

ASSESSING AWARENESS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY IN DHEMAJI DISTRICT, ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

The socioeconomic traits of rural households in Dhemaji, Assam, as well as their knowledge of important initiatives aimed at reducing poverty, are investigated in this study. The study uses a multi-stage sampling technique to examine awareness levels and involvement in programs including Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Orunodoi, and Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme. It is based on a primary survey of 303 households. The results show that although a large portion of respondents are aware of employment and food security programs, there is still a low level of awareness regarding pension plans. The study emphasizes the necessity of improved policy interventions and outreach to close knowledge gaps at the local level.

KEYWORDS: *Awareness, Poverty Alleviation Programmes, Socio-Economic Characteristic, Occupational Distribution.*

INTRODUCTION

World Bank defines poverty is a social phenomenon that occurs when a portion of the population is unable to meet their fundamental necessitiesWorld Bank (2011). It is a terrible plague on humanity that is causing hardship in many developing nations, including India. It may have a variety of political, social, and economic causes and consequences. 6.7% of Indians, according to the government, live below the country's official poverty threshold as of 2019 (Government of India, 2019). According to World Bank estimates, 763 million Indians were living below the poverty line in 2011 (World Bank, 2011). In India, 29.8% of the population is below the national poverty line, according to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 2010 Report. About 21.9% of India's population, according to the most recent United Nations Millennium Goal Programme Report, live below the poverty line (United Nations, 2019).

The Indian government has implemented a number of initiatives to end poverty. Three stages were assigned to each of these initiatives (Government of India, 2019). First, from the 1950s to the end of the 1960s, improving the status of the tenants and redistributing land were the primary priorities. Poor families, marginal farmers, and landless laborers received the majority of attention during the second phase of poverty reduction programs, which began at the end of the

1960s and ended with Integrated Rural Development Programs. The Indian government has implemented a number of initiatives to end poverty. Three stages were assigned to each of these initiatives (Government of India, 2019). First, from the 1950s to the end of the 1960s, improving the status of the tenants and redistributing land were the primary priorities. Poor families, marginal farmers, and landless laborers received the majority of attention during the second phase of poverty reduction programs, which began at the end of the 1960s and ended with Integrated Rural Development Programs.

BRIEF OUTLINE OF SOME POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES:

Some major poverty alleviation programmes (PAPs) that are executing in Assam may be explained as follows:

a. MUKHYAMANTRI ANNA SURAKSHA YOJANA (MMASY):

On October 2, 2010, the then Chief Minister of Assam launched the MukhyaMantri Anna SurakshaYojana. Following the implementation of this program, a notified selection committee led by the Deputy Commissioner chose 10,000 households from each Legislative Assembly Constituency (LAC). Later on, it was raised to 15,000 households under each LAC. The recipients of this program received 20 kg of rice each month at a price of Rs. 6 per kg against a Family Identity Card (FIC) (Government of Assam, 2011).

Since then, the program has evolved into the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, which currently includes the majority of MMASY households. The program has distributed rice at a rate of Rs. 3.00 per kilogram since it began in Assam in December 2015, reaching 84.17 percent of the rural population and 60.35 percent of the urban population. Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) cards and Priority Household (PH) cards are the only two ration card types available in Assam under the NFSA. In Dhemaji district, there are 1,04,465 MMASY beneficiaries out of 24,776 ration cards (Government of Assam, 2015).

b. MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT (MGNREGA):

The Government of India launched MGNREGA in 2005 with the goal of giving the nation's rural poor 100 days of unskilled manual labor annually in order to increase the livelihood security of rural households. Additionally, a third of the jobs created for women under the MGNREGA are guaranteed. After verification, job cards are issued by the GaonPanchayat to all adult family members who want to perform physical labor that requires no ability.

All 32 districts of Assam were covered by this program in the 2019 fiscal year (Ministry of Rural Development, GOI, 2019 Report). The Assam government spent Rs. 637.56 crores in 2015–16. Nearly Rs. 46.64 crores, or 7.32%, of this was spent in the district of Dhemaji (Government of Assam, 2016). As a percentage of all applications in the Dhemaji district, 85.58 percent of job cards were issued during the 2019–20 fiscal year. Also, 83.56 jobs provided as percentage of total job demanded to the job card holders in Dhemaji district in the same financial year (Government of Assam, 2020).

c. ORUNODOI:

Orunodoi or Arunodoi scheme is an important poverty alleviation programme introduced by the Government of Assam on 2nd October, 2020. It is a brand-new program designed to empower women and give impoverished families financial support. Under this program, the Government

of Assam gives 20 lakh eligible families a monthly financial support of Rs. 1000 to buy basic food supplies. After that, 24 lakh families would be covered under the Orunodoi plan. The Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) program would be used to transfer the funds to the beneficiary's account. Based on eligibility/ineligibility criteria, the recipients are chosen at the GaonPanchayat (GP), Village Council Development Committee (VCDC), and Urban Local Body (ULB) levels. The Government of Assam's most recent statistics indicates that 19,32,903 people in the state are overall beneficiaries of this scheme (Government of Assam, 2021).

d. INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OLD AGE PENSION SCHEME (IGNOAPS):

The social sector program known as the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) began its operation on August 15, 1995. It is a part of the National Assistance Programme (NSAP). Under this system, the Government of India and Assam, respectively, give each pensioner with a Minimum Mandatory Provision (MMP) of Rs. 200 and Rs. 50 per month. All Indians 60 years of age and older who live below the poverty level are covered by this program. Every beneficiary between the ages of 60 and 79 receives a pension of Rs. 250 per month, while those 80 and above receive a pension of Rs. 500 per month.

The scheme is implemented in all the Panchayats under five development blocks of Dhemaji district. According to the most recent data gathered from the office of DhemajiZilaParishad, there were 17,845 beneficiaries overall (Government of Assam, 2019).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Das, K. (2004) focused on the research of the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) in Mizoram in her book "Rural Development in Mizoram." He claims that although the IRDP is a crucial program for creating self-employment in Mizoram, it has been observed over time that it no longer significantly affects rural development or the reduction of poverty.

Bandopadhyay (2007) in his book 'Poverty Alleviation and Pro-Poor Growth in India' examined how poverty alleviation tactics have changed and evolved over the course of consecutive five-year plans and policymaking concerns, while addressing development and justice. He claims that there is a high level of societal unrest as a result of the unequal distribution of wealth and income. In order to guarantee pro-poor growth, he promoted creating an efficient structure to eradicate poverty challenges more quickly. He made the argument that inadequate accessibility and connectivity are the main contributors to poverty that never goes away.

In his unpublished doctoral thesis, "Effectiveness of Poverty Alleviation Programs: A Case Study of Self Help Group in Lakhimpur District of Assam," Hazarika (2015) claimed that despite numerous attempts by the Indian government to enhance the economic standing of rural communities through poverty alleviation initiatives, nothing has changed. In contrast, there were nearly twice as many poor individuals in 2015 as there were in 1947.

Chowdhury (2019) in her paper 'Role of MGNREGA in Poverty Alleviation: A Study of Karimganj District in Assam, India', observed that during her study period, the overall number of families employed under MGNREGA decreased. She noted that, in comparison to 2017–18, the overall amount of assets created in 2018–19 increased significantly. Compared to 2017–18, the budgetary allotment for various MGNREGA projects grew in 2018–19, with labor spending reaching its highest level during this time.

RESEARCH GAPS:

The following are the key research gaps that emerged from the analysis of earlier works on poverty reduction programs:

1. There aren't many empirical studies on grassroots poverty reduction initiatives in Dhemaji district of Assam.
2. The majority of previous research discussed how poverty alleviation programs operated, but they said little about people's knowledge of the current programs in the Dhemaji district.
3. The Orunodoi Scheme of the Assam government and public awareness of it were not adequately explained in the majority of empirical literatures.

The current study is an attempt to close the information gap and add a new perspective to the field of research on programs aimed at reducing poverty and the degree of awareness among the local population in the studied area.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

This study is important because it assesses the socioeconomic status of rural households in Dhemaji, one of Assam's most impoverished and flood-prone districts, and determines how well-informed they are about important initiatives aimed at reducing poverty. The study finds awareness gaps and implementation difficulties by examining participation levels in programs including MMASY, MGNREGA, Orunodoi, and IGNOAPS. The results show that in order to guarantee the accessibility and inclusion of these programs, better outreach initiatives, legislative changes, and focused interventions are required. Additionally, by addressing the dearth of empirical research on grassroots-level awareness of poverty alleviation activities in Assam, the study adds to the body of current literature. The knowledge gathered from this study can help NGOs, government organizations, and policymakers create more efficient development plans, increase program effectiveness, and support sustainable rural development. The study also lays the groundwork for future investigations on reducing poverty in areas that are prone to natural disasters and economic vulnerability.

OBJECTIVES:

The main objectives of the paper are as follows-

- a. To highlight the socio-economic characteristics of the surveyed households.
- b. To examine awareness about poverty alleviation programmes among surveyed households.

METHODOLOGY:

The current study was mostly an empirical investigation. Both primary and secondary data served as the foundation for the investigation. The Dhemaji district was chosen as the universe of study, and this is where the primary data were gathered. Multiple-stage sampling was used to get primary data. Purposive sampling was used in the first stage to choose the district under investigation. For instance, Dhemaji district, where a sizable fraction of the population lives below the poverty line, was chosen for the study. As per Human Development Report of Assam, 2014, 37% of the state's population is below the poverty level. One development block, the Dhemaji Development Block, was purposefully chosen for the second stage in order to guarantee adequate representation of various population groups, including SC, ST, and OBC. Three villages—Kechukhana No. 1, Kuwaphola, and Nepalikhuti—were chosen from the block

for the third stage based on their distance from the block headquarters. 303 beneficiaries were chosen at random in the last round based on BPL and APL families.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SURVEYED HOUSEHOLDS:

The thorough socio-economic characteristics of the surveyed families are highlighted in the following table-

TABLE-1: DETAILS OF SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS

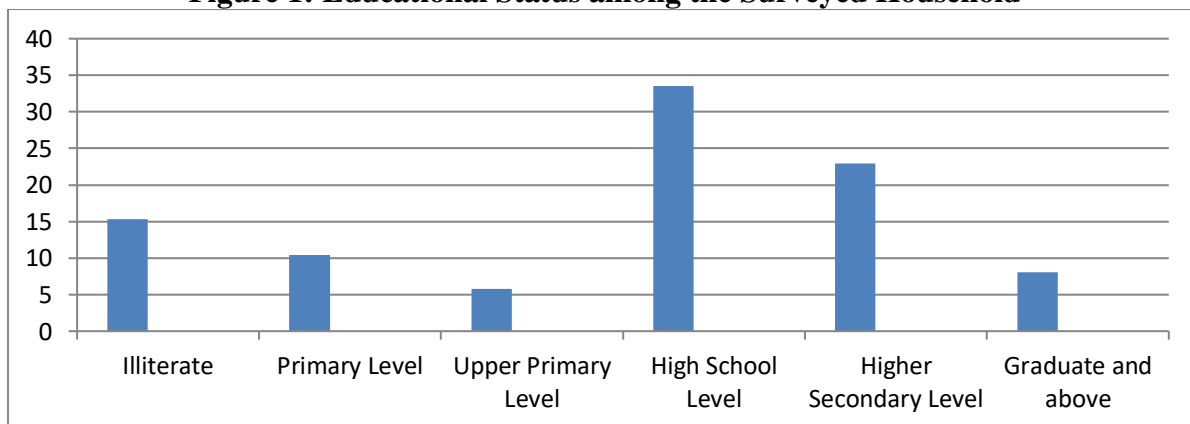
Total Sample Households	303
Total Population in the Sample Households	1283
Female in the Sample Households (Percentage)	50.66
Male in the Sample Households (Percentage)	48.48
Average Family Size of the Surveyed Households (Persons)	4
Members of Work force in the Households (Active) out of the Labour force (Percentage)	30.24

Source: Field Survey

The information about the sample households in the surveyed locations is highlighted in the above table. It was discovered that there were 303 sample households overall, with 1283 people living in those households. Males made up 50.66 percent of the overall population in the houses polled, while females made up 48.48 percent. However, 30.24 percent of the entire labor force was determined to be actively employed, and the average family size of the households examined was 4 persons.

Figure 1 below shows the results of an analysis of the educational attainment of the households surveyed. It demonstrates that the sampled homes in the studied villages have a low overall level of education. High school education accounted for 33.51 percent of the households polled, with higher secondary education coming in second at 22.91 percent. There were just 8.02 percent of households with a graduate or above.

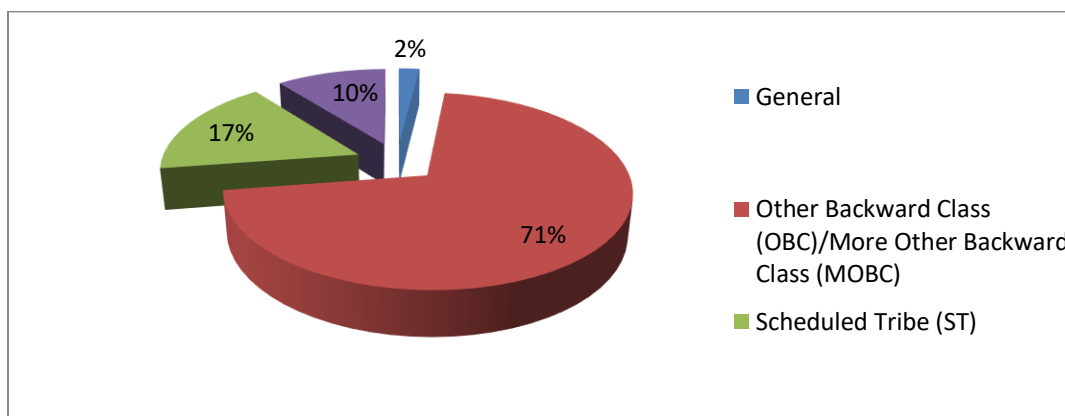
Figure 1: Educational Status among the Surveyed Household



Caste is frequently found to be a significant factor in the rural economy when it comes to choosing an occupation, and it may also serve as a barrier to just taking specific types of vacation. Figure 2 shows the specifics of caste status in the area under survey. In the Dhemaji

district, 70.62 percent of the families questioned were OBC, 1.99 percent were General Caste, 16.83 percent were ST, and 10.56 percent were SC. The details is shown in the figure 2-

Figure 2- Status of Caste among the Surveyed Household



Source: Field Survey

Occupational distribution of a population is defined as the proportion of total workforce engaged in different occupation. The scenario of occupational distribution of Head of the surveyed households is shown in the table-2.

Table-2: Distribution of Occupation of the Surveyed Households (Percentage)

Occupation	Percent
Agriculture	79.53
Service	0.99
Business	4.95
Daily Labour	4.29
Others	6.27
Total	100

Source: Field Survey

It was discovered that the majority of the heads of the households surveyed worked in agriculture (79.53 percent) and in the military (0.99%). At the same time, 6.27 percent of households were involved in various activities, 4.29 percent were daily laborers, and 4.95 percent ran a business.

An attempt is also made to examine the size of family in the surveyed areas as it is an important factor of all round development of a household. The details are shown in table-3.

Table-3: Family Size of the Surveyed Households (Percentage)

Family Size	Percent
Less than 4	34.00
4 to 6	60.72
Above 6	5.30
Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to Table 3, the majority of households in the examined area had four to six people (60.72 percent), followed by those with less than four members (34.00 percent). In the Dhemaji district, families with more than six members had the lowest percentage (5.30 percent).

Human life depends on three essential elements: food, clothes, and shelter. Although all three of these elements are equally significant, the final one—the home—is essential to fostering a sense of community within the family. The details of the surveyed area are displayed in table 4 below

Table-4: Types of House in the Surveyed Area (Percentage)

Types of House	Percent
Kutchha	60.39
Semi Pucca	36.96
Pucca (RCC)	2.31
Total	100

Source: Field Survey

According to Table 4, 60.39 percent of the 303 households in the Dhemaji district that were polled lived in kutchha homes, while 36.96 percent lived in semi-puccas. Pucca dwellings were occupied by just 2.31 percent of the households surveyed.

One significant factor influencing the execution of programs aimed at reducing poverty is the household's financial situation. An analysis of households' economic situation was attempted, and the results are shown in Table 5

Table-5: Economic Status of Surveyed Households

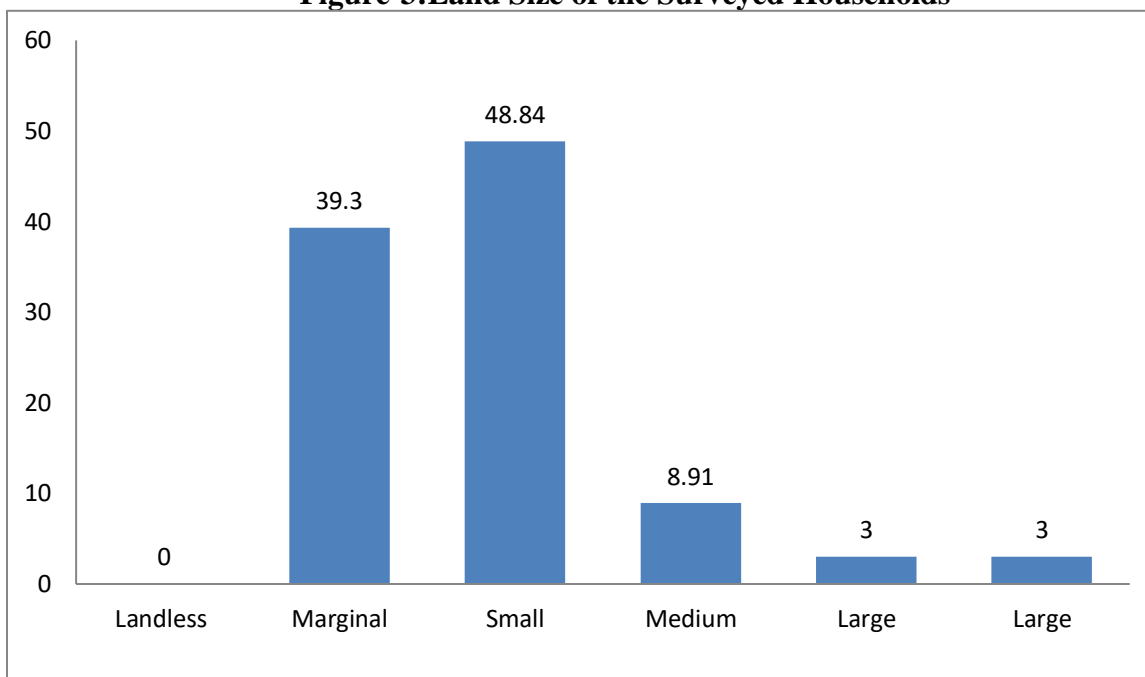
Characteristics	Percent
BPL	98.34
APL	1.65
Total	100

Source: Field Survey

It was discovered that 98.34% of the homes in the Dhemaji district that were examined fell into the BPL category, while the remaining 1.65% fell into the APL category. It is evident that the majority of the homes surveyed had very poor overall economic position.

For rural areas, land is seen as a valuable productive resource. In light of this, an effort was made to look at the households that were polled based on their land ownership. The following figure 3 displays the specifics. It indicates that the majority of households in the district under study had land that was between one and two hectares in size (48.84 percent), with the marginal size of land holder coming in second (39.30 percent). It was discovered that 8.91 percent of the families questioned owned land that was between 4 and 10 hectares in size. It was discovered that only 3% of the households questioned owned land larger than 10 hectares. But surprisingly, not a single surveyed household was found to have landless category.

Figure-3: Land Size of the Surveyed Households



Source: Field Survey

AWARENESS ABOUT POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES AMONG SURVEYED HOUSEHOLDS:

It was observed that a number of poverty alleviation programmes are functioning (either newly launched or restructured old programmes) in the surveyed villages of the district. It is interesting to know whether the surveyed households are aware about the poverty alleviation programmes. This is because if they are not aware about their own rights for their own benefits it is expected to be easy for the corrupt people to deprive the beneficiaries.

An attempt was made in this regard to explore awareness level of beneficiaries about the poverty alleviation programmes. For this, actual or potential beneficiaries were asked whether they were aware about different poverty alleviation programmes. Based on the responses of the respondents, a table was prepared which is shown in Table-6.

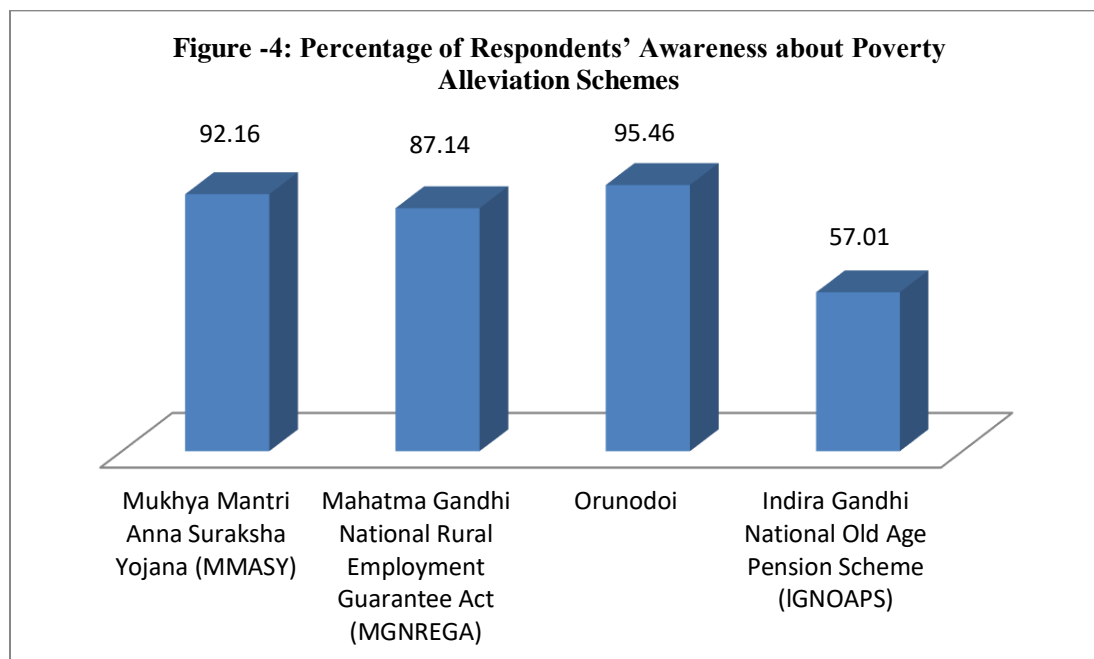
Table-6: Percentage of Respondents’ Awareness about Poverty Alleviation Schemes

Name of the Schemes	Respondent’s Awareness
MukhyaMantri Anna SurakshaYojana (MMASY)	92.16
Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)	87.14
Orunodoi	95.46
Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)	57.01

Source: Field Survey

Table-9 shows that 92.16 percent of surveyed households were aware about MMASY followed by MGNREGA (87.14 percent), Orunodoi (95.46 percent). However, the awareness regarding IGNOAPS was quite low (57.01 percent). If people are not aware about their own rights in the form of benefits it will be quite easy for the corrupt officials to deprive them. So, one of the important requirements to avail leakages of PAPs is to ensure that the beneficiaries are aware of the benefits of the programmes.

The awareness level of the surveyed households regarding the selected four Poverty Alleviation Schemes was shown diagrammatically in Figure-4.



Source: Field Survey

CONCLUSION:

The broad conclusion emerging from both primary and the secondary data in the present study is that the surveyed district was dominated by rural population. A good percentage of people consisted of socially disadvantaged groups like scheduled caste, scheduled tribes as well as backward caste. The district was also found to be economically backward and dominated by agriculture and allied sector. The surveyed households engaged in services or business remained insignificant. But if we looked in case of agricultural land owning status of surveyed households, it was found that around 85 percent of surveyed households belonged to marginal and small category in both the districts.

As a result, majority of surveyed households remained poor. This is also reported by the data that around 98.34 percent of surveyed households belongs to BPL category. They availed the benefits of at least one or two of the poverty alleviation schemes among four selected poverty alleviation programmes namely MMASY, MGNREGA, Orunodoi and IGNOAPS.

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