

# **WOMEN AND THEIR STATUS OF WORK: A STUDY OF NAGAON DISTRICT**

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## **Abstract**

Livelihood is a means of securing the necessities of life. It is a means of support and subsistence. The right to livelihood of women is the key to the overall development of women. Women are important actors for both economic and social development at the local and national levels. Women can play an important role in carrying out a wide range of economic activities in addition to domestic responsibilities. But it is important to note that livelihood patterns and options of women have remained traditional and strictly limited even today. Much of women's work remains unrecognized and unvalued. In this paper, an attempt is made to study the status of works of women in Nagaon district of Assam. Here study has been made in details regarding different types of valued and unvalued works that women are doing in their daily lives and women's interpretation about their livelihood options. Valued works represent those works in return of which women receive payments in terms of money. On the other hand unvalued works of women are those works in return of which they do not get anything in terms of money. The study is based in primary data. The data are collected through direct personal interview method by using a pre structured survey schedule.

**Keywords:** Women, Valued Work, Unvalued Work

## **Introduction**

Livelihood is a means of securing the necessities of life. It is a means of support and subsistence. Livelihood is defined as a set of activities which involves securing water, food, medicine, shelter, clothing and the capacity to acquire above necessities working either individually or as a group by using resources (both human and material) for meeting the requirements of the self and his/her household on a sustainable basis with dignity.

The concept of status is used to represent the condition of individuals in society. Thus, the status of women represents the hierarchical position of the women acquired through the enactment of the roles assigned to them by the society in which they live. Economically empowered women play a more active role in household decision making, with greater bargaining power to increase spending on education and health (DFID, 2007). Participation of women in economic activities, particularly outside home, is often regarded as an important enabling factor in the economic and social empowerment of women. Employment, particularly for cash and in non-traditional occupations, potentially empowers women by providing financial independence, alternative sources of social identity and exposure to power structures independent of kin network (Sunita Kishore et al, 2004). These suggest that the link between women empowerment and women's participation in workforce is a vital one for their emancipation from poverty.

But it is important to note that the livelihood patterns and options of women have remained traditional and strictly limited even today. Much of women's work remains unrecognized and unvalued. This has an impact on the status of women in society, their opportunities in public life and the gender blindness of development policy (HDR, 1995). The works of women can be categorized into valued work and unvalued work. Valued works of women represent those works in returns of which they receive payments in terms of money. For example- wage, salary etc. But for some particular types of work such as child care, care for the family members, cooking, cleaning at their own house which are very important works but still considered as low-skilled and therefore they are unvalued in the society. Thus undervaluing or unvaluing the works performed by women is one of the most important factor which causes gender pay gap, occupational segregation, low status of women and wage discrimination in the society.

In Assam also the development and corresponding status of women is directly linked with the social, religious and cultural traditions, stages of economic development, level of education etc. In the present paper an attempt is made to study the status of works of women in Nagaon district of Assam.

**Objectives**

The study is based on following objectives:

- (i) To study the livelihood pattern of women in Nagaon District.
- (ii) To examine various unvalued works of women in Nagaon district.
- (iii) To assess and examine the women's own interpretations for their livelihoods.

**Methodology**

The study is based on primary data and the target group population comprises of adult women belonging to 18-60 years age group. A sample of 300 respondents from 300 households is selected at random for the study from the district. A structured interview schedule is prepared and used for collecting data through household survey. Direct personal interview method is used for collection of data. The data are collected from both employed and unemployed women.

**Results and Discussion**

Much of the works done by women are either undervalued or unvalued. This is one of the many reasons responsible for the socioeconomic backwardness of women in many developing countries of the world. The present study, therefore, attempts to assess the livelihood patterns and the nature of the valued and unvalued works of the women in Nagaon district of Assam which is one of the most backward districts of the state.

**Table 1: Current Valued Livelihood of Women (Participation in percentage)**

<b>Nature of work done</b>	<b>Percentage of women doing</b>	<b>Average income per month</b>	<b>Percentage of satisfaction from job</b>
Teachers in Educational Institutions	12	35885.71	88.5
Doctor	2	80000	94
Beautician	7	3857.20	80
Saleswomen	4	3214.67	70.25
Care Taker	1	2000	40
Nursing	1	12890.50	83.60
Tuition	4	2560	73.25
Agent of insurance company	2	10000	60
Tailoring	2	6000	65
Cooking	3	5000	70
Weaving	6	3250.70	67.5
Company worker	1	7000	62
Diary business	3	1250	61
Home maid	5	1200	55.25
Agricultural labour	3	1150	54.5
SHG	4	250	51

Table-1 throws light on the valued livelihoods of respondent women as found at the time of survey. Out of total 300 respondents 12 percent of women are doing the jobs of teaching in educational institutions. Their average income per month is Rs. 35885.71 and their average job satisfaction level is 88.5 percent. From the data it is found that the percentage of women as a teacher is high as compared to other livelihood options. Out of 300 respondents, 2 percent respondents are working as doctor. Their average income month is Rs. 80000 and their average satisfaction level is 94 percent. From the table it is seen that lowest percentage of women that means 1 percent of women are engaged as care taker, nurse and company worker.

The important unvalued works that the respondent women are currently doing on regular and temporary basis are shown in Table-2. Unvalued works represents those works in return of which women do not receive payments in terms of money. Some particular types of works such as child care, care giving for the family members, cooking, cleaning etc. which have very high moral value but have no money value. These works are still considered as low skilled and they are unvalued in the society.

**Table- 2: Current Unvalued Works of Women**

Types of work done	Percentage of Women doing work		Avg. hours spend per day
	Regular basis	Temporary basis	
Cooking	96.5	3.5	3.38
Family care	99	1	4
Cleaning activities	96.26	3.75	3.34
Weaving	4.69	25.36	2.21
Gardening	0	43	1.68
Woolen work	0	25.5	1.42
Embroidery	0	12	1.1

From the Table-2 it is seen that out of 300 respondents 96.5 percent women do cooking on regular basis by spending time on an average 3.38 hours per day and only 3.5 percent women are doing it on temporary basis; 99 percent women are found engaged in care giving for their family members on regular basis by spending time on an average of 4 hours per day and just only 1 percent women do it on temporary basis.

Following table represents women's interpretation of their livelihood option.

**Table-3: Age-Group Wise Respondents Own Interpretation of Their Current Livelihood**

Age-Group	Percentage of Respondents			
	Very Good	Good	Bad	Very Bad
18-24 (Young)	0	40	60	0
25- 45 (Economically Most Productive)	36.87	42.40	20.74	0
45- 55 (Older)	68.18	22.73	9.09	0
55-60 (Oldest Respondents)	78.57	7.14	14.29	0

From the Table it is seen that in the age group of 25-45 years which is economically most productive age, 36.87 percent respondents express their livelihood option as very good, 42.40 percent respondents express their livelihood option as good and 20.74 percent respondents express their livelihood option as bad.

**Table-4: Major Reasons Stated by Respondents for Their Own Interpretation of Their Current Livelihood**

Own Interpretation	Major Reasons for Stated Interpretation (% of Respondents)					
	Enhancement of Family Income	Exposure to Outside World	Application of Skill and Knowledge	Undervalued	Strenuous	Absence of Alternatives
Very Good	37.14	1.43	3.93	-	-	-
Good	28.93	2.85	-	-	-	3.57
Bad	-	-	-	9.28	5.73	7.14
Very Bad	-	-	-	-	-	-

From the Table-4 it is clear that out of the respondents who considered their livelihood as ‘very good’, 37.14 percent believed that their livelihood enhances their family income, only 1.43 percent believed that it exposes them to outside world and 3.93 percent stated that their livelihood is very good because it permits them to apply their skill and knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

From the study it is found that women respondents are engaged in sixteen different types of livelihood options. Thus it can be said that that job satisfaction is positively correlated with the level of income. The study also reveals that almost all the women are doing unvalued works like cooking, family care, and cleaning activities like washing clothes, home cleaning etc. on regular basis by spending 3-4 hours time every day for which they get no money. Some particular types of works such as childcare, care giving for the family members, cooking, cleaning etc. have very high moral value but have no money value. These works are still considered as low skilled and they are unvalued in the society. Besides this, their job satisfactory level is also not so much high apart from a few women respondents.

Thus from the study it can be assumed that the status of women in Nagaon district is not so much satisfactory. Therefore measures should be taken to improve the status of women in the district. Education of women is found to be the most effective factor in influencing the status of women empowerment in a positive way.

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