

## IDENTIFICATION OF VARIOUS LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES OF THE MANIPURI WOMEN AND TO STUDY THE EXTENT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN MANIPUR

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### ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to identify the various income-generating activities and to study the extent of empowerment of women in Manipur. Considering the need of the present study, the research was formulated on the basis of descriptive and analytical research design and suitable variables were selected. This study was conducted in Manipur at twelve villages viz. Kanto, Khurkhul and Sekmai under Lamsang block, Thangmeiband, Iroisemba and Sagolband under Lamphel block of Imphal west district and Maram Bazar, Senapati town and Shajouba from Mao Maram block, Leimakhong, Motbung and Kangpokpi from Saitu Gamphazol block of Senapati district during a period from May 2022 to March 2023. In the study, 240 women respondents were selected purposively based on their livelihood activities. Data was generated through a sample survey of women by personal interview methods using pretested well-structured interview schedule. The findings revealed that majority of the total respondents were working as vegetable vendors at 54.17 per cent, processed food items vendor at 7.08 per cent as second majority, traditional items vendor at 6.25 per cent as third majority, local grocery shop, fruit vendor and farming at 4.58 per cent each as fourth majority, livestock rearing at 3.75 per cent as fifth majority, embroidery at 3.33 per cent as sixth majority, weaving at 2.92 per cent as seventh majority, hand-woven basket vendor and fish vendor at 2.08 per cent as eighth majority, meat vendor at only 1.67 per cent as ninth majority, fish farming, tailoring and banana leaf vendor at 0.83 per cent as tenth majority and women who managed rice mill at 0.42 as the least majority. The study further revealed that majority i.e. 97.50 per cent of the respondents were in the medium level of women empowerment followed by 2.50 per cent of the respondents in the high level of women empowerment and none of the respondents fall in the low level of women empowerment and the index scores of women empowerments for the pooled population was 0.62, for Imphal west was 0.63 and for Senapati was 0.61.

(Key words: Women empowerment, livelihood activities, manipur, income-generating activities)

## INTRODUCTION

Chambers and Conway (1992) stated that a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base. Ifeanyi-obi and Mathews Nijoku (2014) in their study inspected the socio-economic factors affecting the choice of livelihood among rural dwellers in southern Nigeria reported that the rural dwellers were engaged in various livelihood activities such as farming, trading, sand gathering,

transportation, civil service, contracting, food vendors, tailoring, mechanic, carpentry, welding, palm wine tapping, local gin distillation, aluminium work, plumbing, fishing, broom wearing, basket weaving, mushroom gathering, snail picking, cloth weaving, pottery, etc.

Devi (2014) in her study on Determinants of Development among Women in Manipur, stated that weaving, agriculture, petty businesses were the main economic resources of Meitei women. Embroidery, knitting and handicrafts are also activities engaged by women. Vashum *et al.* (2016) concluded in their study on income generating activities of women in Seijang village, Imphal East District, Manipur that some income generating activities taken up by the Manipuri women were embroidery, weaving,

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cultivation, private business and others. Anonymous (2020) reported that women in Kairembikhok village in Thoubal district of Manipur were breaking all stereotypes by getting into the carpentry profession which had always been a male-dominated industry. Arambam (2020) concluded that the industrial classification data indicated that women in Manipur played an active role in the economy. Their involvement in productive sectors, like agriculture, trade and commerce and in manufacturing, particularly household industry which were activities which had a lot to do with capital formation (physical and financial) imply that they were really the backbone of the economy of Manipur.

Kabeer (1999) defined empowerment as a change that referred to expansion on people's ability to make strategic life choice in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. Empowerment for a woman means a combination of changes in her aspiration and achievement, i.e. being able to define her own life choices to pursue her goals. Tandon (2016) stated that empowerment was a process to change the distribution of power between men and women, both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society as women were often considered as subordinates to men and they were denied the power to decide their life choices. Further, Devi (2013) defined economic empowerment of women as one of the basic tools for social empowerment. According to the author, literally empowerment means to invest with power and the power is ability through which one can influence the behaviour of other with and without restraint. Women empowerment provides women the ability to gain control over resources, develop physical and psychological capacity to challenge the prevailing gender customs.

The study of Haley *et al.* (2021) found that engagement in income generating activities generally improves women's capacity to pay for things and contribute to family well-being. It was also stated by Raman and Nagalaxmi (2014) that participation in income generating activities helps in the overall empowerment of women.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was conducted during May 2022 to March 2023 in the North-eastern state of India, Manipur. The district Imphal West and Senapati districts were selected purposively based on the engagement of the women in various types of informal livelihood activities especially sale of agricultural and allied products as most women resort to vending for livelihood in the state and other unorganised livelihood activities in the selected area. The locale of the research was selected because of the unique women-only market and also local market sheds providing a platform to earn a livelihood for women in the valley. The research aimed to study the income-generating activities of the Manipuri women vendors and other self-employed women and to delve into the extent of empowerment of the women respondents. Four blocks, namely, Lamphel and Lamsang from Imphal west, Mao-Maram and Saitu Gamphazol from

Senapati district were selected purposively. Three villages were selected purposively from each of the selected blocks. From Lamsang block, Kanto, Khurkhul, Sekmai and from Lamphel block, Thangmeiband, Iroisemba and Sagolband, from Mao-Maram, Maram Bazar, Senapati town and Shajouba, from Saitu Gamphazol, Leimakhong, Motbung and Kangpokpi were selected purposively as women engaged in various types of informal livelihood activities especially vending activities and other agricultural and allied activities were present. 20 respondents were selected from each of the selected 12 villages based on random sampling method making it a total of 240 respondents. Descriptive and analytical research design was used for the study. The statistical analysis method was used to analyse the data on frequency, percentages and composite index Women Empowerment Index (WEI).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Livelihood activities of the women

From the study, some of the identified livelihood activities were vegetable vendor, fruit vendor, traditional items vendor, processed food vendor, meat vendor, fish vendor, local grocery shop, farming, livestock, fishery, weaving, embroidery, tailoring, handwoven basket vendor, banana leaf vendor and rice mill. During the study period as shown in the Table 1, it was observed that majority of the total respondents were working as vegetable vendors at 54.17 per cent, processed food items vendor at 7.08 per cent as second majority, traditional items vendor at 6.25 per cent as third majority, local grocery shop, fruit vendor and farming at 4.58 per cent each as fourth majority, livestock rearing at 3.75 per cent as fifth majority, embroidery at 3.33 per cent as sixth majority, weaving at 2.92 per cent as seventh majority, hand-woven basket vendor and fish vendor at 2.08 per cent as eighth majority, meat vendor at only 1.67 per cent as ninth majority, fish farming, tailoring and banana leaf vendor at 0.83 per cent as tenth majority and women who managed rice mill at 0.42 as least majority.

Selling vegetables was the most- practiced livelihood activity by the women in both Imphal west and Senapati at 41.67 per cent and 66.67 per cent as they believed it was the most profitable and viable economic activity in the informal sector. They also expressed the opinion that vegetables were needed daily and thus, they will get a daily income through vending of vegetables. The vegetables were obtained from the local farmers who grew vegetables or vegetable farms from whom the vendors procured at wholesale rates and then sold it at retail price directly to the consumers. Also, vegetables like tomato, onion, garlic, cucumber, cabbage, cauliflower and some other vegetables were also imported from states like Assam and West Bengal as the state production could not fulfill the needs of the population especially during the off-season.

The findings are in alignment with Akhter and Kamraju (2023), who stated that the women vendors were classified on the basis of food, vegetables, fruits, electronic

gadgets, children s toys, flower, broom sticks, vessels, crockery, chairs, beads, ornaments, fish and poultry activities.

Jayanti *et al.* (2023) reported the job profile wise women work shared in rural Manipur for the year 2020 and was observed in their study a categorical analysis as 37.57%, 45.65% and 33.37% for high job profile, mid-job profile and low job profile respectively.

Devi *et al.* (2024) also found that feed processing, handloom and handicraft, integrated farming, piggery farming and poultry farming were some of the high-income generating activities in the districts of Imphal west and Imphal east in Manipur.

#### Extent of empowerment of the women

The findings (Table 2) revealed that majority i.e 97.50 per cent of the respondents fell in the medium level of women empowerment followed by 2.50 per cent of the respondents fell in the high level of women empowerment and lastly none of the respondents fell in the low level of women empowerment. The Table also highlighted that the index scores of women empowerments for the pooled population was 0.62, for Imphal west was 0.63 and for Senapati was 0.61 which indicated that the women respondents were empowered to a desirable level but there was room for improvement. Additionally, the range of the WEI score was also highlighted in the Table as 0.54-0.73 for Imphal west district, 0.52-0.68 for Senapati district and 0.52-0.73 for the pooled population.

This indicates that the women respondents in the state were empowered at moderate level. The study also revealed that the women respondents in the valley area were a little more empowered than their counterparts in the hilly areas. The credit certainly goes to the existence of 500

years-old Ema market and the women in the Imphal valley enjoy privileges such as bigger markets and more working hours as it was a city and not so secluded. The women in Imphal west also got certain privileges as exposure to women-market culture since time immemorial and had been engaged in vending service thereby earning a livelihood. However, the women in Senapati did not lag far behind with the establishment of permanent market sheds, they were provided with better market opportunities and areas to explore various livelihood activities. It can be concluded that the women through their income generating activities were able to earn and contribute in their household expenditure which provided them an avenue to express their opinions allowing them to participate in the decision-making.

The findings are in line with that of Ayemi *et al.* (2025) where it was revealed that majority (81.67%) of the respondents were economically empowered falling under the medium category followed by 16.67 per cent of the respondents were highly empowered while only 1.67 per cent of the respondents were empowered upto low level.

Arambam (2021) stated that women in Manipur have a rich legacy of being empowered in the sense of being active in productive economic activities from ancient times and for active participation in collective action against social injustices. They also took part in decision-making in the household, but at the same time they were not in major decision-making positions in society and they did not play a powerful role as leaders and decision makers.

Menon *et al.* (2020) revealed in her study in Bangalore that working women were highly empowered concerning work, home, and freedom of choice or movement and their total empowerment was better than women who were not working.

**Table 1. Distribution of the respondents according to livelihood activities**

Occupation	Districts	Frequency	Percentage
Vegetable vendor	Imphal west	50	41.67
	Senapati	80	66.67
	Pooled	130	54.17
Fruit vendor	Imphal west	8	6.67
	Senapati	3	2.50
	Pooled	11	4.58
Traditional wear/items vendor	Imphal west	10	8.33
	Senapati	5	4.17
	Pooled	15	6.25
Processed/readymade food items vendor	Imphal west	9	7.50
	Senapati	8	6.67
	Pooled	17	7.08
Meat vendor	Imphal west	0	0.00
	Senapati	4	3.33
	Pooled	4	1.67
Fish vendor	Imphal west	5	4.17
	Senapati	0	0.00
	Pooled	5	2.08

Local Grocery shop	<i>Imphal west</i>	6	5.00
	<i>Senapati</i>	5	4.17
	Pooled	11	4.58
Farming	<i>Imphal west</i>	5	4.17
	<i>Senapati</i>	6	5.00
	Pooled	11	4.58
Livestock	<i>Imphal west</i>	5	4.17
	<i>Senapati</i>	4	3.33
	Pooled	9	3.75
Fish farming	<i>Imphal west</i>	2	1.67
	<i>Senapati</i>	0	0.00
	Pooled	2	0.83
Weaving	<i>Imphal west</i>	5	5.83
	<i>Senapati</i>	0	0.00
	Pooled	7	2.92
Embroidery	<i>Imphal west</i>	8	6.67
	<i>Senapati</i>	0	0.00
	Pooled	8	3.33
Tailoring	<i>Imphal west</i>	2	1.67
	<i>Senapati</i>	0	0.00
	Pooled	2	0.83
Hand-woven basket vendor	<i>Imphal west</i>	0	0.00
	<i>Senapati</i>	5	4.17
	Pooled	5	2.08
Banana leaf vendor	<i>Imphal west</i>	2	1.67
	<i>Senapati</i>	0	0.00
	Pooled	2	0.83
Rice Mill	<i>Imphal west</i>	1	0.83
	<i>Senapati</i>	0	0.00
	Pooled	1	0.42

**Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to level of women empowerment**

Districts	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Standard deviation	Extent of women empowerment	Range
Imphal west	Low (0.00-0.33)	0	0.00			
	Medium (0.34-0.70)	<b>114</b>	<b>95.00</b>	0.04	0.63	0.54 – 0.73
	High (0.71–1.00)	6	5.00			
Senapati	Low (0.00 - 0.33)	0	0.00			
	Medium (0.34-0.70)	<b>120</b>	<b>100.00</b>	0.04	0.61	0.52 – 0.68
	High (0.71–1.00)	0	0.00			
<b>Pooled</b>	Low (0.00 - 0.33)	0	0.00			
	Medium (0.34 - 0.70)	<b>234</b>	<b>97.50</b>	0.04	0.62	0.52 – 0.73
	High (0.70–1.00)	6	2.50			

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