

AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LIVELIHOOD ASSETS STATUS OF TRIBAL RUBBER GROWERS OF TWO PROMINENT DISTRICTS IN ASSAM

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The paper seeks to enquire the livelihood conditions of the tribal rubber growers of two major rubber growing districts of Assam *viz.*, Goalpara and Kokrajhar. Five livelihood assets or capital indices (physical, human, natural, financial and social) were used to reflect the livelihood conditions of these rubber growers of the chosen districts. Twenty three variables (called sub-components) were used to construct these five capital or asset indices. The five asset indices together constitute Sustainable Livelihood Indices (SLI) for each of the two districts in consideration. The SLI of the Goalpara tribal rubber growers was found to be higher than that of Kokrajhar growers indicating better overall socio-economic status of the growers of the former district. However, differences between the individual sub-components among the growers of the two districts were insignificant indicating almost similar livelihood assets status of the tribal rubber growers of the two districts. Some of the factors contributing to the existing livelihood conditions of the two selected districts were also identified in the paper for further policy implications.

Keywords: Assam, Livelihood assets, Rubber plantation, Sustainable livelihood framework, Tribal livelihood

INTRODUCTION

Assam is an important contributory state in India's rubber plantation sector from the non-traditional region. Although evidence of existence of native rubber in North East India in general and Assam in particular dates back to the Colonial era (Majumdar, 2016), commercial rubber plantation was introduced in this state in 1950s by the Soil Conservation Department of the Government of Assam (Pradeep *et al.*, 2017). The twin objectives of introducing rubber in North East India were to wean off swidden agriculture-led soil and forest land degradation in the hills and to provide the

local hill-dwelling swidden agriculture practicing nomadic Scheduled Tribes (STs), permanent settlement-based livelihood opportunities (Debbarma and Purkayastha, 2019; Viswanathan and Shivakoti, 2008).

Given Assam's prolonged existence in the rubber plantation sector of our country, it is imperative to study the impact of rubber plantation on the lives and livelihoods of the growers. In this regard, this paper attempts to assess the livelihood conditions of the tribal rubber growers of two important rubber growing districts of the state *viz.*, Goalpara and Kokrajhar. These two districts are consistently performing for several years