



IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON COST OF LIVING STANDARDS OF THE SCHEDULED CASTE COMMUNITIES IN BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY OF UPPER ASSAM, NORTH-EAST INDIA

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Abstract

The economic development of a country is a concern for every developing country like India. On the other hand, the economic development is also depends on rural development. But due to Covid-19 Pandemic all the development process has adversely affect. In India too, the Covid-19 Pandemic has slowed down the economy upto a large extent. Most of the peoples working in the urban and semi-urban areas have lost their sources of income due to this Pandemic situation. It directly affects the household consumption of those vulnerable. Among the vulnerable the most effected people are the SCs and the STs. The vulnerable due to the Covid-19 pandemic have been facing difficulties in their day to day economic life in India. Among the households, the BPL families are affected mostly in both the urban and rural areas in India. Among these BPL families, mostly the daily working personals and their household are directly affected particularly in rural areas in the North Eastern Region. Similarly the members of the SHGs are also effected economically. In this background a survey has been conducted to understand the economic condition of the SC member SHGs and their families at rural and flood affected areas of Brahmaputra Valley of upper Assam. For the purpose of the study, Lakhimpur district was purposively selected for gathering both primary and secondary information. In order to achieve the goal of the study a field survey was conducted by the researcher by randomly collecting the primary data from 50 SC member SHGs at 5 (five) Development Blocks of Lakhimpur district and from each sample SHGs 2 SC members were randomly selected. A personal interview and observation method were used to collect the primary information maintaining a social distance as recommended by the government. The study concludes with the findings that the average expenditure on food consumption per household as well as the average expenditure on non-food items per household in a week were decreased due to effect of Covid-19.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, Cost of Living Standards, SHGs and SC Community.

Introduction:

In most of the developing countries poverty is deepest among the Scheduled Caste (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) communities. Poverty directly affects in forest and flood-prone areas which are extending from eastern Uttar Pradesh to the Assam plains. These vulnerable groups of people are deprived of their adequate access in the basic needs of life such as health, education, housing, food, security, employment, justice and equity. Some of them again dispossessed off their own traditional

land as their livelihoods are being undermined. The poverty problem creates a tough issue as it increases year after year even after independence (Prabhala et al., 2019). Issues of sustainable livelihood, social and political participation are also considered as a major problem in India. All these factors are thus responsible for higher incidence of poverty in rural India. In this regard, microfinance to Self Help Groups (SHGs) may be considered an option for meeting the financial needs of the people living in



the rural areas. The SHGs are playing a vital role for the economical development of the rural poor. After joining SHGs and by taking the different economic activities peoples have not only increased their savings but also economically uplifted.

But due to Covid-19 Pandemic all the development process has adversely affect. In India too, the Covid-19 Pandemic has slowed down the economy upto a large extent. According to NCAER, incomes of almost 85% of households in the national capital region (NCR) have been impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak (The Economics Times, April, 2020). Most of the peoples working in the urban and semi-urban areas have lost their sources of income due to this Pandemic situation. It directly affects the household consumption of those vulnerable. Among the vulnerable the most effected people are the SCs and the STs. The vulnerable due to the Covid-19 pandemic have been facing difficulties in their day to day economic life in India. Among the households, the BPL families are affected mostly in both the urban and rural areas in India. Among these BPL families, mostly the daily working personals and their household are directly affected particularly in rural areas in the North Eastern Region. Similarly the members of the SHGs are also effected economically. In this background a survey has been conducted to understand the economic condition of the SC member SHGs and their families at rural and flood affected areas of Brahmaputra Valley of upper Assam.

Objectives:

The present study was based on the following objectives:

- ▶ To study the socio-economic background of respondents.
- ▶ To study the food consumption pattern of the respondents before and during the lockdown period.
- ▶ To study the Non-food consumption pattern of the respondents before and during the lock down period.

Scope and Methodology:

The study is confined to Lakhimpur Districts of Assam only. Again for the purpose of the present study Lakhimpur district is purposively selected

for understanding the economic condition of the poor people living in the rural areas during the Covid-19 Pandemic situation. Moreover the sample districts are also considered as the flood affected districts amongst the other districts of Assam. The present study was based on both the sources of primary and secondary. The secondary data have been collected from District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Official websites of Aajeevika & Ministry of Rural Development, and some important reports & briefing book of NRLM collected from the internet. The secondary data have also been collected through various journals, magazines, relevant documents and newspapers. In order to achieve the goal of the study a field survey was conducted by the researcher by randomly collecting the primary data from 50 SC member SHGs at 5 (five) Development Blocks (namely Lakhimpur, Naoboicha, Boginadi, Narayanpur and Dhakuakhana Block) of Lakhimpur district. Again, from each sample Block 10 SC member SHGs and from each sample SHGs 2 SC members were randomly selected. A personal interview and observation method were used to collect the primary information maintaining a social distance as recommended by the government. For analyzing, simple average and percentage analysis have been used.

Analysis and Findings of the Study:

After collecting the primary data from the field survey, the researcher has made an attempt to analyse the data by preparing tables.

Respondents According to Family Size:

The relevant data relating to family size of the members of the SHGs are depicted in **Table 1** as below:

Table 1
Respondents According to Family Size

S I. No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	2 members family	18	18
2	3-5 members family	22	22
3	More than 5 members family	60	60

Source: Field survey.



The study revealed that 60 per cent of the respondents have members of more than five in the study district. 22 per cent have three to five members and 18 percent have 2 member families that have been found in the district.

Respondents According Family Nature:

The relevant data relating to family nature of the members of the SHGs are depicted in **Table 2** as below:

Table 2
Respondents According to Family Nature

Sl. No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	Nuclear	36	36
2	Joint family	64	64

Source: Field survey.

The study revealed that 64 per cent of the respondents have joint family in the study district whereas 36 per cent have nuclear families that have been found in the district.

Respondents According to Holding BPL Card:

The relevant data relating to having BPL cards of the members of the SHGs are depicted in **Table 3** as below:

Sl. No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	Own Card	92	92
2	Cards of friends & relatives	04	04
3	Both Card	04	04

Source: Field survey.

The study revealed that 92 per cent of the respondents have their own BPL Cards for use in domestic purpose where 4 per cent each have used the BPL Cards of their relatives or friends or even both for purchase of grocery items for their household purposes in the study district.

Respondents According to Daily Income Status:

The relevant data relating to daily income status of the members of the SHGs are depicted in **Table 4** as below:

Table 4
Respondents According to Daily Income Status

Sl. No.	Variable	Before Lockdown	After Lockdown
1	Below Rs. 100/-	-	16
2	Rs. 101 – Rs. 300/-	04	42
3	Rs. 301 – Rs. 500/-	16	24
4	More than Rs. 500	80	18

Source: Field survey.

The study revealed that 80 per cent of the respondent’s households were earning more than Rs. 500/- per day before the lockdown period which was now only 18 percent. Majority of the member’s households were earned daily income between Rs. 101/- to Rs. 300/-. It is not sufficient to live with that limited amount of earnings. The daily earnings were reduced rapidly during this lock down period. 16 percent respondents were earned below Rs. 100/- in the study district. Thus the economic condition of the respondents were very poor during the Covid-19 Pandemic situation.

Respondents According to Food Consumption habits (in Weekly Rupees):

The relevant data relating to food consumption habits of the members of the SHGs during the lockdown and before lockdown period are depicted in **Table 5** as below:

Table 5
Food Consumption habits (in Weekly Rupees)

Sl. No.	Variable	Before Lockdown		After Lockdown	
		Amount	Percentage	Amount	Percentage
1	Rice	700.00	2.63	500.00	3.89
2	Sugar	1,250.00	4.70	650.00	5.05
3	Wheat	2,200.00	8.27	1,650.00	12.83
4	Grocery	1,550.00	5.83	500.00	3.89
5	Kerosene	4,000.00	15.04	3,560.00	27.68
6	Vegetables	6,200.00	23.31	2,400.00	18.66
7	Non-vegetables	10,200.00	38.35	3,600.00	27.99
8	Fruits	500.00	1.88	-	0.00
	Total	26,600.00	100.00	12,860.00	100
	<i>Average per households</i>	532		257.2	

Source: Field survey.



As far as food consumption was concerned, household's food consumption pattern was also found decreased as the average expenditure decreased from Rs. 532/- per week to Rs. 257.20/- per week during the lockdown period. Among the food items during the lockdown period there was not a single household found in the district who have able to purchase fruits for the households. This was because of decrease in daily income of the respondents during lockdown period. The use of kerosene has increased from 15.04 percent to 27.68 percent.

Respondents According to Non-Food Expenditure Pattern (in Weekly Rupees):

The relevant data relating to expenditures on non-food items of the members of the SHGs during the lockdown and before lockdown period are depicted in Table 6 as below:

Table 6
Non-Food Expenditure Pattern (in Weekly Rupees)

Sl. No.	Variable	Before Lockdown		After Lockdown	
		Amount	Percentage	Amount	Percentage
1	Mobile Recharge	1250	13.02	625	9.36
2	DTH/Cable Recharge	2250	23.44	1250	18.73
3	Petro/Diesel	2000	20.83	600	8.99
4	Personal Hygiene	2500	26.04	1500	22.47
5	Cleaning Products	1000	10.42	1000	14.98
6	First Aid Items including Hand Sanitizers	600	6.25	1700	25.47
	Total	9600	100	6675	100
	<i>Average per households</i>	<i>192</i>		<i>133.50</i>	

Source: Field survey.

Similarly as regards to non-food expenditure was concerned, household's non-food expenditure pattern was decreased as the average expenditure decreased from Rs. 192/- per week to Rs. 133.50/- per week during the lockdown period. Among

the non-food items during the lockdown period the households were more conscious about the health and hygiene care as the weekly expenditure increased from 43.07 percent to 62.92 percent. But expenditure on mobile , DTH Recharge, use of petrol/Diesel were gradually decreased as revealed from the field study.

Suggestions:

After analysing the data the following suggestions are given forwarded:

- As per the direction of Assam Govt. the high-income group of people should come forward to help those BPL families economically.
- By maintaining social distance and maintaining medical security, if possible, the medically fit people should give some opportunity to do their normal income generating activities twice in a week.

Conclusion:

The Covid-19 Pandemic effects the whole economy of the world in a very depressed way. Everybody is suffering from this Pandemic. We should very care about ourselves not only for own but also for the family as well as for the society. The economic condition of the poor SC families are very much effected in both rural and urban areas. The study concludes that due to effect of Covid-19 the income of the poor households is decreasing and thereby they should be taken care by the government. The study also concludes that the food consumption and the expenditure on non-food items among the SC communities were found very poor during the lockdown period due to the Covid-19 Pandemic situation in area under study.



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