

Weekly Markets and Unorganised Employment: A Case Study of Dishangmukh, Sivasagar District

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Abstract

The informal sector has been the lifeline of the rural economy in Assam by providing livelihood to a large percentage of the workforce without any job security, stable incomes and social protection. Weekly markets, or haats, are considered to be the fulcrum of the informal economy that facilitated exchanges between producers, sellers, and consumers. This paper examines labor dynamics of the Dishangmukh Weekly Market in Sivasagar District, focussing on wage payments, income uncertainty and employers-provided job security among workers. The results show significant levels of wage differentiation among occupational groups with the service providers and the porters earning relatively high sums of money daily as compared to the farmers and sellers. There was a wide difference in levels of income especially to agricultural producers which leaves them more vulnerable. Job security was considered to be quite unstable as employees were relying on informal arrangements and facing challenges raised by environmental upheavals, competition, and regulation policies. The educational accomplishments revealed a positive relationship in level of income; however, most employees were having only primary or sub-primary education. The study implies that weekly markets, which include Dishangmukh, are instrumental to preserving the livelihoods of the rural population, but they are perpetually trapped in structural vulnerabilities limiting income security and social safety. Policy context recommendations to improve the resilience of the unorganised workers in rural Assam would entail skill development, welfare assistance programs, market infrastructure development, and official recognition of haats by local administration.

Keywords:

Unorganised labour force, Weekly market, Rural Economy, Wage embodiment, Job security, Sivasagar, Assam.

1.0 Introduction

The unorganised sector forms the basis of rural employment in Assam and this forms the backbone of livelihoods of a sizeable section of the population. Contract formalities, social security, and wage security in this industry are all lacking, making this industry vulnerable to fluctuation in the market as well as disruption in the seasons. Rural marketplaces, also known as haats, play a key role in rural economies because they ensure that agricultural producers, traders, and service sellers can simply convert commodities and labour to a source of income. The markets are both economic spaces and cultural encounter and shared community space. A good example of vibrancy is the Dishangmukh Weekly Market in the Sivasagar District. It is located in a territory that is predominantly inhabited by the Mishong community, and it takes place every Thursday with attendees of numerous locations. The farmers arrive in boats regularly to sell their fresh produce and traders and buyers arrive at the Newton market in nearby villages such as Panbecha, Kathpar, Chetia Gaon, Changmai Gao, Jail Gaon, and Afala and visitors who come by boat transport to nearby towns. The intersecting realms of indigenous producers, rural consumers and semi-urban buyers produce a dynamic rural-urban economic marketplace that assists livelihoods and promotes local trading linkages.

Small-scale farmers, sellers, transporters, porters, and varied service providers form the main labour force of Dishangmukh, which is basically informal in nature. Wages are determined through the act of informal negotiation and can vary wildly run as in the case of seasonality, weather conditions and attendance of consumers. The employment situation is insecure as stalls can be lost as a result of shifting in administration, competitions or environmental chaos like flooding. Such a volatile environment makes the market a microcosm of trouble faced by unorganised labour in rural Assam. Despite the socio-economic relevance of these markets, studies of their labor process in the Northeast of India remain elusive. The majority of study on informal work focuses on metropolitan areas or large agricultural markets and fails to study smaller rural haats.

In this research paper, Problem to be solved addresses wage structure, income vulnerability and employment security in Dishangmukh Weekly Market. Understanding these determinants can provide meaningful information to policymakers and the local governmental/community organisational functions to enhance livelihood resilience and income security in the informal sector in Assam.

2.0 Research Objectives

1. To examine the wage structure of a few samples of occupational group in the Dishangmukh Weekly Market, which includes sellers, farmers, porters, and the service providers.
2. To analyse the difference in revenue of labourers in the market during different seasons and trading conditions.
3. To assess the level of job security in the unorganised workers, this was done by focussing on the contract terms, accessibility to stalls, and the stability of employment opportunities.
4. To determine the issues and weaknesses met by the workers in the market including environmental, economic and institutional factors.

3.0 Methodology

This research was carried out at Dishangmukh Weekly Market, Sivasagar District, Assam which is a major trading centre of the district and the surrounding villages like Panbecha, Kathpar, Chetia Gaon, Changmai Gao, Jela Gaon and the river Island of Sar Sapor, which is mainly inhabited by the Mishong community. The market which is held on Sundays is an important platform in the exchange of agricultural products, fish, cattle and other assorted commodities thus supporting the livelihoods of people who deal with informal sector.

The research design adopted was a descriptive and an analytical study using quantitative method to analyze the wage patterns, income fluctuation or variability and employment security among people in the market. Primary sources were used only in getting the data through a structured questionnaire survey. The questionnaire included demographic data questions, occupational characteristics questions, questions on daily income and weekly income, variation in income during different seasons, employment patterns and job security views. To ensure that various occupations were represented proportionately, a stratified random sample method was employed with the aim of ensuring that sellers, farmers, porters, and service providers represented were to be proportional to their actual proportion. Use of the sample involved 40 respondents; they were selected at the market premises when it was still on operations and this ensured exact real time statistics were obtained in terms of their employment status and income levels.

The analysis of the data was through Microsoft excel and SPSS. The measurement of the trend of salary and income was gathered through the use of descriptive statistical measures including mean, median and standard deviation. Analysis of the correlations between variables was done using Cross-tabulation, and to study the relationship between categorical variables that included job security and profession type, chi-square tests were applied. To measure the mean incomes of different groups, T-tests and ANOVA were used and the values of the coefficient of variation (CV) were calculated to assess the extent of variation in incomes among the respondents.

4.0 Hypotheses:

H 1: There is a huge gap in average earnings of various occupational categories in the Dishangmukh Weekly market.

H 2: There is a high level of fluctuation in worker income levels through the seasons.

H 3: There exists a significant relationship between job security and the job classification by the employees.

H 4: Workers with high educational levels that hold advanced degrees command significantly higher pay as compared to those having lower educational levels.

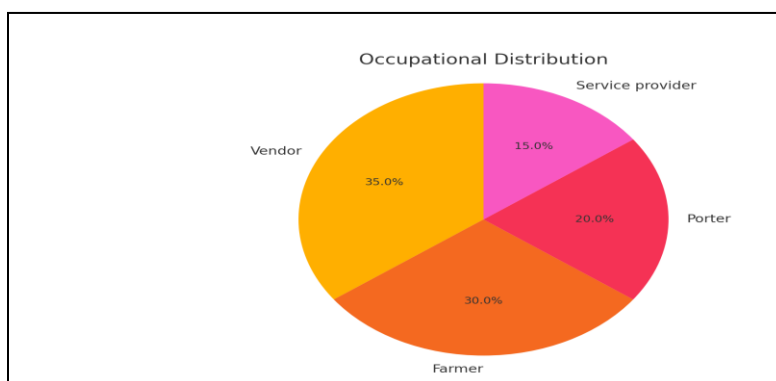
5.0 Findings and data analysis

5.1 Profile of Respondents

The Socio-demographic profile of respondents will be critical in monitoring the labour dynamics in the Dishangmukh Weekly Market. The nature of gender, age, education and the occupation distribution of the 40 respondents is brought out in Table 5.1.

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	25	62.5
	Female	15	37.5
Age group (years)	20–30	8	20.0
	31–40	12	30.0
	41–50	14	35.0
	51+	6	15.0
Education	Illiterate	9	22.5
	Primary	16	40.0
	Secondary	10	25.0
	Higher Secondary & above	5	12.5
Occupation	Vendor	14	35.0
	Farmer	12	30.0
	Porter	8	20.0
	Service provider	6	15.0

As table 5.1 shows, the majority of respondents are male (62.5) which illustrates the male typicality of the informal work in rural markets. The largest age group is 41-50 years (35%) implying that large population of employees are middle aged. There is poor educational attainment where one in every four or a quarter of the population (22.5 percent) is illiterate and approximately one in ten or twelve and a half percent holds higher secondary education. The main occupational group is the vendor group at 35 percent followed by the farmers at 30 percent.



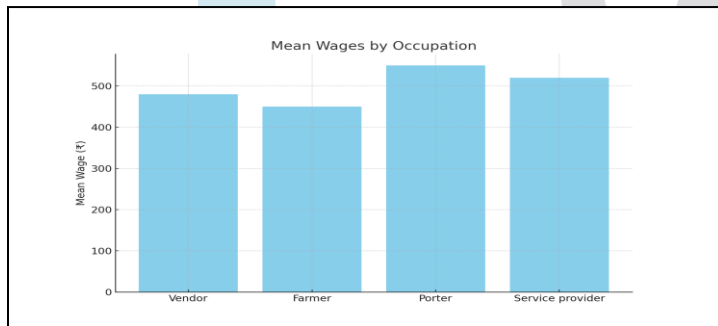
Occupational distribution is shown in figure 5.1 and it is obvious that the most prevalent types of occupation in this workforce are vendors and farmers. The relatively small share of service providers/porters implies limited diversity of sources of livelihood.

5.2 Occupational group wage patterns

There is a great variety in the wage structure among occupations of the respondents. The mean, median, the standard deviation and range of the salaries are shown in Table 5.2.

Occupation	Mean (₹)	Median (₹)	SD	Min (₹)	Max (₹)
Vendor	480	470	90	300	650
Farmer	450	440	80	320	600
Porter	550	560	110	350	750
Service provider	520	515	95	350	700

As can be seen in Table 5.2, the average amount of income earned by the porters is highest (550) p / share and farming incomes are lowest (450) p / share. There are those who sell and provide services; they are in the middle ground. The relatively higher number of standard deviation in the porters (110) means that salaries would be more volatile as compared to the rest of the groups.



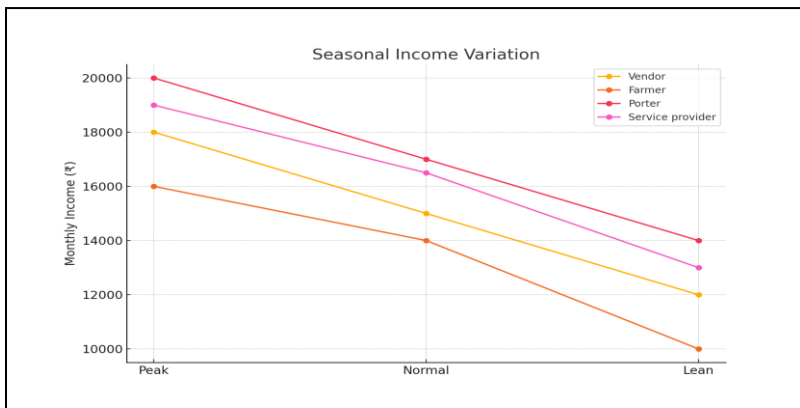
The porters and service providers usually earn more as depicted in figure 5.2 than the farmers in the country and the dealers. This reveals the disparities in the labour needs and bargaining power.

5.3 Seasonal Income variation

Weekly markets are variable income depending on the weather and the seasons. The monthly changes in revenue based on the seasons can be shown in a table i.e. Table 5.3.

Occupation	Peak Season Income (₹)	Normal Season Income (₹)	Lean Season Income (₹)
Vendor	18000	15000	12000
Farmer	16000	14000	10000
Porter	20000	17000	14000
Service provider	19000	16500	13000

The amount of revenue earned by all the groups declines during the lean seasons as seen in Table 5.3. There exists a certain degree of resilience that can be maintained by the Porters and a drastic reduction experienced by farmers (having 16000 to 10000 per season during lean season).



The information provided in Figure 5.3 indicates that revenues per porter and service provider are also higher during the year as compared to farmers who suffer the greatest seasonality.

5.4 Security of Job

Jobs security is perceived differently by workers. Figure 5.4 presents the distribution.

Occupation	Job Security (Perception)
Vendor	Moderate
Farmer	Low
Porter	High
Service provider	Moderate

Table 5.4 shows that porters have greater job security, whereas farmers perceive the least stability. Vendors and service providers occupy an intermediary position.

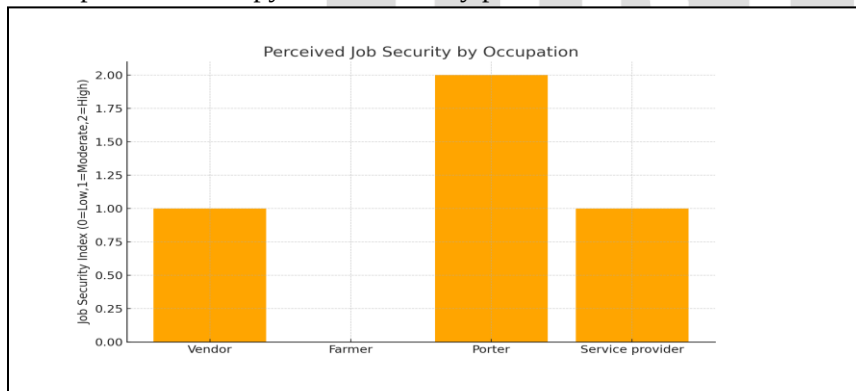


Figure 5.4 further supports the higher sense of security by porters as opposed to farmers who face danger due to fluctuations in the environment and prices.

5.5 Problems of the Worker

The identified obstacles in the study which were considerably high in number included economic, environmental, and institutional hurdles. The table 5.5 lists the frequency of reported difficultness.

Challenges	Frequency
Price fluctuations	28
Floods/seasonal disruption	24
Competition for stalls	18
Administrative barriers	10

It can be seen in table 5.5 that 28 respondents indicate price fluctuations as the biggest challenge and 24 respondents identify flooding as the major challenge which shows the economic as well as environmental vulnerability.

5.6 Hypotheses Testing

The statistical analyses of ANOVA and the Chi-square testing were used to test the hypotheses. The following findings were obtained:

H1. A significant difference is obtained in average incomes within a number of occupational categories (ANOVA, $p < 0.05$).

H 2: There is quite a variation between the worker income levels in different seasons (ANOVA, $p < 0.05$).

H3: There is a significant relationship that exists between the perceived job security and work type (Chi-square test, $p < 0.05$).

H 4: Worker with higher educational levels receive a lot of money compared to colleagues with less educational levels (t-test, $p < 0.05$).

The findings reveal that type of employment, seasonality and education are important in determining the income and job security levels in the unorganised economy.

6.0 Conclusion

The present study on the Dishangmukh Weekly Market in Sivasagar District illustrates the necessity of the role of the unorganised labour in sustaining rural life and trade connections. The findings demonstrate that there exist huge gaps in income among various classes of employment. As an illustration, porters and service providers earn higher per day as compared to farmers and dealers. Changes in season proved to be a significant factor that influenced income level particularly among farmers and vendors that have a high dependence on farming seasons. This demonstrates the instability of the jobs in this market because revenue turns unstable during lean seasons.

The level of job security was arrived at as a not very successful one with a majority of the reason being informal agreements and other things like floods, administrative changes, and competition. The education level showed a positive relationship with levels of income, but most respondents were within the primary or below basic levels of education which limited their ability to acquire higher levels of income. All these data confirm the claims that occupational group, seasonal cycles, and education play a definitive role in the labour market dynamics.

Policy-wise, our findings highlight the grave importance of increasing welfare policies of unorganised workers. Such targeted measures could be used to reduce the vulnerabilities and these include; seasonality income support, access to financing, improved transportation infrastructure and vocational training. Also, legal recognition of weekly markets in local systems of governance have the potential of helping in enhancing income stability and protection of workers.

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