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Status of Higher Education in Sustainable Development of Rural Areas: A Study on Goreswar Area of Baksa (BTAD) District

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Abstract

Majority of the India's population belongs to rural areas and from poor family background; it's a major challenge to ensure their access to quality education. The lack of learning capacity and opportunities is both a cause and an effect of rural poverty. Higher education is the main backbone of sustainable economic development and modern society. But majority of the higher educational institutions are urban centric in India and higher educational institutions which are belongs to rural areas are of lack quality. As a result of this rural and poor people are deprived. This paper is an attempt to highlight the key issues and obstacles of higher education in Goreswar area of Baksa (BTAD) district and to find out some possible measures to overcome those barriers.

Keywords: Higher Education, Rural Area, Sustainable Development, issues etc.

Introduction: Rethinking education in rural areas requires first reviewing the characteristics of the rural sector, particularly in developing countries, and then considering the place of education in the current sustainable rural development debate. To a large extent, rural areas have been neglected in development policies. Similarly the rural dimension of basic education issues in most developing countries was largely overlooked in the 1990s. India the second most populous country in the world, with over 1 billion people, is home to one-sixth of humanity. It has also become one of the world's new economic giants. However, much has been written on the place of agriculture in primary education and on the impact of education on farmer's productivity. In other words, looking at education in the context of sustainable rural development and food security is not in itself a new approach. Education has always been considered as the only key component of human development and greatest liberating force. Hence, traditionally, higher education has always held the most venerable position in our society. It is considered as fundamental to all round development of the individual both at material and spiritual levels. Higher education is intrinsically intertwined with the development process and constitutes the instrumentality of modernization of tradition. Higher education is the process of helping people to achieve their individual and social goals by realizing their potential. It the process that aims at developing competency among people and creating such conditions as favourable Government policies, programmes or interventions etc. where people can apply these competencies for the benefit of all.

Knowledge based competition within a globalizing economy is promoting a fresh consideration of the role of higher education in development and growth. Previously it was often viewed as an expensive and inefficient public service that largely benefited the wealth and privileged. Now it is understood to make a necessary contribution, in concert with other factor, to the success of national efforts to boost productivity, competitiveness and economic growth. Viewed from this prospective, higher education ceases to contend with primary and secondary education for policy attention. Instead, it becomes an essential complement to educational efforts at other levels as well as to national initiatives to boost innovation and performance across economic sectors.

The modern age of educational history in Assam began with the annexation of Assam with British Empire in accordance with the treaty of "Yandabu" in 1826. According to the report of late W. Robinson, who was appointed the first Inspector of Schools in 1840 for the Brahmaputra valley a deplorable condition of the indigenous educational institutions prevailed in 1841 and though the efforts of government and other agencies new initiatives were taken to open new educational

institutes. By 1875, the number of educational institutions for general education rose to 1293 with an enrolment of 31462. It is after the independence in 1947, that a rapid expansion took place in the field of education. In the post independence period the major concern of Government of India and of the states was to give increasing attention to education as a factor, vital to national progress and security. Problem of educational reforms and reconstruction were reviewed by various commissions and committees. In the later part of the last century Policy on Education (1986) has been adopted at the national level.

Although much has been learned about the development process over the past five decades, gaps in understanding the higher education still remains. One of these concerns the interactions among educational achievement, output performance, and improved national income. This study was commissioned to review what is known about conceptual underpinning for higher education's role in sustainable development, and to assess empirical evidence that might lead to a better understanding of how these interactions functions in practice. The finding suggests that how higher education can assists countries with technological catch-up and thus improve the potential for sustainable faster growth of rural areas.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study is confined keeping in mind the following major objectives:-

- ▶ To study the present status of higher education and sustainable development of Goreswar area of Baksa district.
- ▶ To suggest some measures to improve higher education for sustainable development of rural areas.

Methodology of the study: The methodologies commissioned in determining the data are based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data is been collected from the nearby area of Goreswar. The study was conducted during the month of December 2015. A total of 250 samples have been collected randomly from 5 villages of Goreswar area. Out of the 250 samples 50 each have collected from 5 villages. The methods implemented for collecting primary data were Observation, Interview, Telephonic communication and Unscheduled Questionnaire.

The secondary data has been collected mainly from various publications of Government of India, Government of Assam, Journals, Newspapers and web etc.

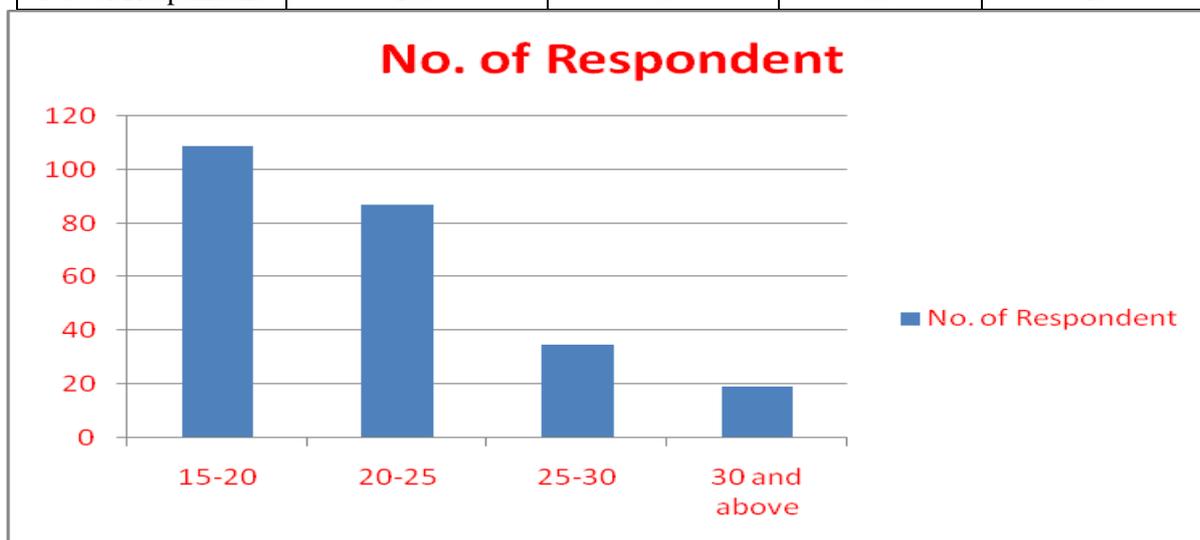
Rational of the study: 'Higher education' the word itself indicates that how much important it is for sustainable development of the any area whether urban or rural as well as the country. So development of higher education can be defined as sustainable development of rural areas. It can also be taken as main force of economic development of a country. The acceptance of higher education as a developmental force will lead the advancement of rural areas. Rural people are often unaware of their rights and here is when education comes into play. Proper education related to awareness of rights, schemes, facilities available for the betterment of the rural areas and development of those areas. These will led to better understanding of the situations demand resulting to which the standard of living will raise and also the economy of our nation will improve.

Current status of Higher Education in India and Assam: Higher education is the vital importance of the country, as it is a powerful tool to build knowledge-based society of the 21st century. With the growing size and diversity of the higher education sector particularly in terms of courses, management and geographical coverage, it has become necessary to develop a sound database on higher education. Existing Data Base on higher education is inadequate and out of date. Collection and dissemination of data on higher education suffers from incomplete coverage, inordinate time lag etc. Due to this, Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), which is being calculated on the basis available data, does not reflect the correct picture of the country's development in respect of higher education sector. Government has set up a target of increasing the GER from the present level of about 12 % to 15 % by the end of XI five year plan and to 30% by the year 2020. Various new initiatives have been taken during XI Five Year Plan to increase the GER. Reliable and comprehensive data base is an immediate requirement to measure the actual GER and efforts taken to improve the GER. A sound data base on higher education is also required for planning, policy formulation, fulfilling international commitments, research etc.

Findings and Analysis: During our survey a lot of things about the present condition of higher education in rural areas are coming in to light. Based on several variables of observation like Age, Educational Qualification, Marital Status, Annual Income, Problems etc. and we have collected the data accordingly. The data collected from the field are analyzed to assess the status of higher education and sustainable development of rural areas.

Table : A Profile of the Respondents Age Group

| Age | 15-20 | 20-25 | 25-30 | 30 and above |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| No. of Respondent | 109 | 87 | 35 | 19 |

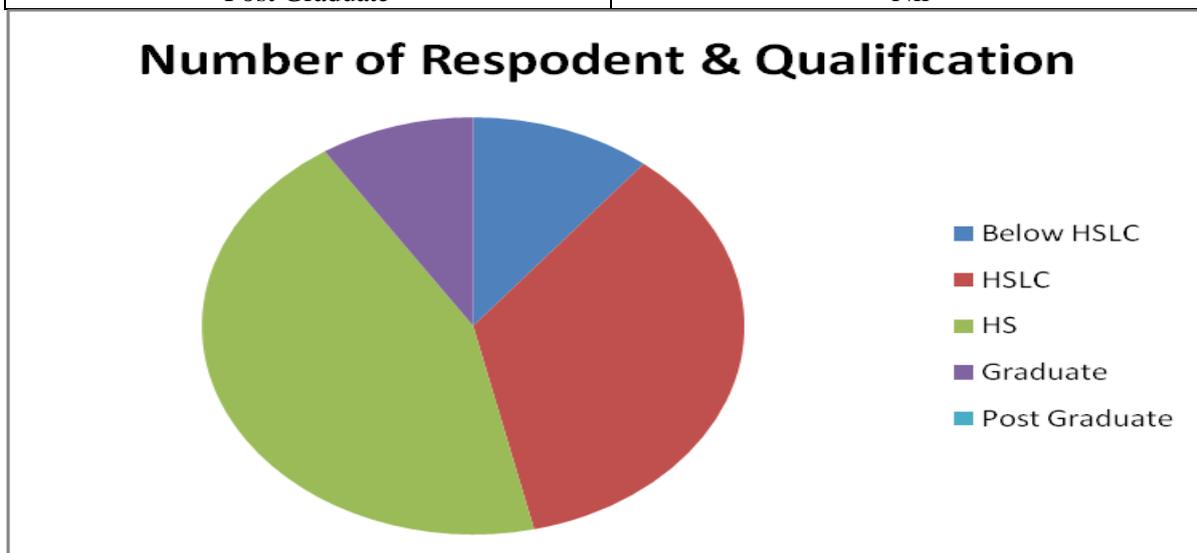


Source: Field Study

During the study most of the respondent who come forward with their view on higher education and development of their locality are from the age group of 15-20 years and the people from the age group of 30 years are not that much interested in answering any question on higher education and sustainable development.

Table: B Educational Qualification

| Educational Qualification | No. of Respondent |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Below HSLC | 27 |
| HSLC | 89 |
| HS | 111 |
| Graduate | 23 |
| Post Graduate | Nil |



Source: Field Study

It is observed from the study that qualification of major part of the respondent are HSLC and HS and they have not enrolled themselves for higher education due to various reasons and engaged themselves on what their families done or continuing. Only a few portion of that locality are Graduate and no one has enrolled themselves for Post-Graduation. From the above table it is observed that only a few people of that area have gone to higher education and it's automatically leads to that locality to downward development due lack of highly qualified people.

Table: C Marital Status

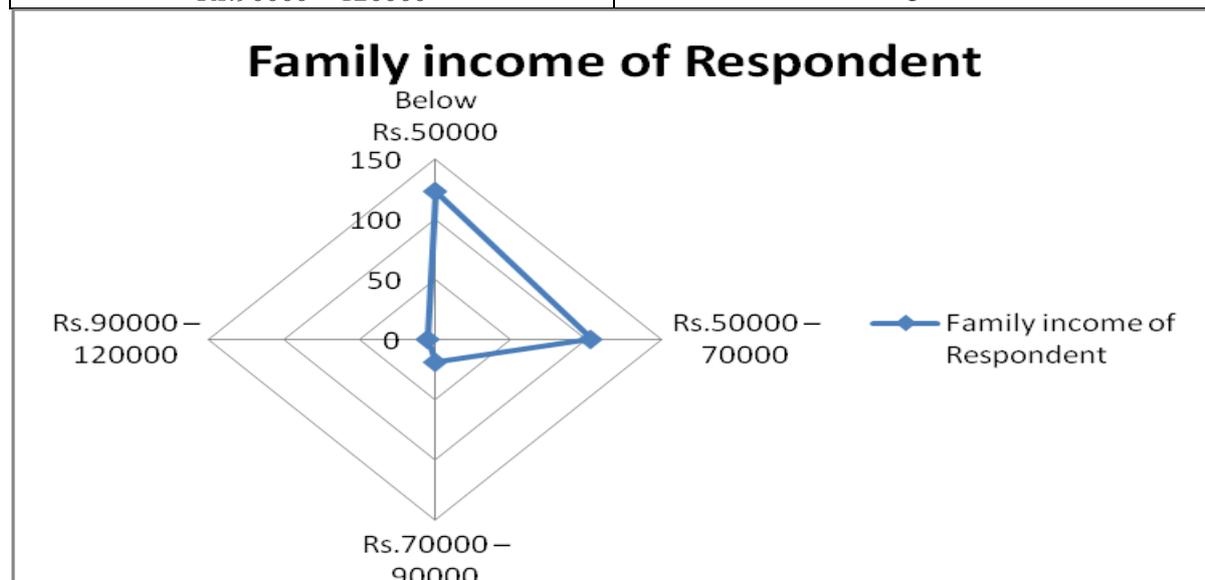
| Marital Status | Married | Unmarried |
|--------------------|---------|-----------|
| No. of Respondents | 57 | 193 |

Source: Field Study

From the above tables, it is observed that majority of the respondent are unmarried, even then also they have not or unable to enroll themselves for higher education and contribute their knowledge for the development of the locality. So, it's a great matter of concern for us.

Table: D Annual Income of the Respondent and Their Family

| Annual Income | Family income of Respondent |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| Below Rs.50000 | 123 |
| Rs.50000 – 70000 | 103 |
| Rs.70000 – 90000 | 19 |
| Rs.90000 – 120000 | 5 |



Source: Field Study

It is observed from the table that the total annual family income of Majority of the respondents was below 50000 and in between 50000-70000. So, due to high cost of higher education they are unable to enroll their kids to higher educational institutes. So that they are unable to create themselves upto the mark of globalized economy and their locality remains backward.

Challenges of Higher Education and Development in Rural Areas:

- ◆ **Low Access to Higher Education:** As per UGC report on higher education in India – 2008, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in Assam is 8.8% , which is below the national rate of 10.8% . The report also reveals that the availability of the colleges of general education in Assam is 9.5 against National average of 8.1. As a whole the C-PI index in Assam is 10.8 against the national average of 12.4. These indicate the great challenge of widening the access of higher education particular in Assam.
- ◆ **Challenges of Inequality:** Besides the low GER for overall population of Assam, large variation exist among the various categories of population like male-female, rural-urban, SC-STs and

General categories. Due to urban centric and uneven distribution of institutions of higher education, it is not equally available in the rural areas of the state.

- ◆ **High Cost of Education:** Govt. finding on higher education and research in India and in Assam has always been meager. To make up for this and to make higher education globally competitive, presence of private players in the field have been allowed along with self financing courses in aided universities resulting in very high cost of higher education. Due to higher cost and lack of sufficient number of govt. institutions rural people are deprived from enrolling themselves for higher education. As a result the development of rural areas also moves downward.
- ◆ **Poor Infrastructure:** During the course of the study it is observed that the provincialized colleges of rural areas of Assam suffer from the problem of lack of basic amenities and state-of-the-art infrastructure, which stand in stark contrast to the private colleges and universities. Even the central universities are endowed with better infrastructure and facilities for the student and the teachers. However, it is the provincial colleges and state universities that cater to the largest number of students in Assam including the poorer and rural section who cannot afford to pay for education in private institutions. These institutions find it hard and disadvantageous to compete with the private universities and colleges that are better equipped to prepare students for the global employment market and overall sustainable development of the locality as well as the state.
- ◆ **Financial Problem:** Financial problem has always handicapped the desired progress of quantitative and qualitative higher education in rural as well as in urban areas of Assam. Assam is primarily an agrarian economy and nearly 70 % of the total population in the state is dependent on agriculture and allied sectors. So most of them are not financially sound people and they desire to involve their kids after a minimum level of study into their agricultural activities due to non-availability of fund to enroll their kids to higher education.
- ◆ **Neglect of Traditional field of knowledge:** Growing popularity of professional courses with prospects of quicker and better employability has negatively affected the enrolment of students in traditional fields of knowledge like basic sciences, classical language and literature, art etc. The enrolment registers of colleges and universities in Assam stand testimony in this fact. Most of the talented students move out of the state after completing senior secondary course in search of good professional and technical colleges like medical, engineering, management etc. leaving only a few for pure and basic field of knowledge and this also decreasing the development of rural areas of Assam.
- ◆ **Falling standard of Research:** Though research is basically aimed at developing knowledge and understanding for solution of vital problems faced by man and for developing theories and generalization, current practice in the field can hardly claim to fulfill its basic purpose. Though there has been considerable increase in the number of academic research during the recent times, these cannot be considered as attempts to satisfy the inquisitive and scientific thirst for knowledge. This supposition finds testimony from the fact of increased number of Ph. D. registration with private universities, some of which are facing criminal procedures due to widespread violation of norms.
- ◆ **Lack of Higher Educational Institution:** Non availability of higher educational institution in rural areas of Assam is also one of the great challenges of development of higher education in rural areas. Non availability of such institutions also de-motivates the major section of people to enroll themselves for higher education and develop knowledge for development of themselves as well as the society.

Measures for promotion of Higher Education and Sustainable Development of Rural Areas: In view of the problem identified in the study, it found necessary to adopt some measures for improvement of higher education and equally development of rural areas. Following recommendations have been made for the development of higher education in rural areas: –

- Required number of Government higher educational institutions has to be made available in the rural areas for improvement of higher education as well as development of rural areas.
- Cost of higher education have to minimize, so that the families belongs to lower category of income can also enroll their kids for higher education.
- Scholarship facility should made available on merit basis.

- Proper research works have to be done for development of rural areas and improve of higher education.
- Traditional field of knowledge should also be given priority along with global technology for proper development of rural area and higher education on those areas.
- Proper infrastructure should have to be developing in rural areas for better improvement of higher education and sustainable development.

Conclusion: Higher education and sustainable development in rural areas of Assam is facing big challenge having them to compete with the global players, especially after education becomes a marketable product and after India opened its market for global competitors. However, sustainable development and institutions of higher education in Assam, with crying need for basic amenities and infrastructure, are hardly ready for this global competition. The annual exodus of bright students from rural areas of the state in search of better education partially indicates the defeat of the institutions of higher education in Assam. If the higher education is to be saved from becoming bane on economy of the rural areas of Assam, then a well thought policy for sustainable development and higher education combined with adequate Government funding and proper monitoring and control can bring much needed change in the area.

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