

# প্রতিধ্বনি the Echo

*An Online Journal of Humanities & Social Science*

Published by: Dept. of Bengali  
Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India.

Website: [www.thecho.in](http://www.thecho.in)

## Socio Economic Status of Women Vendors in Towns of Kokrajhar District

Roselin Basumatary

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Economics, CMJ University,  
Meghalaya

Email: - reeba28@rediffmail.com

### Abstract

*The study aims to examine the personal profile, family profile, migratory status, living, working and economic conditions of the women vendors of the towns of Kokrajhar district. It also aims to access their health condition. To study the socio-economic status of the women vendors, data was collected from the sampled women vendors with the help of a questionnaire. Data collected from the sample was entered in SPSS (V.13) and analysis was done. The finding of the study will help the people especially the policy makers to know the socio-economic condition of the women vendors. It will help in planning for the welfare of such workers*

### INTRODUCTION AND RELATED

**STUDIES:** Women are almost half the adult population. They contribute two third of the world's working hours and yet earn only 1% of the world's property <sup>1</sup>. In developing countries the reality of most women is that they are compelled by poverty to seek and income, either as the sole earner of the family or to supplement income of the family.

Globalization is causing shrinking of the organized sector accompanied by the expansion of informal sector. Economic opportunities created by the liberalization are highly unequal. Those who are skilled, have access to market, have better links, have been able to benefit, for women of upper class, the quality as well as opportunities for employment have improved. But for most women workers however, the quality of employment is poor

without any skill or access <sup>2</sup>. The rise of female participation in the informal sector is more due to economic compulsion than any change in work ethos. In a labor surplus economy like India's with low employment avenues and increasing cost of living females have been increasingly pushed into labor market.

In the informal sector in urban areas where women are not generally engaged in agriculture, they are engaged as weavers, vendors, constructional laborers, domestic servants etc.

As defined by ILO in 1991, the term 'informal sector' refers to very small scale units producing and distributing goods and services consisting largely of independent self-employed producers in urban areas of developing countries some whom also employ family labour or a few hired workers or apprentices, which operate with very little

capital or none at all, which utilizes low level of technique and skill, which therefore operate at a low level of productivity which generally provide very low irregular income and highly unstable employment to those who work in it.

It is informal in the sense that they are for the most part unregulated and unrecorded in official statistics. They tend to have little or no access to labour markets, to credit institution, to formal education and training institution or to many public services and amenities. They are not recognized, supported and regulated by the government, they are often compelled by circumstances to operate outside the law and even when they are registered and respect aspects of laws they are almost invariably beyond the pale of second protection, labour legislation and protective measures at work place. Informal sector producers and workers are generally unorganized and in most cases beyond the scope of action of trade union and employers organization and they generally live in appalling, often dangerous and unhealthy condition even without basic sanitary facilities in the shanty towns of urban areas<sup>3</sup>.

The workers of the informal sector work as piece workers, self-employed workers, paid workers in the informal enterprises, unpaid workers in family business, casual workers without fixed employer and sub-contract workers linked to the formal enterprises. Vendors are self-employed workers.

According to Mukhopadhyay, 'the boundary of the informal sector is obtained by the standard exclusion principle, i.e., what does the sphere of formal sector not covered is informal sector. The sector includes petty self-employed small units, of factory production employing 7-10 persons, shops and other establishments. Thus entire sector is a heterogeneous mix in which workers are not protected by labor

legislation rules. People migrate from rural subsistence sector to the urban commercial sectors. The holding sector is in actual practice the urban traditional or unorganized sector, which absorbs the rural migrants initially in what are called the informal economic activities such as hawking, pedaling, retailing of consumer goods, working in household repair shops, carrying head loads, pushing carts, plying manual rickshaw and so on. However, by its very nature this sector offers insecure jobs and low wages or returns'<sup>4</sup>. According to Harold Lubell the informal sector constitute the residual labor market of the last resort, characterized by self-employment and low income producers of marginal goods for lack of any other means of earning a livelihood. It is also identified as a reservoir of traditional and modern skills, which can be made productive, if effective demand is created for them<sup>5</sup>.

Based on the nature of their activity, vendors, so called petty traders can be categorized as 'street vendors', 'small petty vendors' and 'petty vendors'. Petty vendors have fixed space with proper shelter for conducting their trade which in turn allows them to invest more. Small petty vendors conduct the trade at a fixed space but without proper shelter. Street vendors carry their activity moving around the streets either carrying head loads or by using a push cart<sup>6</sup>. In the towns of Kokrajhar district only small petty vendors are seen.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

The following methods were used in the study:

- a. Preparation of a questionnaire to collect data.
- b. Sampling: 41 women vendors were selected as samples from the towns of Kokrajhar district. There are three towns in the district namely Kokrajhar, Gossaigaon and Salakati.

30 of them were from from Kokrajhar town, 4 from Gossaigaon town and 7 from Salakati town.

- c. Collection of data: Data was collected through personal interviews with the help of questionnaire from the samples. Data was collected in October and November, 2012.
- d. The data collected was then entered in SPSS (V.13) and analysis was done.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:** Personal profile, family profile, migratory status, living conditions, working condition, economic conditions and health of the sampled women vendors is discussed below with the help of tables derived with the help of SPSS.

Regarding the personal profile of the respondents', the study reveals that majority of the women vendors were Hindus and the rest were Christians (Table 1.a). Muslim women vendors were not seen. Castes wise distribution shows that majority of them were scheduled tribes (Table 1.a). Table 1- b, c, d shows that all the women vendors were married, majority of them belong to age 31-50 years and more than 50% of them had their marriage before being 21 years. About 76% of them were educated but they did not have high level of education (Table 1- e, f). 66% of them had only primary education and the rest have education only up to middle level. Majority of them reported that they could only write their names and do simple calculation.

Table 2- a, b, c, d, e, f shows the family profile of the respondents. The study reveals that about 93% of them came from big nuclear families comprising of 4-8 members. The rest have very small families having less than 4 members or very big families having greater than 12 members. About 22% of the respondents were either

widow or divorced and 78% respondents' husbands were alive. Out of that 78%, about 49% did not have educated husbands and only 29% had educated husbands. Though they were educated, majority had only primary education. Respondents having husbands reported that because of no education or low level of education their husbands work in the informal sector as laborers, vendors, farmers, rickshaw pullers, drivers, entrepreneurs other than vendors, private employees. 7.30% of the respondents reported having one child, 22% of two children, 41.5% of three children, 26.80% of four children and 2.40% of six children. Total numbers of children of the respondents were 122 and all were educated and 100 of them were unmarried. Majority of the unmarried children were found to be non-working and majority of the married children were found working. It was observed in the study that most of the children were young and school going and so they were unmarried and non-working.

Table 3 shows the migratory status, type and cause of migration of the respondents. Majorities (73.20%) of the respondents have migrated and out of that many have migrated daily. Poverty has compelled 66.00% of the respondents to migrate to work.

Table 4 – a, b, c, d, e shows the living condition of the women vendors. 80.50% reported of having own house and the rest reported of staying in rent. Many have migrated in the towns daily preferring to stay in their own homes in rural areas. Only a small percentage of the vendors have pucca houses, while a huge percentage of the vendors have kutchra and semi pucca (others) houses. Majority reported of having 2-4 rooms as because many have big families. More than 50.00% of them reported of having no ventilation in their houses and about 27.00% had improper ventilation. Though it was found that

majority had separate kitchen facilities (61.00%) yet most of their kitchens were not in good condition – without proper light, no ventilation and windows, ordinary doors, no water facility etc. All the respondents reported of having private water facility inside their premise because of the inadequate water supply by the government. Majority of the vendors living in their houses had tube well as the water source as because it is comparatively cheaper than digging wells or installing tap water connection. Most of the vendors that were staying in rented houses reported of preferring staying in houses with tube well water facility because of the cheaper rent. Almost of all of them (97.60%) did not have bath- room facility though a huge percentage of them had latrine facility inside their premises. More than 50.00% of the respondents did not have drainage facility around their houses which made their living area dirty. 92.70% of them availed electricity facility. Majority of those living in rural areas and migrating daily for work also availed electric facility because of the Rajib Gandhi Rural Electrification Program. Respondents reported of frequent power cuts and low voltage. Only a small percentage (12.00%) of the women was found throwing their waste in the collection points while the rest were found throwing in road side, around house or in drains. About 76.00% of the women vendors did not have TV, 80.50% did not have fan, 80.50% did not have good furniture and 73.00% did not have LPG connection for cooking in their houses.

Table 5 – a, b shows the working condition of the sampled women vendors. They were found selling meat, vegetables, fish and fruits. 80.50% of them reported of working for 9-12 hours a day. About 56.00% of them were in vending profession for 6-10 years, 36.60% for 11-15 years and 4.90% for greater than 15 years. 88.00% of

the respondents were compelled by poverty to work. Regarding the condition of work place it was found that all of them did not have shelter for work. They were found selling in the road side where they have to bear heat, cold, dust, noise and crowd. Only 25.00% of the respondents have separate toilet (for ladies) and drinking water. Another 50.00% of the respondents have no toilet but only drinking water facility. The rest 25.00% did not have toilet as well as drinking water facility.

Table 6- a, b, c, d shows the economic condition of the women vendors. The table shows that 41.50% had income Rs.4001.00-Rs.8000.00, 19.50% had Rs.8001.00-Rs.12000.00, 7.30% had Rs.12001.00-Rs.16000.00, 26.80% had Rs.16001.00-Rs.20000.00 and 4.90% had Rs.20001.00-Rs.25000.00 per month. About 17.00% of the respondents reported of having one earning member, 61.00% have two, 12.20% have three and 9.80% have four earning members in the family. Regarding the family income, 22.00% reported of having Rs.5001.00 – Rs. 10000.00 family income per month, 24.00% of Rs. 10001.00 – Rs. 15000.00, 17.10% of Rs.15001.00- Rs.20000.00, 29.30% of Rs.20001.00-Rs.25000.00, 4.90% of Rs. 25001.00 – Rs.30000.00 and 2.40% had greater than Rs.30000.00 per month. As seen from the table, the average spending by the women vendors on various items were: 50.49% on food, 2.71% on cloth, 1.83% on house, 6.63% on fuel, 5.95% on health, 7.37% on education, 6.07% on entertainment and recreation, 12.44% on travel and 6.49% on miscellaneous items. It was observed that majority of the women vendors were compelled by poverty to work and so they spend major portion of their income on fooding. Regarding indebtedness only a small percentage (7.30%) of the respondents were found in debt and they had borrowed from unorganized sources such as

relatives and money lenders. Even though many were poor they did not go for credit facilities given by organized sources. The reasons observed for no borrowing from the organized sources were low level of education and ignorance. Less borrowing from unorganized sources was also observed and the main reason found was the high rate of interest that prevails both in the rural and urban areas of the district.

Health status of the sampled women vendors are shown in table 7- a, b, c. As far as the illness is concerned, about 29.00% were weak, 75.60% had ache, 12.20% had sinusitis and headache, 17.10% had blood pressure and eye problem, 24.40% had gastritis, 2.40% had piles and 9.80% had menstrual problems. Due to poverty, majority of the respondents reported of visiting Govt. health centers and others

(homoeopathic centres, pharmacy, indigeneous medicines) as because visiting them cost comparatively lower than visiting private health centers. Regarding their child birth, all of them reported of getting antenatal care and giving normal delivery. More than 50.00% of women had their child delivery with the help of midwives. The reason observed for most of the women preferring normal delivery and midwives was the lower cost involved in it. 22.00% of the respondents reported having abortion and out of that 12.2% had spontaneous abortion and the rest had induced abortion.

More than 50% of the vendors reported of having non-cooperative husbands, domestic violence and non-involvement in decision making. 80% of them reported of not getting help in household work.

Tables:-

**1. Personal Profile of the respondents':**

a. Religion and Caste:

No. of samples	Religion			Caste			
	Hindu	Christian	Muslim	General	SC	ST	OBC
41	87.80	12.20		2.40	2.40	78.00	17.10

b. Age in years:

No. of samples	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55
41			9.80	26.80	12.20	41.50	9.80

c. Marital Status:

No. of samples	Unmarried	Married	Widow	Divorced
41		78.00	17.10	4.90

d. Age at marriage:

No. of samples	No. of married respondent	Age at marriage					
		16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45
41	41	56.10	41.50	--	2.40	--	--

e. Educational status:

No. of samples	Educated	Uneducated
41	75.60	24.40

f. Level of education:

No. of samples	No. of educated respondent	Primary	Middle	High School	Higher Secondary	Uneducated
41	31	61.90	9.8	--	--	24.40

## 2. Family Profile:

a. Family type and size:

No. of samples	Type		Size			
	Nuclear	Joint	<4	4-8	9-12	>12
41	92.7	7.3	9.8	82.9	7.3	--

b. Educational status and level of education of husband:

No. of samples	No. of husband	Educational status			Level of education of husband			
		Educated	Uneducated	No husband	Primary	Middle	High school	HS
41	32	29.3	48.8	22.0	22.0	7.3		

c. Occupation of husband:

No. of husband	Labor	Vendor	Agriculture	Ricks-haw puller	Driver	Entrepreneur	Private job	Govt. job	Misc
32	7.3	22.0	22.0	12.2	9.8	2.4		2.4	

d. No. of children:

No. of samples	Total Children	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
41	122		7.3	22.0	41.5	26.8		2.4

e. Educational and marital status of children:

Total no. of Children	Educational status		Marital status	
	Educated	Uneducated	Married	Unmarried
122	122	0	22	100

f. Married working and non-working and unmarried working and non-working children:

Total no. of children	Married		Unmarried	
	Working	Non-working	Working	Non-working
122	20	2	2	98

**3. Migratory status, type of migration and cause of migration:**

No. of samples	Migratory status		Type				Cause		
	Migrated	Not migrated	Daily	Seasonal	Temporary	Permanent	Poverty	Employment	Others
41	73.2	26.8	53.7		19.5		65.9	7.3	2.4

**4. Living conditions: housing, water supply, sanitation:**

a. Status of house, type of house and no. of rooms:

No. of samples	House status			Type of house			No. of rooms		
	Own	Rented	Others	Pucca	Kutcha	Others	<2	2-4	>4
41	80.5	19.5		17.1	39.0	43.9	4.9	78.0	7.1

b. Ventilation and kitchen status:

No. of samples	Ventilation status			Kitchen status			
	No ventilation	Properly ventilated	Improper ventilated	Separate	Multipurpose room	In veranda	outside
41	53.7	19.5	26.8	61.0	39.0		

c. Water sources:

No. of samples	Water source		Inside source			Outside source	
	In premise	Outside premise	Tube well	Well	Tape water	Tube well	Well
41	100		87.8	9.8	2.4	--	--

d. Bathroom, latrine, drainage and electric facility:

No. of samples	Bathroom facility		Latrine facility		Drainage of water		Electric facility	
	Yes	No	Inside	Outside	Exist	Does not exist	Yes	No
41	2.4	97.6	80.5	19.5	43.9	56.1	92.7	7.3

e. Waste disposal and other facility:

No.	Disposal of house hold waste	Other facilities
-----	------------------------------	------------------

of samples	Road-side	Around house	In drains	Neighboring plot	Collection point	TV		Fan		Furniture		LPG	
						Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
41	22.0	61.0	4.9	--	12.2	24.4	75.6	19.5	80.5	19.5	80.5	26.8	73.2

**5. Working conditions: working hour per day, service period in years, compulsion to work:**

a. Working hour per day and service period in years:

No. of samples	Working hour per day				Service period in years			
	<4	4-8	9-12	>12	1-5	6-10	11-15	>15
41	--	19.5	80.5	--	2.4	56.1	36.6	4.9

b. Compulsion to work:

No. of samples	Compulsion to work				
	Poverty	To supplement income	Husband expired	Husband unemployed	Others
41	87.8	9.8	--	--	--

**6. Economic conditions:**

a. Respondents' income per month:

No. of Sample	Respondents' income per month					
	<4000	4001-8000	8001-12000	12001-16000	16001-20000	20001-25000
41	--	41.5	19.5	7.3	26.8	4.9

b. Family income per month, number of earning members:

No. of earning members in the family							Family income per month					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	5001-10000	10001-15000	15001-20000	20001-25000	25001-30000	>30000
17.1	61.0	12.2	9.8	--	--	--	22.0	24.4	17.1	29.3	4.9	2.4

c. Expenditure pattern:

No. of samples	Average spending by women vendors in different items									
	Food	Cloth	House	Fuel	Health	Education	Entertainment & recreation	Travel	Misc	
41	50.49	2.71	1.83	6.63	5.95	7.37	6.07	12.44	6.49	

d. Indebtedness, amount, source:

No. of samples	Indebtedness status	Amount of debt	Source of debt



	Yes	No	<1000	1001-5000	5001-10000	10001-15000	Relative	Money lender	Bank
41	7.3	92.7	--	7.3	--	--	2.4	4.9	--

Purpose of debt:

Purpose of debt						
Marriage	Education	Illness	Daily needs	Business	To repair house	Not applicable
--	4.9	--	--	2.4	--	92.7

**1. Health:**

a. Illness and health service facility availed:

No. of samples	Common illness													Health facility availed			
	Weak	Ache	Fever	Skin disease	Malaria	Headache	Jaundice	Hypertension	Diabetes	Eye problem	Gas problem	Piles	Menstrual problem	Sinusitis	Government	Private	others
41	29.3	75.6	2.4	9.8	2.4	12.2	2.4	17.1	4.9	17.1	24.4	2.4	9.8	12.2	63.4	2.4	95.1

b. Antenatal care and delivery type:

No. of samples	Antenatal care			Delivery type			Delivery conducted by			Abortion		Abortion type	
	Yes	No	Not Applicable	Normal	Caesarian	Not applicable	Doctor	Midwives	Relatives	Yes	No	Spontaneous	Induced
41	100	--	--	100	--	--	43.9	56.1	--	22.0	78.0	12.2	9.8

Source of the tables: Based on field survey (October and November' 2012)

The foregoing discussion throws light on the various problems of the women vendors that they face at home, at work place and health problems. The problems faced by the women vendors at the home front were many. Some of the important

problems were: their dual responsibility both at home and at work place, sharing of earnings, cultural constrains, non-co-operative husbands, domestic violence and non-involvement in decision making. Besides that they also did not have good

living condition. They also faced several problems at work place like long hours of work, lack of provision of basic facilities, welfare programs and social security. They also reported of suffering from common illness. Since most of them belonged to the low social economic strata they were extremely vulnerable to ailments and diseases. They reported of having weakness, ache, gastritis etc. Above all these problems the women vendors have lacked behind in education. They either were uneducated or have very low level of education for which they could not enter in formal sector job market.

The world cannot afford to do without women's full contribution at every level of social, economic and political activity. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said 'in order to awaken the people it is the women who have to be awakened, once she is on move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves'.

So based on the findings, the following suggestions have been made:

- The finding related to the educational status of the women vendors (Table 1) shows that about 76.00% of them were educated but though educated they had low level of education. Majority of them had only primary education. Due to this low level of education they were not able to participate actively in decision making process. There is direct correlation between level of education and employment and naturally this is the basis for employment. Therefore equal access to education for women and girls should be ensured. Special measures should be taken to eliminate discrimination, create a gender sensitive educational system and improve the quality and level of

education to facilitate lifelong learning as well as development of occupational or vocational or technical skills for women.

- The finding regarding the place of work revealed that all of the women vendors had no proper shelter for work. As there was no proper shelter they have to carry their things up and down every day from home to work place and work place to home. Road side was their work place and majority of them did not have the basic amenities such as drinking water, toilet and light facilities. The government should look in to give the basic facilities at work place i.e., shelter, toilet, drinking water and light facilities.
- The findings regarding the income of the sampled women vendors on an average were Rs.12,207.32. Looking at their family size and number of earning members in the family that amount of earning was not good. In fact they were compelled by poverty to work. Being poor, in times of financial crisis they borrow at an exorbitant rate of interest from neighbours, relatives and money lenders but hardly approach banks due to their low level of education and ignorance. These leads to heavy indebtedness. Now micro credit mechanism and micro finance institutions of adequate financial, human and market resources to implement the policies should be managed by concerned departments, financial credit institutions and banks and connected institutions.
- The finding regarding health problems revealed that informal sector women vendors were suffering from common illnesses. The question of health and safety

should be considered in a broad context and possible areas should be identified where protective measures need to be increased.

- The entry of women vendors into the labor market has not yet had the effect of relieving them of a share of house work. Women vendors work longer hours in order to fit all their work. Still women vendors do not get due respect. They have to face domestic violence and no help from husbands. A suitable educational program to give dignity to the work they do need to be carried out with family members of the workers. Proper awareness should be created among the women vendor's husbands. Also counseling programs are needed to change the behavior of

the husbands and make them realize the importance of better environment in their family.

- Voluntary organizations can work towards making improvement in their health status, educational attainment and general welfare. Following areas particularly can be intervened by these groups:
  - i. To organize awareness programs regarding their legal rights, health nutrition and sanitation.
  - ii. To make arrangement for doctors to organize health camps or free medical checkups.
  - iii. To make provision for adult education.

#### REFERENCES:

1. United Nations, 1975.
2. Jhabvala, R., 2002, 'Liberalization and women worker', EPW.
3. International Labor Organisation, 1991.
4. Mukhopadhyay, Ishita, 1994, 'Urban informal sector and communal violence: a case study 1992 riots in Calcutta', Economic and Political weekly, August, 1994 pp- 22
5. Harold, Lubel, 1973, 'Underdevelopment and employment in Calcutta', international labor review, vol-XIX, No.1, July pp-28
6. Bhang Baba Saheb, S, 2011, 'Women vendors in urban informal sector', Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi.
7. Joint Director of Economics and Statistics, Kokrajhar "Statistical Handbook of Bodoland Territorial Council, 2010".
8. Anjum Saba, (2011) "Women Workers in Informal Sectors", The Women Press, Delhi.