

A Study on Socio-economic well-being of rural area of Lebong, Darjeeling

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Introduction:

Well-being is a positive outcome that is meaningful for people and for many sectors of society, because it tells us that people perceive that their lives are going well. Good living conditions (e.g., housing, employment) are fundamental to well-being. Tracking these conditions is important for public policy. However, many indicators that measure living conditions fail to measure what people think and feel about their lives, such as the quality of their relationships, their positive emotions and resilience, the realization of their potential, or their overall satisfaction with life—i.e., their “well-being.” Well-being generally includes global judgments of life satisfaction and feelings ranging from depression to joy.

Extended measures of well-being examine living standards in a household using measures other than income and earnings. It covers five broad domains:

- i) appliances and electronic goods, such as possession of refrigerators, cellular telephones, and computers
- ii) housing conditions, including level of satisfaction with overall home repair, adequate living space, and sufficient privacy
- iii) neighborhood conditions and community services, such as: road conditions and the presence of abandoned buildings; satisfactory police, fire, and medical services; and attitudes towards local schools
- iv) meeting basic needs, including the ability to pay bills in full, to avoid eviction, and to have sufficient food

- v) the expectation of help, should need arise, from friends, family, and the community.

Concept of Social Well-being:

The concept of Social well-being is given by David M Smith. The concept of social well-being and the quality of life seems to be synonymous. But the ‘quality of life’ implies a rather personalized concept, whereas the concept of social well-being addresses the welfare of some social group. The research conducted by Bradburn and Caploutz in 1965 on happiness has indicated possibilities for the analysis of levels of psychological well being or self-esteem. Stagner in 1970 proposed a set of ‘psychological urban indicators’ that would focus on the frequency and intensity of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the aspects of urban life perceived as important by the inhabitants of the city. The use of Massive surveys to find out what the people themselves think of the quality of life and the criteria and conditions impinging on it may be the only way to avoid introducing the biased values of the academicians and government officials concerned professionally with social indicators.

The concept of social well-being eventually related to human happiness or the capacity of individuals to realize their perception of the good life, because this is the ultimate criterion for determining whether a society is well or sick. The concept of social well-being considers a society which people will have incomes adequate for their basic needs of food, shelter and a living standard. The status and dignity of the people individual should be respectable and socially and economically mobile. Good quality education and health services should be available to all and their use should be reflected in a high level of physical

and mental health. People should live in a decent house, neighbourhoods and should enjoy a good quality of physical environment. They should have access to recreational facilities, including culture and arts and adequate leisure time to enjoy it.

Concept of Economic well-being:

Economic well-being offers an holistic view of the contribution made by people, households, businesses and communities to a healthy economy and society. It allows this contribution to be described in terms of their output, their wages and profits. It also reflects other inputs that these individuals and groups can make to economic health, and the positive and negative social and environmental outcomes of these inputs.

Economic well-being tends to take a wider perspective than that provided by traditional economic policy objectives, such as raising productivity. It recognises that those who are active as employees or who run businesses are not the only contributors to healthy economies. People whose primary economic activity is as consumers of goods and services, also contribute to economic well-being.

Economic well-being approach is particularly valuable in rural areas. The nature and outcomes of economic activities in these areas are often wider than those which are traditionally perceived to be produced by an area's 'working population'. As strong community involvement and partnership working are a regular feature of projects in rural areas, economic activities will often also deliver environmental and social goals and benefit all sections of a community in a more integrated way.

Objectives of the Study:

- i) To examine the socio-economic well-being of the rural people.
- ii) To establish the **full range of factors** those contribute to personal "well-being".
- iii) To study the various employment status of rural people leading a good quality of life.
- iv) To examine the influence of factors on well being of the rural people.

- v) To study the different aspects of rural well being.
- vi) To analyze the positive aspects of socio-economic well being of rural people.

Design/Methodology:

Both qualitative and quantitative information has been generated from the primary and secondary sources. For the collection of data and information, baseline field sample survey from two rural areas has been carried out by questionnaire method (socio-economic survey). The investigation on-site interviews are based on the information collected from one rural area i.e. Lebong with 50 families. Hence, the generalization of findings has been based on the sample study. Simple statistical tools like pie-charts, bar diagram, histograms, were used to analyse the data collected from primary and secondary sources.

Darjeeling:

Darjeeling "The Queen of Hills" having a population of 1,842,034(2011 census) is a place composed of 61% of Rural areas and 39% of urban areas. The town is located in the Mahabharat Range or Lesser Himalaya at an average elevation of 6,710 ft (2,050 m) with 27°02'N and 88°10' E longitude. This paper will emphasize on the *socio-economic well being* of one rural area of Darjeeling i.e. **Lebong**.

Case study of Socio-economic well being of Lebong, Darjeeling:

Location of the Study area:

Lebong is a valley about below Darjeeling town, West Bengal, India. It is about 8 km from the Mall, the central location of Darjeeling with geographical coordinates of 27° 5' 0" North and 88° 17' 0" East. The valley is noted for its race course. Lebong is also the place where initial tea plantation of the Darjeeling hills started in 1850s.

1) Family Size:

The data presented in Table indicates that, majority (74%) of people belonged to small family and remaining (26%) belonged to large family size. The possible reason for finding small size families would be that, acceptance of small family norms by family to lead considered life with limited earnings and another reason might be due to awareness among people about problem of large family size.

Distribution of respondents according to their family size

(N=50)

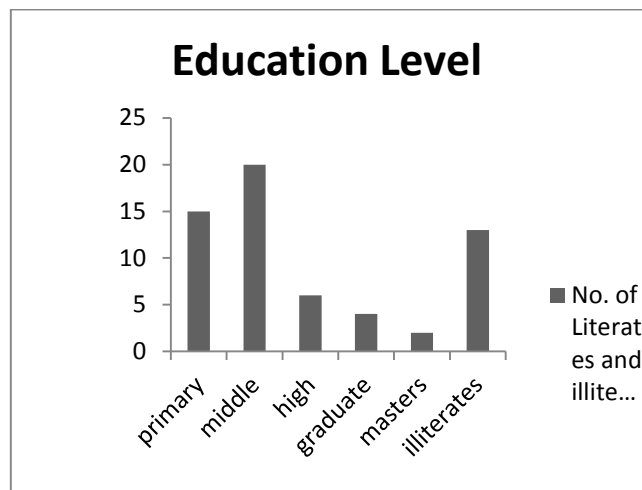
Family size	Frequency	Percentage
Small size (Below 5)	37	74
Big size (5 and above)	13	26
Total	50	100

2) Education:

Educational attainment does not only relate to gaining knowledge in a formal sense but also to the general desire to expand one’s knowledge and to be exposed to new ideas. For many respondents **educational opportunities** not only related to their own professional development, but it was important to have the financial means to send their children to the schools they would like them to attend.

The findings indicated that, considerable percent of the people (30%) were educated up to primary school, followed by middle school (40%) level of education. This situation might have arised due to low financial position of the beneficiaries and non-realization of importance of education. However, few people(12%) had

education upto high school, (8%) graduate and (4%) masters and illiterates (6%).



N=50

(Source: Field Survey 2012)

Literacy is the key element for socio-economic progress of the society. The findings revealed that the area has high literacy rate. Around 6% of the people living in this area are illiterates. The literacy rate is low among primary sections and quite satisfactory among higher sections of the education levels. The awareness among poor people have enhanced the education level to a satisfactory level. The presence of 7 schools namely Siksha sangha high school, Nimna Madhyamik School, Badamtam junior high school, Bhadrasheela Memorial Institute, Sunrise school, Saraswati vidya daan academy and pine mount school has played great a role in the development of educational system.

3) Quality of Life:

Leisure activities serve a number of purposes, all of which contribute to well-being: they provide relaxation, destressing, entertainment, an escape from reality, and an escape from one’s daily routine; they give one the opportunity to be creative and practice hobbies. Although **spirituality and religion** were considered by some respondents to contribute to their sense of well-being, the two concepts are not considered to be the same and respondents spoke of themselves more in relation to being spiritual rather than religious. The survey revealed the good quality of life of life of rural people of Lebong. Most of the people of Lebong are enjoying recreational facilities. Around 60% of families owes Televisions and sound systems, around 90% of families uses mobile phones for

communication, around 20% families own computers and most importantly 80% of the family lives in their own houses, only 20% are dependent on rent. 90% of the family have electricity in their houses which supports good recreation to the rural families. Besides this, 3 playgrounds are available for childrens and adults as well.

4) Health:

Good **personal health** was regarded as a very important influencing factor on well-being and respondents defined health in a number of ways. It was seen as the absence of illness, suffering or any weakening or break with social life. Related to a person's health is their **physical fitness** and exercise which affects one's level of energy, heart, fitness and physical shape. Similarly, **nutrition** has an influence on a person's health and consequently on well-being. The influence of nutritional intake on well-being includes having something to eat, eating quality food, what you eat, and the relationship between food and money. Respondents see it as a contributing factor to well-being to be able to get **health care** when they need it. This is also regarded as the closest connection between health and money - more money means access to better services, medication and nursing homes, which can, at least to some extent, influence health itself.

While considering the health condition, the entire area has a small dispensary or clinic situated Kotwaali which has been serving the village as a means of first-aid medical facility and is still serving the village. There is one Primary Health Centre(PHC) in the entire area which is supplying free medical or first aid facilities to the people.

5) Economic and employment situation:

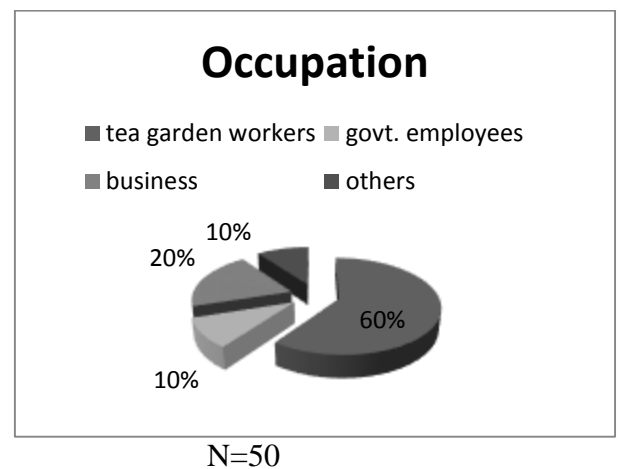
Respondents in the **Lebong** area were unanimous about the importance of money in order to attain a state of well-being. Money is seen as the foundation of well-being and provides access to other factors that influence well-being, such as participating in cultural activities, buying books, buying a house, practicing hobbies, etc. Meeting basic needs (such as housing, food, heat, clothes, etc.) is a goal in itself, but also makes it possible to have a peaceful family life as the stressors caused by lack of basic resources and needs are

avoided. Non-essential spending, on the other hand, is characterised as being able to share, to spoil yourself and others, indulge in one's passions, to save, and to travel when going on holiday. At its most basic level **employment** relates to well-being because of the need and importance of just having a job (that lasts) and an income. However, at a higher level than just being employed and being satisfied with having a job, **job satisfaction** (having the job one wants and being satisfied in one's job) in an important contributing factor to well-being.

The employment status(occupation) and the annual incomes of Lebong are as follows:

a) Occupation:

In terms of economic condition it has been seen that most of people are engaged in tea garden(60%),only few are government employees(10%) and the rest depends on business . around 32 shops are present and 7 shops provide ration in this area. The availability of 3 dispensaries with free medicines distribution under council has maintained a good health condition among the people of this area.

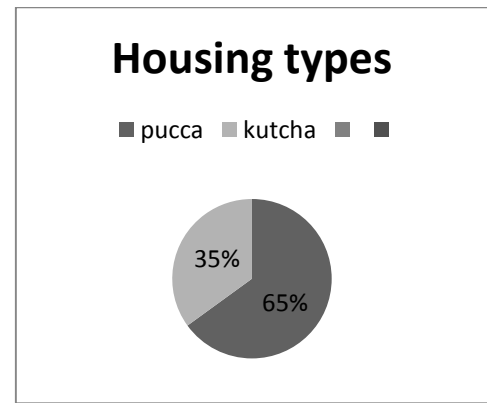


(Source: Field Survey, 2012)

About 60% of households in the area own both land and livestock. There are few farmers with economic size of landholdings, who are growing vegetables, doing fish farming and tree planting. Some are enterprising by growing vegetables on leased lands. But only a few of the labor force are engaged in the off-farm employment activities. Most of the poor families are dependent on wages for income.

b) Annual income:

Respondents in Lebong were unanimous about the **importance of money in order to attain a state of well-being**. The survey revealed that out of 50 sample households, 26 respondents had the annual income below Rs.4800 before the implementation of TRYSEM. After receiving the benefits from the programme 21 respondents of the total sample households crossed the poverty line. About 14.00% households belonged to semi- medium income group. Nearly 13% of the households belonged to low income group. Mostly 19% households belonged to medium income group. Very less per cent (4%) of the household belonged to high income group.



N=50

(Source: Field Survey, 2012)

6) Infrastructure:

The **quality of one's residence** is influenced by what one can afford (the relationship between housing and money) and just having a roof over one's head was seen as important. Cleanliness (graffiti-free and not dirty), safety, security, sufficient parking in the neighbourhood, accessibility to a range of services, quality of public services in the area (transport, schools, refuse collection), proximity to nature, and the absence of air and noise pollution were mentioned by respondents as **contributing factors to the quality of the living area** and therefore to well-being. In addition to the quality of one's living area, being in nature and the **quality of natural resources** can influence well-being either positively or negatively. For example, environmental problems can have a negative influence on well-being.

In terms of **Infrastructure**, well connected and pitched roads has been seen all around the Lebong sub-centre tea garden namely Ging tea estate, Bannockburn tea estate and Badamtam tea estate has accessed all the major rural areas with good transport facilities. The presence of banks and post office proves the achievement of good quality of these areas.

7) Housing Types:

The area is composed of 65% of pucca houses and 35% of kucha houses. Most of the houses are built with cements and only few houses are built with woods and tins. The housing conditions reveals that the rural people are living a good quality of life.

8) Sanitation:

- In 2003-04, most of the members did not have proper sanitary system at their home.
- The drainage condition of the locality was poor.
- This affected their health condition leading to various diseases like – warm infection, urine infection, viral fever, skin infection, malaria, etc.
- With the upliftment of income over years and change in their lifestyle, the sanitary system also improved.
- In 2011-12, almost all the members could afford low cost safe sanitation at their home.

The above data reveals the improvement of sanitation in the Lebong area which is one of the important aspects of rural well being.

CONCLUSION:

So far, study on the socio economic well being revealed the better status of rural people of Lebong area attaining a good quality of life. Society has attained better education, high to low per capita income, self-employment, food security, better primary health care facilities. So, to improve the condition, more stress on literacy, steps to organise self help groups for employment purpose are necessary at first. Moreover, awareness of people and their intervention to control the problems like illiteracy or

consumption of alcohol is still required. Mass media may take major role to increase awareness among people about these matters. The results suggest that considerable care is needed in theorising about the impact of socio-economic variables on the status and wellbeing of rural people within their families because these are very sensitive to prevailing socio-economic values within the societies or communities to which they belong. As should be evident from the preceding discussion, socio-economic well-being is an important aspect of development impact analysis. The various changes in the social environment and social well-being of a community that result from development may be significant, yet they are often subtle and not easy to quantify.

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