source: Primary Data

**Table 2:** Forms of female informal activities

Forms of Informal Activity	No of Female Respondents	Percentage
Domestic Worker	8	40
Rice-cake Maker ( <i>Pitha</i> )	7	35
Milk-Seller	1	5
Tea Shop	4	20
Total	20	100

Source: Primary Data

**4.1.2 Nature of Informal Activities**

The nature of doing the informal activities is also different due to the different forms of activities. It means when it comes to regularity of informal employment, about 55% activities which are basically associated with women like domestic workers, rice-cake maker, selling tea, etc. are everyday activities and about 45% are occasional employers like labourers of construction works, fishing, etc.

**Table 3:** Regularity of Employment

Regularity of activity	No of Respondents	Percentage
Occasional	18	45
Everyday	22	55
Total	40	100

Source: Primary Data

Another important thing is that the timing of doing such activities, whether it is occasional or not, is also different according to the forms of informal activity. For example-making rice-cake or selling it along with tea is the activity which is done before 8-9 a.m., i.e. in the early morning, whereas selling fast foods is done in the evening times. Labourers including construction workers or daily-wage Labourers works from 8a.m. to 4p.m., whereas the domestic workers works for 2-4 hours from early morning. The nature of informal activities also includes the location of doing the activities which is also different like people associated with the activity of selling tea, rice-cake or fast foods, etc., is done at footpath, for domestic works or selling milk they have to go to the employers’ or customers’ houses etc.

**4.2 Living Condition**

The living condition of riverside people will basically include housing, hygiene, social and economic conditions which are almost similar regardless of their different informal activities. They are as-

**4.2.1 Housing Condition**

Almost all the houses in the riverside area are mud or bamboo walled with tin roof consisting of one room with kitchen in verandah. They don’t have electricity facility in the house and the main source of lightening up the house is kerosene-based lamp or sometimes in the absence of kerosene, they use candles. These people have widely used wood or cow dung for cooking as they don’t have LPG facilities.

**4.2.2 Hygiene Condition**

The people of riverside area are living in an unhygienic condition which often causes diseases, particularly of their children. The first cause of disease is drinking water without filtration or boiling it. Another cause is that they don’t have adequate toilet facilities and they often defecated in the open space. Moreover, those who hardly have toilet facility that is not well-equipped with septic tank.

**4.2.3 Social Condition**

When it comes to social condition of riverside people, it not only includes the social status or class based on their mode of income, but also their educational status, the culture they follow or the languages they speak. Most of the respondents in the study are found illiterate except three respondents who are literate but not completed high school. Further, these people are migrated from different char areas of the district or from nearby districts for better economic opportunities and started to settle down in the riverside areas of nearby Goalpara town. Therefore, the language they used to speak is Bengali even in their workplace too.

**4.2.4 Economic Condition**

The economic status of riverside people is not satisfactory, particularly of women. The following two separate tables on per day income of men and women have shown the unsatisfactory economic condition of women in comparison to men. It is inferred from the table that out of 20 male respondents, 40% are earning about Rs.250-300 per day. But out of 20 female respondents, 45% have their earning about Rs.100-150 per day which is lower than men’s daily average income. Moreover, men’s minimum earning is Rs.150 and maximum is up to Rs.300 or above. But in case of women, about 30% have their earning below Rs.100, 45% is about Rs.100-150, 10% is about Rs.150-200 and 15% have earned about Rs.200-250 per day as shown in the table.

**Table 4:** Income of Men

Per day Income	No of Male Respondents	Percentage
Below 100	0	0
100-150	0	0
150-200	3	15
200-250	6	30
250-300	8	40
Above 300	3	15
Total	20	100

Source: Primary Data

**Table 5:** Income of Women

Per day Income	No of Female Respondents	Percentage
Below 100	6	30
100-150	9	45
150-200	2	10
200-250	3	15
250-300	0	0
Above 300	0	0
Total	20	100

**Source:** Primary Data

## 5. Conclusion

The people residing at nearby riverside areas of Goalpara town are widely involved in the informal sector and earn their livelihood by doing a number of different informal activities. Due to their backwardness as they are basically migrated from various char areas of the district, they somehow manage to settle down in riverside areas and engaged in informal kind of activities for its ease of entry. The study have revealed the different forms of activities adopted by men and women, and the different nature of doing those informal activities including location of work, timing of doing those activity, daily or occasional. It has also revealed the unsatisfactory living condition including housing condition to economic condition. Although the riverside people are living in a poor economic condition due to their lack of skill, the study has found that the condition of women is more backward than the men. Moreover, these sections of people are more prone to diseases because of their lack of consciousness regarding hygiene condition which is also polluting the Brahmaputra.

Therefore, it can be concluded that some essential measures or policies should be taken for the migrated riverside people by the NGOs to make them aware at least about their adequate living condition including the need of education, health and hygiene so that they can provide a better future to their children. It will also help to preserve the natural quality of Brahmaputra and its surroundings by maintaining a clean environment.

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