



## Socio-economic conditions and women's empowerment in Char areas of Sipajhar revenue circle, Darrang district, India.

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### Abstract

This present study examines the economic condition of the Muslim women living in the unstructured "Char" areas of the Sipajhar Revenue Circle, Assam, with an emphasis on their economic awareness and empowerment efforts. In six different villages, household surveys were conducted to assess women's economic participation and livelihood practices where they were working in agriculture, small business sectors and their knowledge of government schemes and financial literacy regarding prevailing government policies and their legal rights. Overall, women lacked understanding of the social infrastructure related to education and healthcare; schools were limited and healthcare facilities were lacking. The data points to marks of gender inequality with household decision-making and limited social mobility. In all respects, the Char women are bound by gender norms and inequality. The women in the Chars need formalized training to advance their employability enough to self-sustain. Overall, the research presents urgent needs for funding to promote education, awareness, healthcare and financial skills for women, as well as providing pathways for women to be formally represented in household decision-making processes that can help create a denial of the environmentally vulnerable and socially, legally bound women of the Char areas in the economically neglected area of Assam.

**Keywords:** Women's empowerment, Gender equality, Socio-economic conditions, Char areas, Economic awareness, Assam, Sustainable development, Social infrastructure

### 1. Introduction

Women's empowerment is a critical component of the wider development agenda and widely recognized as a key requirement for gender equality, poverty relief and sustainable economic development (UN Women, 2019). This recognition is based on understanding that empowering women benefits individual women but also has huge positive ripple effects on families, communities and national economies. Research shows that women's empowerment is strongly associated with improved health outcomes, higher levels of education and greater productivity at the economic level (Duflo, 2012; Klasen, 1999). Although this is recognized globally, women's empowerment realities are not uniform. Each setting

varies considerably in socio-economic and geographic components.

Women's empowerment is influenced by the context in which women live. Cultural context, economic background, access to education, healthcare and law all influence women's ability to live within their rights (Nussbaum, 2000). Women in marginalized places, with social, economic, or geographical decline, suffer unique and complicated barriers to their progress and well-being (Sen, 1999). Women may face discrimination, violence, limited access to resources and exclusion from decision-making. To empower women living in marginal communities one must understand barriers that women face.

This research is about women in Char, which is a

temporary riverine island formed by alluvial material in large river systems. Char is a result of the river systems' natural process of continuous erosion and accretion. Char can be found in places with very active river systems, like the Bengal delta in South Asia. The primary concern with Char is it being transitory and not sustainable and therefore vulnerable to natural hazards such as flooding, erosion and displacement (Rahman, 2007). With a constant threat of such hazards, livelihood support for communities will be challenged.

The 'Char' area residents, including women, experience a variety of deprivations related to the frailty of their surroundings and the exclusion of their community from the rest of society (Haque, 2015). By and large, life in 'Char' areas suffer from a lack of access to primary services in education, healthcare, sanitation and clean drinking water. Livelihood insecurity is a perennial problem. Agriculture, the main source of income for most households in 'Char' areas, will regularly be adversely affected by floods and erosion. The existing social exclusion relating to geographic isolates, in addition to discrimination, complicates the ability of the 'Char' residents to access opportunities and resources.

In this context of pervasive disenfranchisement, women in 'Char' areas have an even greater disadvantage than men with the all-encompassing power of patriarchal attitudes and societal cultural practices (Kabeer, 2000). The patriarchal cultural attitudes and societal practices further restrict women's mobility and access to education and employment. Their access to volunteer or participates in decision-making is limited in the household and less likely in the community. This means women suffer the negative cumulative impact of vulnerability originating from their exposure to risk, economic hardship and gender inequality. Given the potential for risk and insecurity in the northern Bangladesh context, the cumulative impact can be quite complex and harmful, particularly for women, which points to a crying need for targeted interventions that address the unique needs of women in these areas and that promote women's empowerment. If the challenge of 'Char' women is considered, different researchers and resource authorities may construct more proactive strategies to achieve gender equality and sustainable development for disadvantaged areas.

## 2. Literature review

Women's empowerment is a complex and multidimensional notion that has emerged as a priority

in development discourse and research. Women's empowerment is not simply about equality or justice; it involves a radical transformation of gender relations where women can exercise agency, access resources and fully realize their potential (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2012). This change mandates that attentions are paid to discriminatory norms and practices that have prevented women from making decisions and/or claiming greater power over their lives (Dyson & Moore, 1983). According to Rowlands (1997), empowerment should be viewed as a process which allows women to gain control over their worlds progressively, combined with a redistribution of power and rights that provides equal opportunity for all. Rowlands's definition is simply a clearer articulation of the concept that empowerment is dynamic and always relational, since it concerns the removal of the barriers associated with systematic inequality that motivate inequality for women to proceed.

The literature has been able to identify a number of intertwined dimensions of women's empowerment which all play a role in that richer understanding of women's empowerment. These dimensions are a way to organize the many factors that can promote or inhibit women's empowerment, across various social contexts and lives.

### 2.1 Economic empowerment

This dimension is focused on women's access to and control over economic resources, such as land, capital, credit, labor and income (Kabeer, 1999). Economic empowerment enhances women's independence and well-being by allowing them greater autonomy, autonomy leads to fewer dependents and until women are free from dependence on others they are less capable of seeking opportunities (World Bank, 2012). When women can access productive economic opportunities, they can understand how they and their decisions contribute to their own well-being and the economic development of their communities. Additionally, there is evidence that that empowering women economically can lead to high return on investment, such as agricultural productivity increases, positive health benefits and less vulnerability to poverty (UN Women, 2014).

### 2.2 Social empowerment

Social empowerment includes the role of women in social and political life and includes decision-making bodies, community organizations and public political activity (Narayan-Parker, 2002). It also addresses the

reconstruction of social norms and practices that discriminate against women, promotion of gender equality and engendering of equality with respect to education, health and medical care, the legal and justice systems and violence against women. In many ways, social empowerment is about creating a more inclusive and equal society in which women's voices are heard and women's rights respected (Sen, 1990).

### **2.3 Psychological empowerment**

This dimension speaks to women's self-esteem, confidence and sense of agency (Narayan-Parker, 2002). It includes helping women self-believe, achieve positive self-regard and cultivate their ability to move past barriers to their own success. Psychological empowerment is an important aspect of women's resilience. Without being psychologically resilient, women will be less able to thrive after challenges and/or adversity. Resilience provides women with the strength to pursue their goals and dreams. Moreover, past research suggests that psychological empowerment is a strong contributor to how women's overall well-being and satisfaction with life (Zimmerman, 2000).

Women in marginalized contexts, like Char areas, experience a distinctive and complex set of challenges which can inhibit gender empowerment. The limitations to women's empowerment are the product of several factors, including geographic isolation, environmental vulnerability, economic deprivation and social exclusion. We must understand these challenges in order to formulate appropriate interventions for women's empowerment in this context.

### **2.4 Limited access to education and healthcare**

Women's opportunities for personal and professional development, as well as their ability to make well-informed choices regarding their health and wellbeing, are constrained by their limited access to quality educational and health services (World Bank, 2012). Char areas often lack educational and health services, tend not to have properly equipped and staffed educational and health facilities and often have poorly trained staff. This lack of access is particularly relevant to women, as they have most often been tasked with childcare and household chores, which prevent them from going to school, or access to health services. In addition, cultural norms often advise against girls from receiving education and women from obtaining health care services, which can also maintain gender inequalities (UNICEF, 2011).

### **2.5 Economic vulnerability**

Women in marginalized communities are often found in precarious, poorly-paid jobs, with little or no social protection or economic security, typically making them more likely to be exploited (Chant, 2003). In Char areas, economic opportunity is limited and women's economic engagement typically is informal sector-based engagement in economic activities such as agriculture, fisheries and artisanry. All of which tends to be low-wage, inconsistent work, with insecure working environments and poor or no access to credit and markets. Moreover, women's economic vulnerability is often due to their lack of ownership of land or property generally, which means they lack access to collateral and restricted access to formal financial institutions.

### **2.6 Social exclusion and discrimination**

Existing social and cultural norms may lead to gender inequalities, restrictions on women's freedom and discrimination and violence (Sen, 1990). In the Char, patriarchal attitudes and practices operated in support of traditional gender roles limit women's preference for education, jobs and decision-making power. In these patriarchal gender relations, women and girls also experience gender discrimination in property succession, access to and ownership of property and access to justice. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment and human trafficking are also common across the characters, leading to the further powerlessness of women and, as a result, their well-being.

### **2.7 Environmental risks**

Women in Char areas face heightened vulnerability to climate change and environmental degradation that can aggravate their existing vulnerabilities and create new barriers for their livelihoods and well-being. For example, Char areas are very flood-prone, erosive and drought-prone, which often results in communities being displaced; agricultural production being jeopardized, businesses damaged and destroyed infrastructure -environmental shocks that affect women a disproportionate amount of time to men, because women hold the responsibility of managing household resources, providing food and water for their families and caring for the sick and elderly. Women's increased vulnerabilities and gender-based violence risks in the aftermath of these environmental shocks reinforces the gendered impacts of climate change (UNDP, 2007). Displacement and resource scarcity contribute to

women's vulnerability and exacerbate rather than eliminate existing forms of inequality and marginalization.

Previous research based on Char areas has already established the precariousness and vulnerabilities surrounding dwellings, notably women. Accounts of threats to food security, drinking water, sanitation and health (Islam, 2012; Mallick & Vogt, 2012) have documented the multiple struggles of these woman's day-to-day. Some studies of displacement/migration have looked at the impacts of forced exodus on women's lives and their responses to various environmental shocks (Gain et al., 2017; Rahman et al., 2017). None of the previous studies focused specifically on the social and economic empowerment of women in Char areas. Existing knowledge gaps have impeded understanding challenges which relates to the specific circumstances of women in Char areas and restricted relevant interventions that could be designed to illicit empowerment. Analyses of primary indicators of women's empowerment in Char areas is particularly important for policy and action, allowing communities to recognize women as capable of empowerment. Such research should focus on the following:

- Identifying the key barriers to women's economic and social empowerment in Char areas.
- Assessing the effects of environmental change on women's livelihoods and wellbeing.
- Evaluating how effective existing interventions to empower women are.
- Formulating recommendations for policies and programs that could strengthen women's agency and improve their life chances.

Bridging these knowledge gaps will help to create a better understanding of women's empowerment in Char areas and will allow us to devise better approaches to promote gender equality and sustainable development in these marginalized areas.

### 3. Objectives

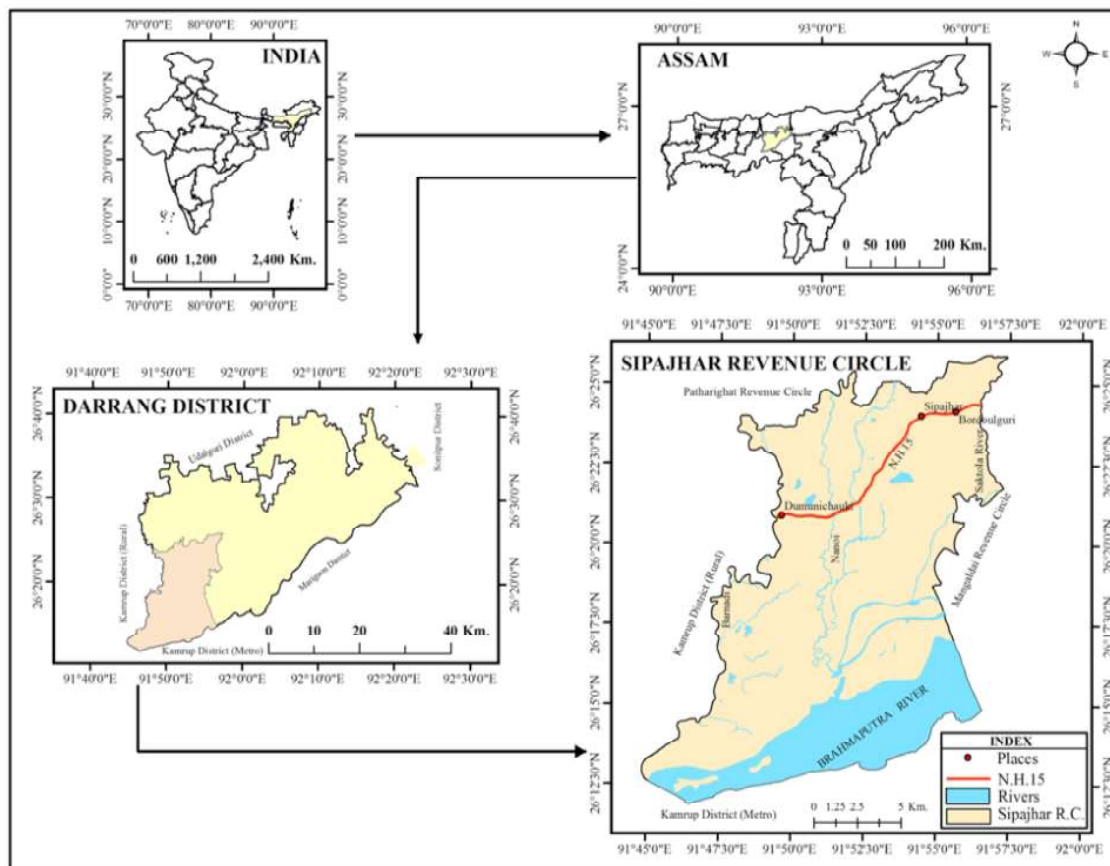
This study aims to address socio-economic conditions and promote women's empowerment in the char areas of Sipajhar Revenue Circle, Darrang district, Assam and has the following objectives:

1. To assess the level of economic awareness among Muslim women in the char areas of Sipajhar, covering aspects such as financial literacy, awareness of government schemes and knowledge of legal rights.
2. To identify the socio-economic and demographic factors influencing their participation in economic activities, including agriculture, animal husbandry, small-scale businesses and wage labor.
3. To analyze the relationship between economic awareness and the level and type of economic participation among these women.
4. To explore the perceived barriers to economic empowerment, including social norms, access to resources and institutional support, through qualitative data collection methods.
5. To identify potential opportunities for promoting economic empowerment among Muslim women in char areas through targeted interventions and policy recommendations.

### 4. Study area

The study area is Sipajhar Revenue circle of Darrang district being located in the south western part of the district, it extends from 26°09' to 26°22'N. latitude and 91°45'E to 91°52'E longitude. This revenue circle with a total population of 123498 (2011) covers an area of 299.87 Km<sup>2</sup> (29987 ha) comprising 93 villages, 14 Gaon (village) Panchayat and 3 Mouzas, namely Sipajhar, Lokrai and Hindu-ghopa Mouza. The Sipajhar revenue circle is surrounded by Patharighat circle in the North, Mangaldai revenue circle in the east Marigaon and Kamrup district in the south and west.

The river Brahmaputra is the main river in the east to west direction. Other important tributaries of the Brahmaputra are Barnadi, Nonoi, Mangadai, Nowanodi, Saktola, Dhansiri. The climate of the district is congenial. In the winter, the northern part of the district is colder than the rest of the district. The average temperature ranges from 10° to 30°C. Average annual rainfall is about 1791mm. The relative humidity is about 37% in the month of February/March and about 82% in other months.



**Fig.-1:** Location of the Study Area, Sipajhar Revenue Circle

**5. Materials and methods**

This research is focused on collecting primary data through conducting a household survey in the Char Areas of Sipajhar circle of Darrang district. The questionnaire used in the survey included inquiries pertaining to the economic knowledge and involvement of Muslim women. The study was conducted in six selected villages with a high concentration of Muslim population, which are Suktaguri No.1, Barbari, Dhalpur No.1, Dhalpur No.2, Kuruwa and Bheheni Chapari. A total of 65 households were chosen using random sampling techniques in the Muslim-majority Char areas of Sipajhar circle in Darrang district. The collected data was then analyzed using various statistical methods such as frequency, mean, percentage, standard deviation and the coefficient of correlation. The main objective of the study is to identify the factors that affect the economic knowledge and involvement of Muslim women from a household perspective. This will help pinpoint any hindrances that hinder their participation in economic activities in rural areas. To determine the relationship between economic

awareness and participation, the Pearson’s correlation method was used.

**6. Results and discussion**

**6.1. Social infrastructure facilities**

An examination of social infrastructure in the Char areas of Sipajhar Revenue Circle, Darrang district, Assam reveals a significant shortfall in education and health facilities. This study, which examines villages such as Suktaguri no.1, Barbari and Dhalpur no.1 shows an acute lack of middle and high schools- there are only lower primary schools (12) which contribute to inhibiting education pathways and likely higher dropout rates consequently ameliorating the supply of skilled labour. Access to health care services are similarly poor, with the health infrastructure comprised of very few health facilities (5) and limited to only Public Health Centres which simply do not function well to provide adequate and accessible healthcare services. The lack of adequate health care infrastructure raises questions about health needs and health disparities in these productive riverine areas that experience seasonal flooding, since the floods contribute to poor access to

education and health services.

The findings underscore a pressing need for infrastructural investment in these Char areas. Prioritizing the establishment of additional middle and high schools is crucial for uninterrupted education. Simultaneously, enhancing healthcare infrastructure, including increasing the number of health centers, expanding service offerings and ensuring adequate resources, is paramount. Community engagement

and collaborative partnerships between local governance, NGOs, governmental agencies and the private sector are essential for successful implementation. Addressing these infrastructural deficits is not only vital for improving individual health and educational outcomes but also for promoting socio-economic development and fostering a more equitable and sustainable future for these marginalized communities.

**Table-1:** Social Infrastructure Facilities Available in the Sample Villages

Sl. No.	Name of Village	No. of Educational Institute					No. of Health center		
		L.P	M.E	H.S	S.S.S	College	PH.C	B.PHC	Sub-center
1.	Suktaguri No .1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
2.	Barbari	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
3.	Dhalpur No.1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
4.	Dhalpur No .2	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
5.	Kuruwa	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
6.	Bheheni Chapari	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
	Total	12	0	4	0	0	1	0	5

*Source:* Primary data

## 2. Health worker, Anganwadi centre, road connectivity and library facilities

Data from six villages in the char areas of the Sipajhar Revenue Circle in Assam indicate a mixed picture in terms of the health services, child development sites, means of transportation and communication and educational facilities. Each of the six villages has health workers that provide access to primary health care providers in these remote areas; however, there are only two villages that have Anganwadi centers to enhance accessibility to early childhood education and health services and to provide support to mothers. Road connectivity representing the potential to utilize the various services and opportunities was noted in four villages indicating varying levels of accessibility. Importantly, none of the villages have libraries, which indicates the lack of many forms of

educational opportunities and resources but an opportunity to lend books to continue lifelong learning and personal development. The lack of libraries has implications for literacy development and has the potential to perpetuate poverty. The findings provide a sound basis to justify a serious commitment of various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in addressing these multifaceted challenges. It is clear that a concerted and collaborative educational and health and infrastructure-development approach is necessary to address the continuation of inadequate services. It is essential to consider the intersection between health care, education and the infrastructure gap to support sustainable economic growth and improved quality of life are realized for these at risk char people.

**Table-2:** Health workers, Anganwadi center, road connectivity and library in sample villages

Sl. NO.	Name of village in char area	Health Workers		Anganwadi Centers		R.C With BHQ		Library	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Suktaguri No.1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
2	Barbari	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
3	Dhalpur No.1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
4	Dhalpur No. 2	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
5	Kuruwa	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
6	BheheniChapari	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
	Total	6	0	4	2	2	4	0	6

*Source:* Primary data

### 3. Social awareness among women

This research investigates the social awareness of women in the Char Areas of Sipajhar Revenue Circle, Darrang, Assam, in relation to education, health, social norms and empowerment. The findings reveal a complex understanding of education, where some women experience its provisions while acknowledging its importance, describing social and cultural norms that may still prioritise gender roles over education but recognise how education can potentially determine children’s futures, especially children who are girls. Moreover, the level of health awareness and its relevance was found to be moderately supportive of targeted health education programs which could enable awareness of hygiene and nutrition.

With respect to social norms, much of society accepts the dowry system as a barrier, as it is gradually accepting widow remarriage. With respect to technology, it is recognized as creating opportunities to utilize mobile

and social media platforms for women’s empowerment. Most people recognize that smaller families provide better educational opportunities, understanding that resources will be limited. Nevertheless, most society does not recognize female infanticide as a crime and still needs to educate the community about it. Likewise, understanding of the appropriate age for marriage is still limited and one of the agenda items for community action is early marriage.

To conclude, while many barriers remain for women in the community, the willingness of women to become involved ambitiously in community life demonstrates the fact that there is a developing consciousness of their role within the community. Overall, the community is somewhere at a fork in the road, requiring deliberate and specific strategies to bridge the gaps in education, health and women’s rights to develop a more equitable society.

**Table-3:** Social Awareness of Women

Sl. No.	Statements	Not at all (%)	Very little (%)	A Little (%)	Somewhat (%)	To a great extent (%)
1.	Believe that education always helps to live better live in society	30.8	23.1	4.6	13.8	27.7
2.	Level of education for both boys and girls children determine their life in future	26.2	13.8	20.0	21.5	18.5
3.	Aware the health and hygiene of family	12.3	26.2	7.7	30.8	23.1
4.	Aware about nutritious value of the food for the family	18.5	30.8	7.7	20.0	23.1
5.	Dowry system is a barrier in the society	16.9	16.9	13.8	16.9	35.4
6.	Widow marriage has a positive impact in the society	21.5	18.5	13.8	9.2	36.9
7.	Mobile and Social media has an Impact on the society	4.6	24.6	20.0	20.0	30.8
8.	Small family have opportunities to give better education to the children	9.2	23.1	24.6	16.9	26.2
9.	Female infanticide is a crime in the society	20.0	16.9	16.9	18.5	27.7
10.	Aware about the marriage age of Boy and girl child	27.7	18.5	12.3	13.8	27.7
11.	Women should take active participation in community and public life	29.2	13.8	16.9	12.3	27.7

*Source:* Primary data

**4. Decision making on household activities**

A study on decision-making process in households in the Char of Sipajhar Revenue Circle, Darrang (Assam) reveals grave gender inequalities that uphold and sustain paternalistic regimes of control and authority. The husband predominately decides important matters related to children’s education (40%), marriage (32.3%) and other household activities. Joint decision-making occurred mostly, although it was always male-determined and husband-dominance invariably limits the wife’s autonomy. There was some joint decision-making in health and health care decisions which afforded the wife only marginally more authority (33.8%) than the husband (35.4%). Determining family size affirmed additional husband-dominance. Major purchasing, household economic disbursement decisions ultimately were predominantly undertaken by the husbands (36.9%), while some household economic responsibility-sharing was present, husbands retained the available spending authority undermining the wives’ economic status and financial independence, etc. Generally, the results

further reified the cultural context of family economics, continuing to underpin and sustain socioeconomic and gendered inequalities in wealth accumulation and economic security in Darrang — though there was some partnership in financial expenditure or investment planning. To address these patriarchal structures and patronage relations of power will require the implementation of specific measures designed to amplify gender-based knowledge and capacity building, improve women’s literacy, raise awareness of rights and diversify female engagement in programs that privileged gender equality (community, health, education, etc.). Parity in economic decision-making that industry education and advocacy can provide will allow men to rethink family resourcing for household development and reduce inequity by creating equal opportunities for women to self-determine wealth, value and diversity. The power relations underpinning inequality and implications for household and social organization is much larger process than contemporary policymakers’ imagine (or care).

**Table-4:** Decision making on household activities

Sl. No.	Who takes decision regarding	Self (%)	Husband (%)	Jointly with Husband (%)	Other members (%)	All of us (%)
1.	Children education	21.5	40.0	27.7	10.8	.0
2.	Marriage age of Children	15.4	32.3	32.3	15.4	4.6
3.	Decision on Marriage of children	10.8	29.2	32.3	21.5	6.2
4.	Size of family (number of children)	9.2	36.9	29.2	13.8	10.8
5.	Health care for sick person in the family	9.2	35.4	13.8	7.7	33.8
6.	Major purchase of wealth like ornaments, land etc.	6.2	36.9	35.4	6.2	15.4
7.	Overall household expenditure on social ceremonies	6.2	36.9	23.1	7.7	26.2

**Source:** Primary data

**5. Decision making on social activities**

This study examined women’s decision-making regarding social events across different topographies of Char, plain and low-lying areas in Sipajhar Revenue Circle, Assam and found significant variations in autonomy. The freedom to seek permission for engaging in social activities for women’s engagement varies tremendously, for example, visiting the family or markets across the three regions. How socially determined women’s ability to seek permission by different activity types indicates significant levels of control over women. From the study, women in Char areas show a much higher need for permission to visit family meaning there are more strict social controls. The percentage of women who needed to find permission in order for any type of social engagement

at the market was noted to be high even across the three areas, indicating women engagement of social-economic areas are entrenched in the culture of socially hesitating to women’s public spheres. Disparities also emerge in areas of the recreational activities women can engage in, with plain areas showing more restrictions than low-lying areas. The finding of marginalized decision-making with women ideologically continuing asking permission to engage in situational decision-making and engaging in social programs, such as marriages, further expresses a level of diminished autonomy women in Char areas experience when compared to plain and low-lying areas. Overall, the findings demonstrate how women’s local customs and practices develop women’s social freedom and presents avenues of targeted interventions towards

women’s empowerment that should consider, particularly, more severe social areas of autonomy such

as Char areas and how to openly agree to engage in a more equitable society.

**Table-5 : Decision Making on Social Activities**

Sl. No.	Statements	Topography			
		Plain area	Low lying area	Char area	Total
		%	%	%	%
1.	Need permission to visit parents/relatives/friends/neighbours/siblings	37.5	27.4	43.1	36.0
2.	Need permission to go to market	73.8	69.5	69.2	72.0
3.	Need permission to go to cinema hall	69.2	46.3	56.9	61.8
4.	Do you have right to take decision according to the situation	46.7	54.7	44.6	48.2
5.	Do you have right to take decision to Participating in social programmes like marriage etc.	89.2	71.6	53.8	79.2

*Source:* Primary data

**6. Economic awareness among women**

Research conducted in the Char Areas of Sipajhar, Assam reinforces key gaps in rural women’s socio-economic awareness that weaken their ability to achieve empowerment and develop their community. For example, the study analyzed that a sizeable portion of participants (36.9%) typically doubted the education system’s ability to improve their economic opportunities suggesting the need for initiatives that demonstrate a correlation between education and economic empowerment. A similar sizeable portion (47.7%) perceived education either as having little to no impact on women’s economic conditions, indicating potential opportunities to develop success stories in educating women on the financial benefits of the contribution of education. The fact that while some individuals recognized that women’s financial contributions helped achieve women’s social standing, over fifty percent of respondents perceived these contributions as little to nothing, indicate community-based programs are warranted to celebrate women’s economic contributions.

Moreover, the concerning fact that so few of the sample (66.1%) feel that women’s work (particularly agricultural) is ignored necessitates initiatives that will record and shed light on women’s contributions and changes associated with women’s economic contributions, in order to change the perceptions held in society. The low levels of awareness surrounding Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and with respect to self-dependence, or a economic level independence also disturbs as they represent areas needing targeted promotion. With respect to property, while some respondents recognized that ownership may produce respect for such property, a sizeable proportion perceived unequal property rights, meaning there will be a need to advocate for legal literacy about property rights. Overall the study confirms that there is a need to clear gaps through different types of interventions; educational initiatives, community engagement and legal advocacy in order to generate new understandings of economic awareness and towards economic empowerment of these women for capital economic development in Assam.

**Table-6: Economic awareness of women**

Sl. No.	Statements	Not at all (%)	Very little (%)	A Little (%)	Somewhat (%)	To a great extent (%)
1.	Education creates better Awareness about economic opportunities	36.9	18.5	6.2	16.9	21.5
2.	Education improved the economic condition of women in your community	32.3	15.4	6.2	21.5	24.6
3.	Women contribute financially to the family, her status and respect always enhanced	13.8	21.5	15.4	27.7	21.5
4.	Economic aspect of work participation of women in agricultural field and home are always ignored	23.1	23.1	16.9	21.5	15.4
5.	Knowledge about SHG functioning	35.4	9.2	13.8	32.3	9.2
6.	SHG help women to become economically self-dependent	30.8	15.4	12.3	29.2	12.3
7.	Ownership right of women get more respect and autonomy in the family	27.7	12.3	20.0	30.8	9.2
8.	Women have equal property right with men	27.7	16.9	10.8	15.4	29.2
9.	Daughters have right on ancestral property	27.7	13.8	10.8	32.3	15.4
10.	Women have right to keep property in own name	29.2	13.8	12.3	20.0	24.6

*Source:* Primary data

## 7. Conclusion and recommendations

1. This study has conducted an extensive examination of the social and economic situations of women in Char regions, through relevant indicators such as, access to social infrastructure, health systems, social awareness, decision-making and economic awareness. The findings reveal the plight of women, particularly, limited access and acceptance to education, healthcare and economic opportunities and to making decisions to claim their rights to do so.
2. In light of these findings and their implications to improving women's empowerment in Char areas, we recommend the following:
3. Invest in Social Infrastructure and Health Systems: Focus on creating educational institutions (higher secondary level), health care services and Anganwadi centers in Char regions. Invest in a functional system that makes education, health systems and Anganwadi accessible, affordable and quality services.
4. Increase Social Awareness: Use both formal and informal system of awareness and communication covering, education, health, hygiene and women's rights and making community leaders, religious leaders and local entities a part of the awareness campaigns.
5. Financial support to empower Women: Develop women's economic activity by supporting skills training, access to finance and or credit facilities and linking women to markets and support the creation or strengthening of Self-Help Groups.
6. Increase Decision-Making Power for Women: Increase women's representation among official decision-makers at the household, community and local government levels and encourage women to hold decision-making positions in community organizations and local governance bodies.
7. Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks: We should implement, enforce and create new policies and laws that protect women's basic human rights and promote gender equality. All aspects of these frameworks must apply and have equal value to women, including equal access to property and inheritance rights and other legal protections.
8. Address Environmental Vulnerabilities: We should make efforts to prioritize the needs of women and mitigate the effects of climate change and environmental degradation on women. However, this must be balanced with the sustainability of livelihoods and environmental conservation.
9. Conduct More Research: We must carry out more research to get a better understanding of the barriers and opportunities for women's empowerment in the Char areas. This should include research on best practices, the most effective interventions and impacts and evidence-based policy decisions related to women's empowerment.

By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to improve the lives of women in Char areas and promote their full and equal participation in society. This will not only benefit women themselves but also contribute to the overall development and well-being of their communities.

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### ***Ethics and Consent***

We declare that the manuscript was prepared following the protocols of the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2008. There is no requirement of consent from the University of Science and Technology Meghalaya for this research paper.

