

A Study on the Socio-Economic Conditions of Fishing Community of Assam with Special Reference to the Lakhimpur District

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Abstract

The fishing culture plays a vital role in the economic development of the state. A good number of people of the state are engaged in this field. It not only generates employment but also earns money from foreign countries. In India, inland water resources consist of rivers and canals of about 1,95,210 km, reservoirs 0.29 million hectare, pond and tanks, 0.24 million hectare lakes, floodplain and derelict water bodies are 0.07 million hectares. But, such a vast water source to offer yet underexploited. Assam is endowed with vast fishery resources in rivers, ponds, derelict water bodies, and beels covering about 2.85 lakh hectars located in both the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley. The fishy culture of Assam plays a significant role in the socio-economic development and employment generation and supporting livelihood. Despite the vast potential of the fishy culture in the state, the fishermen's socio-economic condition is not satisfactory. The fishermen have been deprived of many amenities for which they were deprived of the livelihood's minimum needs. In this paper, an attempt has been made to study the socio-economic condition of the fisherman of Assam with special reference to the Lakhimpur District.

Key Words: *Fishy culture, Fisherman, rural development, socially backwardness*

Introduction

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the majority of the people of Assam as like the rest of part of the country. Though the state provides more interest in industrialization during the last six decades, still the state is not in a position to feed its citizens as their requirement. Due to this cause, a majority of rural people engaged in additional or alternative means of earning to revive their declining economic condition and their living standard. Therefore, there are needs for diversification of agriculture and agricultural allied sector like inland fishery and fish culture.

The increasing demand for fish and fish products in the national and international market, stagnating marine fish production with its associated cries availability of underutilized and unutilized water resource in the inland region has forced policymakers to come out in certain interventions in the form of promotional and segmental policies. In recent time, there has been increasing realization that inland fishing has adequate potential to provide employment and reduce poverty by creating sustainable fishery base livelihood.

The role of the fisheries sector in the Indian economy is amply evident. It generates employment for the large coastal and other population where more than 24 lakhs full time and 36 lakhs partial fisherman are engaged and raises the nutritional standard, increase food supply and earns foreign exchange and improving the socio-economic condition of fisherman. The Inland fisheries play an important role in uplifting the rural poor accounting for about 15% of total global employment.¹ It also recognized as a influential income source and employment generator. It also recognized as an important area for the growth of subsidiary industries and is a source of cheap and nutritious food besides being a foreign exchange earner. In India it is estimated that 12 million people are directly engaged in fishing and about 60 million are exclusively dependent on it for a living.²

The state of Assam has 3.44 lakh ha of static water resources in the form of beels, ponds and tanks, community tanks, swamps/ low lying areas, reservoirs besides riverine resources of about 2.05 lakh hectares.³ In addition to the two major river system viz. the Brahmaputra and the Barak with their tributaries and plays a significant role in the socio-economic development and employment generation and supporting livelihood and also forms an important source of diet for people in Assam.⁴

Table No. 1
Fishery resources and their utilization of Assam

SN	Resources	Number	Water Spread Area, in km/hectores
1	River Fisheries	Main River 2 Tributaries- 53 lakhs	4820 Km.
2	Beels /Ox-bow	Registered: 430 Unregistered: 767	60215 hectores
3	Forest Fisheries	71	40602 hectores
4	Derelict water bodies/swamps/low-lying	3887	5017 hectores
5	Reservoir fisheries	52	116444 hectores
6	Individual Ponds	6361393	2553 hectores
7	Community Tank	76308	55430 hectores

Source: Department of Fishery, Government of Assam

¹ FAO. The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, 2000

² Manasi S, Lathe N, Raju K V. Fisheries and livelihood in Tungabhadra Basin, India: Current status and Future possibilities. The institute for social and Economic change, Bangalore, India, 2009, 1-24.

³ Gogoi, Budhin, et al, *Fishery based livelihood approaches and management of fishery resources in Assam*, India, International Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Studies 2015; 2(4): 327-330

⁴ Water Resource, *Fish and Fish Seed Production*, Director of fishery Government of Assam p.1

Fishy culture is prevalent in the rural areas of the state especially among the people of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Muslim minority. It is also observed that Koibatas, Jal keot etc. of Scheduled Caste and Missing and Kasari of Scheduled Tribes and a part of a Muslim community practice fishing for their livelihood. However, in the changing economic scenario, people of these communities also adopt other economic activities efficiently along with their education. People involved in fishing are categorized into three groups: 1. People those catch fishes for daily uses. 2. People belonging to the fishing community and dependent on fishing for their livelihood. 3. Rural entrepreneur (Leaseholders). In this study the 2nd group of the fishing community is taken into account.

A detailed study on the socio-economic condition of the fishermen and the fishing gears of the Lakhimpur District has not been documented earlier. Therefore, the present study has been pledged to evaluate the socio-economic conditions of the fishermen as well as fishing gear used by them.

Objective of the Study

It is widely accepted that the main focus of the fishing communities in Assam in general and the Lakhimpur, in particular, is to how they generate the production, redistribution and gradually in entrepreneurial development. In this study, the following objectives enumerated for study-

1. To examine the socio-economic condition of the fishing community of the District.
2. To study the income, saving and investment generation of the fishing community.
3. To know the use and utility of the fishing culture of the District.

Methodology

The study will be based on both primary and secondary sources of data. To examine the objectives of the study, the investigator carried out a field study in the Lakhimpur district in particular.

For collecting data and information, 10 villages were randomly selected from two developments block, namely Lakhimpur and Telahi Block. In the final stage, altogether 100 sample households were selected for the collection of data.

The data has been collected by using structured questionnaires and direct interaction with sample beneficiaries. The secondary data were collected from various Journals, newspaper, website, official documents, the internet and related other official documents of the Government

department concerned. The present study covers Bachagaon— a village of Sobansiri valley under Madhya and Dakhin Telahi Gaon Panchayat and Amtola and Ranganodi under Telahi Block in Lakhimpur District of Assam.

Profile of the Respondents

To study fishermen's socio-economic condition and the use of different types of fishing gears in Lakhimpur district, the researcher has interviewed 100 fishermen from a different group of the fishing community. In this study, the researcher has tried to examine the socio-economic condition of fishermen of Lakhimpur District, especially in Telahi Development Block. To understand the socio-economic condition of the respondents, it is essential to understand the profile of the same. The profile of the respondents of the study area can be discussed as under.

Table-2
Total Numbers of the Respondents

Sex	Numbers
Male	100
Female	-

Source: The field study of the researcher
Table No 3 states the numbers of the respondents. It was found that all the fishermen involved in fishing culture were men. There were not a single number of women or third gender.

Educational Status

Table No. 3 stated the educational qualification of fishermen from the study area. Out of 100 respondents, it is found that 95 per cent of the fisherman has belonged to education group of lower primary and only 5per cent matriculates or HSLC passed.

There is no higher educated fisherman in the study area. The educational status of the fisherman families is very sorrowful. It is found that 86 per cent out of 540 members is left the school before pass the upper primary school. 13 per cent is matriculation and only 1 per cent is BA passed.

Table-3
Educational Profile of the Respondents

Level of education	Family education status	Percentage
Below HSLC	465	86%
HSLC	70	13%
BA	5	1%
MA & others	Nil	-

Source: The field study of the researcher

Religious Status:

Table No. 4, stated the status of the religion of respondents. The researcher found that the Hindu community had played dominating role in the study area. It is estimated that 63.3 per cent of respondents belong to the Hindu community and 36.7 per cent of respondents from the Muslim community. No Christen, Buddhist and Jainism community fish-man was found in the study area.

Table 4
Religious status of Fishermen

Religion	Total number	Percentage
Hindu	57	63.3%
Muslim	33	36.7%
Others	nil	Percentage

Source: The field study of the researcher

Social Distribution of the Respondents

In the Lakhimpur district, more or less all categories of people belong to different caste are involved in the fishing activities. In the study, it was found that 11 per cent of respondents belong to ST, 43 per cent respondents were Schedule Caste, 42 per cent belonged to OBC. Among this 42 per cent, 33 per cent belongs to religious minorities i.e. Muslims, which is states in Table No. 5

Table-5
Caste of respondents

Category	Numbers	Percentages
ST	15	15
SC	43	43
OBC	42	42
GENERAL	-	-

Source: The field study of the researcher

Age-wise Distribution of the Respondents

Table No. 6 shows the percentage of the age distribution of respondents (fishermen). In the study, it was found that only the head and young men of the family were associated with the fishing activities. During the study, it was observed that the age group of fish-men was started from the above 20 years. The analysis stated that 26.81 per cent of respondents belonged to the age group between 20-30 years, 49.28 per cent of respondents belonged to the age group between 31-40 years, and the rest of 23.91 per cent of the respondents belonged to the age group between 41-50 years.

Table-6
Age-wise distribution

Age group	Percentage of respondents
20 to 30	26.81
30 to 40	49.28
40 to 50	23.91

Source: The field study of the researcher

Socio-Economic Condition of the Fisherman:

In the study area, it was found that the socio-economic condition of the fisherman is not good. They are living in a below standard condition. Most of the fisherman belongs to the schedule

caste and schedule tribe. The general caste people are not associated with this culture. From the traditional social points of view, these categories of people have one own identity as a fisherman and hence, they are recognised as low categories of people of society. In the study area, it was also found the one class of economically sound people plays dominating role in this field. They take the fish field for lease and invest their money and other categories of people were compelled to work under them. In the study area, we have seen three different categories of people involved in fishing activities. The first categories are people who catch fish for their daily uses, not for commercial purposes. The second group of people, belongs to the fishing community and dependent on fishing for their livelihood. They catch fish daily under the leadership of leaseholder by 60:40 shared. The third group is found, namely leaseholder who invests capital. We have also seen the participation of women in the field of fishing culture. The profiles state that the 100 per cent respondent is a male category, but the male respondent says that their woman is helping them by catching fish.

Housing pattern: The housing pattern is one of the most important indicators or determinants of the people's economic condition. During our study, an attempt was made to find out the housing condition of respondents. From the investigation, it is found that 95.6 per cent of fisher's housing condition is Kacha whereas only 4.4 per cent of respondents are living Assam type house. No RCC building houses are found among the fishing community. This reflects the poor living condition of the people in the study area.

Sanitary facilities: The sanitation condition is very bad among the fishing communities due to poor economic condition. From the survey, it is found that 73.3 per cent of fisher's sanitation condition is Kacha and 12.3 per cent are semi-kacha. 11.1 per cent of people have yet been to the open toilet. At present, the initiative has been taken by the government through *Anamay* under *Sachacha Bharat Abhijan* to constitute permanent sanitation result of which 3.3 per cent of respondents get permanent sanitation are Pucca. The present study revealed that the sanitary conditions of the fish farmers were relatively not satisfactory.

Drinking water facilities: The provision of clean and safe drinking water is considered to be the most valued element in society. The study showed that 50 per cent of fishing community use

drinking water from deep well and 16.7 per cent use neighbours well. It is also observed that 33.3 per cent fishing community use tube well for drinking water. No government water supply is found for freshwater.

Electricity facilities: In the observation, it is found that 75 per cent fisherman's housing connected with the electricity facilities and 25 per cent has not connected with an electric line and therefore they used kerosene lamp and candle.

Health Service: The health facilities among the ST fisherman are very poor. There is no governmental and private hospital in the area particularly in the area of ST people living. When health problem occurred among these people, they generally take advice from village doctor and use natural medicine.

Income from fishing: The standard of living of a person depends on income. But, the income of the fisherman in the study area is very low because they have no own fish source for regular fishing. They catch fish under the leadership of leaseholder. On the other hand, the study area is flood-prone and they could not catch fish regularly in the whole year. The researcher found that their average daily income Rs 250. From the analysis of the fish man's income level, it was revealed that the annual income of the fish man varies between 20,000 to 1 Lac. The highest percentage of income Rs 30000 to Rs 50,000(38.9%) and the second-highest income group is between Rs 20,000 to Rs 30,000. This level of annual income is not sufficient to maintain their normal livelihood for which their socio-economic condition is very bad. It is noted that the fishing culture is seasonal in the study area. During the time of the flood, they cannot maintain their livelihood only income from fishing. Therefore, they are engaged in other activities like agriculture, business and daily labour.

Loan and Saving: The fishing community in the study area is economically backward. Their annual income is not satisfactory. Therefore, the saving percentage is low. However, 74.4 per cent fish-man open account in the bank saving almost zero. The causes for low income are low production and low capacity for catching fish. The amount of fish catches by the fisherman in the study area is not always the same. During the survey, it is found that 34.4 per cent of fisherman catches average daily fish up to 5kg, 38.9 per cent fisherman up to 7kg and 17.8 per cent

fisherman catches daily fish average up to 12 kg. Only 8.9 per cent of respondent daily catches fish above 12kg. The fisherman used different types of fishing gear to catches different types of fish in the study area. In the investigation, the researcher found that 26.7 per cent of fishermen use a cast net, 23.3 per cent of fishermen used a scoop net and 30 per cent of respondents used a gill net for catches fish. Some of the fishing communities used traditional fishing gear like bamboo made, which percentage is 13.3 while around 23.3 per cent of respondents used scoop nets, 30 per cent of respondents used gill nets, and 6.15 per cent of respondents used different kinds of traditional bamboo traps and different fishing lines, which is 13.3 per cent and 6.7 per cent respectively. The researcher also found that no fisherman has received a loan from the bank for fishing.

Findings

From the analysis of data collected from the fish man in the study area, the researcher found the following findings related to the fisherman's socio-economic condition.

1. The size of the family of the fishing communities is big and in every family, there are at least five family members or above.
2. The educational qualification is very low. It is found that their children leave the school before they completed HSLC due to low economic condition.
3. In the observation, it is found that only Hindu and Muslim community are engaged in fishing practices in the study area. No Christian Fisherman is found. The ST, SC and Muslim minority dominated the fishing field in the area.
4. There are two types of fishing community is found who catch fish for only daily consumption and another catches fish for business purpose.
5. The housing and sanitation pattern is almost Kachcha. Most of the sanitation system among the fishing community is open. They use well and tubal for drinking water. Most people use pond and river water as drinking water.
6. The 38 per cent people's fishing income is between 30,000-50,000. Due to low annual income, their saving passbook is zero amounts.
7. The fish market is unorganized. There are no formal markets to sell fish by themselves. They sell fish at the place of fishing. The middle man buys fish from the fishers and sells it in the market.

8. The fishers have no own fish water to catches fish. The leaseholder buys rivers, Beels Pond and other fish wetland area from the government or landowner and permits fishers to catch fish. The catching fish has divided into 60:40 among them.
9. The social status of the fishing communities is not good. They have always treated as low-class people in society.

Suggestion

From the analysis of data and findings of the study, few recommendations may be put forward for the development of fish production and fishing community as below.

1. To get a better result from the fishing industry, it is needed to intensively used modern scientific fishing practices.
2. To popularize and motivate fish farming in Assam, the government should organise a demonstrational program for the farmer community.
3. The fish man of the study area is economically backward to practice modern fish culture. Therefore, the loan should be provided by the government with a subsidy to the fisher at more easy terms and condition and a special offer must be there who practices fish farming as the primary occupation for their livelihood.
4. The bank and fishery department should provide loan at a low rate of interest. If required, there should be provision for the short period loan not exceeding one year as maintenance cost of the farm and their family.
5. The fishery department should take the initiative to award fisherman for their achievement so that the people this profession as a noble profession.
6. It is essential to form cooperative societies to develop beels, pond and other wetland areas to increase fish production.
7. Special incentives may be created to offer for the special achievement of the farmers in the shape of a reward or newsletter.
8. Different integrated fish culture practices viz., fish-cum-pig, fish-cum-duck, fish-cum-paddy, fish-cum-dairy, fish-cum-poultry etc. should be more extensively adopted by the farmers.
9. The activities of the beneficiary must be strictly supervised so that they cannot show any negligence in performing the scientific guidelines. Government should take necessary

measures for extraordinary damage. There should be the facility of insurance coverage for large scale damage and that should be made popular.

10. Government should take initiative to set fish market so that they can easily sell their fish without the help of the middle man.
11. Government should provide facilities related to education, sanitation, drinking water, road and transportation, etc. so that the socio-economic condition of the people develops. For government should emphasize the programme of rural development.

Conclusion

The economic condition of the fishermen of the study area is too poor. Maximum numbers of fishermen are unable to fulfil their minimum domestic requirements. Most fisherman are less understanding about modern capture fisheries techniques. Here capture fishery business was male dominant. During survey periods, it was found that a total of 12 types of fishing gears were used in fishing time. As obtained from the study, it was noticeable that cast net, tongi Jal, dheki jal, kawoi langi, puthi langi and rou langi were most extensively used for fishing by local fishermen. According to the seasonal variation, different kinds of traditional fishing equipment's were also used.

The socio-economic condition of the fishermen in the study area is not satisfactory. The fishermen have been deprived of many amenities. The education level of the fishermen was too poor. Due to the lack of awareness as well as the poor income of the fishermen families, their son and daughter cannot go to higher education. The researcher found that due to economic backwardness and low income, the people of this community cannot send their children to school. Therefore, they engage their children in daily labour or as a salesman in the fishing market to support their families before attaining education. Therefore, the government should take the initiative to improve the educational status in the adjacent area, such as built up educational institution, free admission and direct financial assistant to the student. Although there are available fishing resources in the District, it is not properly used. The fisheries potential of these resources is still underutilized. Therefore, the scientific fish farming method is needed to increase its productivity of fish. Hence, aquaculture reforms should address issues in enhancing

fish production to ensure sustainable livelihood to the rural farmers from both capture and culture fisheries.

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