

Constraints Impeding Livelihood Diversification of Farmers in West Bengal

Biswarup Saha¹ and Ram Bahal²

1. Asstt. Prof., Department of Fisheries Ext., Rural Sociology & Management, COF, CAU, West Tripura

2. Principal Scientist, Division of Agricultural Extension, IARI, New Delhi-110012.

Corresponding author e-mail: biswarup.ext@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Livelihood diversification is a key strategy by which people in many parts of the world try to improve their well-being. Livelihood Diversification has come under increasing scrutiny because of their powerful and pervasive impacts. DFID adopting Livelihood diversification as central to its strategy for meeting the goals set out in its 1997 White Paper 'Eliminating World Poverty. However, farmers are often not able to construct productive strategies to diversify their livelihood because of overwhelming odds. Drawing on research from Darjeeling and Uttar Dinajpur districts of West Bengal this paper presented evidence that despite the vast potentiality to diversify the livelihood towards farm and non-farm activities in the study area, there were problems such as negative perception of the community, lack of marketing facilities for the product, absence of storage infrastructure, lack of improved technology and skills, inadequate or no experience on new occupation, shyness in doing socially underestimates work, lack of business start-up budget and absence of wide market for the non-farm output. There were also lacks of potential researches to study the effect of non-farm activities on farm production and to identify the major problems that hamper the non-farm sector. State machinery should play a facilitator's role in terms of promoting investment in infrastructure such as road, electricity, irrigation facility. etc. more of a decentralised operations for government programmes, especially using the local institution for greater efficiency and better outreach was needed. Availability of support services such as credit to rural producers through appropriate changes in policies and delivery mechanisms should be ensured for sustainable development of farmers.

Key words: Livelihood diversification; Constraints ;

Diversification is the single most important source of poverty reduction for small farmers in South and South East Asia (FAO and World Bank, 2001). Livelihood diversification is a key strategy by which people in many parts of the world try to improve their well-being. It may be a means for those in poorer countries to try and assure themselves a better income through diversified activities. Diversification of livelihoods also happens in richer countries, where individuals and families seek opportunities to earn extra money. There is also widely believed that an important driver of the rural non-farm economy is agricultural growth. The focus has therefore remained on increasing farm incomes and supplementing this with efforts to enhance skills, improve access to credit and productive assets which would enable poor people to diversify into small enterprise, trade and agro-processing etc. For the

purposes of this paper, the definition of livelihood diversification chosen by Ellis is being used: Rural livelihood diversification is defined as the process by which rural households construct an increasingly diverse portfolio of activities and assets in order to survive and to improve their standard of living (Ellis, 2000).

The infinite variety of livelihood diversification strategies employed by rural people highlights the fact that they operate in diverse environments which are complex and risk prone (Chambers et al., 1989) are often not able to construct productive strategies to diversify their livelihood because of overwhelming odds. In this section these odds were reviewed which needed immediate attention from planners as well as policy makers to secure livelihood of farmers. The odds vary from households to households and region to region. In order to streamline it, a sound strategy needs to be

planned to promote large scale livelihood diversification in rural areas. In order to secure people's livelihood, it is imperative to determine as to what exactly are the inhibiting factors so that necessary interventions may accordingly be made to create a conducive climate. Having this assumption in view, an attempt was made in this paper to identify the constraints that impede the farmers to diversify their livelihood in selected districts of West Bengal.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Uttar Dinajpur and Darjeeling districts of West Bengal. These two districts also represented different types of agro-climatic and socio-economic conditions of the state. Two blocks from each district and two villages from each block were selected randomly. Twenty households of farmers in each village were randomly selected to constitute a total sample size of 160. Both secondary and primary data were used for the study. The constraints in the present study referred to all those factors or forces which may be social, psychological, infrastructural, economical and promotional that singly or in conjugation with each other hindered or restricted the farmers to diversify their livelihood. On the basis of available literature, survey of the locality and discussion with different groups of officials, an exhaustive list of constraints to diversification was prepared and classified into broad groups depending on their nature. These limitations can be broadly classified into: (i) infrastructural, (ii) promotional (iii) social (iv) economical and (v) others. A semi-structured questionnaire was developed based upon the information acquired during the explorative research phase, and pre-tested prior to the survey. The respondents were asked to pinpoint the constraints applicable to them. The score were assigned 0, 1, and 2 as not serious, serious or very serious respectively. The total score for each constraint was calculated with the help of the responses received from all 160 respondents. The mean score for a particular constraint was worked out by dividing with the weighted score of the constraints with the total number of respondents. Afterwards, the ranking of constraints was done according to mean score of each statement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Infrastructural Constraints in livelihood diversification: Good infrastructure is an essential ingredient for livelihood diversification. Directly or

indirectly, it helps farmers to diversify into different sectors of activities so that vulnerability can be reduced and livelihood outcomes can be achieved. It is not only accelerator but contributes a great role in livelihood diversification. In Table 1 the infrastructural constraints in livelihood diversification as perceived by diversifier as well as non diversifier farmers under study were presented.

Table 1. Infrastructural Constraints in livelihood diversification

S.No.	Infrastructural constraints	Mean Score	Rank
1.	Lack of marketing facilities for the products	1.75	I
2.	Lack of storage facilities	1.60	II
3.	Absent of small-scale labour intensive enterprises	1.45	III
4.	Lack of change agent.	1.28	IV
5.	Lack of inadequate financial institution in the locality	1.15	V
6.	Poor communication facilities	1.08	VI
7.	Poor social over-heads	0.82	VII
8.	Insurance facilities not available	0.76	VIII
9.	Inadequate labour force	0.65	IX

Lack of marketing facilities for the product they produce (1.75) emerged as the most important constraints that hinder the different options of farm as well as non-farm diversification. The absence of storage infrastructure also one of the severe constraints (1.60) perceived by the respondents that restricted the crop diversification specifically to those crops which are very perishable in nature and required cold storage. Absence of small scale labour intensive enterprises (1.45), lack of change agent (1.28) also hinders diversification. The finding suggested that besides creating facilities for training to enhance diversification, the constraints commonly agreed upon by the farmers need to be taken special care. The constraints as observed in this study were also reported by Rao *et al.* (1986) Singh (1988), Sharma (1990) and Sadengi (1991).

Promotional Constraints in livelihood diversification: It referred to the imperfection perceived by the farmers to be associated with various services meant for livelihood diversification. The services broadly included technical as well as skill oriented information, follow-up, financial and others material services. In Table 2 the mean score and rank of promotional constraints were presented. It was found that major problems in order of importance were lack of technical guidance (1.60),

limited availability of skill training (1.55), lack of needed assistance (1.34) and complicated procedure to get loan (1.25).

Table 2. Promotional Constraints in livelihood diversification

S. No.	Promotional constraints	Mean Score	Rank
1.	Lack of technical guidance	1.60	I
2.	Limited availability of education and skill training	1.55	II
3.	Lack of needed assistance	1.34	III
4.	Complicated procedure to get loan	1.25	IV
5.	Insufficient Govt. incentives	1.08	V
6.	Ineffective and corrupt extension agent	1.04	VI
7.	Lack of improved technology	0.92	VII
8.	Inadequate irrigation facilities	0.80	VIII
9.	Govt. programme not consistent with needs	0.78	IX
10.	Delay in getting loan	0.74	X
11.	Inadequate availability of raw materials	0.62	XI

The above findings underlined the need for selection and placement of grassroots workers having missionary zeal, providing technical assistance, training and incentive so that farmers get motivated to diversification activities. Planning of programmes should be as per the need of the farmers. These findings conform with the findings of many social scientists, namely, *Sangita (1990)*, *Sharma (1990)*, and *Mahajan (1990)*, *sadengi (1991)*, *Barrett et al. (2000)*.

Social Constraints in livelihood diversification : As it can be seen in Table 3 there were ten social constraints. But four major social constraints as indicated were inadequate or no experience on new occupation (1.70) shyness in doing socially underestimate work (1.48), inadequate information and knowledge about diversification (1.25) and lack of successful entrepreneur in the locality (1.20). The findings suggested that the first step to promote diversification is to provide rich learning experiences to the farmers which not only educate them but also gradually build up the human resource characters of the farmers. The farmers, particularly the non-diversifiers were found lack of awareness and interest in diversification outside of their familiarity. To the extent possible, more and more information and encouragement should be provided. Political interference and corrupt system in planning and implementation of developmental programme needed

to be minimized if not completely done away with. *Jiggins (1986)*, *Vaa et al. (1989)* and *Kabeer (1990)* also found similar types of constraints in their study of livelihood diversification.

Table 3. Social Constraints in livelihood diversification

S. No.	Social constraints	Mean Score	Rank
1.	Inadequate or no experience on new occupation	1.70	I
2.	Shyness in doing socially underestimate work	1.48	II
3.	Inadequate information and knowledge about diversification	1.25	III
4.	Lack of successful entrepreneur in the locality	1.20	IV
5.	Inadequate family labour	1.11	V
6.	Lack of family encouragement	0.86	VI
7.	Norms and religious values excluded women or other groups from participation in certain activities	0.65	VII
8.	Lack of religious and caste support	0.60	VIII
9.	Dominance of high caste	0.51	IX
10.	Lack of sound health and good physique	0.38	X

Economic Constraints in livelihood diversification: Majority of the farmers experienced capital shortage. This created serious economic problems for the rural families in their day to day work. Economic constraints to diversification were obvious because capital is a must for a non-crop activities and majority of the youth were not still independent in their economic behaviour. At the local level, the lack of credit was also more likely to affect the poorest groups, and these people may find it more difficult to access other means to diversify. The findings given below indicate the severity of the problem.

Table 4. Economic Constraints in livelihood diversification

S.No.	Economic constraints	Mean Score	Rank
1.	Too much competition in local enterprises	1.78	I
2.	Inadequate loan from financial agencies	1.60	II
3.	Lack of own capital	1.55	III
4.	High cost technology	1.26	IV
5.	Inadequate income generation than primary activity	1.08	V

The economic constraints as shown in Table 4 in descending order of importance were too much competition in local enterprises (1.78) lack of own capital

(1.86), inadequate loan from financial agencies (1.60) and lack of own capital (1.55).

The farmers had lack of knowledge about many new activities which could be economically viable and practically feasible in the locality. In absence of such knowledge they talked to such occupations or enterprises in which there is already a stiff competition. Lack of finance and less of availability from other sources was also restricted farmers to invest extensively in their existing activities as well as to diversify into other sectors. This is why competition was viewed as main constraints. High cost technologies (1.26) mostly refers to hardware aspects of the technology. Although Government subsidies are available on parts, machinery, etc., through various programmes, the Govt. officials so circumvent these subsidies that their advantages do not accrue to the diversifiers. The findings suggested that the major constraints to livelihood diversification could be talked through adequate financing to rural farmers for supporting their diversification activities. These findings conform to the study of many social scientists, namely, *Srivastava (1984), Bhatt (1988) and Sharma (1990), Sadengi (1991), Masefield (1996) and Henin (2002).* *Others Constraints in livelihood diversification:* Others constraints as mentioned in Table 5 were also very important for immediate attention to promote livelihood diversification for overall development of the nation. The other constraints according to their priority were primary activities not leaving enough time to pursue (1.50), climatic risk & uncertainty (1.42) and seasonal attacks of diseases (1.28). Adams and Mortimore (1997) are also reported similar types of findings in their study of livelihood in Northern Nigeria and all developing countries.

Table 5. Others Constraints in livelihood diversification

S.No.	Others constraints	Mean Score	Rank
1.	Primary activities not leaving enough time to pursue	1.50	I
2.	Climatic risk & uncertainty	1.42	II
3.	Seasonal attacks of diseases	1.28	III
4.	Poor harvest	1.06	IV
5.	Degraded and/or insufficient natural resources	0.61	V

In the wake of rural development programmes, numerous opportunities are being created for self employment which ensures growth and expansion. In addition to this, opportunity for diversification was also

found in rural situation. Agro-processing of the abundant agricultural crops presents one of the greatest opportunities. Non-traditional agricultural crops were being introduced. These opportunities can help one build his secured livelihood. Yet very few farmers were taking up these opportunities because of lack of ability to visualize and potentiality to mobilize resources to utilize these opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Despite the vast potentiality to diversify the livelihood towards farm and non-farm activities in the study area, there were problems such as negative perception of the community, lack of marketing facilities for the product, absence of storage infrastructure, lack of improved technology and skills, inadequate or no experience on new occupation, shyness in doing socially underestimate work, lack of business start-up budget and absence of wide market for the non-farm output. There were also lack of potential research to study the effect of non-farm activities on farm production and to identify the major problems that hamper the non-farm sector. State machinery should play a facilitator's role in terms of promoting investment in infrastructure such as road, electricity, irrigation facility etc. More of decentralized operations for government programmes, especially using the local institution for greater efficiency and better outreach programmes are needed. Availability of support services such as credit to diversifiers through appropriate changes in policies and delivery mechanisms should be ensured for sustainable development of the farmers going for diversification. Diversification options are limited by economic constraints, natural assets of the household (land, livestock) and human assets (family structure and skills). They were also limited by social, cultural, and political factors, particularly caste and wealth. As a result, there can be vast differences between types of household in the diversification options they can pursue. It was therefore important to assess diversification trajectories for different groups, particularly for different 'livelihood classes' and caste groups. Only with such disaggregation is it possible to identify winners and losers from new options, so as to protect those from becoming vulnerable, support those who are finding their way out of poverty, and remove constraints to others doing the same.

Paper received on : July 02, 2011

Accepted on : November 11, 2011

REFERENCES

1. Barrett, C., Bezuneh, M., Clay, D. and Reardon, T. (2000). Heterogeneous constraints, incentives, and income diversification strategies in rural Africa. Broadening access and strengthening input market systems. University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.
2. Bhatt, G.D. (1988). Evaluation of the rural development programme in U.P.; A case study. *ICSSR Research Abstract Quarterly*, **17**(3&4): 93-104.
3. Chambers, R., Saxena, N. C. and Shah, T. (1989). To the hands of poor –water and trees. Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd.
4. DFID, (1997). White Paper on international development. Department for International Development: London.
5. Ellis, F. (2000b). Rural livelihoods and diversity in developing countries. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
6. FAO and World Bank (2001). Farming systems and poverty- improving farmers livelihoods in a changing world, Rome and Washington D.C.
7. Henin, B. (2002). Agrarian change in vietnam's northern upland region. *J. Contemporary Asia*. **32** (1): 3-28.
8. Jiggins, J. (1986). Women and seasonality: coping with crisis and calamity, *IDS Bulletin*. **17** (3): 9-18.
9. Kabeer, N. (1990). Poverty, purdah, and women's survival strategies in rural Bangladesh, in H. Bernstein, B. Crow, M. Mackintosh and C. Martin (eds), *The food question. Profits versus people?* London: Earthscan.
10. Mahajan, V. (1990). Foster Entrepreneurship an approach to enterprise promotion for the rural poor. In S. Vyakarnam (Ed.) *when the harvest is in: developing rural entrepreneurship*, Intermediate Technology Publication, London, U.K., 156-169.
11. Masfield, A. (1996). A study of opportunities for income diversification, FARM Africa: Community Oriented Rural Development Project (CORDEP), Addis Ababa: Farm Africa.
12. Rao, C.S.K., Kumar, M.A. and Kishen, N.R. (1986). Growth of small industries in rural areas: prospects and constraints. *SEDME*, **13**(4): 39-50.
13. Sadengi, B. (1991). Occupational diversification among self-employed rural youth: A study In Coastal Orissa, Ph.D. Thesis (unpub.), Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi.
14. Sangita, S.N. (1990). Infrastructure for self-employment programmes: A focus on TRYSEM. *SEDME*, **17**(1): 49-76.
15. Sharma, A.V.K. (1990). Self-employment programmes: retrospect and prospect. *SEDME*, **17**(2): 1-14.
16. Singh, R.P. (1988). Role of dairy enterprise in increasing income and employment. *J. Rural Development, NIRD*, **5**: 583-590.
17. Srivastava, P.K. (1984). Manufacturing and marketing problems of wooden toys industry of Udaipur City. *ICSSR Research Abstract Quarterly*, **13**(3&4): 105-108.
18. Vaa, M., Findley, S.E. and Diallo, A. (1989). The gift economy. a study of women migrants survival strategies in a low-income bamako neighbourhood. *Labour, Capital and Society*, **22** (2): 234-60.
