

ENHANCING LIVELIHOOD OF KHASIA TRIBE THROUGH SOCIAL SAFETY NET PROGRAMS IN SYLHET DISTRICT: A PERCEPTION ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This research work was conducted to assess the livelihood status of the Khasia tribe and their perception of the impact of the social safety net programs (SSNPs) on their livelihood assets. A total of 120 respondents were interviewed using a structured questionnaire from Gowainghat and Jaintiapur of Sylhet District. Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. Descriptive statistics and a sustainable livelihood framework, 'Asset pentagon' were used for data analysis. The household-level livelihood assessment reveals that the annual average income of the agricultural household (Tk.106346.67) was higher than the average annual non-agricultural household income (Tk.79250.98). Again, the average annual expenditure of the agricultural household (Tk.96039.44) was higher than non-agricultural household (Tk.55921.04). However, the savings of non-agricultural households (Tk.23329.94) were higher than agricultural households (Tk.10307.67). In analyzing the livelihood pattern using different asset categories, the study reveals that SSNPs had significantly improved educational facility (77.5%), medical facility (50.8%), social group participation (56.7%), self-managerial ability (59.2%), social accessibility (52.5%), cash in hand (41.7%), and cash in the bank (46.7%) in the study area. The study recommends SSNPs such as vulnerable group feeding (VGF), vulnerable group development (VGD), widow allowances, and disability allowances for more effective support. These findings will be supportive of improving the livelihood condition of the Khasia tribe as well as other indigenous communities and disadvantaged groups of Bangladesh.

Keywords: Livelihood, Khasia tribe, Social Safety Net Programs (SSNPs), Sustainable livelihood framework.

Introduction

Bangladesh is a South Asian country widely renowned for its natural beauty and cultural diversity. Its population is nearly 168.1 million (UNFPA, 2019). Bangladesh is also home to significant numbers of indigenous people generally known as 'Adivasi', 'Khudronrigoshti' or 'Upazati'. The 'Khasia' or 'Khasi' is a matriarchal ethnic group of Bangladesh. They migrated from Tibet to Assam about five hundred years ago (Banglapedia, 2014). The number of Khasia in Bangladesh was 12,300, but the Bangladesh Khasia Society claims to be around 30,000 (Banglapedia, 2014). Another data states that about 90 Khasia villages in Bangladesh have approximately twenty thousand populations (Rahman, 2004). They traditionally practice market-oriented Betel-Leaf (Piper Betel) and Betel-Nut (Areca Catechu) based farming systems. In addition to these, they also cultivate paddy, vegetables, and various kinds of fruits, mainly on hilly land. However, erstwhile researchers (Nath *et al.* 2003) claimed that Khasia ethnic tribe was facing challenges in maintaining a sustainable livelihood. Limited resources, low agricultural production, and low incomes have given rise to financial obligations and created a vicious circle of burdens. Hence, livelihood study is crucial to assess the livelihood scenario and thereby consequent improvement of livelihood of such small ethnic tribal community.

The social safety net programs (SSNPs) could be decisive in improving the livelihood of the lag behind segments of the population of a country. The SSNPs consists of non-contributory assistance existing to improve the lives of vulnerable families and individual experiencing poverty and destitution (World Bank, 2018). Poverty reduction strategic papers

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(FY: 2009-13) identified as many as eighteen SSNPs that fall within cash allowance or other support categories (IMF, 2013). These are old age allowance, allowance for widowed and distressed women, allowance for the distressed person with disabilities, maternity allowance for poor mothers, honorarium for freedom fighters, programs for orphans, subsidy for fuel, stipend for dropout students, stipend for girl students, stipend for students with disabilities, fund for garment workers training and support, temporary unemployment removal, employment program for poor, disaster-affected farmers fund, rural mother center, maternal health voucher scheme, community nutrition program, food assisted programs (IMF, 2013). In recent times, the social safety net programs (SSNPs) brought immense obtrusive positive changes in individual asset conditions (World Bank, 2019).

To conduct intensive research regarding the livelihood of the Khasia tribe, we made a modest attempt to review the previous research works, which are as follows: Nath and Makota (2014) studied indigenous forest villagers in the northeastern hill forest of Bangladesh and revealed that the mean monthly income of Khasia people was almost three times higher than that of the national income of Bangladesh. Islam and Uddin (2013) conducted a study on the livelihood condition of indigenous people of Bangladesh and revealed that the primary and secondary educations among indigenous females are comparatively higher than males. The study also estimated that the mean monthly income of the Khasia ranges from about Tk. 9,700 to nearly Tk. 19,500. Shikder (2013) researched socio-economic background of Khasia community and found that the mean monthly income of Khasia family was Tk. 8500. Muzib (2014) recorded the impacts of ecotourism on ethnic people and found that ecotourism increases the income of the ethnic people from Tk. 15,000 to Tk. 16,500. Haider *et al.* (2013) conducted a study on indigenous management practices of the Khasia community of Bangladesh and revealed that the average farm size is about 1.21 hectares per family. Rahman *et al.* (2009) investigated the cultural and financial management techniques of the betel leaf-based agroforestry system of the Khasia community in Bangladesh and found that the literacy rate among the Khasia community was 100%. The study also estimated that the Khasia is an economically prosperous community with a minimum family income of Tk. 4000 per month.

The existing literature indicates that there have already conducted a good number of studies on the livelihood condition of the Khasia tribe. However, there existed a paucity of the latest research regarding the livelihood status of the Khasia tribe. Additionally, there existed very few studies related to the impact of SSNPs on changes in livelihood assets. Considering this, we decided to conduct a study to assess the livelihood status of the Khasia tribe and their perception of the SSNPs impact on changes in livelihood assets. However, the specific objectives of the study were: (i) to assess the livelihood status and pattern of the Khasia tribe; and (ii) to evaluate the perception of the Khasia tribe on SSNPs impact on their livelihood asset. The finding will be helpful in determining the existing livelihood status and thereby will be supportive of improving the livelihood in contrast to the mainstream household of the country. Again, the evaluation of perception will also help to design the SSNPs prioritizing the necessity of the small ethnic community. In a broad sense, we believe that such findings will assist the government, policymakers, researchers, and social workers in taking necessary actions regarding the overall well-being of the Khasia tribe.

Materials and Methods

Selection of the study area

Some earlier researchers found that the concentration of *Khasia* habitat is high in the Sylhet district (Rahman, 2004). Keeping in mind this, among the four districts of the Sylhet Division, the Sylhet district was selected. In these districts, two Upazilas namely: Gowainghat and Jaintiapur, were selected purposively because of the availability of a large number of respondents, easy accessibility, and good communication facilities. The location map of the study area is presented in Figure 1.

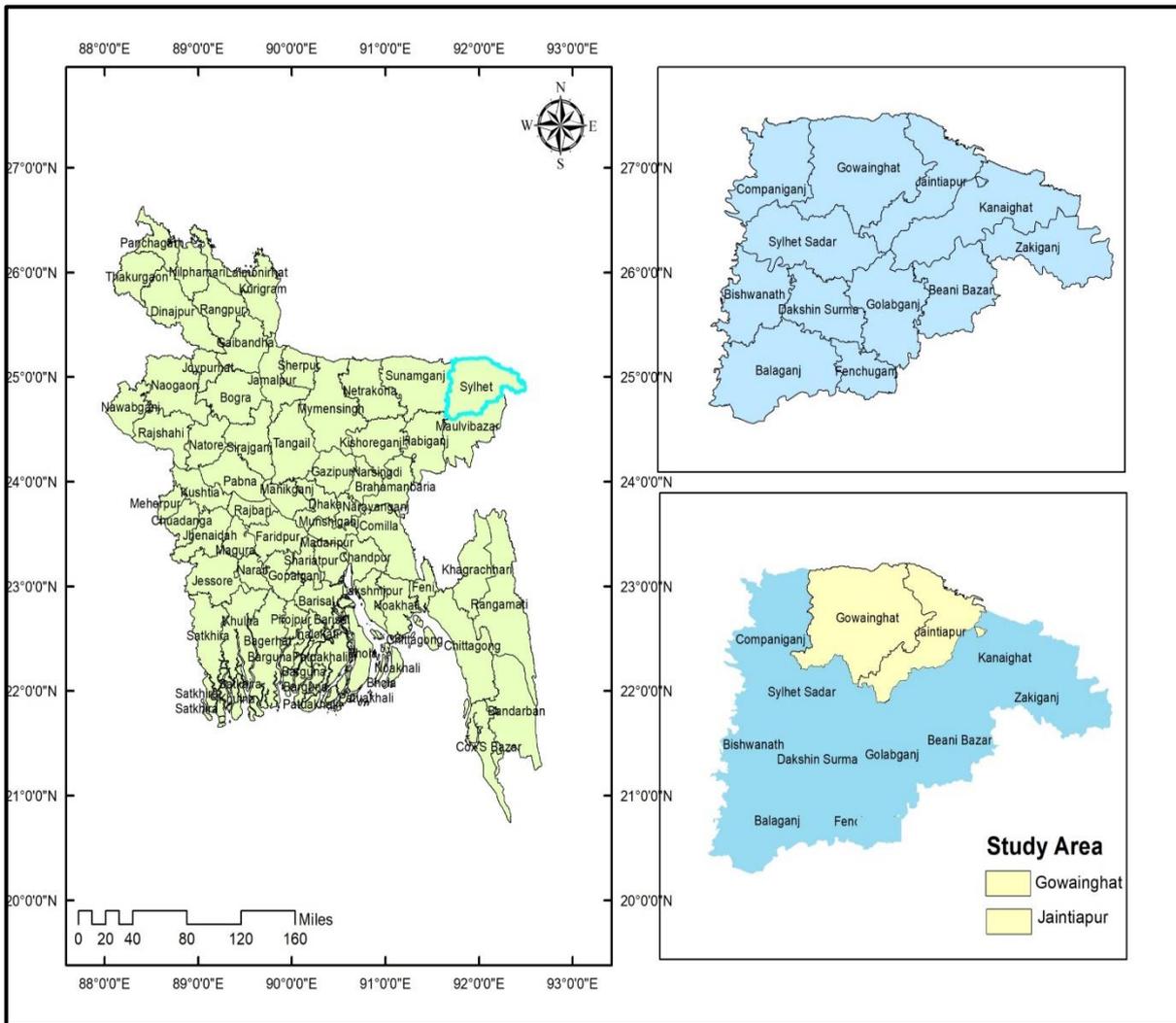


Figure 1. Location map of the study area

Sampling design

A total of 120 respondents were chosen using the convenience sampling technique for the present study from 6 *Khasia* villages – namely, Khasia Hati, Bollapunjee, Shongrampunjee, Lamapunjee, Nokshiapunjee, Mokampunjee.

Method of data collection and analysis

The study utilized both primary and secondary data. For collecting the primary data, a pretested questionnaire-based interview schedule was used. The data were collected in March 2019. The present study also utilized secondary data from BBS and different journals. For data analysis, Microsoft Office Excel 2010 and IBM SPSS were used.

Analytical technique

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics is a technique that has been used for the sum, average, and percentage interpretations of data. The present study used the sum, average, and percentages when and where necessary.

Sustainable livelihood framework

Livelihood patterns can be appraised by listing out an asset's position using a livelihood framework known as 'Asset pentagon'. The asset pentagon comprises five types of capital –

namely: human capital, social capital, natural capital, physical capital, and financial capital (DFID, 2000; FAO, 1996). The sustainable framework is presented in Figure 2. A sustainable livelihood is the consequence of both inter-relationship and intra-relationship among the components of these capitals. Changes in the asset position over one year are discussed as the transformation and improvement of the livelihoods of the respondents.

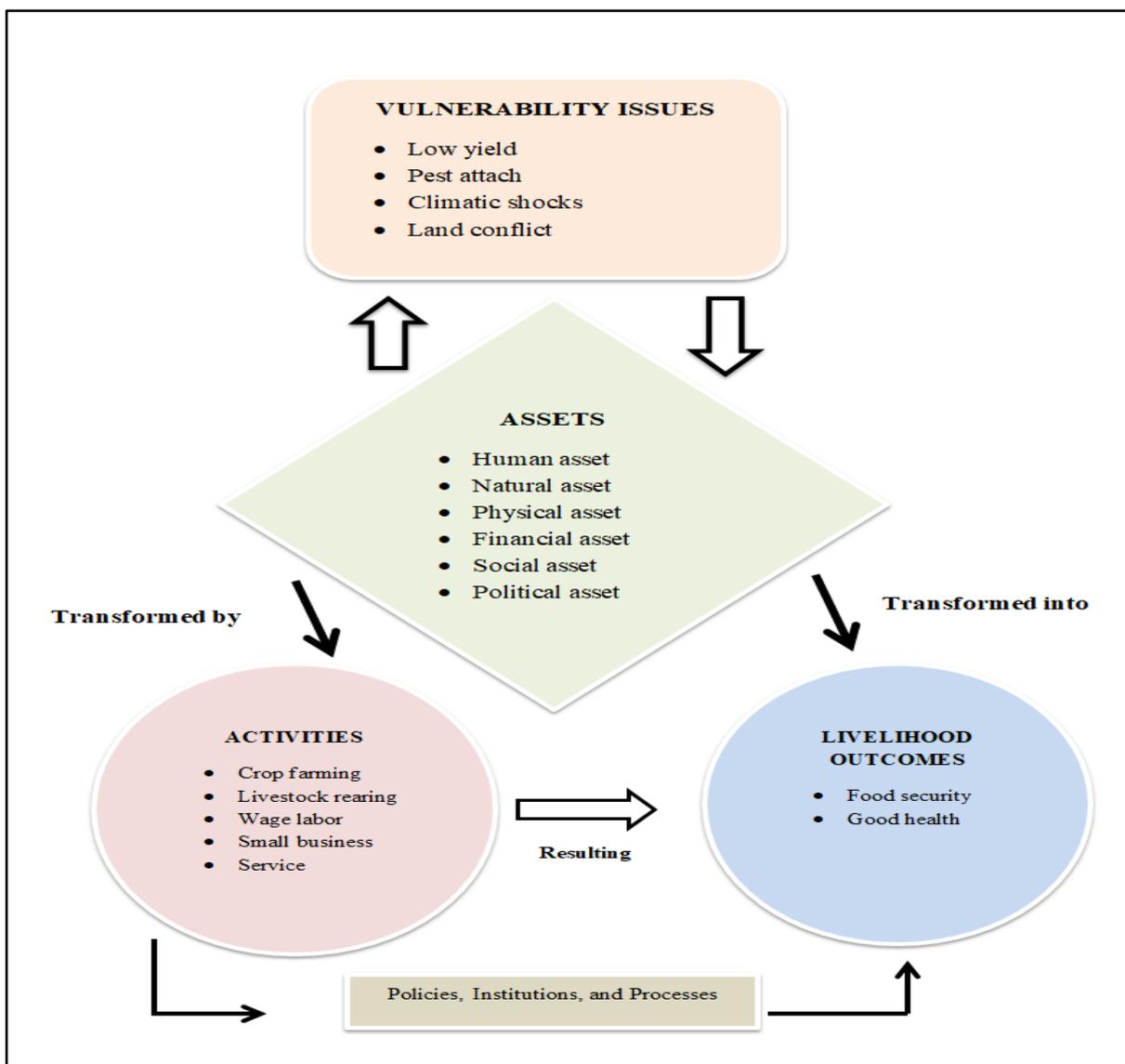


Figure 2. A logical framework for sustainable livelihood

Results and Discussion

Demographic information of the respondents

The demographic information of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the respondents

Categories	Sub-categories	Number of respondents	%
Age	18-35	23	19.2
	36-50	51	42.5
	Above 50 years	46	38.3
Gender	Male	80	66.7
	Female	40	33.3
Family size	1-4	44	36.7
	5-6	49	40.8
	Above 6	27	22.5
Literacy rate	Illiterate	10	8.3
	Sign only	3	2.5
	Primary and above	107	89.2
Occupation	On-farm activities		
	Farmer	72	60
	Off-farm activities		
	Wage labor	28	23.30
	Service	4	3.30
	Small business	13	10.80
	Remittance	1	0.80
Other	2	1.70	

Source: Field survey, 2019

It is apparent from the table that the majorities of the respondents (42.5%) were in the 36-50 age group categories and were male (66.7%). Again, most respondents (40.8%) had a 5-6 members family size. In the case of literacy, the mainstream respondents (89.2%) had primary education and above. For the present study, the occupational activities of the respondents were mainly categorized as on-farm activities and off-farm activities. For on-farm activities, all of the respondents (60%) were found to be farmers. While for off-farm activities, the respondents were recorded as wage labor (23.30%), service (3.30%), small business (10.80%), remittance (0.80%), and others (1.70%).

Household-level livelihood status

The sample households' income, expenditure, and savings play an important role in measuring the household level livelihood status in the study areas. The sources of household income, nature of expenditures, savings, and credit facilities are discussed below.

Annual income

Table 2 shows the main sources of household income.

Table 2. Average household income of the respondent

Main Sources of Household Income	Average Annual Income (Tk.)
Average on farm income (agricultural household)	106346.67
Average off-farm income (non-agricultural household)	79250.98
Wage labor	69104.64
Small business	198585.00
Service	19575.40
Remittance earnings	52780.00
Others	44780.00

Source: Field survey, 2019

It shows that the annual average income of the agricultural households was calculated at Tk. 106346.67. On the other hand, the average annual non-agricultural household income was computed as Tk. 79250.98. It can be seen that the average on-farm income is higher than off-farm income.

Annual expenditure

Table 3 depicts the annual household expenditures for varied items such as food, clothes, health service, children's education, electricity, festivals, house repair, transport, and agricultural farming cost.

Table 3. Average annual household expenditure of the respondent

Expenditure Items	Household Annual Average Expenditure	
	Agricultural Household (Tk.)	Non-Agricultural Household (Tk.)
Food	29836.11	29299.59
Cloth	9328.61	9081.22
Health	1565.97	1583.67
Education	2693.05	2336.73
Electricity	766.25	728.78
Festivals	8055.55	7846.94
House Repair	2591.11	2510.61
Transport	2279.16	2265.31
Crop farming Cost	19680.55	-
Livestock farming Cost	19243.05	-
Average total Annual Expenditure	96039.44	55921.04

Source: Field survey, 2019

For indigenous agricultural households, the average total annual expenditure was calculated at Tk.96039.44. This was lower than the average total annual income. Average annual expenditure on food items was found to be the highest Tk. 29836.11. Crop farming and livestock farming costs averagely Tk.19680.55 and Tk.19243.05. Cloth, health, education, electricity, festivals, house repair, and average transport expenditure was calculated at Tk.9328.61, Tk.1565.97,

Tk.2693.05, Tk.766.25, Tk.8055.55, Tk.2591.11, Tk.2279.16, respectively. For indigenous non-agricultural households, the average total annual expenditure was calculated at Tk.55921.04. It was lower than the agricultural household counterpart. Average annual expenditure on food items was the highest, Tk.29299.59. Cloth, health, education, electricity, festivals, house repair, and average transport expenditure was calculated at Tk.9081.22, Tk.1583.67, Tk.2336.73, Tk.728.78, Tk.7846.94, Tk.2510.61, Tk. 2265.31, respectively.

Household saving and loan position

The household savings are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Annual average income, expenditure, and savings of the respondents

Items	Agricultural Household (Tk.)	Non-Agricultural Household (Tk.)
Average Annual income (A)	106346.67	79250.98
Average Annual expenditure (B)	96039.44	55921.04
Total savings(A-B)	10307.67	23329.94

Source: Field survey, 2019

It shows that indigenous agricultural households' average yearly savings were Tk.10307.67 and indigenous non-agricultural household savings were Tk.23329.94. Households usually kept savings as cash in hand or deposited in the bank. Some households also took money as loans from the bank, cooperative society, various NGOs, private money lenders, and relatives and neighbors.

Livelihood pattern of the respondents

Human capital

Human capital comprises education, health, training, knowledge efficiency, and access to information that enable a person to choose from various livelihood strategies and attain livelihood objectives. Human capital development is the threshold and prerequisite for successfully accomplishing other livelihood assets. Table 5 represents the present status of the human capital of the indigenous people of the study area.

Table 5. Present status of the human capital owned by the respondents

Asset Category	Percentage of Response	
	Yes	No
Medical facility received	61.7	38.3
Education received	91.7	8.3
Training received on income generation	36.7	63.3
Access to information	51.7	48.3
Knowledge efficiency	58.3	41.7

Source: Field survey, 2019

All categories except training received on income generation by community members have shown satisfactory condition. 91.7 percent of respondents received education facilities, 61.7 percent received medical facilities, 58.3 percent had higher knowledge efficiency, and 51.7 percent had access to information.

Social capital

The important components of social capital are social group participation, political group involvement, self-managerial ability, and social accessibility. The present study found that the present status of social capital of the respondent in the study area is good. Table 6 shows that 54.6 percent of people participated in various social groups.

Table 6. Present status of social capital owned by the respondents

Asset Category	Percentage of Response	
	Yes	No
Social group participation	54.6	45.4
Political group involvement	17.5	82.5
Self-managerial ability	54.1	45.9
Social accessibility	61.67	38.33

Source: Field survey, 2019

Self-managerial skill means problem-solving, resisting stress, communicating, managing time, and strengthening memory. 54.1 percent of members of the study area had the self-managerial ability. Moreover, social accessibility was estimated at 61.67. However, the involvement of political groups showed unsatisfactory conditions and was estimated at 17.5 percent.

Natural capital

Cultivable land and forest products were documented to determine natural capital presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Present status of the natural capital of the respondents

Asset Category	Percentage of Response	
	Yes	No
Cultivable land	88.3	11.7
Forest product	60	40

Source: Field survey, 2019

About 88.3 percent of the respondent had cultivable land, whereas 11.7 percent had little or no cultivable land. On the other hand, 60 percent of the respondent had forest products. The size of cultivable land is constantly fluctuating in the study area.

Financial capital

Financial capital is the most important asset that directly influences livelihood conditions. Availability of financial capital can heighten the production scale and encourage entrepreneurship ability. The indigenous tribal group usually lacks sufficient capital. The key components of the financial capital are cash in hand, cash in the bank, credit facilities, and savings. Income level usually has a meaningful impact on financial capital. Table 8 shows that 49.2 percent and 38.3 percent of the respondent had cash in hand and cash in the bank, respectively.

Table 8. Present status of the financial capital of the respondents

Asset category	Percentage of response	
	Yes	No
Cash in hand	49.2	50.8
Cash in bank	38.3	61.7
Credit	50.8	49.2

Source: Field survey, 2019

Most of the indigenous community members kept little cash in hand or bank. Responses in favor of credit taken were approximately equal to responses of no credit taken on.

Physical capital

Physical capital is one of the most important factors of asset pentagon. Physical capital comprises house, tube well, toilet, mobile, electric fan, vehicles, and fridge. Table 9 outlines the present status of physical capital owned by the respondents.

Table 9. Present status of physical capital of the respondents

Asset Category	Percentage of Response	
	Yes	No
Kutch house	59.2	40.8
Pucca house	40.8	59.2
Sewing machine	10	90
Tube-well	51.7	48.3
Pucca toilet	41.7	58.3
Kutch toilet	58.3	41.7
Electric fan	51.7	48.3
Bicycle	25	75
Motorcycle	6.7	93.3
Mobile phone	100	0.00
Fridge	12.5	87.5
Television	20	80

Source: Field survey, 2019

From Table 9, it is evident that 59.2 percent of the respondents lived in the *kutch* house, and 40.8 percent of respondents lived in the *pucca* house. Straw and tin are mainly used for the roofing of *kutch* and *pucca* houses. 58.3 percent of respondents owned *kutch* toilet, and 41.7 percent owned *pucca* toilet. Again, 51.7 percent of respondents owned tube-well. Respondents who do not possess tub-well fetch water from the pond, well, river, natural cascade, or from the neighboring tube well. Ten percent of the respondent owned a sewing machine, 25 percent owned a bicycle, and 6.7 percent owned a motorcycle, 12.5 percent possessed a refrigerator, 20 percent of respondents in the study area owned a television. However, all the respondents owned personal telecommunication devices or phones.

Distribution of livelihood capitals of the tribal respondents

Figure 3 visually presents information about tribal livelihood assets, thereby bringing important inter-relationships between the various assets to life. The shape of the pentagon displayed the variation in respondent's access to assets schematically.

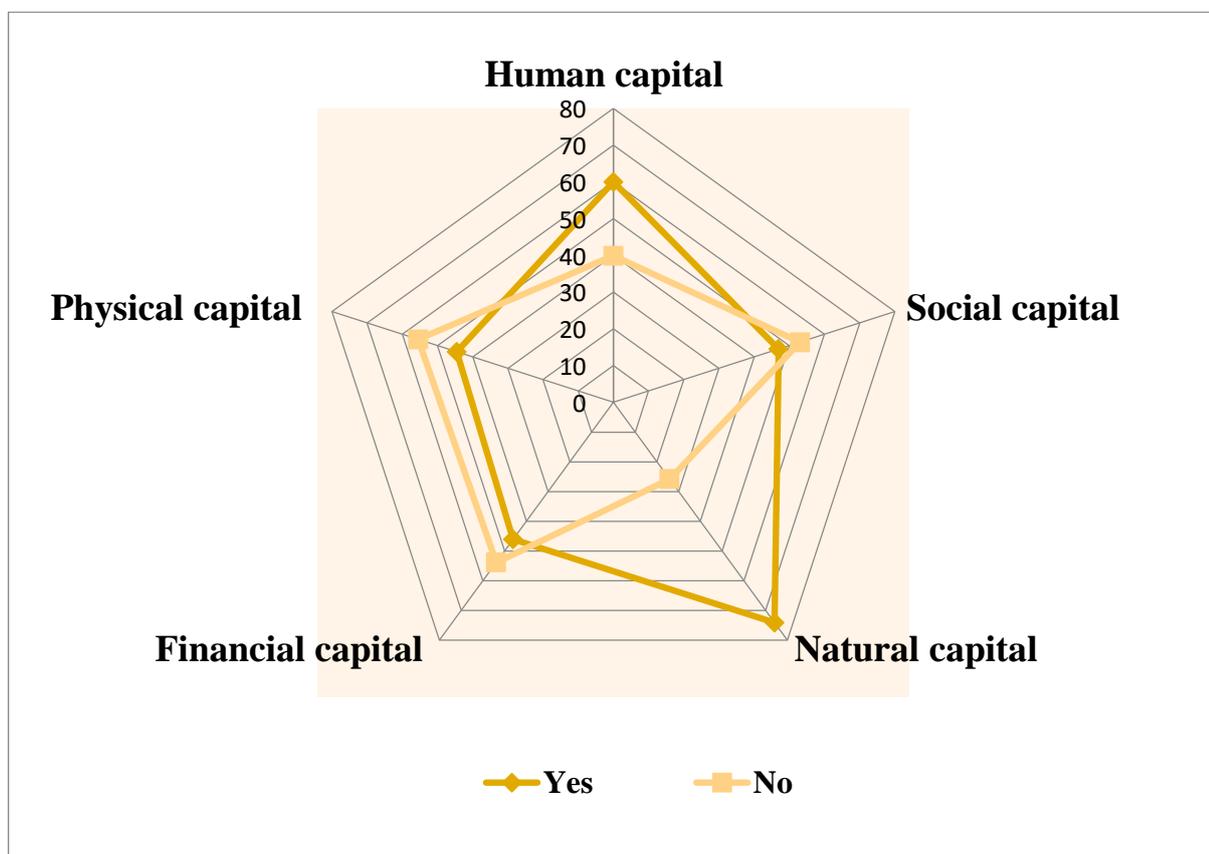


Figure 3. Asset pentagon for respondents

Perception on SSNPs impact on livelihood asset

Table 10 represents the respondent perception of SSNPs impact on changes in livelihood assets.

Table 10. Perception of the impact of SSNPs on livelihood asset

Livelihood Asset	Asset Category	Percentage of Response		
		Increase	Decrease	Constant
Human Capital	Medical facility received	50.8	38.3	10.8
	Education received	77.5	8.3	14.2
	Training received on income generation	54.2	32.5	13.3
	Access to information	67.5	20.8	11.7
	Knowledge efficiency	52.5	36.7	10.8
Social Capital	Social group participation	56.7	27.5	15.8
	Political group involvement	15	35	50
	Self-managerial ability	59.2	28.3	12.5
	Social accessibility	52.5	25	22.5

Natural Capital	Cultivable land	6.25	26.25	67.5
	Forest product	17.5	26.7	55.8
Financial Capital	Cash in hand	41.7	34.2	24.2
	Cash in bank	46.7	29.2	29
	Credit	49.2	37.5	13.3
Physical Capital	Kutcha House	-	7.4	91
	Pucca House	4.2	-	95.8
	Sewing Machine	-	-	100
	Tube Well	14.2	-	85.8
	Pucca Toilet	29.2	-	70.8
	Kutcha Toilet	1.7	27.5	70.8
	Electric Fan	3.3	-	96.7
	Bicycle	-	-	100
	Motorcycle	-	-	100
	Mobile Phone	-	-	100
	Fridge	-	-	100
	Television	10.8	-	89.2

Source: Field survey, 2019

Most of the respondents reported that components of human capital such as medical facilities, education, training, information access, and knowledge had increased. 50.8 percent of respondents thought they were receiving more health facilities than before. Most of the respondents (more specifically, 77.5 percent) reported an increase in educational facilities in the study area. Due to the increase in education facilities, community members' access to information and knowledge efficiency have increased over the last year period. About 67.5 percent of respondents in the study area thought they have more access to information now. 52.5 percent reported an increase in knowledge over the last one-year period. A significant percentage of respondents hold perceptions of constant changes in these areas (Table 10).

Almost all social capital components had shown positive increment. Almost all respondents had achieved higher social accessibility, but involvement in political activities remained constant. Their self-managerial capacity had improved in the study areas. 56.7 percent of respondents reported increased social group participation, and 15 percent reported increased political group involvement. 59.2 And 52.5 percent of respondents believed that self-managerial ability and social accessibility had increased over the past one-year period from SSNPs (Table 10).

According to respondents, cultivable land and forest product components of natural capital had not changed much over the past year from SSNPs. Only 6.25 percent of the respondent had increased access to cultivable land. Most of the community members identified a decrease in cultivable land over the past year. Due to a higher rate of deforestation, forest products were also diminishing rapidly. However, only 17.5 percent of respondents believed forest products had increased (Table 10).

There was a slight increase in cash in hand and cash in the bank for financial capital. According to the recorded responses, credit taking has slightly decreased after SSNPs technical and financial assistance. However, still, now, they are obliged to take some credit for productive and survival purposes (Table 10).

For the different asset categories of physical capital, it was evident from the table that the percentage of the *kutcha* house had not increased, but 4.2 percent *pucca* house increased. 14.2 percent tube-well, 29.2 percent *pucca* toilet also increased over the past year. 10.8 percent increase in television had been recorded. All other components stayed constant according to the response of indigenous members of the study area. Due to the gradual increase in electricity in the study areas, modern amenities such as television, phone, and fridge are increasing in numbers. Income may have direct or indirect influences on this increment (Table 10).

Conclusion

This paper assessed the livelihood status of the *Khasia* tribe and their perception of SSNPs impact on changes in their livelihood assets. Although there existed a good number of research regarding the livelihood status of the *Khasia* tribe, there existed a paucity of latest livelihood research. In addition to these, there existed very few studies related to the impact of SSNPs on changes in livelihood assets. In the assessment of household-level livelihood status, the study found that the annual average income of the on-farm household was higher than the average annual off-farm income. Again, the average annual expenditure of the agricultural household was higher than non-agricultural household. However, the non-agricultural household savings were higher than agricultural households. In analyzing the livelihood pattern regarding different asset categories of human capital, the study revealed that most of the tribes had received higher education (91.7%), medical facility (61.7%), knowledge efficiency (58.3%), and access to information (51.7%). For social capital, most of the respondents were found participating in various social groups (54.6%), had the self-managerial ability (54.1%), and social accessibility (61.67%). Similarly, for natural capital, the majority of the respondent had cultivable land (88.3%) and forest product (60%). In the case of financial capital, the study found that a significant portion of the respondent had cash in hand (49.2%), and credit access (50.8%). However, for physical capital, the study showed that almost half of the respondents had access to the *kutcha* house (59.2%), tube-well (51.7%), *kutcha* toilet (58.3%), and electric fan (51.7%), and mobile phone (100.0%). The findings regarding the impact of SSNPs on changes in livelihood assets revealed that SSNPs had significantly improved educational facility (77.5%), medical facility (50.8%), social group participation (56.7%), self-managerial ability (59.2%), social accessibility (52.5%), cash in hand (41.7%), and cash in the bank (46.7%) in the study area. Hence, these SSNPs deserve high priority to improve the livelihood asset of the *Khasia* tribe. Besides these programs, similar other programs such as vulnerable group feeding (VGF), vulnerable group development (VGD), widow allowances, and disabled allowances may also provide more effective support. These findings, in a broad sense, will help to take necessary actions not only from the perspective of the *Khasia* tribe but also from other indigenous communities or disadvantaged groups of Bangladesh. The government, policymakers, researchers, and social workers can use these findings according to necessity.

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