

Household Income, Education and Livelihood Diversification Options: Contextualizing Livelihood (in)Security of North Bengal Tea Workers

1. Introduction

The concept of 'livelihood' deals with the ways and means that individuals and households utilize to 'make their living'. Meaningful livelihood is that which sustains and ensures that poor households live with dignity and hope for better future. 'Livelihoods' as defined by Chambers and Conway (1992) and Ellis (2000), comprise capabilities, assets (including both material and social assets) and activities that are required by households for means of living. At a very basic level, one's livelihood may include wide and diverse range of activities people engage in to find sources of food, fuel, animal fodder and cash to make or improve their living (UNDP :1999). Essentially, the livelihood focuses on the household and revolves around both material and social resources or assets (e.g. land, labour, knowledge, money, social relationship) and what households do with these resources (Hiremath: 2007). Livelihood security, on the other hand, is the ability of the households to meet their basic needs and realize their basic rights which include adequate food, health and shelter, minimal level of income, basic education and community participation (Frankenberger et al: 2000). According to Frankenberger (1996), the 'household livelihood security' can be defined as 'an adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic needs, including adequate access to food, potable water, health facilities, educational opportunities, housing and time for community participation and social integration'. Thus, livelihood security is a broader concept than food security. The food security is mainly concerned with the procurement of food for living whereas livelihood security deals with the procurement of food, shelter and clothing, besides the ability of the household to cope with shocks and stresses without the permanent depletion of assets (Ellis: 2000). However, questions always arise as to: what is the level at which a household's livelihood can be called to be secured? In other words, at what level does an individual or a household attain livelihood security? According to the livelihood index prepared by international organizations working on livelihood issues, there are eight components of livelihood security that includes income and assets, food and nutrition, education, participation, water sanitation, primary health and reproductive health (CARE : 1996). In order to reach that acceptable level of livelihood security, individuals and households are required to have adequate household income to sustain their living for a substantial number of month and weeks in a year. However when the household income becomes inadequate for procuring of food, potable water, shelter, health including basic education, households starts facing threats to their livelihood. While the access to educational opportunities may appear just one of the needs (and not necessarily the most important one in the rural context), its accessibility or deprivation influences the degree of livelihood security that an individual or a household may enjoy. Therefore, better educational opportunity, particularly, higher education can play crucial role in enhancing the income of individuals as well as households; thereby, strengthening the livelihood security. Likewise, the need for diversifying

various livelihood options becomes crucial to address livelihood threats, especially when the source of household income becomes solitary and meager.

2. Context of the Study

Generally, the concept of livelihood security has focused on the rural lives and various activities that the rural folks engage themselves to secure their livelihoods. However, in this paper the concept of livelihoods is extended to the tea garden households. It is a general misconception that because the tea garden workers get regular wages and other benefits in the organized sector like tea industry, they enjoy livelihood security. On the contrary, generations of tea garden workers have continued to face livelihood insecurity as they completely or partially depend on the daily wages, weekly ration (rice and flour) and other benefits provided by the tea plantation management for their livelihood (Goddard: 2004; Biswas et al: 2005). That is why during the “sickness” or closure of gardens their livelihood insecurity becomes even more acute. In recent decades, especially in the first decade of this millennium, securing of livelihood has become even harder for the tea garden households in the face of crises facing the Indian tea industry due to increasing competitions from many countries and apparent loss to owners resulting in irregular payments, wage cuts and even temporary or indefinite closure of tea gardens (Goddard: 2004; CEC: 2007; Biswas et al: 2008). North Bengal¹, where the study was conducted, is one of the most badly affected tea regions in India by the tea industry crises. The wage cuts, delay in wage payments, increasing job reduction in many gardens have led to more unemployment, and above all, malnutrition and starvation deaths in some closed gardens that have been causing negative effect on the psyche of tea workers in this region (Talwar et al: 2003; Biswas et al: 2008).

Besides the low wage structure what has compounded the livelihood insecurity of the workers in North Bengal, has been the cutting down on jobs have caused steep rise in unemployment among tea garden residents. This means that while the number of earning members in a household remains constant or even reduced, the number of dependent members keep increasing with the addition of new members in the family. And with the prices of daily commodities rising unabated the household livelihood insecurity gets exacerbated. With none or hardly any alternative works available in or around the gardens, securing of livelihoods can become very challenging especially tea gardens located far from urban or market centres. With no ownership of land and lack of other options around that would provide for supplementary source the household income remains very low among the tea garden households; thereby, accentuating their livelihood insecurity.

¹ North Bengal is a particular geographical area in the northern part of West Bengal comprising six districts, still its remarkable Socio-cultural feature and identity cannot be denied. North Bengal is particularly famous for being second highest tea producing area after Assam.

At the backdrop of this, it needs to be acknowledged that a variety of factors impact on the process of such diversification of livelihood options. Yet, it is interesting to note that a host of studies on livelihood related issues in tea gardens of North Bengal and elsewhere conducted so far have conspicuously failed to grasp the complex interplay of a multiplicity of variables impacting on the livelihoods diversification options. Studies by Bhowmik et al (1996) and Mukherjee (1997) show serious socio-economic problems faced by the tea plantation workers in Assam and North Bengal tea regions. On the other hand, Talwar et al (2006) and Centre for Education and Communication (2007) specifically discuss the socio-economic crises being faced by Scheduled Tribe (ST) population engaged in plantation labour in different tea growing regions of India albeit without investigating the deep rooted causes for this state of affairs. The studies of the sort of Subba (2001), Sircar et al (2002) and Rasaily (2008) only show that plantation wage labour being the only source of livelihood for most tea garden workers while being silent on the issue of diversification options. Similarly, Bhadra (1992), Talwar et al (2003) and Goddard (2004) argue that vulnerability of tea garden workers is mainly due to their over-dependence on tea management for securing their livelihoods. Likewise, based on their study in Bangladesh, Sircar, Islam and Gain (2008) point out that the absence of land right of the tribal community in tea gardens is the prime factor responsible for their poor livelihood security. Thus the brief survey of studies shows most scholars have failed to delve on the need for livelihood diversification which may help enhance household income; and thereby, increase the livelihood security of workers. Further, there is no literature found that tries to find co-relation or some kind of interface between the levels of education and securing of jobs outside the tea garden territory. Thus, there is definitely some information and knowledge gap in the available researches on the interface between household income, educational level and diversification of livelihoods. The present study, while acknowledging the existence of the interplay of multiple variables determining livelihood options, takes one variable of pertinence-the availability of options of educational enhancement in determining the livelihood diversification options in the tea gardens. Keeping the above components in mind, this paper attempts to provide glimpses of livelihood insecurity that the household in tea gardens of North Bengal experience, and accentuate the options for livelihood diversification in order to enhance household income. Additionally, the study attempts to find a link between the level of education with that of household income and available diversification of livelihood options.

3. Objectives and Methods of the Study

The study was conducted with some specific objectives in mind. First of all, the study conducted in North Bengal tea region of West Bengal attempts to assess the levels of education and current household income among the tea garden households of North Bengal. Secondly, the study attempts to link different levels of education among workers with the household income and vice versa. Thirdly, the study attempts to link the educational levels with livelihood diversification options in order to address the livelihood security concerns of tea garden households in the North Bengal tea region.

For the collection of data and information on the above stated objectives of the study, 5 tea gardens of the North Bengal tea region were selected. Primary data were collected employing questionnaire/schedule and personal interviews while observation techniques and focus group discussions were employed to triangulate the data gathered from major sources of data collection methods. A total of 40 households were selected from each select garden through stratified random sampling. Thus, a total sample size of 200 was taken from the 5 selected tea gardens of North Bengal. The sample study was done keeping in mind the universe of the select tea plantations which comprised a mixture of different ethnic groups, dominated by Tribals of Chotanagpur origin and Nepalese and others ethnic groups. Apart from this, about 5 key informants from each selected gardens were interviewed through semi-structured questions on the issues relating to the livelihood security and diversified livelihood options in their gardens. The key informants comprised *panchayat* members, union leaders, garden managers, teachers or government employees working outside the garden. Secondary data were gathered from books, journal articles, newspaper clippings and other written materials.

4. Location and Locale of the Study Area

Five tea gardens selected for the field study are located in the three tea belts or regions under the Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri Districts of West Bengal. Belgachi and Marapur tea gardens are located in the Terai² tea region of the Darjeeling District while Dhooteriah tea garden is located in the Darjeeling Hills of the same district. The other two tea gardens, namely, Ramjhora and Gandrapara are located in the Dooars³ tea region of the Jalpaiguri District. The rationale for choosing these tea gardens were the following: i) they were located in three tea regions, thereby making a good representation of the North Bengal tea district; ii) the three regions were under two administrative districts- Darjeeling Hills and Terai tea region were under Darjeeling district while Dooars tea region was under the Jalpaiguri district. Moreover, Darjeeling Hills, was also administratively under the DGHC (Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council) which was influenced by powerful local party namely, Gorka Jana Mukti Morcha (GJMM). iii) Fully operational and “sick” tea gardens. While Dhooteriah, Gandrapara and Marapur tea gardens were fully operational and healthy-type of gardens Ramjhora and Belgachi came under “sick garden” category. IV) Large-company owned and small company or proprietor owned tea gardens: Gandrapara and Dhooteriah were owned by large companies, such as Goodricke and Alchemist respectively whereas Belgachi, Ramjhora and Marapur were either owned by small companies or a proprietor

² The “Terai” means moist and marshy grassland which geographically comprises Siliguri- plains of Darjeeling district at the base of the Eastern Himalaya and is composed of alternate layers of clay and sand, with a high water table that creates many springs and wetlands.

³ Dooars is a tract of North Bengal within Jalpaiguri district that lies along the Teesta and Sankos rivers. This tract, with the Eastern Doors which now forms part of the Goalpara district of Assam was annexed to Bengal in 1865 (Grunning: 1911).

or a business-family. For the summary description of the five selected gardens refer to table 1 below.

Table 1: Brief Description of the Five Selected Tea Gardens from North Bengal

Garden/Year Estd.	Ownership/ Mgmt Type	Garden Type/ Location	Worker Status	Description/Status
Belgachi (Estd in 1870 by Davenport Tea Co)	B.K. Kadia Pvt. Ltd – Proprietor	Large-sized Garden; (1200 Acre) Proximity to Small Urban Centre;	Total Residents: 7000- Permanent Workers: 800; Temporary Workers: 850; Dependents: 5350	A “Sick Garden” Closed from 9 th Dec.’10- 14 Jan. ’11; About 5 km from Naxalbari Town
Dhooteriah (Estd in 1859 by Borogham British Co)	Alchemist Group of companies,	Large-sized Garden (330 Ha); Located in Remote Area,	Total Residents: 8000 Permanent: 1371; Temporary: 1100; Dependents: 5530	Fully Operational; about 30 km south of Darjeeling and 12 km off Hill Cart Rd from Rangbull Bazaar.
Gandrapara (Estd. In 1895 by Assam-Duars Tea Co)	Goodricke Tea Co. Since	Large size Garden (630 Ha); Proximity to Small Urban Centre;	Total Residents: -8000-; Permanent: 2000; Temporary: 1100; Dependents: 4900	Fully Operational; about 3 km from Banarhat Town (Jalpaiguri District)
Marapur (Estd in 1956 by Debnath Tea Co Pvt Ltd)	Deonar Tea Plantation Pvt. Ltd.- Family owned	small-sized Garden (350 Acre); Isolated Location- Near Nepal Border	Total Residents about 1050- Permanent Workers: 199; Temporary: 250 and Dependents: 600	Fully Operational; One of the few family-owned gardens not declared as “Sick Garden”.
Ramjhora (Estd in 1905 by Duars Tea Company)	Hind Tea Co. since 9 Oct. 2010, Small company	Large-size Garden- (1300 Acres); Isolated Location-	Total Residents about 6000 (846 Households)- Permanent Workers: 800; Temporary Workers: 0; Dependents: 5154	One of the most badly affected gardens due to closure; closed from 2002-2010-about 350 death related to malnutrition, sickness and starvation

5. Analysis and Discussion

The present study has tried to map the livelihood diversification options, apart from educational levels and household income of North Bengal tea workers, selecting 5 tea gardens for sample study. In the sections that follow, an attempt has been made to relate livelihoods security to variables like household income, education and diversification of livelihood options. Various tables, figures and charts below reveal the findings on the five selected gardens that have been mentioned and described above. The study attempts to analyze and discuss three variables,

namely household income, level of education and livelihood diversification. Then it tries to link the educational level of tea garden workers with the level of household income and whether the access to education level helps in diversifying the livelihood options or becomes a hindrance in livelihood diversification.

Table 2: Comparing the Level of Education in 5 Gardens (200 HH; 956 members)

Tea gardens	No Education	Cl. I-V	Cl. VI-IX	Cl. X-XII	Graduation
Belgachi	58 (29%)	68 (34%)	46 (23%)	29 (14%)	0
Dhooteriah	31 (17%)	61 (31%)	70 (35%)	32 (16%)	4 (2%)
Gandrapara	57 (28%)	52 (27%)	59 (29%)	24 (12%)	9 (4%)
Marapur	49 (29%)	67 (40%)	41 (24%)	12 (7%)	0
Ramjhora	31 (17%)	71 (38%)	53 (29%)	24 (13%)	4 (2%)
Total	226 (24%)	319 (34%)	269 (28%)	115 (12 %)	17 (2%)

5. 1. Levels of Education and Household Income

One of the most important assets that individuals need to acquire is the “human capital” which refers to the level of knowledge and skills individuals can equip themselves with through education (Ellis: 2000). The education used effectively plays pivotal role in empowering poor households and in enhancing their social and economic position in the society (www.cclpworldwde.com). Therefore, there is a strong relationship between household socio-economic status (which includes parental education, economic status, etc.) and levels of schooling (Education Charter: 1999). It is found that the children of the never schooled parents and with deficit economic conditions are more likely to be out of school than their peers living with better economic condition (Nath et al: 2005). Inversely, parents with better economic conditions will seek better and higher level of education for their children (ibid). The table 2 above shows that levels of education in the 5 selected gardens is very low. 24% of the households in the sample gardens have no education while a high 34% have only elementary schooling. The table also shows that only 12% have either high school or higher secondary education whereas only 2% tea garden residents from the 200 households in 5 selected tea gardens of North Bengal have either completed graduation or pursuing college education. Various reasons could be cited for very high literacy rate in the studied tea gardens. The parents of the workers being illiterate themselves could be a factor for not educating their children without knowing the value of education. However, ‘adolescent work’ in the past in tea gardens had definitely lured students away from school or being cause for drop-outs while at the same creating extra bread earners for households. Other explanation that emerged is

that since the workers and their households depended completely on tea garden for their livelihood, their motivational level for education was very low. It is also believed that since the time of British Planters, the tea garden workers were given just enough to feel secure but not enough to progress in life; as a result, workers did not consider education as a tool to enhance their livelihood (Bhowmik et al: 1996).

The rather higher percentage of persons with primary (Cl. I-V) and junior high school education (up to Cl. IX) is due to new enthusiasm for schooling among the present generation of tea garden residents with Government's new drive for free and compulsory education under *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* ('education for all'). Another finding coming to light was that the workers of Nepalese ethnicity are more progressive with regards to education than those of tribal community. The finding shows that of the total 17 persons (2%) of the sample population having college education (completed or pursuing), in table 2, majority belong to Nepali ethnic group while only a small percentage were from Tribal (*Adivasis*) community despite constituting the largest number of residents in North Bengal tea gardens.

Table 3: Household Income Levels in 5 Selected Gardens (Sample 40 HH)

Tea gardens	<Rs. 500	Rs. 500-1500	Rs. 1501-3000	Rs. 3001-5000	Rs. 5001-7000	>Rs. 7000
Belgachi	0	3 (7.5%)	12 (30%)	18 (45%)	4 (10%)	3 (7.5%)
Dhooteria	0	5 (10%)	21 (52.5%)	8 (20%)	4 (10%)	2 (5%)
Gandrapara	0	5 (12.5%)	18 (45%)	14 (35%)	2 (5%)	1 (2.5%)
Marapur	0	3 (7.5)	14 (35%)	18 (45%)	5 (10%)	0
Ramjhora	0	10 (25%)	14 (35%)	13 (32.5%)	3 (7.5%)	0

Table 3 above depicting household income presents no household having income earning below Rs. 500 whereas only 7 household (out of 200 selected households) earn more than Rs. 7000/month. Study show that in the 5 surveyed tea gardens about 39% household earn between Rs. 1501-3000 a month followed by 35% household who earn between Rs. 3001-5000 per month. Thus, an average tea garden household has to manage their household expenses with Rs. 100-150 a day with an average of about 4 dependent members to feed; that is why, majority of the

household in these 5 gardens face livelihood insecurity. A very significant finding was that though a daily wage of Rs. 67 is given to the North Bengal tea workers (apart from some fringe benefits) in reality they receive only Rs. 1200 to 1400 a month after some ambiguous deduction which means workers receive a meager Rs. 40 to 47 per day as cash in hand. It is indeed ironic that a tea worker in North Bengal plucks between 25 to 40 kgs of tea leaves on a daily basis, which in a domestic retail market fetches between Rs.1637.50 to Rs. 2620 at an average rate of Rs. 65/kg; in return he/she receives a pittance of (Rs. 67/day⁴).

5. 2. Linking Household Income Level with Accessibility of Education

The present study has revealed that there are some interface between the level of household income and accessing of education in tea gardens of North Bengal. On analyzing Table 2 and Table 3 it becomes evident that households in the 5 selected tea gardens who could afford to educate their children in colleges belong to income category of Rs. 5,100 to Rs. 7,000 or above. It can also be inferred from above tables that persons having graduation or college degree from Gandrapara (4.5%), Dhooteriah (2%) and Ramjhora (2%) come from families with relatively higher income earning than others. Table 3 shows that a small percentage (13%) of households has income level ranging from Rs. 5,001 to Rs. 7,000 or more which explains the table 2 which shows that only a small number (2%) of individuals in the five sample tea gardens could afford college education. In Dhooteriah Tea Garden of the Darjeeling Hills 15% households earn between Rs. 5,001 to Rs. 7,000 and more, as a result, 16% have Cl. X-XII education while 2% have completed or pursuing college education. Similarly, 10% and 7.5% households in Gandrapara and Ramjhora tea gardens respectively under Dooars tea region have household income ranging from Rs. 5,100 to Rs. 7,000 and which show about 16% in Gandrapara and 15% in Ramjhora among the surveyed household accessing higher secondary or college education. No one in Marapur tea garden located in Terai tea region has income close to Rs. 7000 which reflects 0% college graduates (refer to table 2 & 3). It must be noted here that household income is not the only condition for accessing the higher secondary or college education. Gandrapara showing relatively better educational level (16% having class X, XII or college education) is located near a town having schools and colleges while Marapur with no college graduates is located in an isolated area having no high school in its vicinity. Notwithstanding this, only those households having relatively higher income could financially make college education accessible as the study revealed. Thus, data gathered indicate that persons or students who have pursued or pursuing college education belonged to households having relatively higher income category. Households with lower income level have either dropped-off after middle school or parents have stopped their further education as they wanted their children to be working and earning members.

According to the study for the majority (39%) of the tea garden workers household income ranges between Rs. 1501-3000/month followed by who earn between Rs. 3100-5000/month for

⁴ Wages in North Bengal Terai and Dooars tea regions were raised to Rs. 85/day from November 2011 while in Darjeeling Hills it was raised to Rs. 90/day from March 2011.

35% households (refer to Table 3 above). Consequently, a majority of the households in the selected tea gardens of North Bengal have to live in fragile equilibrium, which means, they earn bare minimum to meet their most basic needs but not enough to access education, particularly, college education. In other words, the low income provides only just enough to survive, but not adequate for any savings and thus, inadequate for long-term sustainable economic progress (Lindenberg: 2002). Inversely, since such a high proportion of population in the surveyed tea gardens has income level at ‘fragile equilibrium’, majority population has either no education or only basic primary education. On the other hand, in order to access education at graduation or college level where government normally does not subsidize, households must have relatively high income or sufficient income to spend for educational expenses. It implies that not all the households under the aforementioned income category can access higher education; inversely, the lower educated or just literate garden residents are not employed at skilled and high paying higher jobs (govt or private). So, they settle for unskilled tea garden works or casual labour— as the case may be—and the vicious circle goes on.

Table 4: Livelihood Diversifications options in 5 gardens (Sample 200 HH)

<i>Tea Gardens</i>	<i>Govt Job</i>	<i>Pvt. Job</i>	<i>Farming (sale of crops)</i>	<i>Daily Labour</i>	<i>Small Business</i>	<i>Livestock</i>	<i>Govt Scheme/ Aid</i>
Belgachi	0	1	7	12	6	10	3
Dhooteriah.	0	9	3	8	8	20	1
Gandrapara	0	6	16	7	3	9	0
Marapur	0	0	19	3	2	10	0
Ramjhora	0	6	12	2	15	15	18
Total	0	22(11%)	57(29%)	32(16%)	34 (17%)	64 (35%)	22 (11 %)

5. 3. Livelihood Diversification Options

Since the present wage structure is unable to provide livelihood security to most households and, because there are hardly any alternative sources to supplement household income, tea garden households in North Bengal are compelled to seek other available options to diversify their livelihoods and counter livelihood threats. Some development scholars, such as Scoones (1997),

Hiremath and Misra (2006) and Hiremath (2007) propose the need for different livelihood approaches for the enhancement of livelihoods and reduction of poverty. In their studies they maintain that in order to effectively address the poverty and enhance the livelihoods of the poor, different interventions, like income enhancement strategies and livelihood diversification should be employed. Sati (2009) calls for diversifying livelihood opportunities, through diverse cash crops in agriculture for improving livelihoods. However, study shows diversification of livelihood through cultivation of cash crop is a very limited option for tea garden households in North Bengal as only 19% household have land ownership (0.5-1.0 Bigha), so essential for crop cultivation. Therefore, most households engage in other type of livelihood opportunities that help them to supplement their income.

From Table 4 above, it can be inferred that majority of tea garden households diversify their livelihoods through rearing livestock (35%) followed by farming activities (29%). Supplementary source of income through livestock includes rearing and sale of chicken, pigs, goats and dairy milk while income from farming activities include sale of beetle nuts and some homegrown fruits. A very small number of garden households also save their expenses by cultivating paddy, millet, maize and vegetables in their little plots. One important finding of the study is that no individual (0%) out of 200 households from the 5 sample gardens have secured government jobs while only 11% have earning from private jobs.

In the following few figures/charts, an attempt has been made to establish a link between the accessibility and level of education to livelihood diversification in the five selected tea gardens under study.

Fig. 1A: Linking Education with Livelihood Diversification in Belgachi T.E.

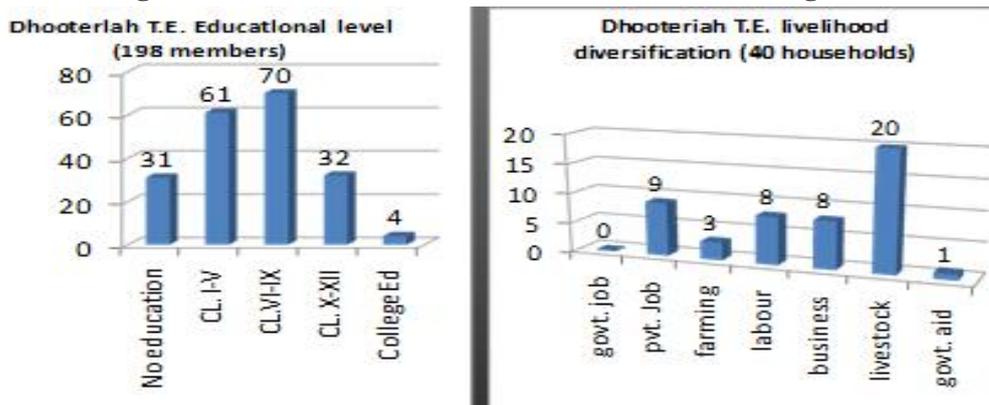


Fig. 1B: Linking Education with Livelihood Diversification in Dhooteriah T.E.

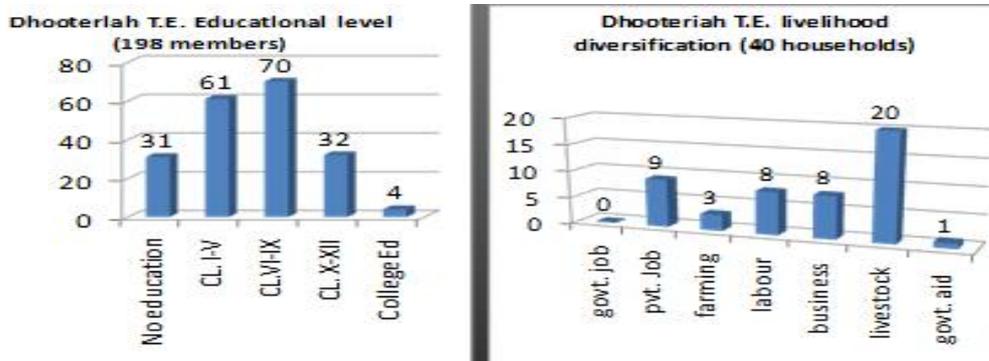


Fig. 1C: Linking Education with Livelihood Diversification in Gandrapara T.E.

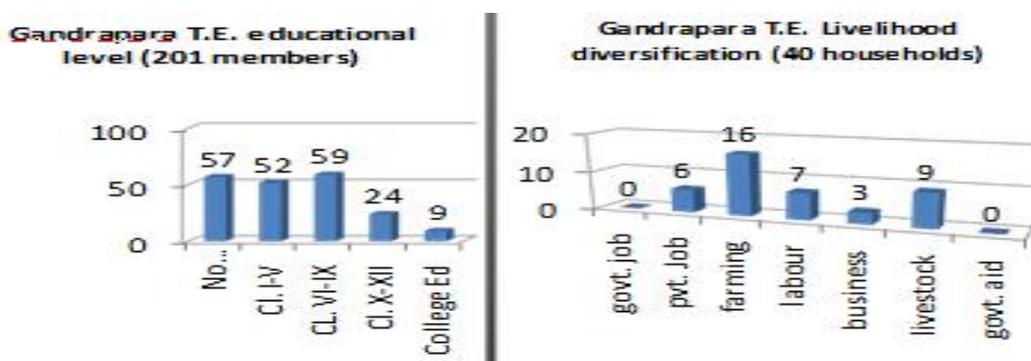


Fig. 1D: Linking Education with Livelihood Diversification in Marapur T.E.

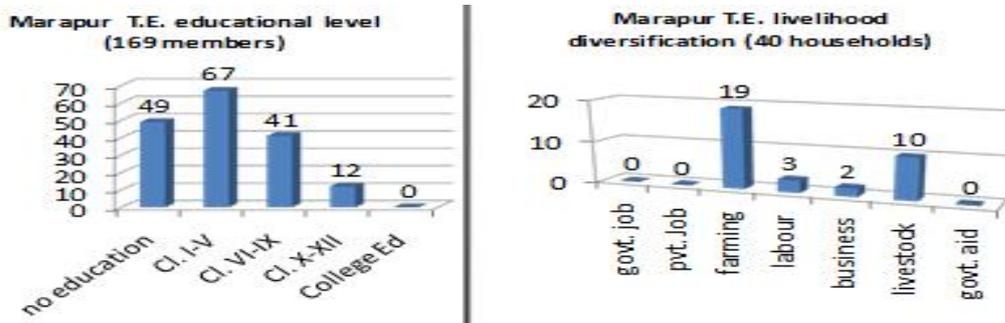
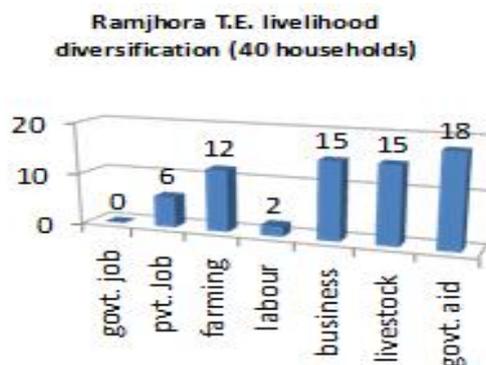
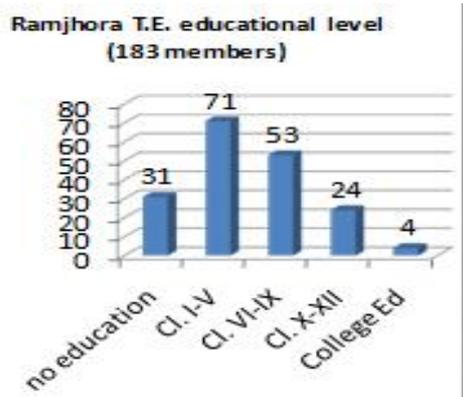


Fig. 1E: Linking Education with Livelihood Diversification in Ramjhora T.E.



5. 4. Linking Livelihood Diversification with the Accessibility to Education

Since the present wage structure in North Bengal tea gardens continue to cause livelihood security concerns, the need for livelihood diversification becomes absolutely necessary for tea garden households. This situation drives the tea garden households to engage in various types of livelihood activities in order to diversify their livelihood options (Table 4). These diversified livelihood sources help in supplementing the earning from the tea plantation works. In some sense it defies the argument held by some scholars that land ownership is absolute necessity for the diversification of livelihood options. Subba (2001) has maintained that tea workers are not able to engage in agricultural activities or raise livestock to diversify their livelihood sources because they have no ownership right on the land they occupy. Study revealed that North Bengal tea garden households seek extra income or save expenses through engaging in small-farming, odd-business, livestock rearing, casual labour, and other kinds of temporary and private works. The table 4 above shows that a major portion (64%) of the livelihood diversification in the sample tea gardens comes from livestock, namely, rearing of pigs, goats, chicken, and cattle. Likewise, 57% of household also supplement their income from farming. The farming in the tea gardens does not refer strictly to agricultural activities in the land (as most households do not own any tract of land) but rather cultivation of cash crops such as, beetle nut, banana fruits etc around their living quarters. For the lack of land for cultivation, most households in the select tea gardens meticulously utilize their kitchen garden for growing vegetables for consumption, and thus, save extra expenses. Since beetle nuts supplies steady income every year and do not need much nurturing and care, most households grow this commercial plant.

The figures 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D and 1E above exhibit that there is some significant link between the level of education and the diversified livelihood options in the tea gardens of North Bengal. The figures above indicate that there is a small minority having completed graduation or college education that are able to secure at least private jobs outside the tea gardens. Comparison of the figures shows that 4 members each in Belgachi, Dhooteriah and Ramjhora and 9 members in Gandrapara have college education which is almost directly proportionate to the figure that shows 9 members each from Belgachi and Dhooteriah and 6 members each from Gandrapara and

Ramjhora tea gardens securing private jobs. Thus, there seems to be a co-relation between the private jobs and college level education. The figure also shows that in Marapur tea garden not a single person has private job (among the surveyed sample population) as no person has college education. Significantly, despite having graduation (college education) none of the 200 sample households has been able to secure a government job. Interviews with key informants reveal that there are various factors, besides college education, that come into play for securing jobs in the public/government sectors. First of all, often located in remote and backward areas graduates from tea gardens have disadvantages in getting employment information as compared to people from urban areas. Secondly, government jobs are very competitive in nature and tea garden graduates lose out on the competition due to lack of exposure etc. And third, and most importantly, in today's world, well-paying government jobs cannot be acquired by degree alone but require bribe which tea garden household cannot afford to pay. Thus, mere acquiring of high (college) education does not suffice in diversifying one's livelihood options through high-paying jobs; it needs more socio-political and financial capital.

6. Concluding Remarks

The above discussions make it amply clear that tea garden workers of North Bengal have been encountering livelihood insecurity for generations as their household income is very meager coming mainly from plantation wage labour. The reduction of jobs in tea plantation sector and increasing numbers of additional or dependent members has not only accentuated the unemployment problem but has compounded the livelihood insecurity for tea garden workers. It does not help matter that most of the households do not own any land. In this context, the access to education, particularly college level education becomes imperative to enhance household income. The study shows that having better household income has helped in accessing higher secondary or college education. In the five select tea gardens where the study was conducted, students or persons having completed graduation or pursuing college education came from rather decent income category households (Rs. 5000 and above a month). But since majority of tea garden households surveyed come under low income category, most of them have either no education or only elementary education. However, irrespective of the income category and educational levels, the study also shows that most households tend to engage in diversified livelihood options to supplement their household income. The study results confirmed by observation show that the livelihood diversifications, mainly through rearing of livestock and farming activities, are employed by majority of tea garden households in North Bengal having lower education and lower income. Since the illiterate or semi-literate population is not equipped or skilled enough to secure jobs in the government or private offices a high percentage of tea garden population in the selected gardens diversify their livelihoods through less skilled options, namely, livestock rearing, farming and casual labour. The section on 'linking the education with livelihood diversification options' in all five tea gardens shows a very high percentage of workers and their household members as illiterate (no education) and with elementary education (Cl. I- V) which is reflected on figures showing a large number of household engaged in 'livestock rearing'

followed by farming or casual labour for diversifying their livelihood. At the same time, findings show that better education has helped in securing better paying jobs in the private sectors. Households having members with college education have sought jobs in the private sectors, including self-employment like odd-business to diversify their livelihood options. And invariably all households with jobs requiring skills and knowledge gained through better education have been able to enhance their household income as well. Thus, the study has revealed that despite lack of land ownership and absence of alternative jobs, there are other options to diversify livelihoods for the tea garden residents. And, therefore, individuals and households can address their livelihood threats by engaging in whatever options available in the tea gardens. But while only unskilled works may be available for supplementing the household income for illiterate workers, better paying jobs could be accessed if the individuals are equipped with skills and knowledge made possible by better and higher level education.

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