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**A FEW OBSERVATIONS OF IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON FOOD AND NON-FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERN OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN RURAL ASSAM**

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**ABSTRACT:**

The economic situation of the World is suffering very much due to the pandemic of Covid-19. Similarly, the Indian economy is also affected largely. According to NCAER, incomes of almost 85% of households in the national capital region (NCR) have been impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak. The middle and lower income groups of people are facing difficulties in their day to day economic life in India due to this pandemic. Among the households of BPL families are affected mostly in both the urban and rural areas in India. Similarly, the Tribal people living in the remote areas are mostly affected. They are fighting for their livelihood during this pandemic period. In this background a survey has been conducted to study the household consumption of the Tribal community in respect to their food and non-food consumption behaviors at rural and flood affected district of Assam like Lakhimpur. For the purpose of the study, both the sources of primary and secondary were used. The primary data were collected from 200 Households of Tribal families covering 4 (four) Revenue Circles of Lakhimpur district of Assam. A personal interview and observation method were used to collect the primary information maintaining a social distance as recommended by the government. Statistical tools like average and percentage analysis were used for analyzing the data collected from the field survey. The analysis of the study concludes with the findings that there is significant difference that has been observed on food and non-food consumption pattern before and during the lockdown period. The average expenditure on food consumption per household as well as the average expenditure on non-food items per household in a week were decreased due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic in the area under study.

**Key Words:** Covid-19 Pandemic, Lock Down period, Rural Assam and Tribal Communities.

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Every nation's economic development is depends on the development of rural economy particularly development of tribal communities living in the rural areas. But it has been seen that many of the poor tribals living in the rural areas are still deprived of their basic needs of life today. These people are socially and economically not upgraded. Thus their development is to be very much concentrated in the process of socio-economic development. In addition to that, the Covid-19 pandemic also creates difficulties economically among these tribal people. They are hungry for food and other non-food essential requirements for their day to day life. In India the tribal are considered as an integral part of social fabric (*Awais & et al 2009*). The life style, community habits and habitats of tribals have made it difficult for them to keep pace with modern society; they are not well placed economically, politically, educationally or industrially but they are trying hard to catch up with the rest of India (*Awais & Singh, 2007*).

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:**

The economic situation of the World is suffering due to the pandemic of Covid-19. Similarly, the Indian economy also suffered adversely and affected the India's population at a large. Among the effected people, the most affected are the vulnerable groups of people living below the poverty line category, differently abled people, women, children, elderly and migrant workers in particular. The lockdown restrictions adopted by the government attempting to control the spread of Corona virus affected financially on individuals without a stable income source, daily wage workers, displaced people or migrants (*Amrita News, 2020*). The poverty problem creates a hard-hitting issue as it increases year after year even after independence (*Prabhala et al..2019*). Forest and flood-prone areas are mostly inclusive of such poverty which is extending from eastern Uttar Pradesh to the Assam plains. Already the vulnerable groups of people are deprived of basic needs of life such as health, education, housing, food, security, employment, justice and equity. The lockdown due to Covid-19 is an addition to such vulnerability and economic deprivation. Lack of access to productive assets and financial resource is considered as one of the major cause of poverty in India. Issues of sustainable livelihood, social and political participation are also considered as a major problem in India. All these factors are thus responsible for higher incidence of poverty in rural India.

The Corona virus pandemic 2019-20 is directly affecting the economic condition around the World. Indian economy slow down rapidly due to Covid-19 pandemic. According to NCAER, incomes of almost 85% of households in the national capital region (NCR) have been impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak (*The Economics Times, April, 2020*). The middle and lower income groups of people are facing difficulties in their day to day economic life in India due to this pandemic. The economic situation of the rural people is very much effected during the lockdown period. Among the households, the BPL families are affected mostly in both the urban and rural areas in India. Among these vulnerable groups of people, the household of the tribal communities are directly affected particularly in rural hills and flood affected areas. In this background a survey has been conducted to study the household consumption of the tribal in regards to their food and non-food consumption pattern at the rural and flood affected areas of rural Assam particularly situated in the North Bank corner of the river Brahmaputra.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The objectives of the present study are:

- ▶ To study the impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the food consumption pattern of the respondents before and during the lockdown period.
- ▶ To study the impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the non-food consumption pattern of the respondents before and during the lockdown period.

**SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY:**

The study is confined to Lakhimpur Districts of Assam only. Again for the purpose of the present study Lakhimpur district is purposively selected for understanding the economic condition of the poor people living in the rural areas during the Covid-19 Pandemic situation. Moreover the sample district is also considered as the flood affected districts amongst the other districts of Assam. The present study was based on both the sources of primary and secondary. The secondary data have been collected from District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Official websites of Aajeevika & Ministry of Rural Development, and some important reports & briefing book of NRLM collected from the internet. The secondary data have also been collected through various journals, magazines, relevant documents and newspapers. The primary data were collected from 200 Households of Tribal families covering 4 (four) Revenue Circles of Lakhimpur district (namely North Lakhimpur, Subansiri, Narayanpur and Dhakuakhana) of Assam. A personal interview and observation method were used to collect the

primary information maintaining a social distance as recommended by the government. For analyzing the data statistical tools like average, percentage analysis have been used by the researcher.

### **OBSERVATION AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:**

After collecting the primary data from the field survey, the researcher has made an attempt to analyse the data by preparing tables.

### **RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO THEIR ENGAGEMENT AND SOURCE OF INCOME:**

An effort has been made by the researcher to study the different engagements and the sources of income of the respondents under the study area. The relevant data relating to the respondent's source of income and their engagements are presented in **Table 1** as below:

**Table 1**

**Respondents according to Engagement and Source of Income**

Sl. No.	Type of Engagement	Frequency	Percentage
1	Daily Wage Worker	40	20.0
2	Vegetable Vendors	20	10.0
3	Meat Vendors	12	6.0
4	Fish Vendors	12	6.0
5	Milk Vendors	8	4.0
6	Hotel Boy	37	18.5
7	Barber	12	6.0
8	Farmer	23	11.5
9	Private Employee	16	8.0
10	Small Shop	20	10.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Field survey.*

The study revealed that majority of the respondents i.e 20 per cent have engaged themselves on daily workers and earn money for their households in the district under study. 18.5 per cent respondents have engaged as hotel boy as a source of income for their family which was followed by farmer (11.5 per cent), Vegetable vendors and Small shops/Business (10 per cent each), Private employees in different wholesaler and retail shops (8 per cent), Meat Vendor, Fish Vendor and Barber (6 Per cent each) and Milk Vendor (4.0 per cent).

### **RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO FAMILY SIZE:**

The family size of the respondents is presented in **Table 2** as below:

**Table 2**

**Respondents According to Family Size**

Sl. No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	2 members family	30	15.0
2	3-5 members family	53	26.5
3	More than 5 members family	117	58.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Field survey.*

The study revealed that 58.5 per cent of the respondents have members of more than five in the study district, 26.5 per cent have three to five members and 15 percent have 2 member families that have been found in the district under study.

**RESPONDENTS ACCORDING FAMILY NATURE:**

The relevant data relating to family nature of the respondents are depicted in **Table 3** as below:

**Table 3**  
**Respondents According to Family Size**

Sl. No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	Nuclear	72	36.0
2	Joint family	128	64.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Field survey.*

It was observed from the study that 64 per cent of the respondents have joint family whereas 36 per cent have nuclear families that have been found in the district under study.

**RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO DAILY INCOME STATUS:**

The relevant data relating to daily income position of the respondents before and during the lockdown period are presented in **Table 4** as below:

**Table 4**  
**Respondents According to Daily Income Status**

Sl. No.	Variable	Before Lockdown	During Lockdown
1	Below Rs. 100/-	0(0.0)	37(18.5)
2	Rs. 101 – Rs. 300/-	7(3.5)	80(40.0)
3	Rs. 301 – Rs. 500/-	52(26.0)	40(20.0)
4	More than Rs. 500	140(70.0)	43(21.5)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200(100.0)</b>	<b>200(100.0)</b>

*Source: Field survey.*

*Note: () indicates the percentage of the respondents.*

The study revealed that 70 per cent of the respondents were earning more than Rs. 500/- per day before the lockdown period which was now only 21.5 percent i.e an decrease of 48.5 per cent. Majority of the respondents i.e. 40 per cent were earned daily income between Rs. 101/- to Rs. 300/- which was not sufficient to live with that limited amount of earnings and run the household expenses. The daily earnings were reduced rapidly during this lock down period. 18.5 percent respondents were earned below Rs. 100/- in the district under study. Thus the economic situation of the respondents was found very poor during the Covid-19 Pandemic situation in the area under study.

**RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO USE OF BPL CARD:**

The relevant data relating to use of BPL cards by the respondents are presented in **Table 5** as below:

**Table 5**  
**Use of BPL Cards by the Respondents**

Sl. No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	Own Card	170	85.0
2	Cards of friends & relatives	23	11.5
3	Both Card	7	3.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Field survey.*

The study (**Table 5**) revealed that for purchase of grocery items like (rice etc.) 85 per cent of the respondents were use their own BPL Cards where 11.5 per cent were used the BPL Cards of their

relatives or friends. 3.5. percent respondents were used the cards of both (own and friends/relatives) for purchase of grocery items for their household purposes in the study district under study.

#### **RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO MODE OF PURCHASE FROM PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM (PDS):**

An effort has also been made by the researcher to study the mode of purchase from Public Distribution System (PDS) and the relevant data are presented in **Table 6** as below:

**Table 6**

#### **Respondents According to Mode of Purchase from Public Distribution System (PDS)**

Sl. No.	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	Direct Purchase	181	90.5
2	Through Intermediaries	19	9.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Field survey.*

The study revealed that 90.5 per cent of the respondents were purchase directly by using the BPL Cards whereas 9.5 per cent used the BPL Cards for purchase through intermediaries for their household consumptions in the study district under study.

#### **RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO FOOD CONSUMPTION HABITS (IN WEEKLY RUPEES):**

The relevant data relating to food consumption habits of the respondents during the lockdown and before lockdown period are depicted in **Table 7** as below:

**Table 7**

#### **Food Consumption habits (in Weekly Rupees)**

Sl. No.	Variable	Before Lockdown		After Lockdown	
		Amount	Percentage	Amount	Percentage
1	Rice	2680	3.2	1200	4.0
2	Sugar	4520	5.4	1512	5.1
3	Wheat	9320	11.1	2300	7.7
4	Grocery	15120	18.0	3320	11.1
5	Kerosene	9600	11.4	8544	28.6
6	Vegetables	15216	18.1	5760	19.3
7	Non-vegetables	24480	29.1	6640	22.2
8	Fruits	3200	3.8	610	2.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>84136.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>29886</b>	<b>100.00</b>
	<i>Average per households</i>	<i>701.13</i>		<i>249.05</i>	

*Source: Field survey.*

As far as food consumption was concerned, household's food consumption pattern was also found decreased as the average expenditure decreased from Rs. 701.13/- per week to Rs. 249.05/- per week during the lockdown period. Among the food items during the lockdown period there was only a 2 per cent household found in the district who have able to purchase fruits for the households. This was because of decrease in daily income of the respondents during lockdown period. The use of kerosene has increased from 11.4 per cent to 28.6 per cent.

**RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO NON-FOOD EXPENDITURE PATTERN (IN WEEKLY RUPEES):**

The relevant data relating to expenditures on non-food items of the respondents during the lockdown and before lockdown period are depicted in **Table 8** as below:

**Table 8**  
**Non-Food Expenditure Pattern (in Weekly Rupees)**

Sl. No.	Variable	Before Lockdown		After Lockdown	
		Amount	Percentage	Amount	Percentage
1	Mobile Recharge	4200	17.2	1500	10.1
2	DTH/Cable Recharge	5400	22.1	3000	20.1
3	Petro/Diesel	4800	19.6	1440	9.7
4	Personal Hygiene	6000	24.5	3336	22.4
5	Cleaning Products	2640	10.8	2400	16.1
6	First Aid Items including Hand Sanitizers	1440	5.9	3240	21.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>24480</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>14916</b>	<b>100</b>
	<i>Average per households</i>	<i>204.00</i>		<i>124.30</i>	

*Source: Field survey.*

As observed from **Table 8** the household's non-food expenditure pattern was decreased as the average expenditure decreased from Rs. 204.00/- per week to Rs. 124.30/- per week during the lockdown period. Among the non-food items during the lockdown period the households were more conscious about the health and hygiene care as the weekly expenditure increased from 41.20 per cent to 60.20 per cent. But expenditure on mobile , DTH Recharge, use of petrol/Diesel were gradually decreased as revealed from the field study.

**SUGGESTIONS:**

After analysing the data the following suggestions are given forwarded:

- There is a need to help the poor people by the high-income group of people to come up with the financial crises during this pandemic situation.
- By maintaining social distance and maintaining medical security, if possible, the medically fit people should come forward to do their normal work so that the poor people can generate income for their livelihood and fulfil at least the basic need of their households.

**CONCLUSION:**

The Covid-19 Pandemic affects the whole economy of the world. Every people is suffering from this tragic pandemic. We should take care about ourselves not only for own but also for the family as well as for the society. It is seen that, during the Covid-19 pandemic situation the economic condition of the poor families particularly the tribal were very much affected in both rural and urban areas. Many of them have not even unable to purchase the daily requirement for their households. Most of the daily incomes earning people have lost their daily work due to the lockdown situations. Even after lockdown many of the high-income group of people have not given the opportunity to those workers due this pandemic. From the study it is concluded that due to effect of Covid-19 the income of the households of the tribal communities were decreased. The study also concluded that the food consumption and the expenditure on non-food items among the households of the tribal were found very poor during the lockdown period due to the Covid-19 Pandemic situation in area under study.

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