

HUMAN CAPITAL AS A SOURCE OF LIVELIHOOD: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN KARBI-KUKI TRIBES OF KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT, ASSAM

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Abstract: *Human capital in any society forms a significant part of livelihood framework analysis of the rural communities like that of the Karbi and the Kuki tribes of Karbi Anglong district in Assam. Alternatively, human capital is a collection of resources—all the knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience, intelligence, training, judgment, and wisdom possessed individually and collectively by individuals in a population. These resources are the total capacity of the people that represents a form of wealth which can be directed to accomplish the goals of the society, nation or state or a portion thereof. The main objective of this paper is to compare the quality of human capital in a traditional livelihood system like that of the Karbis and the Kukis in Karbi Anglong district. It focuses on the links between human capital and rural livelihood, looking in particular at the indicators that connect the two. This paper is mainly based on field study conducted by the author among the Kuki-Karbi tribe in Karbi Anglong District, Assam as a part of her research field work. The data generated in this paper is mainly based on primary sources collected by the author in the study area. The paper concludes that how human capital enhance the capacity of livelihood condition by comparing between the two tribes in terms of quantity and quality.*

Keywords: Human Capital, Livelihoods, Community, Rural Development

Introduction

Human capital is an aggregate economic view of the human being acting within economies, which is an attempt to capture the social, biological, cultural and psychological complexity as they interact in explicit and economic transactions. It is also defined as the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or population, viewed in terms of their value or cost to an organization or country. It highlights the importance of labor, health, education and skills as assets to achieving livelihood (Ellis,2000). It refers to knowledge, ability to labour, good health etc., that enable an individual, household or community to carry on their livelihood strategies (DFID,1999). Labor is a vital asset for households, but labor alone cannot sustain livelihoods but when enhanced through education, training and other skills, it becomes extremely an effective tool for poor households to gain livelihoods. Households maximize the use of their labor to compensate wages below subsistence. In fact, labor, as an asset, depends on good health: Since labor depends on health, illness can remove individuals from the labor pool and can push them into poverty (Narayan 2000, Grinspun 2001, Ellis 2000). Ellis (2000) identifies public education and health service as a means through which labor can be maximized for the benefit of the households. The hill zone of Assam is composed of two hill districts namely – Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills (now Dima Hasao). The zone is characterized by undulating topography where Karbi Anglong is dominantly having low hills with gentle slopes.

Objective

The main objective of this paper is to compare the quality of human capital in a traditional livelihood system like that of the Karbis and the Kukis in Karbi Anglong district, Assam.

Study Area

The study is confined in Lumbajong Block which is situated in the east division of the district, which includes Diphu, headquarter of the district and Singhason Hill Range, the highest point of Karbi Anglong Plateau. It also comes under Singhason Constituency of the Autonomous District Council, Karbi Anglong. Under this block, the Singhason Hill area that comprises villages belonging to diverse ethnic groups like the Karbi, Kuki, Dimasa, Garo and Nepali. These groups

have settled in this area since many decades. Karbi Anglong is situated in the central part of Assam situated between 25°32'N to 26°36'N latitudes and 92°10'E to 93°50'E longitude. It is bounded on the north by Nagaon and Golaghat districts, on the south by the North Cachar Hills district, on the east by Golaghat district and Nagaland and on the west by Meghalaya. The total geographical area of Karbi Anglong is 10,434 sq. km, accounting 13.3 percent of the total geographical area of the Assam. The district happens to be the largest district in the state. The total population of the Karbi Anglong district is 9,65, 280 (2011) and is dominated by Karbi tribe. Population density of the district is 64 nos. per sq.km and the literacy rate is 73.52 where the literacy rate of the male population (82.12) is much higher than that of the female population (64.62). The district is mainly underdeveloped and backward as 88.18 percent of the total populations are still living in the rural areas against 11.82 percent of the population in urban areas.

Methodology

The study for the present paper is based on primary sources of data which is collected through structured household interview schedule in selected sample villages of both the tribes representing the different concentration zones practicing Jhum Cultivation for their livelihood. A stratified random sampling technique is followed where two sets of household- one from the Karbis and another from Kukis is surveyed. Qualitative data on Human Capital and livelihood System is collected with the help of focused group discussion with the village elders and concerned officials. The data collected is entered and analyzed by using simple statistical techniques. The data provided by the schedules is classified and tabulation is done after. The results so found is interpreted to get a clear picture about the Role of Human Capital in the Livelihood System of Karbi-Kuki Tribes.

Results and Discussion

As human capital is considered as one of the essential asset in improving the livelihood conditions of the households, skills, health and education to earn a living a comparison of the human capital between the Karbis and the Kukis are discussed in this paper. Keeping in mind the significance of human assets and to compare the quality of human capital in a traditional livelihood system for both the tribes we now here attempt to sort an assessment of quality of human assets between the two tribes in terms of age group and household size, health, education, skill and occupation.

Age Group and Household Size

In tribal societies population within the age group of 15 to 59 is considered as the most productive human resources. The study reveals that the highest percent is found in the age groups between 35-44 and 45-54 years among both the tribes. There is no much variation in terms of age groups and a uniform kind of population can be observed among both the tribes. The percent of working population is high in both the cases than the percent of dependent population. Highest number of households falls in middle and working age groups. It is clearly reveals that, the Karbis and the Kukis generally have large families and interestingly an equal percent of 60.63 of households having 5-8 number of members. 27.50 percent households of the Karbis and 30.63 percent households of the Kukis have ≤ 4 number of members. It is seen that both the Karbis and the Kukis have almost an equal percent of households found to have large family size of above 9-12 members. Both the Karbis and the Kukis have only 1.88 percent and only a negligible 0.63 percent of households have a very large family size of above ≥ 13 . This indicates that due to growth of population there is a decline in the size of families among both the tribes. The Karbis and the Kukis of present generation do not consider having large families as an advantage anymore. As agriculture is no longer a profitable occupation for them anymore and with the growth of modernization and improvement in health and medical facilities and awareness about family planning are gradually changing the mindsets of the rural communities. These factors have propelled in bringing down the size of family structure among the Karbis and the Kukis in the district.

Education and Health

Literacy rate and education is a reflection of good human capital. Higher levels literacy not only results in greater level of awareness but also contributes in improving the economic and social wellbeing of the rural communities like the Karbis and the Kukis in the district.

Table 01: Percent of Educational Status of the Head of Households

Educational Status	Tribe			
	Karbi		Kuki	
	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
Illiterate	53	33.13	7	4.38
Primary	25	15.63	112	70.00
Middle	45	28.13	29	18.13
Secondary	24	15.00	10	6.25
Higher secondary	9	5.63	1	0.63
Graduation	4	2.50	1	0.63
Post-graduation	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	160	100	160	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 01 highlight the educational aspects of the head of the households of the Karbis and the Kukis. One interesting fact to be noticed from the table is that among both the tribes head of the household are found to possess some formal education ranging from primary to school education to higher education like graduation while none can reach till the level of post-graduation. 33.13 percent of the Karbis and 4.38 percent of the Kukis are found to be illiterate. Among both the tribes the educated percent of the head of households is found maximum in the middle and secondary category. 15 percent of the Karbis and 6.25 percent of the head household of the Kukis has studied till secondary level. Compared to the Kukis we find that in the higher education category of above secondary level there are more number of persons among the Karbis than the Kukis. It is found that 5.63 percent and 2.50 percent of head of household of the Karbis are in the higher secondary and are graduates while only 0.63 percent and 0.63 percent of head of household of the Kukis are in the higher secondary and are graduates respectively. So, comparing from table 01 it is assumed that formal education is not a new thing for both the Karbis and the Kukis. It is only in terms of opportunities and constrains they vary. Many of the respondents from both the groups attributed the low level of educational status to unavailability of educational institutions of higher learning as well as the distance factor for this dismal figure.

Table 02: General Health Condition of Households

Status of Health	Tribe			
	Karbi		Kuki	
	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
Good	51	31.88	12	7.50
Moderate	94	58.75	93	58.13
Poor	15	9.38	55	34.38
Total	160	100	160	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Like education, health plays a significant role in determining the state of human capital and overall quality of the life of both the hill tribes to a great extent. It is subsequently interlinked with various multidimensional and diverse livelihood options that people adopt in sustaining their life. Health condition of the members of a household greatly affects the economic condition and income of the people. Poor health condition lead to an increased expenditure on medical expenses which reduces the financial condition of the household. Table 02 shows the health condition of the Karbis and the Kukis and it can be stated that 58.75 percent of the Karbis and 58.13 percent of the Kukis stated that their health condition is moderate. 31.88 percent households of the Karbis and 7.50 percent households of the Kukis stated that their health condition is good while 9.38 percent of the Karbis and 34.38 percent households of the Kukis stated that their health condition is poor. High percent of poor health condition of the Kukis may be because of its remote location and also due to non-availability of sub- health centres and dispensary in the villages where diseases cannot be treated in times of emergency except the local physician who treated the sick people without much knowledge of the cause of the disease.

But over all it can be assumed that the overall general health condition of a good majority of the households of both the tribes is moderate in character.

Skills

Possessing the required skills help the tribal community in building a better base for their livelihood. Tribal societies mainly in the district remained marginalized in respect of acquiring necessary skills. However, traditional practices such as, art and crafts, hunting, farming provides inputs for meeting societal and other household needs. We categorize the skills of the Karbis and the Kukis into two classes i.e., traditional skills known and practiced in the household and modern skill learned and practiced in the household.

Traditional Skills

Apart from main and subsidiary occupations tribals of Karbi Anglong district have certain skills, primarily having affinity with traditional works such as weaving and basketry bamboo and cane works, wood works and use of traditional medicine.

Table 03: Traditional Skills Known and Practised by The Household

Traditional Skills Practiced	Tribe			
	Karbi		Kuki	
	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
Farming	131	81.88	131	81.88
Fishing/Hunting	22	13.75	4	2.50
Farming/Weaving	1	0.63	2	1.25
Basketry	0	0.00	2	1.25
House Building	0	0.00	19	11.88
Unstated	6	3.75	2	1.25
Total	160	100	160	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 03 focuses on some of the traditional skills which are known and practices by the Karbi and the Kuki households of Karbi Anglong district. It is seen that farming is the most common traditional activity found to be practised by the household. Along with farming we see that the households practised other traditional activities in combination. The table clearly shows that in some of the cases traditional activities like hunting, weaving, basketry, house building is also found in a negligible condition. When compared in terms of both traditional skills known and practised by the households of both the tribes there is not much differences that can be noticed and analysed. Like for example when observed from table 5, it is seen that, the same percent i.e., 81.88 households of both the tribes are seen to be practicing farming as the traditional skills. This indicates that the main occupation is farming for both the tribes who depend solely on farming for their livelihood. Besides farming, fishing and hunting also occupy a significant part in the traditional skills practised by the tribes as 13.75 percent of the Karbis and 2.50 percent of the Kukis know and practised fishing and hunting. It may be assumed that except farming a few traditional activities like hunting, weaving, basketry, house building holds good for both the groups. This meagre income from these skills help in supplementary sources of income and lead some better livelihood opportunities for both the present as well as for the future generations of both the tribe.

Modern Skills

The Karbis and the Kukis know/learned modern skills besides the traditional ones to enhance their ability in various other fields and to widen their skills by trying their hands in various modern skills like poultry, piggery, diary etc which not only helps them to venture in some better skills but also provide alternative income for the households which help them to live a better livelihood. Poultry, piggery, dairy farming, Pisciculture, horticulture/Silviculture are some of the important modern activities seems to be known or learned by the Karbis and the Kukis. Like traditional activities even modern activities seems to be known or learned in single or in combination of two activities as seen in table 04.

Table 04: Modern Skills Known/ Learned in the Household

Modern Skills Practiced	Tribe			
	Karbi		Kuki	
	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
Poultry	0	0.00	122	76.25
Piggery	148	92.50	36	22.50
Dairy farming	0	0.00	1	0.63
Pisciculture	0	0.00	1	0.63
Horticulture/Silviculture	0	0.00	0	0.00
Unstated	12	7.50	0	0.00
Total	160	100	160	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 04 shows the different types of modern skills known/learned by the Karbi and the Kuki households in Karbi Anglong district. Poultry is the most important known and learned modern skills for the Kukis as 76.25 percent households know and learn poultry while the Karbis do not practised poultry while piggery is widely known and learned modern skills for the Karbis as 92.50 percent households practised it while 22.50 percent household of the Kukis practised piggery. Whereas, the Karbis do not practise dairy farming, pisciculture, horticulture/Silviculture while a negligible percent of about 0.63 percent households of the Kukis practised dairy farming, pisciculture.

Occupation

Occupation has been considered as a social phenomenon than economic criterion, it not only decides the status, position of the respondents but also the nature of day-to-day life. Majority of the respondent's primary occupation is cultivation for both the tribes. As both the tribes are practicing jhum cultivation as their main source of livelihood and occupation is from agricultural activities.

Table 05: Main Occupation of the Households

Occupational Status	Tribe			
	Karbi		Kuki	
	No. of HH	Percent	No. of HH	Percent
Cultivators	132	82.50	158	98.75
Daily Wage labour	8	5.00	1	0.63
Self employed	2	1.25	1	0.63
Agricultural labour	4	2.50	0	0.00
Government Service	9	5.63	0	0.00
Non-Workers	1	0.63	0	0.00
Others	2	1.25	0	0.00
Cultivators and Government service	2	1.25	0	0.00
Total	160	100	160	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 05 shows the different types of occupational structure practiced by the Karbis and the Kukis. It is evident from the table that sizeable proportion of the population are cultivators who are directly or indirectly engaged in cultivation from their own land. It is found that 98.75 percent households engaged as cultivators is higher among the Kukis compared to the Karbis 82.50 percent households engaged as cultivators in the selected villages. Instances of non-land based occupations like daily wage labour, shop owner, daily wage labour are found among both the groups. This clearly shows that land dependency among the groups is very high and sizeable proportion of their income comes from their agricultural field. Land becomes integral part of their life among the groups which appears to be the main driving force in the contestation of space. Any loss of land would mean loss of livelihood and on the other hand, extension of agricultural field would mean gaining more wealth.

Conclusion

The concept of human capital has close relationship in a tribal rural community like that of the Karbis and the Kukis. The economy of people in the hills of Karbi Anglong revolves around

agriculture which means that the Karbis and the Kukis are highly dependent on agricultural for their sustenance. Sizeable proportion of the population of both the tribes are still tied to their agricultural field which is their mainstay of the livelihood. Overall when we compared we found that the basic quality of human resource remains more or less agrarian in nature. Among both the groups it is observed that the households are more inclined towards natural resource based activities.

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