

The Socio Economic Status of Females of Sundarban Regions in West Bengal

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Abstract: The economy is such a factor that decides the status of living. Sundarban is the largest area in the world with tidal halophytic mangrove forests. It is a delta of the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers and is situated in the West Bengal state of India and the neighboring country of Bangladesh. Residents rely mainly on agriculture, livestock rearing, and fisheries. They face challenges such as poverty, marginalization, and an acute struggle against geo-climatic events. The present study was conducted to assess the socio-economic status of the farming community under the given resources such as demographic, physical, cultural, environmental, and social issues. A combined indicator of one's economic and sociological status is the socioeconomic status. It is a nuanced measure based on income, education, and occupation, measured in a number of ways, which represented the work experience and social and economic status of an individual relative to others. The empowerment of women is a systematic concept and a dynamic multi-dimensional process that helps women to understand their distinctive characteristics and impact in all areas of life. To do this, it is important to unite and organize women into autonomous groups in order to gain unity and influence and facilitate collective action at the proper time. Rural women with backgrounds in the socioeconomic field are more likely to experience those diseases mainly because of their involvement in hard work in households. This paper examines recent changes in female workforce composition in the area of Sundarban regions. The study identifies the health and educational status of Sundarban women. The present paper deals with the changing role of the female in the development of the socio-economic condition of the Sundarban region.

Keywords: Socio-economic development, Occupational diversity, Education, Health, Sundarban regions.

1. Introduction

The coastal area of West Bengal is dotted with a number of mangrove species. These mangroves and related forests, abundant with agricultural and marine

wealth, have been the mainstays of villages, agriculture, development, and commerce for centuries. Indian Sundarbans face additional burdens due to the lack of access due to the innumerable streams, canals, and tidal rivers that separate the islands from each other and from the mainland. (Mandal, 2003). The individuals of this region are actually dependent on natural resources to support their means of livelihood, and resources are exploited or over-exploited. For people who live on the edges of the forest reserve, fishing is a major source of livelihood. In the lives of the people of Sundarban regions for years, mangrove habitats have been indispensable. A thorough understanding of existing subsistence practices and related landscape or land-use changes is needed if the ecology and culture of the Sundarban regions are to be organized. To that end, the dynamics and scope for reform of the local subsistence sectors were first discussed and the future successful equity assessment followed. The Sundarban region can divide the various livelihood types into four categories, including the collection of farming, fishing and plowed seed, the wood collection, the handicrafts and others, honey, and other non-timber products (NTFP). (Chandra, 2018). Gender discrimination is common in the Indian Sundarban regions. A patriarchal, patrilineal culture is shaping women's lives in this region. Females usually face a host of nuisance issues, including hard physical labor; less income and wealth, power; violence and intimidation; poor social status; and under-represented in policy and decision-making. The problem is compounded by extreme poverty, poor housing, sanitation, lack of access to clean water for drinking, limited health care, limited availability of education, work opportunities for women who have been active in frying and fish drying/processing. Women in Sundarban regions often work for drying fish for four months, because during these months they have no other viable alternative livelihoods. The literacy rate and the educational status of women throughout the area of Sundarban regions are quite small. A larger proportion of the female population is only educated primarily. The essence of participation in right-based programs such as MGNREGS would affect women's skills and abilities. Greater self-assurance, social recognition, changed roles, and qualities of leadership all transform your work. This type of change can be seen as a significant indicator of women's empowerment.

2. Operational Definitions of the Terms Used

Socio-economic development of society is the cycle of economic and social development. Indicators such as GDP, age, employment and work rates are

used to calculate socio-economic development. Improvements are also seen in less concrete aspects such as personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety and the degree of civil society participation.

Occupational diversity can be defined as the likelihood that two people are from different occupations, drawn at random.

Education is the process of systematically obtaining or providing instruction, especially at a school or university. According to Aristotle “Education is the process of training a man to fulfill his aim by exercising all the faculties to the fullest extent as a member of society.”

3. Review of Related Literature

Nahan et al. (2014) studied the “Socio-economic status and perception of fishermen towards resolving human tiger conflict around the Sundarban Tiger Reserve, India.” The researchers studied the socio-economic status and attitude of 115 fishermen to tigers in the outlying villages of the Sundarban Tiger Reserve. Researchers found that the majority of respondents (66 per cent) lived in Kutcha households prone to regular natural disasters, and 59 per cent of them were illiterate and never attended school. Sixty-two percent of respondents argued that the main role of tigers was to kill and subdue other life forms, while 67 per cent argued that the Sundarban Tiger Reserve declaration was not helpful to their livelihoods. Promoting healthy opportunities for employment, organizing education and awareness campaigns on tiger attacks and rising tiger victim compensation schemes are major socio-economic measures which are most likely to reduce the conflict in human wildlife.

Jagannath Mahato & Dr. Bimal Mondal (2019) made a Case Study on the “Socio-Economic Condition of the Bhumij Tribal Communities in a Village of Sundarban, West Bengal.” Women and men in the village were found to be engaged in a variety of occupations, such as cultivation, harvesting of forest products, small business and agricultural as well as non-agricultural work. It has also been noted that the same individual or family is engaged in more than one trade, and a daunting access to forests and dangerous rivers and creeks has also been reported by the women’s community. A closer inspection of the village’s age composition vis-a-vis occupation revealed a higher preference for the younger generation of Bhumij to engage in migrant labor outside the village and too often cross district and state boundaries. They argued that the

true economic and social situation of the Bhumijis of Colony Para was their deprivation and landlessness, combined with the dangers of entering the forest as a subsistence strategy.

Dutta et al. (2019) the researchers studied the “Socio Economic Scenario of the Farming Community Living in Climate Sensitive Indian Sundarban.” A total of 120 mixed farmers were randomly selected from 10 villages of 5 blocks of Indian Sundarban for study purposes. Independent variables have been calculated using the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation methods. Based on the primary data collected through a personal interview, it was found that the respondents were marginal farmers with an average farmland of 0.41 hectares. The crop intensity was 155.10 per cent, which means that the area is under two crops per year. Diversified crop patterns have been practiced during the agricultural year in upland, medium and lowland areas. 53.83 per cent of land holdings have been irrigated annually. A flock made up of horses, sheep and goats. The production of both native and cross-breed cattle was 1.53 kg/day and 2.90 kg/day, respectively, which were very small. 53.96 per cent of the average income was received from crop production, 15.67 per cent from livestock and 29.96 percent from fisheries. 42.5 per cent of households had credit connectivity, and the rest did not receive credit from any source. Both respondents have experienced extreme climatic conditions over the last 10 years. It was found that 31.67 per cent of the family respondent had immigrated to cities in search of employment. 81.67 percent of the respondents were in contact with the extension. Of which 86.73 per cent had extensive contact for crop production, 70.41 per cent had extensive contact for livestock breeding and 45.92 per cent had extensive contact for fisheries. This research provides a reasonable overview of main socio-economic aspects that will allow policy makers to develop strategies for the climate prone Indian Sundarban’s farming group.

4. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this paper are:

- To explore the existing status of socio-economic conditions of women of the Sundarban region.
- To study about the occupational diversities of women of Sundarban region.

5. Significance of the Study

The socio-economic conditions of various regions in India are seen in various researches conducted. But it is very important to study the socio-economic conditions of females of Sundarban regions. And their role in the improvement of socio-economic condition of their region they live.

6. Methodology

Secondary data are the data collected from another individual or organization. The relevant information on the tribal population can be collected from the Block Development Office, the Panchayat Office and various south 24 Paraganas district government offices, as well as from the South 24 Parganas district census report used to collect secondary information.

7. Research Questions

The following research questions are framed:

- What is the meaning of Socio-economic status?
- What are the livelihood options of females of the Sundarban region?
- What is the educational and health status of women of Sundarban regions?

8. Discussion

8.1. Livelihood Options of Females of Sundarban Region

People living in and around Sundarbans rely primarily on non-timber forest produce (NTFPs) collection. Collecting wild honey in the wilderness of Sundarban regions is one of the main livelihoods in this region, and the people who indulge in it are locally called *mouals*. Certain livelihood choices in this region are timber collection, fuel wood collection, and thatching materials, gastropod fishing and processing. Shifting agriculture is also practiced in this field. (I.Sundar, 2007). Women work in agricultural land, riverside forest, and also go to the deepest jungle in search of food and fuel, risking their lives. The woman plays a dual role of a mother and an earner in the family in the field of agriculture; rural women perform various labor intensive jobs. We are specifically attached to the agricultural system of summer, rainy and winter season. Women, in particular, are also expected to gather wood from fields that

are used as a substantial source of fuel for cooking. Clean drinking water from remote areas is also collected. Rice monoculture was considered the backbone of South 24 Parganas' Sundarban blocks. Sundarban's women are engaged in the cultivation of rice. Livestock and other related activities such as milking, milk processing and ghee preparation are also carried out by women. Rural women earn extra income from the selling of poultry and milk. Mostly women are involved in the washing, weeding, feeding and milking of animals. It is also the duty of rural women to collect, and practice that also gives poor families additional income. The rates of women in poultry farming at the household level are at the core of the poultry industry. Women in Sundarban regions have successfully mobilized and developed their skills in various alternative livelihood activities such as embroidery and organic farming. (Bhowmick, 2000).

8.2. Educational Status of Females of Sundarban Regions

Literacy and basic education liberate people, impart skills and trust, and change the way learners live. They are instrumental in reducing an illiterate person's sense of insecurity. Education is one of the main components of the three Human Development Index (HDI) measurements. Education is, therefore, a top priority for the development of the entire region, and Sundarban is no exception. As far as the educational level is concerned, not all the blocks are highly developed and henceforth they are not equally enlightening to the advancement of society and to the strengthening of the economic base of Sundarban. The overall development of Sundarban regions depends to a large extent on its education, since there is a positive relationship between them. (Das, 2018). Education can provide people with more opportunities for employment. Certain infrastructural innovations should also be related to education. Marriage of girls at a very low age is also due to a lack of proper education. Superstitions concerning women present in every sphere of life in Sundarban can only be eliminated through better education. The extent of the educational advancement of any area is best understood by women's literacy. Female literacy throughout the region reflects not only the standard in the education sector, but also the overall development of the region. The rate of female literacy in the Sundarban regions is not as good. The Sundarban's female literacy rate is quite weak. It should be noted that the southern and western Sundarban blocks are in better condition as far as female literacy is concerned.

8.3. *Conditions of Health of Females of Sundarban Regions*

There is a serious public health issue and the incidence of anemia in women has been increased. Iron deficiency is the most common and widespread dietary disease in the world. Certain dietary deficiencies such as vitamin B12, foliate, and vitamin A are also known. Women in rural West Bengal are among the most ignored and abused, even without the additional distress and practical problems of natural disasters. Teenage pregnancy is higher than the national average in West Bengal, especially in rural areas where child marriage is still widespread. The incidence of high-risk births is increased by low maternal age, poor nutrition, and lack of access to and use of antenatal care services. (Mukherjee, 2007). The amount of hard work that women do in this field throughout the day creates a number of health problems. It is noted that women working on bending positions for longer periods of time and carrying more weight tend to suffer more from MSD-related illnesses and gynecological problems than others. Health care choices are limited to indigenous health care providers who use herbal supplements from forest products, private health care providers who charge prohibitively exorbitant prices, and health professionals who are not eligible, trained or approved to provide medical care but still practice medicine without supervision. Women recruited to be community health workers in either organization are related to their local societies and are therefore attuned to the region's cultural beliefs, prejudices, and sensitivities, such as gender selectivity norms that benefit males, social approval of dowry, and family violence that maintain a patriarchal society. In the remote corners of rural India, the development of the healthcare system needs to be stressed in order to help women recover from their illnesses and to achieve overall health.

9. Conclusion

Sundarban is one of the world's complex ecosystems, created by interactions between land and water, and is considered to be one of the most active wetlands on Earth. The mangroves of Sundarban are well endowed with natural resources that can be used effectively to generate sustainable livelihoods for villages on the edges of the reserve; little effort has been made to date. Proper exploration of NTFP based rural enterprise generating opportunities in the Sundarban region is, therefore, in effect, contingent on the judicial implementation of the technical intervention in the management of natural resources, which will be both economically feasible and environmentally sustainable. The transfer

of appropriate technology in this regard is becoming the most crucial aspect, as it involves the development of technology, the testing of technology for financial feasibility, public dissemination, the development and maintenance of capable enterprises, and, finally, the establishment of a comprehensive market information system. Female members of the family have really realized the economic crisis and have come forward to make a successful alternative economy with a change of Sundarban's climate. It can be observed that in most of the Sundarban blocks of South 24 Parganas, the disparity in job participation between male and female inhabitants has also been reduced. The female segment of society has recently been introduced as the main worker as well as the marginal worker in almost every block of Indian Sundarban of South 24 Paraganas. At the same time, the gender gap between male and female workers has also been reduced. It can be said that Sundarban black women have already come forward to join the mainstream economy in the Sundarban area and to play a very important role in surviving in such a difficult situation. It is seen that males in the Sundarban regions are comparatively more literate than females. Recently, thanks to mid-day meals and other government programs related to education, the gender gap in literacy is declining across age groups. The majority of rural women are uneducated, unskilled, and bound by tradition, thus their productive capacity is also poor and counted as unskilled labor. Rural people have a very vibrant life. Her work begins at dawn and ends at night. Daily routine work begins with house cleaning, drinking water collection, dishwashing, laundry, food preparation for farming, child care. She handles these things quite cleverly.

10. Recommendation and Suggestions

In the light of the above study, the researcher trying to lay down several recommendations for future research options. The following recommendations are as follows:

- To prove the validity of present research and the necessary for further research.
- Research can be done on Socioeconomic status of other unprivileged areas of the country.
- The present study has been conducted on only Women's social economic status, but study can be conducted on Socioeconomic status of men.

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