

Empowerment of Rural Women through Livelihood Opportunities in Incense (agarbatti) Sector in Tripura, India

DR. A. K. RAY

Professor

CHANDRANI BISWAS

Department of Humanities and Social Science

National Institute of Technology (NIT)

Agartala, Tripura

India

Abstract:

Women's work in India is invisible, unrecognized and unremunerated. 31% of Indian workers are women. 96% of women are in unorganized sector. 36% women workers are poor. Compared to male counterparts women have limited access to educational and employment opportunities. For women the extent or control enjoyed by women over their lives and the extent to which they have access to the decision making process are very important. Global Innovation Index (GII) 2013 has recognized Agartala (capital of Tripura) Bamboo Cluster as one of the selected Industry Innovation Clusters in India by National Innovation Council (NInC), Govt. of India. Tripura has good position in India for production of value added bamboo products. Also Ministry of Commerce has announced Agartala as the city of export excellence. More than 1.5 Lakh rural women are working in this sector to earn their livelihood. Female Work Participation in Tripura (21.1%) is less than the national level (24.6%) as per 2001 data. Though in Tripura tribal people are going through various stages of development, still they are bearing the brunt of inequalities poverty and injustice. Tribal people have been coming out of their traditional jhum economy to participate in a kind of work which they did not do before. Though tribal women of Tripura have substantial contribution as labour and mentor but their role is often underestimated and not counted as

economic activity. Women empowerment issues are addressed nationally and locally by both Government and NGOs through income generation and skill development programmes for women. But, in spite of these efforts, the empowerment of women is of paramount concern in Tripura. Present study shall focus on socio-economic and educational status of rural women of Tripura engaged in incense stick making activity and impact of these income generating activities and social work intervention on their personal income and decision making process, problems in carrying income generating activities.

Key words: rural women, women empowerment, Tripura, India.

Introduction:

Women workforce constitutes an integral part of total workforce in India. Almost 400 million people (more than 85 percent of the working population in India) work in unorganized sector and of these 120 million are women. Women working in the informal sector are not included in the official statistics and their work is undocumented and considered as disguised wage work, unskilled, low paying and does not provide benefits to the worker. Poverty, lack of access to education and inadequate health facilities are their major problems. The connection between poverty and women's lack of power over resources and decision-making has now caught the attention of policymakers in government and mainstream development all over the world (Endeley, 2001:34). Women workforce constitutes an integral part of total workforce in India. They constitute one third of labour force and supply two third of the total working hours and yet they are earning only one-tenth of the income and they own only 1% of the prosperity (Saravanavel, 1987). In India 61.35% people still live in rural areas, which is about 12% of the global population living in rural areas. Women have taken a chunk of 48.5 % of total population (Census 2011). India will have the largest number of younger workforce

between the age group of 15-59 years in the year 2030. Among this young working population the share of people from rural areas will be substantially higher making the rural demography more prominent in the decade to come. (Dr. Sanjay Tiwari, 2013). Women's work in India is invisible, unrecognised and unremunerated. 31% of Indian workers are women. 96% of women are in unorganised sector. An estimated 20% of rural households are de facto female headed- (widow, desertion, male out-migration). 36% women workers are poor (source: Ms. Latha Reddy, Ambassador of India, Issues and Challenges – Empowerment of Women in India). Traditionally, women's roles are confined to household chores and farming activities, which, in general engage them for a longer hours than men (14-16 hours compared to men's 7-9 hours a day) each day (UNDP, 2004; ADB, 1999). In addition compared to male counterparts women have limited access to educational and employment opportunities. Still largely the households and society directly and indirectly deny or discourage women's role as decision maker. The participation of women in the labor force has always been lower than that of men, in the rural as well as urban areas. In democratic society, like in India, voting right is an important index of empowering women. A broad based political participation of women is limited due to various factors such as illiteracy, ignorance, lack of consciousness and family pressure and constraint. Women in India are not allowed to participate in decision making process at personal, family and community level as highlighted in different studies. Article "The Challenge of Empowering Women in India: The Current dynamics" by Hazra in book entitled "Empowerment of Women in North East India – socio economic perspectives, observes that inspite of various initiatives on women's rights, women in India are still much more likely to be poor, malnourished and illiterate and have less access than their counterparts to medical care, property ownership, credit, training and employment. Empirical evidence shows a positive correlation

between women's earnings, their productivity and poverty alleviation (World Bank and Gender Equality, 2010-08-10). The 2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (UN DESA, 2009: v) verifies that there are positive multiplier effects for overall social and economic development when women, in the same extent as men, access economic and financial resources. Amartya Sen (2000:201) states that when women participate in economic activities the society as a whole benefits. Social benefits are provided through women's enhanced status and independence. Development strategies are guided towards more inclusive of rural population by way of: increasing employment opportunities in rural areas, retaining the work force in rural areas and improving the quality of life in rural areas, creation of infrastructural and urban utilities in rural areas, reducing the rate of plight of rural people in urban areas.

Tribal population is an integral part of India's social fabric and has the second largest concentration after that of the African continent. It is more than the total population of France and Britain and four times that of Australia. The population of tribal communities scheduled in the Constitution of India and known as Scheduled Tribes (STs) was 8.43 crore (1 crore = 10 million) as per 2001 census and accounts for 8.2% of the total population. 4.26 crores are men and 4.17 crores are women, accounting for 8.01% and 8.40% respectively. The need for empowerment of tribal's women hardly needs justification. Their primitive way of life, economic and social backwardness, low level of literacy, out dated system of production, absence of value systems, sparse physical infrastructure in backward tribal areas and demographic quality of tribal areas make the development of tribals and tribal areas essential. They The majority of the scheduled tribes about 97.4% of total tribal population in the states are predominantly inhabited in rural areas. The tribal as disadvantaged social group suffer from many crippling problems that retard their development keeping

them relatively backward and marginalized in a growing economy, thus paving path of dissension and social unrest of which the North –Eastern States have a bitter experience. Female Work Participation in Tripura (21.1%) is less than the national level (24.6%) as per 2001 data. Tribal economy of Tripura, although characterised by its relative backwardness is undergoing changes. Tribal people have been coming out of their traditional *jhum* economy to participate in a sustainable self-employment through incense stick production. Women development Programmes have been progressively developed and implemented by many Governmental and Non Governmental Organizations by providing various types of women empowerment Programmes including income generating programmes. Livelihood is not merely a means of survival only. It can be said as a cultural tradition of a community. Approximately 1.5 lakh highly skilled artisans, mostly women (tribal and non tribal) are engaged in production of various bamboo products. Most of the artisans work from their household based at rural areas and are linked to traders/buyers, in unorganized manner. Since its merger with India, micro and small scale cottage industries have come up all over the state and these are major contributors to its economy. Such industries based on local forest and natural resources are providing livelihood to a large number of rural people of the state. Incense is such a sector based on which many industries are functioning at household level to small and medium industrial level. This sector has tremendous potential and has created livelihood opportunities in the rural pockets, especially for the women, as a result of which large-scale rural employment have been created to generate self employment and increase standard of living among the rural communities. A number of cottage industries have grown up in and around urban and rural areas. Though in Tripura tribal people are going through various stages of development, still they are bearing the brunt of inequalities poverty and injustice. Women

empowerment issues are addressed nationally and locally by both Government and NGOs through income generation and skill development programmes for women. But, in spite of these efforts, the empowerment of women is of paramount concern in Tripura. Present study shall focus on socio-economic and educational status of rural tribal women of Tripura engaged in bamboo value added production, impact of these income generating activities and social work intervention on their personal income and decision making process, problems in carrying income generating activities.

Tripura at a glance:

Tripura one of the North Eastern states of India is surrounded by Bangladesh on the east, west and south. On the east it is bounded by Mizoram and on the north-east by Assam. The population of Tripura as per 2011 is 3671032 comprising 1871867 male and 1799165 female. As per Census, 2011, in Tripura about 73.83% of total population live in rural areas whose principal occupation is agriculture but only one fourth of the total geographical area is net cultivable, thereby leading to large scale underemployment. There are 19 scheduled tribes in the state with their own cultural identity, which includes Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Lusai, Mog, Garo, Kuki, Chaimal, Uchai, Halam, Khasia, Bhutia, Munda, Orang, Lepcha, Santal, Bhil and Noatia. The ST population of the state was 9, 93,426 which consists of 31.05 % of total population of the state. Out of this 4, 89,106 nos. were ST female population. Total Literacy rate of ST population was 56.48 % where female ST literate were 56.48 %. The number of the families living below poverty line in rural areas is 595,397, which accounts for 67% of the total number of the rural families. Percentage of ST and SC BPL families are 33.1% and 21.6 % respectively (Source: 1997 BPL census). Female headed households form 11% of the rural BPL families in Tripura. The problem of

unemployment is acute in Tripura.

Tripura at a glance

Sl no	Head	2001 (Tripura)	2001 (India)	2011 (Tripura)	2011 (India)
1	Sex ratio	946	933	961	940
2	Literacy rate	73.2	65.38	87.8	65.46
3	Female literacy			83.2	65.46

Source: Tripura at a glance, 2010-11, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Tripura

Work Participation Rate of Tribal Women:

The work participation rate of Scheduled Caste population of the state is 42.7 % in 2001 against 35.8 % in 1991 census. The female work participation for ST has also increased from 25.3 % in 1991 to 37.5 % in 2001. The proportion of female workers to main workers in the state has increased from 14.67 % in 1981 to 16.93 % in 1991 and further to 18.35 % in 2001.

Tripura a hub of Bamboo value added production:

National Innovation Council (NInC), Govt. of India under the chairmanship of Mr. Sam Pitroda, Advisor to Prime Minister, on Public Information Infrastructure and Innovations (PII) had selected **Agartala Bamboo Cluster as one of the selected Industry Innovation Clusters in India.** (Chapter 7, Global Innovation Index 2013). **Cluster Innovation Centre (CIC)** in partnership with the **Tripura Bamboo Mission** to initiate innovation movement in the country and showcase the use of innovation as a platform for growth and development of bamboo sector on a multi stakeholders approach.

In a bid to recognise the bamboo and cane craft of Tripura, the Ministry of Commerce has announced **Agartala as the city of export excellence** along with two other Indian

cities, based on geographical locations and import-export performance of the state's bamboo and cane produces over past few years. (Ministry of Commerce, Govt. of India).

Asia is rich in bamboo diversity with approximately 900 species belonging to 65 genera. Next to China, India has the richest Bamboo genetic resources in 136 species, including 11 exotic species out of which 58 species belonging to 10 genera are found in the North Eastern Region (Planning Commission, Government of India April 2003). Bamboo is an integral part of life in North Eastern region of India as well as other parts of the country. This resource has been variously called "the poor man's timber", "the cardle-to-coffin timber", "green gold" and "steel of the nature". It is the largest natural resource and grows all across the Tripura covering about 2397 sq km (covering 23% area of the state) covering nearly 25 different species to help expand bamboo based industries. It is estimated that out of the total 13.67 million tons per annum of bamboo harvested all over the country, 1.12 million tons are being harvested from Tripura. A large section of the population in the state, especially the tribal & the smallholders at the forest fringes, depend on bamboo and derive their livelihoods from the bamboo resources available in the state.

Tripura is one of the leading states for value added bamboo products and for developing the sector in the country. It is estimated that around 6.1 million man days is generated per annum by way of management, harvesting and utilization of bamboo. Bamboo is an important natural resource and the livelihoods of thousands of rural communities are directly linked to it in Tripura. Realizing the important role played by bamboo, the Government of Tripura has been working towards developing the sector in a strategic manner.

While Tripura is rich in natural resources-forest, field and natural gas, its historical and geographical circumstances, have resulted in an economic structure that is non-diversified and lacking a manufacturing base. The state has shifted the

focus of development activities in the state towards a self employment model. This has resulted in creation of livelihoods generating programs those are designed to take advantage of the specific natural resources which the state has in abundance. The Tripura Bamboo Mission (a registered society under Societies Registration Act 1860) is an Initiative of the Dept. of Industries and Commerce, Govt. of Tripura to promote and develop the bamboo based industries and enable livelihood generation through bamboo based activities. TBM has a special focus on promoting sustainable livelihoods for the rural poor by strengthening their own grassroots enterprises through building mainstream market linkages, providing production infrastructure & technology, supporting design & skill development, facilitating credit linkages. IL&FS CDI Ltd has been engaged as the project implementation agency for effective implementation in close association with the Government (TBM, 2012)

Market Share of Agarbatti or Incense sticks is estimated to worth at Rs 3,000 Crore in India. Industry is growing at 15% per year. There are more than 10,000 units operating in the sector spread across rural and semi-urban households, providing employment opportunities to nearly 8,00,000 household-based women workers. This sector is grouped as cottage industry or tiny industry as most of the work is being done at house hold level. This sector has tremendous potential to create livelihood opportunities in the rural pockets, especially for the women, as a result of which large-scale rural employment is created to generate self employment.

Tripura is producing around 25000 MT of bamboo stick to be used in agarbatti industries. It is around 70% of India's requirement of bamboo stick for agarbatti making. Around 2 lakh artisans are involved in Agarbatti stick production activity in the state. In India, out of 2700 Crore economy in agarbatti sector, Tripura contributes only 70-80 Crore.

In general, adding value is the process of changing or

transforming a product from its original state to a more valuable state. Many raw commodities have intrinsic value in their original state. A broad definition of value added is to economically add value to a product by changing its current place, time, and form characteristics to characteristics more preferred in the marketplace (David Coltrain, 2000).

Women face problems and challenges in getting a sustainable livelihood and a decent life due to environmental degradation and the interference of outsiders. Tribal women have adjusted themselves to live a traditional life style in the local environment and follow occupations based on natural resources. It is hypothesized that, the programmes, oriented towards the empowerment of women, have improved their socio-economic conditions and empowerment level.

Objectives:

1. To know the present socio-economic status of the rural women of Tripura
2. To know educational status of the rural women of Tripura.
3. To know the impact of bamboo based value addition activities and social work intervention on their economic independence and decision making.

Methodology:

Sampling & sample size:-

- For this study purposive sampling was used for selection of districts, blocks and clusters. Women respondents were selected randomly. Sample size is 350 who are rural women agarbatti producers belonging to SHGs/Agarbatti Producer groups from remote areas of Tripura.
- All the participants had undergone skill development

training on incense stick production.

Methods for data collection:

- Observations, structured questionnaire and interview schedule, open-ended interviews and personal experiences are used as primary sources of data.
- In addition, different documents like books, articles, and publications of different organization were used for obtaining secondary data.

Decision making:

- Women's participation in decision-making both at personal and household level is studied.
- To analyze women's participation in decision-making, various areas of decision making, both at personal and at family level are distinguished.
- **Personal level:** (source: Kabeer 2009)
 - economic decision like savings, personal expenditure
 - decision on choosing health services
- **Family level:** (source: Kabeer 2009)
 - Involvement in taking decision regarding child's education & marriage
 - making big or small purchases

Results and discussions:

Present study is explanatory and descriptive in nature

1. Marital status, age and educational status of rural women agarbatti producers in value chain up gradation:

Age- In this study age has been categorised into four groups. Upto 35 years of age is named as young, 36-45 years of age is considered as mature, 46-55 years of age is considered as middle age and more than 55 years is considered as above middle aged. 69% of the women were of 'Young age group', 20%

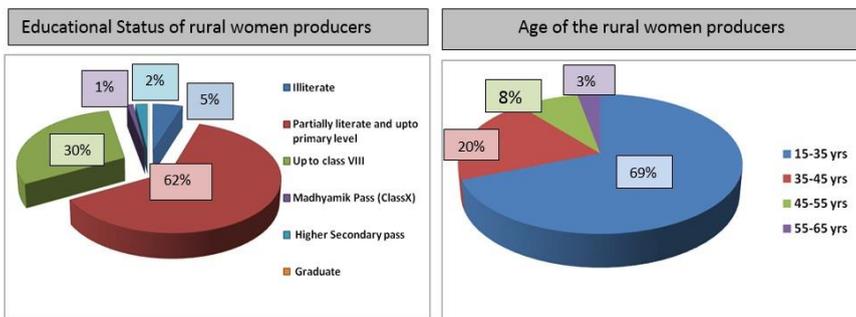
of the women were of 'Mature group', 8% were found to be in the 'Middle aged group' and the rest 3% were in the 'Above middle aged group'.

Marital Status- 89% women were married and 11 % women were single.

Educational Status- No women were found illiterate. 66% of the women were either partially literate or had studied up to primary level. 31% women had studied up to lower Madhyamik and 3% women were either Madhyamik pass or higher secondary pass. No women were found to be graduated.

Table 1: Marital status, age and educational status of rural women agarbatti producers in value chain up gradation - 350 nos.

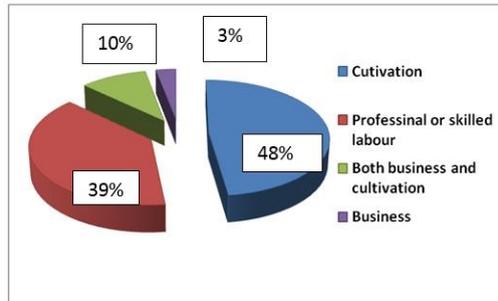
Marital Status	Percentage	Age (Yrs)	Percentage	Education	Percentage
Single	11	15-35	69	Illiterate	5
Married	89	35-45	20	Partially literate and upto primary level	62
		45-55	8	Up to class VIII	30
		55-65	3	Madhyamik Pass(ClassX)	1
				Higher Secondary pass	2
				Graduate	0



2. Source of family income of the Tribal women:

48% are cultivators, 39% are professional or skilled labour, 10%

have the status of both small business and cultivation, and 3% belong to small business category.



3. Community wise distribution of rural women agarbatti producers in value chain:

Table no 3 portrays that majority i.e. 82% of the small rural women producers belong to Below Poverty Line (BPL) category and 17.4% were living Above Poverty Line (APL) in bamboo value chain up-gradation.

Table 3: Community wise distribution of rural women agarbatti producers in value chain

Sl no.	Category	No	Percentage
1	Above Poverty Line (APL)	25	7
2	Below Poverty Line (BPL)	325	93
	Total	350	100

4. Effect of Bamboo Value chain up gradation activities on personal income of the rural women:

It is important that women are generating income following the training as it is hypothesized that women are earning income following their involvement in income generation programme. Some women could not involve in earning income after training. Following the skill training, most of them were engaged in

small but regular production. Majority, 79% of total rural women were not earning before pertaining training on incense stick production only 16% of total rural women were earning up to Rs. 1000/- per month from other activities. But after receiving training on incense stick production 56% of the women are earning personal income up to Rs. 1000/- per month per head. 31%, 2% and 1% women after pertaining training earn in a month Rs. 1000-2500/- , Rs. 2500-3500/- and Rs. 3500-5000/- per head. 10% women are not earning even if they received training.

Table 4: Effect of Bamboo Value added Programme on personal income of the rural women

Income earning/month before training	%	Income earning/month after training	%
Not earning	79	Not earning	10
Up to Rs. 1000	16	Up to Rs. 1000	56
Rs. 1000-2500	4	Rs. 1000-2500	31
Rs. 2500-3500	1	Rs. 2500-3500	2
Rs. 3500-5000	0	Rs. 3500-5000	1
Total	100	Total	100

5. Effect of economic independence and social work intervention on women's decision making capacity:

Decision making in personal matters: 82% of the tribal women had low decision making capacity before participation in bamboo value added production with skill development programme on incense stick production. 18% had high influence on decision making. After the tribal women participated in skill development/capacity development/training on incense stick production, took part in income generation programme and after the women, in group or individually were dealt by professional social worker their (tribal women) decision making capacity raised from 18% to 95.5 % and only 4.5 % women had

low decision making capacity. So, it becomes apparent that involvement in bamboo value added activities with skill set developed through training/capacity building programme enhances their decision making capacity in personal matters to great extent. It will be worth mentioning that the professional social worker who has been dealing with the problems of women group from Tripura Bamboo Mission had applied methods of social work like case work, group work and community mobilization with the social work principals of individualization and self determination.

Decision making in family matters: Before involvement in bamboo value added production with skill development programme on incense stick production 85 % had low and 15 % had high influence on decision making. After their involvement in bamboo value added production and social work intervention 68 % (in comparison to 15% women before intervention) were enjoying high decision making capacity which indicates moderate influence with regard to decision making in family matters.

Table 5: Decision making capacity of women before and after the intervention or skill development programme

Extent of Decision Making		Personal matters	Family matters
Before	Low	82	85
	High	18	15
Total		100	100
After	Low	4.5	32
	High	95.5	68
Total		100	100

6. Decision making in personal matters depending on income of the respondents:

Decision making before participation in bamboo value added production: Most of the tribal women had low decision making capacity before the intervention. Percentage of women graded as low in terms of decision making capacity were found to be

decreasing with the increased range of personal income and percentage of women graded as high for their decision making capacity were found to be increased with the increased range of personal income. But the percentage of women ranking high for decision making were very less because of their personal / and family problems.

Table 6: Decision making capacity in personal matters depending on income of the respondents

Decision Making		Income of Respondent				
		Not earning	Up to Rs. 2500	Rs. 2500-3500	Rs. 3500-4500	Rs. 4500-6000 & above
Before	Low	89	79	73	71	68
	High	11	21	27	29	32
Total						
After	Low	88	33	24	15	7
	High	12	67	76	85	93
Total (%)		100	100	100	100	100

Other findings:

- i. 61.5 % and 98.5% of families of rural tribal women belong to nuclear family and joint family respectively.
- ii. In the villages the sex ratio was 1001. It was more than the sex ration of India.
- iii. Among the surveyed families no family was landless. 21% of the families are holding land of 1 *Kani* land, 45% are holding land of 1-5 *Kani* and rest 34 % families are holding more than 6 *Kani*.
- iv. 79% tribal women had high political knowledge, 18 % tribal women have moderate (basic) political knowledge and 3% tribal women had low political knowledge . Their level of education have a correlation in this direction.
- v. Community Production Centers (CPCs) formed for

production of semi-mechanized incense stick rolling in remote areas of Tripura is an innovation in its kind for the state for development of the sector. Also with the support of National Innovation Council introduction of semi mechanization, by TBM, in incense stick production from bamboo has improved quality of the sticks in the state. This activity has been highlighted in Global Innovation Index 2013. This is also part of innovation move by the state. Also partnering with National Institute of Technology- Agartala and CSIR-CMERI for mechanization in bamboo sector and with CSIR-CIMAP for formulation of low cost Agarbathi premix is innovative initiative by TBM with National Innovation Council.

Problems faced by the rural women in carrying out value addition activities in bamboo sector for earning money

1. Difficulties in managing dual role as unpaid worker at home and paid worker outside home.
2. Non cooperation from family to go outside home and stay for long time for earning.
3. Health problems of the women are also found to be a major constraint for carrying out the activities.
4. Practice of Domestic violence was also observed and was expressed by the tribal rural women.
5. Highly unorganized and age-old traditional method of bamboo stick making and hand rolled agarbatti production is less remunerative to member households and over the years is making this kind of activity less viable.
6. Lack of use of technology for production of intermediate products like bamboo slivers, sticks etc. has resulted in poor product quality as well as low productivity.

7. Most of the women produce bamboo sticks and rolled Agarbathis from home which restricts them from producing sticks with full capacity being engaged in other family activities.
8. For many women the distance of the CPC from their respective home is a major hurdle to work for more time for earning more money.
9. The shortage of raw material is a major hindrance for the development of the industry.
10. Producers suffer greatly from lack of working capital and access to credit and loan facilities.
11. Low levels of education and lack of awareness restrict the artisans from taking benefit of various Govt. schemes available to them.

Conclusion:

The participatory role of women in improving their living conditions by fully exploring natural endowments and alternative uses must find an appropriate place in the strategic approach. Tribal women play a major role in the co-management of their natural, social, economic resources and agricultural development including crop production, livestock production, horticulture and post harvest operations but they remain backward due to traditional values, illiteracy, superstitions, dominant roles indecision making, social evils and many other cultural factors. It is very important to impart practical knowledge and training in modern techniques to all tribal women regularly so that their work becomes easier and becomes viable for more earning option with increased production. Undertake research and extension to improve current practices, increase output and incomes and eliminate adverse ecological effects is worth mentioning. Low literacy especially among tribal girls and high dropout rates at elementary and higher levels as reported are areas of serious

concern. Focus should be on girls' education, inclusive of context-specific traditional and innovative interventions. Launch of special and sustained education initiatives/drives in low female literacy tribal pockets in their mother tongue at least at primary level is fundamental. Take measures through community efforts to eliminate pernicious practices, which result in the torture and oppression of women e.g. witchcraft and superstitions. Rural women should be discouraged for the migration to urban areas, to take low paid, domestic work. Organizations should be encouraged and should scale up working among tribal and ensure the formation, stabilization and bank linkages of SHGs to promote viable micro-economic activities with substantial support in terms of credit and market. These strategies would empower women and bring them into mainstream development. Government and Non-governmental organizations should come up to ensure sustainable bamboo based livelihoods based on a cluster based approach, develop an institutional structure owned and managed by grassroots producers & their federations, build their enterprises based on commercially sustainable business models, provide with the community infrastructure, skill training, and direct raw material and market linkages., mobilize private investment in the bamboo sector in areas like bamboo composites, mechanized sticks and other industrial products, promote plantation in non-forest areas, private land holdings and homestead plantations.

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A. K. RAY is Senior Professor and former Head of the Department of Humanities and Social Science, National Institute of Technology-Agartala, India.

CHANDRANI BISWAS, MSW (Gold Medalist) from Assam University (a Central University), Silchar is a Research Scholar at the Department of Humanities and Social Science, National Institute of Technology- Agartala, India.