



## Challenges to Rural Livelihood Practices: A comparative study among Garos & Non-Garos in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya, India

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of the study is to explore the differences in the asset pentagon relationship between the Garos and the Non-Garos and the challenge faced by the traditional ways of livelihood and the competitions has also been highlighted in the study. This paper attempts to answer the research questions such as (i) What is the inter-relationship of the asset pentagon relationships of these groups of people? (ii) What are the challenges faced by following traditional ways of livelihood? and (iii) What is the degree of competition amongst them in their market? The study attempts to explore the comparative dimensions of rural livelihood challenges among two communities. The area of study is West Garo Hills District, Meghalaya, India. Randomly 8 samples from each market place were chosen to be the samples based on their willingness to provide answers through schedules. The samples constitute 4 Garos and 4 non-Garos, where both 2 permanent shops and 2 temporary sellers have been taken as a sample. The asset pentagon framework was used to make a detailed comparison between the Garos and the non-garos in the West Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya in India. Descriptive statistics using SPSS 23 were performed for the analysis of data. The study shows that the top 5 popularly known market places are Tura market, Jengjal, Rajabala, Tikrikilla and Rongram. The asset pentagon shows interesting relationships between the assets owned by them. This study discovers the various factors underlying the competitive scenarios in the markets among two groups. The various challenges faced by them are transportation problems, shortage of storage facilities, space constraints, inadequate customers, financial shortages, quarrels for space, conflict between themselves which may arise from any circumstances, etc. The degree of competition amongst the Garos and non-garos are mostly for the customers, market share and space for setting up temporary shops on weekly market days

**Keywords:** Challenges, Garos, Indigenous, Livelihood practices, Social Capital.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Livelihood is a means of way of living. It includes assets, income, capabilities and activities that enable people to obtain things necessary to make a living (IFRC). Scholars have defined livelihood in many ways and forms. Livelihood has been a major problem for majority of the populations of the world in developing economies [10]. The traditional way of livelihood is inadequate to meet the expanses of contemporary living styles and standards [18]. Further, there has been an increase in the dependence on every possible kind of means of income or livelihood [18]. With the increase in population there has been a higher demand of every products and services thinkable. Traditional way of production is inadequate to meet this vast gap between demand and supply [2]. The livelihood practices have been changing from time to time on the basis of its efficiency to adequately meet ones needs and sorts [3]. Livelihood practices are changing owing to competition, socio-economic conditions, climatic conditions, migrations and many other reasons [15]. These changes bring about many challenges to livelihood practices of tribal people.

The Garos are the second largest tribe in Meghalaya, India. They dwell in the state of Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, West Bengal and neighbouring country such as Bangladesh (South-west Garo Hills Districts, Government of Meghalaya). In this Study, market places in the Garo hills were considered for sampling purposes. The livelihood practices of Garos have changed over the period of time. They were primarily dependent on jhum cultivation and resources from forest and hills for livelihood. With the swept of modernization, the way of livelihood practices have also changed. Many are now involved in government and non government jobs, business, daily wage labour, security, street vendors, grocers, etc. Modernization has also brought development, business and people from all over the country to Meghalaya and Garos have also moved out from their homelands in search of work and better opportunities. Presently, there is a mix of population living in Garo Hills districts viz. Bangals, Bengalis, Biharis, Hajongs, Koches, Manipuris, Marwaris, Nepalis and many others who are actively involved in commercial activities.

The villagers who rely on markets for their survival are the ones who are less researched and less focused for any studies in the region.

This paper attempts to bring up the challenges faced by the rural indigenous Garos of Garo Hills districts in terms of livelihood practices, asset pentagon relationships and the degree of competition for the customers which are not touched upon by any researcher. The paper also highlights the scenario of prevailing issues in rural markets in terms of competitiveness among indigenous rural people.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous researchers have defined livelihood as the means of living which comprises of capabilities, assets and activities that are necessary for living and surviving [5]. According to the previous works, it has been found that rural people of Asia and Africa were dependent on various livelihood activities such as farming, hunting and fishing [8]. Works on rural livelihoods have found that the most prominent source of livelihood is farm products and forest resources [1]. With the growing population and increase of dependence on only conventional sources of livelihood has led to depletion of already scarce resources [12]. The farm works are seasonal and this makes majority of the rural populations out of work leading to migration to cities, coal mining sites, construction sites and other areas where works are available. This has made rural people to diversify the risk of dependence on single means of livelihood that is farm to non-farm and other means of livelihood [17]. This also gave rise to growth of local craftsman and handicrafts works, trading, brokerage, etc [6].

Previous studies show that before the developments and colonization during the reign of British, Garos would trade with neighbouring plain areas. Sometimes they would even plunder neighbouring plain areas for other resources as well. After independence of India, situations changed and influx of non-garos also started for various economic and livelihood activities. This way the trend continues and people from various race and communities are of common sightings even in interior Garo dominated villages as well. Majority of non-garos being petty merchants, grocers, shopkeepers, barbers, blacksmith, hawkers, daily wage earners, fishermen, etc. As dwellers in rural Garo hills were mostly dependent on income from farm produce and forest produce, need for more sources of livelihood forced people from those areas to seek other alternatives as well. This lead to following the suits of non-garo petty merchants, weekly hath sellers, groceries, brokers, etc. Based upon the models of sustainable livelihood framework designed by Department for International Development (DFID), the five livelihood assets were identified to find out the inter-relationships between Garos and non-Garos of Garo Hills districts. The core livelihood assets are viz. Human capital, Social capital, Natural capital, Physical capital and Financial capital.

The majority of the population of the state is engaged in agricultural activities, despite 10 percent of the land being used for cultivation. This has made to seek for other alternatives of livelihood, such as brokerage, shopkeeper, trader, contractors, daily wage earners, etc. and bought many challenges and tough

competitions in the market mostly dominated by non-garo buyers and sellers. The inadequate infrastructure in rural areas for economic activities has further augmented the challenges faced by the traditional ways of livelihood. In previous literary works, challenges of livelihood in India found that population, natural resources, education, health, infrastructure, problems of employment generation has major influence on livelihood practices [16]. Similarly, there are major challenges of the traditional ways of livelihood, which can only be highlighted by a proper investigation in the field.

Competition in the market place is often thought to bring improvement in quality and reduction in prices of the commodities. It is believed that competition pressures sellers to reduce prices, offer better quality and efficient ways of doing business [11]. However, there are different opinions in this respect, since the theoretical foundations and empirical evidences are vague [7]. The degree of competition in a market is generally measured on the basis of price, quality, quantity offered amongst the competing firms. Several methods have been developed for measuring the degree of competition, viz. Hirschman-Herfindahl index (HHI) , which is a measure of the degree of competition based on how a market is structured [13] and best-response-measure (BRM) developed by Behrens and Lijesen in 2015 [4]. Competitions amongst the unorganised grocers, traders, hawkers, brokers are often for selling space, customers, market share, price, quantity and quality.

## III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Meghalaya is one of the states of north-eastern India. It has currently 11 districts spread across an area of 22,430 square kilometres which are broadly demarcated as Jaintia Hills, Khasi Hills and Garo Hills. The study has been conducted in Garo Hills Division, which comprises of 5 districts viz. North Garo Hills, East Garo Hills, South Garo Hills, West Garo Hills and South West Garo Hills. The study has been conducted in West Garo Hills district which has a second largest population (642,923, as per 2011 census) amongst all 11 districts. 5 popular markets known for their huge weekly market had been considered.

Identification of the markets: 5 most popularly known markets by the people are identified by asking 10 random people and shopkeepers in the Tura Shopping Complex in Tura (district headquarter). Top 5 market places were then identified based upon the frequency of the response obtained. They are Tura market, Jengjal, Rajabala, Tikrikilla and Rongram. For this work, a sample of randomly 8 samples from each market place was chosen to be the samples based on their willingness to provide answers through schedules. The samples constitute 4 Garos and 4 non-Garos, where both 2 permanent shops and 2 temporary sellers have been taken as a sample.

The asset pentagon has been used to analyze the various components of sustainable livelihood framework developed by DFID. Descriptive statistics using SPSS 23 were performed for the analysis of data.

For the second research questions, open ended questions were asked to the respondents through schedules.

The response obtained has been compiled in order to come to the conclusion. For the third questions, respondents were asked the way how they would describe the competitions amongst each other. It was made clear prior to them who their competitors were. The results obtained have been compiled as a summary of the vivid responses.

#### IV. RESULTS

##### A. Human Capital

Around 35% of Garos had family members of more than 6 while 40% of non-garos had family members of more than 7. The family members ranged from 4 to 8 in the sample. The earning members in the family showed from one to four members in the family. Majority of the Garos and the non-garos showed two earning members with a percentage of 45 and 70 respectively. Most of the non-garos had more than one earning members in the family. In an independent t-test ( $p=0.05$ ), the result ( $p=0.101$ ) showed that there is no significant correlation between the number of family members and the number of earning members for both the groups. The human capital index of the Garos and non-garos are 2.7 and 3.1 respectively, indicating that the human capital is more amongst the non-garos. The overall human capital index was found to be 2.93.

##### B. Social capital

The majority of the group had a membership of at least one local body, Garos and non-garos being 35 and 40 percent respectively. Garos are more associated with local bodies than the non-garos. Around 20 percent of them were not associated with any local bodies and committees. The association with these bodies and committees are mostly found with the permanent shops than the hawkers. The social capital index for Garos and non-garos are 0.90 and 0.60 respectively, indicating that the Garos have more social capital than the non-garos. This is evident from the fact that Garos have more bonding amongst each other through a church or clubs and village community than the non-garos who often come to do business only.

##### C. Natural Capital Index

The land ownership amongst the Garos range from 5-17 bighas in the sample and non-garos from 2-12 bighas in their own native places. Majority of the Garos owned more than 5 bighas per family. The land generating

revenue or livelihood ranged from 2-14 bighas per family in Garos and 0-10 bighas amongst non-garos. The natural capital amongst the Garos and non-garos showed the value of 0.64 and 0.65 respectively. This was due to the fact that much of the land in plain areas can be put for productive purposes, whereas in hilly terrain putting the land into productive use is quite difficult and challenging when the access is limited.

##### D. Physical Capital Index

The physical capital index is relatively weaker on Garos side which shows five household without electricity and road inaccessible with vehicles and only one non-garo falling into that category. Rest all are well connected by vehicle enabled road connection till their home as well as electrified. The physical capital index of the Garo shows as 1.25 where as that of non-garos showed 1.85. The vast difference is due to location of some households in hilly areas where electrification have not been done for being too remote and scattered human habitations.

##### E. Financial Capital Index

The financial capital index among the Garos and non-garos indicated 0.54 and 0.48 respectively. This indicated that the ratio of non-farm and other total earnings is more in Garos. Apart from agro based products, Garos are relatively more involved in diversified jobs than the non-garos. Many of the Garos earn their livelihood by handicrafts, selling of forest products and many lump sums economic activities. The data shows that non-farm livelihood activities range from 1-6 in garos and 1-4 in non-garos. In both the groups vast majority of 60 % have at least 2 non-farm source of livelihoods.

##### F. The Asset Pentagon

After putting all the index values, the asset pentagon has been plotted. The overall result shows that both the groups lack in financial capital index, the highest of the being in human capital index. This may be due to the reason for more number of earning members per family amongst the non-garos.

The Garos were ahead in social capital as they are from the same locality and have been associated with their own local bodies and communities, whereas non-garos are there for the sake of business opportunities.

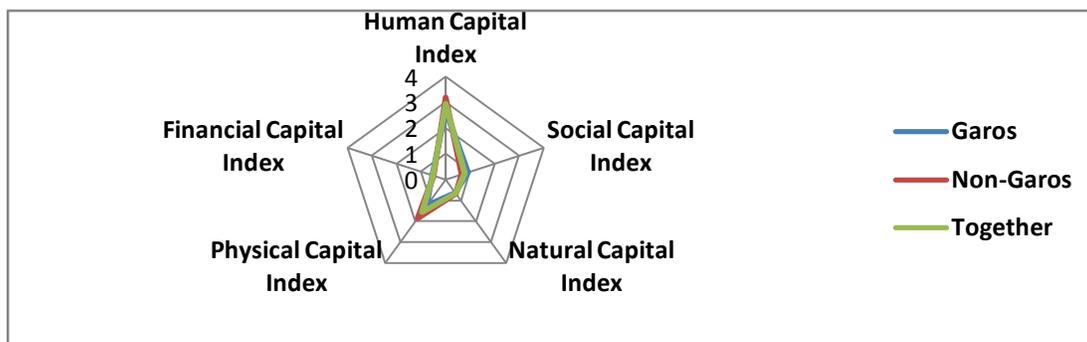


Fig. 1. Asset Pentagon for Garos, non-garos and combined together.

### *G. Challenges of Rural Livelihood practices*

The challenges faced by the rural livelihoods practices are many as obtained from the opinions of both the groups. This challenges have been due to the fact that majority of the traditional ways of livelihoods are insufficient to create enough revenue for the family as a whole. These practices need to be upgraded and value addition has to be incorporated to those means of livelihood so that they generate enough revenue to sustain themselves and the family. Another major challenge is the problem of sustaining those practices profitably in this period of tough competition from cheaper machine and imported products and chores of alternatives. The improper implementation of government schemes for bringing up of traditional arts and crafts, lack of proper channels or merchandising those produces are also a big challenge. Therefore, step has to be taken to identify the setbacks and loop holes that hinder the sustainability of such kind of livelihood practices. The unhealthy competition amongst traders for the market share is also a challenging factor for rural livelihoods. The clashes and fights among traders and customers inhibit the growth of suitable environment for business as well as other means of livelihood. The depletion of natural resources, change in climatic conditions, unusual rainfall, floods, draughts, pollution, disappearance of many flora and fauna are also a challenge for traditional ways of livelihood. Therefore, measures have to be taken for building a sustainable livelihood thorough cooperation amongst the stakeholders.

### *H. Degree of competition*

The degree of competition amongst the Garos and non-garos are mostly for the customers, market share and space for setting up temporary shops on weekly market days. Generally there are much felt competitions amongst the vegetable sellers and hawkers who sell similar products in the market. These competitions are more dominant when non-garos sell products similar to theirs in a lesser price. For that reason, the occurrence of torching of shops, throwing away of selling merchandize, fights and trashing occurs sometimes. To build suitable atmosphere in the market, town committee or the village head responsible for the location has to see that things do not turn violent and out of control. Business bring forth revenue for both the groups, it is up to the individual how he manages them and sustain them for a long period of time.

## **V. DISCUSSION**

For the measurement of the livelihood asset pentagon variables has been chosen as per the observations in the field and DFID literatures.

### *A. Human Capital*

This represents the skills, knowledge, ability to labor and good health. In this context, number of working or earning members in the family has been considered as the variable factor. Each earning member whether male or female, old or young has been considered as a unit. Therefore, calculation of human capital index is given by an equation where the total number of family members divided by the total number of earning members in the family.

### *B. Social Capital*

According to DFID, social capital represents networks and connectedness, membership of formalized groups, relationship of trust, reciprocity and exchanges. Shopkeepers, brokers, grocers, etc. have their own networks and associations. In this regard, membership with various local bodies and merchant bodies has been considered. Membership to any will be taken as a unity. Therefore calculation of Social capital index is given by an equation in which total number of membership of earning members is divided by the total earning members of the family.

### *C. Natural Capital*

According to DFID, natural capital constitutes natural resources stocks from which resources and services useful for livelihood are obtained. In this regard any revenue generating bighas of cultivable land, ponds, house-hold land, and forest land are valued in unity. For calculation of natural capital, total revenue generating natural resources is divided by the total land owned by the family.

### *D. Physical Capital*

According to DFID, physical capital consists of the infrastructures that help to function more productively in the process of livelihood generation. Here, vehicle enabled road till home, electricity are considered for the study. All of these are valued in unity. In order to calculate physical capital, all the responses are taken as unity and totaled.

### *E. Financial Capital*

According to DFID, financial capital denotes any resources that can help people to use for any livelihood activities. Here, financial capital includes salaries, pension, and micro-finance helps. Each one of them is taken as unity for the calculation. Financial capital can be calculated as division of total non-farm earnings with the total earnings.

The challenges faced by following traditional ways of livelihood are a matter of concern for which everyone has different opinion and solutions as well. The challenges will be categorized as follows:

### *F. Opinions of the Garos*

The Garos have mentioned that their practices of traditional ways of livelihood comprises mostly of agriculture, hunting and fishing, gathering edible fruits and vegetables from forests. Apart from that they have been selling agricultural and forest produce in daily or weekly markets, such as bananas, bamboo shoots, areca nuts, handicraft items, weaving products. One of the shopkeeper opined that one has to have multiple source of livelihood in order to lead a decent life if you do not have a regular decently paid jobs. Traditional way of livelihood is just sufficient to sustain the bare minimum basic needs. The resources have dwindled, and the forest produces are also scarce due to excessive exploitation and heavy population dependence on them. There are a lot of restrictions on the use of forest produce from the forest department and non-government organizations as well. Therefore, the best practices are educating off-springs and engaging them in jobs or business.

The poor productivity of agricultural lands in shifting cultivations, depletion of fishes in rivers, depleting forest covers are also posing as a challenge while practicing traditional livelihood practices. The changing needs and ever increasing materialism has also posed as a challenge to traditional livelihood practices as they are inadequate to meet those ends.

Along with that, entry of cheaper alternatives of commercial goods and services from industrialized states and nations has also made rural livelihood practices redundant and very inefficient in terms of productivity and quality. Cheaply availability of many synthetically produced goods have made many of the craftsman and artisans produce sometimes inferior and less profitable to sale in the market.

The increasing competitions from the outside sellers have also become a challenge for the Garos, as it is hard to compete with the productions from the mainland India or plain areas. The landscape features also pose as a challenge of making the best out of rugged terrain.

#### *G. Opinions of the non-garos*

The Non-garos opined that the lack of sufficient infrastructure also poses a threat to not only traditional but modern means of livelihood as well. The improper implementation of rural development schemes also pose as a challenge to rural livelihood practices. The better revenue generation premises in modern means of livelihood are also a challenge for the continuation of traditional livelihood practices.

Both the groups had a similar opinion that the majority of the present younger generation is not interested in traditional means of livelihood practices. Availability of cheaper and better machine products has also made traditional livelihood means as very inefficient and worth discarding those practices.

#### *H. Degree of competition for the means of livelihood*

As the discussion is related with the livelihood practices, degree of competition has obtained mixed responses. In both the groups, some claimed that they were not interfering in each other's business directly as competitors. On the contrary they were mostly engaged in transactions, Goods and services are bought and sold by both the groups. Agricultural and non-agricultural goods are sold by both groups, despite in different percentages. Raw unprocessed agro based products with shorter shelf life were often mostly sold by Garos, while the processed agro based products with longer durability agro-based products were sold mostly by non-garos. It is not easy to make judgment on who sales what the most by a mere observation, still as a keen observer, hawkers selling in the footpath are mostly Garo womenfolk and merchants from outside states buy them in bulks for resale in other places where Garo Hills products are in high demand.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

This paper showed the asset pentagon framework comparison between the Garos and the non-garos in the West Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya in India. This gave a comprehensive idea about the collective asset pentagon framework of both the groups together as well. The paper tried to establish the challenges that are faced by the traditional rural livelihood practices of the

Garos and brought out the degree of competition amongst the Garos and non-garos for the same set of customers in the market.

## **VII. FUTURE IMPLICATION OF RESEARCH**

The transition pattern of livelihood has often been less studied by the researchers in the past. The asset pentagon has been used as a tool to make comparisons with those who practice traditional means of livelihood and those who follow contemporary means of livelihood. The challenges for sustaining the traditional ways of livelihood have been a major issue for the rural tribal folks of Meghalaya. The challenges identified can be tackled by undergoing meticulous study involving all the major stakeholders and a self sustaining livelihood can thus be developed by cooperation from each other. Each one of them wants to gain the most out of their livelihood activities. Competitions are in fact sometimes leading to arguments and burning of shops as well. It is a zero sum game. Further, the challenges of livelihood if tackled in a professional way can be used for strengthening their relationships and earning capabilities as well. These people are bound to make a living in this manner as they see this way of earning to be easier than the other means relatively. Therefore, constructive steps in development of these unorganized sectors can boost the living standard as well as bring development in the region as a whole. The future research may be conducted by identifying all modern economic activities of indigenous tribal people from different nooks and corners of the world.

**Conflict of Interest.** None.

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