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Assessment of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nagaon District of Assam

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Abstract:

Poverty emerges as the key factors for underdevelopment and it is enormously linked with various social issues. Government of India design and implement a number of poverty alleviation Programmes but most of the programmes left the perceptions of ultimate target population and often wrong beneficiary selection procedure fail to capture the policy prescriptions. It is against this background that the present study was entrusted to assess the Poverty Alleviation Programmes using Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) in Nagaon District, Assam. The ultimate aim of this study is to see things from the point of view of the common man. Besides a sample study of poor households, we have documented the several governmental programmes being implemented in the village, their linkages, and the perceptions of different sections of society regarding these programmes. The study reveals that most part of the programmes funds are used in non Productive purpose. A positive linkage is observed among social capital, asset generation and literacy rate. This paper suggested that for successful implementation of programmes, two indicators: educational development and social capital formation should be widely enclosed in programme design.

Keywords: Poverty, participatory, social capital, key informants, asset generation, literacy rate

1. Introduction

The planning era in India has witnessed the design and implementation of several development programmes to reduce poverty in both rural and urban areas. The impact of these programmes has been periodically evaluated by the respective Ministries/Departments as well as by the Planning Commission. Such evaluations have generally tried to look programme implementation from the administrative point of view than from that of the ultimate beneficiaries. Often leading to wrong conclusions and policy prescriptions they fail to capture adequately, the limits and constraints of the key participants.¹ It is against this background that the present study was entrusted to assess the Poverty Alleviation Programmes using Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) in Nagaon District, Assam. This PPA method is widely practiced by researcher from different fields to have a inner information. The ultimate aim of this study is to see things from the point of view of the common man. Besides a sample study of poor households, we have documented the several governmental programmes being implemented in the village, their linkages, and the perceptions of different sections of society regarding these programmes.

Among the various poverty alleviation programmes, 5 Major programmes have been implemented at Nagaon District. They are SGSY, MGNREGA, AAY, IAY and NSAP (old age pension, widow pension etc.). However, the special area development programmes are not implemented in the sample villages. The sample household covers beneficiaries from all the five PAP Programmes. The physical and financial figures on PAPs themselves do not explain how these programmes have contributed alleviating poverty in Nagaon. The basic objectives of this study are: (1) To assess the existing structure of poverty alleviation programmes. (2) To what extent programmes led to economic and social capital formation through durable asset generation.

2. Methods of Study

To assess poverty Alleviation Programmes under Nagaon District three development blocks, viz: jugijan, Raha, Odali, were selected on the basis of development, ie. Developed, medium developed and less developed. Literacy rate is selected as the indicator for development. From each sample development block one village were selected. An attempt is made to assess the impact of poverty alleviation programmes in the villages through the basic social and economic data on both beneficiary and non beneficiary households. Four key informants other than Gram Panchayat members were utilised in gathering the primary data in all the three villages. Apart from this secondary data were collected from the Block Development offices, Panchayat Offices, Offices of the District Rural Development Agency etc were also consulted. To understand the hidden information about the programmes we use four

Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) tools, viz: Transect walk, Social Mapping, wealth Ranking and Venn diagram. To have a broad view of the villages and of main infrastructure facilities and their use a transect walk were done through the villages with four *key informants* and Panchayat member.²

For wealth ranking, list of all sample households was obtained from the ward members. The head of each household along with number of household members was written in separate cards meant for wealth ranking. Four *Key Informants* (KIs) who know each and every house in the village was asked separately to sort out the cards into as many groups according to their own classification of different wealth classes.³ A total of 100 score was given to each *key informants* to rank among each category of their choice. Each KI had full freedom for ranking the households. All the *Key Informants* use the three categories for wealth ranking:

1. Rich
2. Medium
3. Poor

Then all the sample households are ranked on the basis of 100 score point. The average of all the four *key informants* score were done as follows:

$$\text{Average Score} = \frac{\text{Score of 1}^{\text{st}} \text{ KI} + \text{Score of 2}^{\text{nd}} \text{ KI} + \text{Score of 3}^{\text{rd}} \text{ KI} + \text{Score of 4}^{\text{th}} \text{ KI}}{4}$$

Sl. No	Category	Score Range
1	Rich	70-100
2	Medium	40-69
3	Poor	0 – 40

Table 1: Score ranges for different wealth categories

Sl. No	Category	Criteria
1	Rich	Land > 10 bigha Cow > 2 TV/Mobile/ car/ Bike/ private Business ≥ 1 Govt. job ≥ 1 Concrete House ≥ 1
2	Medium	Land < 10 bigha Cow ≤ 2 TV/Mobile/ / Bike/ small shop ≤ 1 Simple Concrete/ Tin Shed House ≤ 1
3	Poor	Land ≤ 2 bigha Cow ≤ 1 Mobile/ very small shop ≤ 1 Tin shed/ Hut/ IAY House ≤ 1

Table 2: Common criteria identified for wealth ranking

3. Data Analysis

For this study both primary and secondary data are collected. To understand the population pattern of the sample villages we use secondary data source and tabulated them as follows.

Village	T. H	T.P.	M	F	SC	ST	L	ML	FL
Pub Salmara	312	1484	732	752	335	281	91.39	96.81	86.12
Dimrupar	604	3355	1656	1699	509	2	81.67	84.51	78.98
Pub Odali	632	3236	1667	1569	276	74	63.23	67.24	58.93

Table 3: Population pattern of sample villages

Note: T.H= Total Household T.P= Total Population M=Male F= Female SC= Schedule Caste ST= Schedule Tribe L= Literacy Rate ML= Male Literacy FL= Female Literacy rate

Sample beneficiaries are collected on the basis of 2% of total household population of the villages. This proportion is maintained in all the programmes for poverty alleviation.

Block	Village	Programmes					Total
		SGSY	MGNREGA	AAY	IAY	NSAP	
Raha	Pub Salmara	8	8	8	8	8	40
Jugijan	Dimrupar	15	15	15	15	15	75
Odali	Pub Odali	16	16	16	16	16	80
Total		39	39	39	39	39	195

Table 4: Programme/village-wise distribution of sample beneficiaries

Source: Sample Survey

Village wise distribution of sample beneficiaries reveals that each village share proportionate numbers of samples on the basis of household population, where pub Salmora covers 40, Dimrupar 75 and Pub Odali 80 numbers of samples. For programme wise distribution of samples, it is observed that all the programmes share 39 equal numbers of samples. To have a better understanding of the programme coverage we have analysed Income and caste wise distribution of respondents.

Sl. No	Category	No. of Families	Percentage
1	Rich	32	16.41
2	Medium	46	23.59
3	Poor	117	60.00

Table 5: Wealth categories of Nagaon District

During the study the wealth categories of beneficiaries, it is found that 16.41 % of beneficiaries are belonging from rich, 23.59% are from medium and the rest 60% are from poor categories. Thus we can conclude that though a major part of beneficiaries are selected from target group who are poor still a significant part of beneficiaries are selected from out of the target group.

Block	Village	General	SC	ST	OBC	Total
Raha	Pub Salmora	22	10	8	Nil	40
Jugijan	Dimrupar	30	28	Nil	17	75
Odali	Pub Odali	48	Nil	9	23	80
Total		100 (51.28%)	38 (19.49%)	17 (8.72%)	40 (20.51%)	195

Table 6: Caste wise Distribution of Beneficiaries

In order to study the coverage of programmes we have to analyse the caste wise distribution of beneficiaries. Out of total 195 sample beneficiaries 100 (51.28%) are belongs from general category, 38(19.48 %) from Schedule Caste category, 17 (8.71%) from Schedule Tribe community and 40 (20.51%) from Other Backward Caste. Hence it is observed that the study covers all the major communities of Assam.

3.1. Assessment of SGSY

Programme Component	Pub Salmora	Dimrupar	Pub Odali	Total
1. No. of sample beneficiaries	8	15	16	39
2. Input Cash	6 (75%)	11 (73.33%)	10 (62.50%)	27 (69.23%)
3. Output				
A. Utilised for Asset generation	4 (50%)	7 (46.67%)	3 (18.75%)	14 (35.89%)
B. Reduction of debt	1 (12.5%)	1 (6.67%)	2 (12.5%)	4 (10.25%)
C. Consumption	1 (12.5%)	3 (20%)	5 (31.25%)	9 (23.07%)
4. Social Capital				
A. Helping other members of the programme during emergency	4 (50%)	7 (46.67%)	6 (37.5%)	17 (43.58%)
B. Participation in social decision making meeting.	5 (62.50%)	8 (53.33%)	6 (37.50%)	22 (56.41%)
5. Impact				
A. Increase in standard of living.	3 (37.50%)	5 (33.33%)	2 (12.50%)	10 (25.64%)

Table 7: SGSY

Study reveals that under SGSY 8 beneficiaries are drawn from Pub Salmora village. Among them three fourth have received input as cash as a part of their subsidy and loan share provided to their Self Help Groups (SHG) by the bank and half of the beneficiaries have utilised their loan amount for asset generation. All the beneficiaries who have been generating assets have received cash by an amount of Rs 20,000/- each, purchased handloom and its accessories. Among these members, 3 of them have prior knowledge on running handloom; hence they are able to generate more assets in the form of purchasing an additional handloom and repair their earlier weaving room. So the standards of living of all the three members have improved. But the remaining one member has not any prior knowledge on running handloom. Thus he is unable to generate sufficient income from handloom for maintaining the family. During the discussion with the SHG members who are engaged in handloom business they informed that the block officials compel them to select a single activity for their SHG for getting loan. So they have to select only handloom as their income earning activity.

Under Dimrupar village 15 sample beneficiaries are drawn for the assessment of SGSY. Among them about three fourth have received input as cash as a part of their subsidy and loan share provided to their Self Help Groups (SHG) by the bank. From the table it is seen that out 7 (46.66%) beneficiaries who have received cash by an amount of Rs 20000/ each, have utilised their loan amount for asset generation but standard of living of 5 (33.33%) beneficiaries have improved. 2 of them have utilised this amount in their existing dry fish store and both of them are running their business smoothly and able to enlarge the size of their store. Moreover, both of them have developed permanent room for their store. Another 3 beneficiaries have utilised this amount in existing small grocery store and all of them able to expand their business. The remaining two beneficiaries who have received cash by an amount of Rs 20000/ each utilised in newly started small varieties store and both the store is fall in credit and going to close down very soon.

From Pub Odali village 16 sample beneficiaries are drawn for the assessment of SGSY. Among them more than three fifth beneficiaries have received input as cash. In this village 3(18.75%) beneficiaries have been utilising their cash for asset generation, but standard of living of 2 (12.5%) beneficiaries have Improved. All the 3 beneficiaries who have utilised their input for asset generation have received loan by an amount of Rs 20,000/- each and 2 of them have started goat farming. Within two years both of them have been able to expand their farm and developed a permanent shed for keeping goats. But another beneficiary utilised his loan amount in small stationary store, he informed that due to his huge amount crept under credit, so within a very short period he will be compel to close the store.

In all the three villages, it is observed that beneficiaries who have utilised their loan amount for reducing their debt and consumption received a very minimum amount of loan, i.e. Rs 2,000/- each. So it is impossible for them to start a new livelihood activity with that amount. Thus from the above findings it can be summed up that among these three villages, programme implementation is high at Pub Salmora, medium at Dimrupar and low at Pub Odali.

3.2. Assessment of MGNREGA

Programme Component		Pub Salmora	Dimrupar	Pub Odali	Total
1.	No. of sample beneficiaries	8	15	16	39
2.	Input Cash				
A.	100 days or more	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
B.	30 days to less than 100 days	2 (25%)	5 (33.33%)	3 (18.75%)	10 (25.64%)
C.	Less than 30 days	3 (37.5%)	4 (26.66%)	5 (31.25%)	12 (30.77%)
D.	Not employed	3 (37.5%)	6 (40%)	8 (50%)	17 (43.59%)
E.	Unemployment benefit received	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
3.	Output				
A.	Utilised for Asset generation	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
B.	Reduction of debt	2 (25%)	3 (20%)	1 (6.25%)	6 (15.38%)
C.	Consumption/health	3 (37.5%)	6 (40%)	7 (43.75%)	16 (41.02%)
4.	Social Capital				
A.	Helping other members of the programme during emergency	3 (37.5%)	5 (33.33%)	4 (25%)	12 (30.76%)
B.	Participation in social decision making meeting.	5 (62.5%)	8 (53.33%)	7 (43.75%)	20 (51.28%)

5.	Impact				
A.	Increase in standard of living	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Table 8: MGNREGA

The basic objective of MGNREGA is to provide at least 100 days employment in a year. If the government authority is unable to provide the same, for the remaining period of 100 days the beneficiaries will get unemployment benefit. For this purpose, government issued job card for each beneficiaries through the Gaon Panchayat office. Under MGNREGA, 8 beneficiaries are drawn from Pub Salmora, 15 from Dimrupar and 16 from Pub Odali Village. Table shows that even a single beneficiary have not got 100 days employment or unemployment benefit from the authority. So the impacts of the programme on target group in all the three sample villages are found insignificant. From the observation it is found that the programme generate asset in the form of a link road through the villages which benefited all. Among the three sample villages social capital formation is high at Pub Salmora, medium at Dimrupar and low at Pub Odali village. All the beneficiaries utilised their benefit for consumption and health purpose.

3.3. Assessment of AAY/ASY

Programme Component		Pub Salmora	Dimrupar	Pub Odali	Total
1.	No. of sample beneficiaries	8	15	16	39
2.	Input(Subsidised rice received)				
A.	20 kg per month	5 (62.5%)	9 (60%)	11 (68.75%)	25 (64.10%)
B.	35 kg per month	3 (37.5%)	6 (40%)	5 (31.25%)	14 (35.90%)
3.	Output				
A.	Consumption	8 (100%)	15 (100%)	16 (100%)	39 (100%)
B.	Asset Generated	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
C.	Support to monthly consumption budget	8 (100%)	15 (100%)	16 (100%)	39 (100%)
4.	Social Capital				
A.	Helping other members of the programme during emergency	3 (37.5%)	4 (26.67%)	3 (18.75%)	10 (25.64%)
B.	Participation in social decision making meeting	5 (62.5)	9 (60%)	9 (56.25%)	28 (71.79%)
5.	Impact				
A.	Increase in standard of living	3 (37.5%)	6 (40%)	4 (25%)	13 (33.33%)

Table 9

39 AAY/ASY sample beneficiaries are interviewed under AAY/ASY programme. Under ASY 25 beneficiaries received 20 Kg rice and under AAY 13 beneficiaries received 35 Kg rice per month. All the 39 beneficiaries informed that benefit received under the programme support their monthly consumption budget. Standard of living of about two fifth beneficiaries improved at the village Pub salmora, exactly two fifth at Dimrupar and one fourth at Pub Odali village. Beneficiaries and key informants informed that the subsidised rice is provided on per card basis not on the basis of number of members in a family. Though a beneficiary has to receive 20 kg or 35 Kg rice, but in actual practice they are getting 18 to 19 kg rice under ASY and 32 to 34 kg rice under AAY. All the Public Distribution System dealer and key informants informed that the government do not provide transportation cost to dealers on time. It takes about 2 to 3 years and the amount the government provided for transportation purpose are not sufficient. So they have to manage transportation cost from a selling 1 to 2 kg of rice from beneficiary's allotment.

3.4 Assessment of IAY

Programme Component		Pub Salmora	Dimrupar	Pub Odali	Total
6.	No. of sample beneficiaries				
i.	BPL and poor	7 (87.5%)	12 (80%)	12 (75%)	31 (79.49%)
ii.	BPL but rich	1 (12.5%)	3 (20%)	4 (25%)	8 (20.51%)
1.	Input				
A.	Amount Disbursed in Rupees				
I.	Rs 38,500/-	6 (75%)	10 (66.67%)	13 (81.25%)	29 (74.36%)
II.	Rs 48,500/-	2 (25%)	5 (33.33%)	3 (18.75%)	10 (25.64%)
2.	Output				
A.	Living Room	8 (100%)	15 (100%)	16 (100%)	39 (100%)
B.	Separate Kitchen	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
C.	Sanitary Latrine	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
3.	Social Capital				
A.	Helping other members of the programme during emergency	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
B.	Participation in social decision making meeting.	5 (62.5%)	11 (73.33%)	10 (62.5%)	26 (66.67%)
4.	Impact				
A.	Increase in standard of living	7 (87.5%)	12 (80%)	12 (75%)	31 (79.49%)

Table 10: IAY

39 beneficiaries are drawn from IAY, about three fourth of them received the dwelling house of Rs 38,500/- each and one fourth of beneficiaries received house of Rs 48,500/- under the revised scheme. Though the govt. introduced another new revised scheme of Rs 75000/- but till date even a single beneficiary of sample villages have not received dwelling house under it. Out of 8 beneficiaries of Pub Salmora three fourth are poor and one eighth of them though listed as BPL but have sufficient resources to maintain their standard of living. So, we sub categorised it as BPL but rich. The same condition is seen under Dimrupar and Pub Odali village where one fifth and one fourth of beneficiaries are categorised as BPL but rich respectively. The survey reveals that the standard of living of BPL and poor categorised beneficiaries has improved but the standard of living of BPL but rich categorised beneficiaries remained as insignificant. All the 30 beneficiaries who's standard of living has improved, informed that they are not satisfied with their dwelling house, because the houses have only a single dwelling room and there is not any provision for separate kitchen and sanitary latrine. During the survey it is found that the list of beneficiaries and future beneficiaries are written in the wall of Panchayat office. Panchayat representative informed that the beneficiaries received houses as per serial number of the list. Block officials, Panchayat representatives and *key informants* informed that the beneficiary list that is put up in the Panchayat office is prepared on the basis of BPL survey done in 2002. Since then till date some of the families included in the list has moved up to Above Poverty Line, but they still continue to get the benefit of IAY. For this reason, it is seen that some rich families are getting IAY house.

3.5 Assessment of NSAP

Programme Component		Pub Salmora	Dimrupar	Pub Odali	Total
7.	No. of sample beneficiaries	8	15	16	39
5.	Input (Cash)	8 (100%)	15 (100%)	16 (100%)	39 (100%)
6.	Output				
A.	Consumption/health	8 (100%)	15 (100%)	16 (100%)	39 (100%)
B.	Asset Generated	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
7.	Social Capital				
C.	Helping other members of the programme during emergency	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
D.	Participation in social decision making meeting.	5 (62.5%)	9 (60%)	7 (43.75%)	20 (51.28%)
8.	Impact				
A.	Increase in standard of living	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Table 11: NSAP

39 sample beneficiaries are drawn from NSAP. All the sample beneficiaries and *key informants* informed that though the benefit received under the programme is supporting the consumption, especially health budget of the consumer but the cash benefit received by beneficiaries is not satisfactory. Since the support amount is very minimum, it is impossible for them to generate assets or to fulfil their basic minimum needs for consumption/ health. Even during the common discussion with villagers it is found that a handful of eligible persons have not received the benefit and in some cases authorities have selected beneficiaries whose actual age is below 65 years and living above poverty line.

Programmes Component		Beneficiaries of Pub Salmora	Beneficiaries of Dimrupar	Beneficiaries of Pub Odali	Total no. of beneficiaries
1.	Total sample beneficiaries for all programmes	40	75	80	195
2.	Input				
A.	Cash	19 (47.5%)	35 (46.67%)	34 (42.5%)	88 (45.12%)
B.	Kind	16 (40%)	30 (40%)	32 (40%)	78 (40%)
C.	No input received	5 (12.55%)	10 (13.33%)	14 (17.5%)	29 (14.88%)
3.	Output				
A.	Consumption/ health	20 (50%)	39 (52%)	44 (55%)	103 (52.82%)
B.	Reduction of debt	3 (7.5%)	4 (5.33%)	3 (3.75%)	10 (5.2%)
C.	Asset generated	12 (30%)	22 (29.33%)	19 (23.75%)	53 (27.18%)
D.	No output generated/ not employed	5 (12.5%)	10 (13.33%)	14 (17.5%)	29 (14.87%)
4.	Social Capital				
A.	Helping other members of the programme during emergency	10 (25%)	16 (21.33%)	13 (16.25%)	39 (20%)
B.	Participation in social decision making meeting	25 (62.5%)	45 (60%)	39 (48.75%)	109 (55.90%)
1.	Impact				
A.	Increase in standard of living	12 (30%)	22 (29.33%)	19 (23.75%)	53 (27.18%)

Table 12: Assessment of all the programmes

The study reveals that about half of beneficiaries received input in the form of cash and two fifth in kinds. The remaining beneficiaries have not received any input under the programmes. From the analysis of data it is found that just above the half of the beneficiaries utilised their fund for consumption/health purposes and around one fourth of beneficiaries used for asset generation. Beneficiaries utilised their programme support for debt reduction is very negligible. The analysis of social capital formation is done by two indicators, which indicates that 20% beneficiaries are helping other members of the programme during emergency and 48.75% beneficiaries are participated in social decision making meeting. Both the indicators are analysed separately as proportion of total number of sample beneficiaries. The impact of the programme for raising the level of standard of living is the key indicator for programme assessment. The data analysis shows that around one fourth of beneficiary’s standard of living has improved than earlier

4. Comparison of Indicators

It is already observed that four programme components viz: asset generation, helping other members of the programme during emergency, participation of social decision making meeting and literacy rate have major impact on programmes. So, we have selected these four components as indicators for the comparative analysis of the impact of the programmes in the sample villages. This is done by using table and radar chart as below.

Sl. No	Villages	Indicators			
		Asset Generation	Helping others during emergency	Participation of social decision making meeting	Literacy rate
1	Pub Salmora	30%	25%	62.5%	91.39%
2	Dimrupar	29.33%	21.33%	60%	81.67%
3	Pub Odali	23.75%	16.25%	48.75%	63.23%

Table 13: Comparison of Indicators

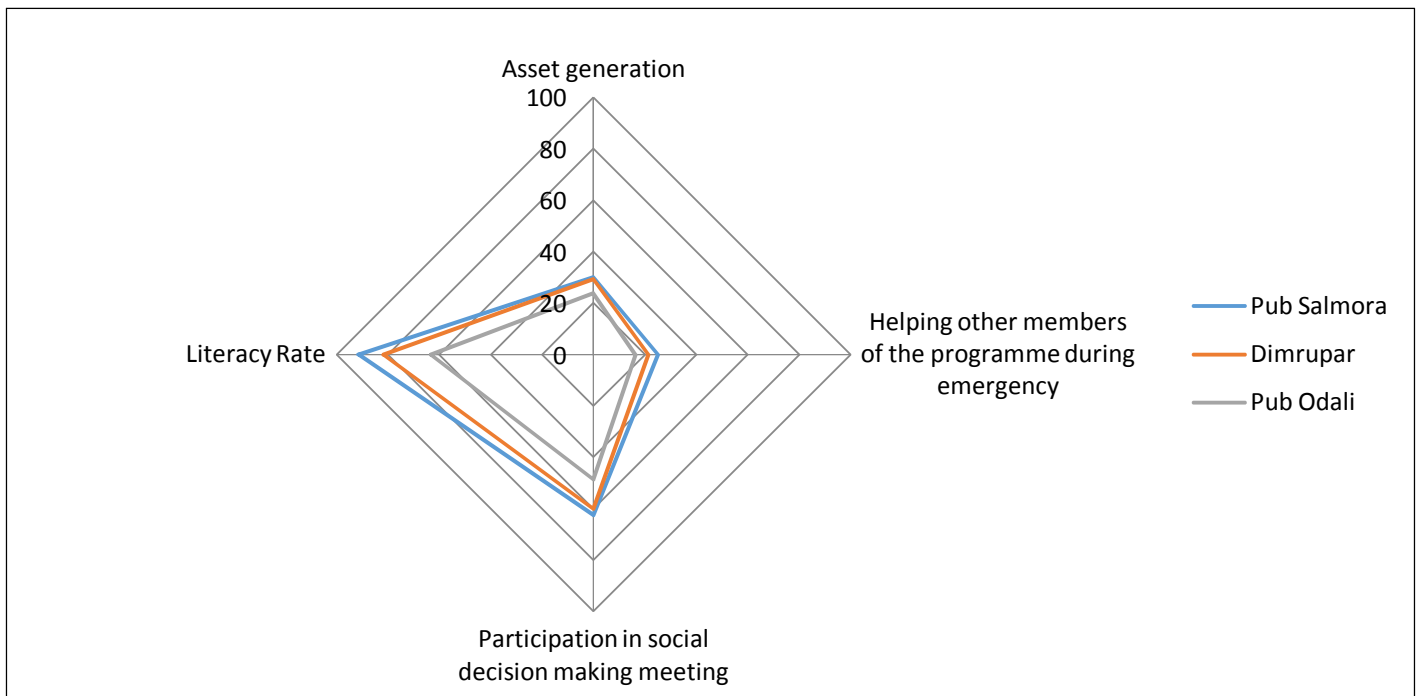


Figure 1: Comparison of Indicators

The radar chart revealed that all the four indicators shows best result in Pub Salmora in comparison with other two sample villages. So it can be concluded that Programme implementation is high at Pub Salmora, Medium at Dimrupar and low at Pub Odali Village. This comparison tested that in the villages where literacy rate is high programme implementation is also high.

5. Conclusion

About one fourth of the beneficiaries are utilised their fund for asset generation and their standard of living has improved. While the remaining part of the programme funds are used for non productive purpose. Though a sizable portion (48.75%) of beneficiaries are participated in social decision making meeting, but only 20% of beneficiaries are helping other members of the programme during emergency. This indicates that there is a gap in social capital formation. The discussion held using participatory Poverty Analysis

concluded that due to not releasing the programme funds on time programme participants are unable to help other members during emergency. During focus group discussion key informants informed that decision for most of the income generating activities are decided by programme implementing agencies of the govt, so due to the lack of choice, experience and awareness on particular activities, most of the programmes are failed. Moreover, they informed that due to insufficient fund sanction, all the programmes are only partially succeeded. The comparative analysis of indicators already proved that higher the literacy rate better the performance of the programmes. So, govt. should develop a mechanism where programme implementation and literacy campaign should go along with together.

6. Shortcomings in Implementation

It has observed that the beneficiaries have not received the full benefit of the schemes due to various reasons—

- i. In some cases the selection of beneficiaries is not transparent, that the persons above the poverty line are selected.
- ii. The practice of not releasing the entire amount of money allotted by block officials is very high. This was a common complaint received in all the blocks. This means that the beneficiaries do not get the full amount of money to which they are entitled and hence are unable to take full benefit of the scheme.
- iii. There is a lack of work culture and motivation on the part of block officials. The required follow up and monitoring of the implementation process is not done and as a result the beneficiaries do not get proper guidance.
- iv. It must also be mentioned that the block officials are working under severe constraints. Many projects have to be implemented but there is scarcity of staff. With the limited staff, it is not possible to supervise the implementation of the programmes.
- v. The poverty alleviation programmes are very much target oriented and a number of schemes are implemented irrespective of the fact whether the schemes are responding to the felt-needs of the people. Any scheme can be successful if it meets the needs of the people.

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