

Socio Economic Impact of Weekly Markets: An Assessment of Farmers in Garo Hills of Meghalaya



Sunildro L.S. Akoijam

Abstract: *The weekly markets in Garo Hills of Meghalaya have been a source of livelihood for thousands of farmers. These markets have also been the main source for availing all basic commodities for survival of thousands of villagers who don't have access to the normal markets for daily essential commodities. But it is observed that farmers who are directly engaged in these weekly markets for ages are not growing economically as well as socially significantly. This paper is an attempt to understand the role of weekly markets in the lives of farmers of thousands villages who are directly engaged in the market for their source of income for livelihood. The paper analyses the socio-economic impacts of the rural weekly markets in the lives of farmers in Garo Hills of Meghalaya. Data was collected through a semi structured schedule from 35 weekly markets operating in Garo Hills. Altogether 175 farmers (5 from each market) who sell their agricultural produce directly in these markets are considered for the study. The study found out that the farmers are able to improve their economic status through it but not significant enough to save for buying extra assets. The average monthly income of the farmers and their economic status is increasing with the years in weekly market. Through the market, farmers get to interact more with others sellers as well as customers. They have become more active in market related activities helping each other in the event of problematic situation and they are receiving more moral supports from others including sellers and customers.*

Keywords: *Farmers, Garo Hills, livelihood, socio-economic impact, weekly markets*

I. INTRODUCTION

Market has been playing a great role in developing the socio-economy of the rural farmers all over the World. Weekly markets are those markets held once a week. In weekly markets, mainly the farmers are seen selling their produces on a particular day in a week as they don't have enough products to sell in the market every day. The weekly

markets of Garo Hills of Meghalaya state in India have a history since pre-colonial times. Weekly markets which are also known as Hats believed to be existed since 10th AD (Kar, 2018.p174). The main agricultural crops grown by Garos were cotton, chilly, jute, mustard, etc. And most of these crops were grown through jhum cultivation method. The surplus products were traded with the Bengal traders through barter system along the foot hills of border areas. Initially, the trade was long distance trade and later the zamindars of respective estates pitched a string of open air as weekly markets until the colonial rulers took control and supervised the markets. Since then, the weekly markets of Garo hills have been thriving mostly in rural areas by providing social and economic importance (Kar, 2013.p62). Socially, these markets served as a meeting ground for all ages and gender other than business transactions of merchants and traders. And economically, these markets have been a place for exchanging the farmers produce with basic necessities of their live such as clothing, iron tools and implements, conventional necessities like tobacco, fowls, cows and bulls ceremonial purpose and for social necessities.

According to census 2011, the population of Meghalaya is 29.67 Lakhs with an area of 22,429 Sq. Km. The state economy is basically agrarian with 81% dependents (both rural and urban) on agriculture and allied activities. The state economy and agricultural growth is also far behind from national averages. Further, the net cropped area is only about 9.87% of the total geographical area of the state. This may be due to constraints such as the undulating topography, transport and communication problem, population dispersal pattern, inadequate credit support, poor marketing system etc. (Department of Agriculture, Government of Meghalaya). The rural population of Meghalaya as per census 2011 is 79.93%. However, the rural population in Garo Hills is 88.41% which is remarkably higher than state average. Rice and Maize are the major food crops. These crops have been the traditional cash crops of Garo Hills. Besides these two, the state is renowned for its horticultural crops like Orange, Pineapple, Lemon, Guava, Litchi, Jackfruit and Bananas; and fruits such as Plum, Pear and Peach. The major vegetable crops grown in the State are Cauliflower, Cabbage, Knol-Khol, Peas, Beans, Tomato, Carrot, Radish, Turnip, Beetroot, Lettuce, Brinjal, Lady's finger, Cucumber, Pumpkin, Squash, Chow-Chow, Gourds and a wide range of other leafy vegetables.

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* Correspondence Author

Dr Sunildro L.S. Akoijam*, Department of Management, North-Eastern Hill University, Tura Campus, Tura, Meghalaya, India. Email: sunil.mba.amity@gmail.com

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As per the information from the Office of Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, Government of Meghalaya, the Garo Hills region has 175 markets. Out of these, 147 markets are held once a week as weekly markets and rests are held more than 2 days a week. That means the farmers and other market participants are less interacted and transacted in terms of business. Moreover, these weekly markets are an age-old market with a history since 10th AD (Kar, 2018,p174).

In this regard, the researchers aim to study the importance of weekly markets in the region, how this age old traditional market supporting the economy of the farmers for their livelihood and how the markets are raising the living standards of the farmers. This paper analyses the economic impacts of the rural weekly markets towards the farmers' live. Moreover it attempts to study the social benefits received by the farmers from these rural weekly markets.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND OF STUDY

A. Periodic markets

Markets which are not held daily and held less than the week days are often termed as periodic market by various researchers. Periodic markets are a type of public space where a large collection of people are present despite of their different ethnic and age groups interact. They have long history since ancient time and are a type of market that both rural people and urban people exchanged goods. Actually, they are places for the activity of various individuals who are involved in the market with different purposes, including economic, social and cultural dimensions (Afsar Keshmiri, 1993). Periodic markets like weekly markets are usually held on both sides of a route passing through, in a space used by commuters or sometimes inside a square. They don't have an architectural space, even though in some cases, they are traditionally held in open or temporary shaded spaces using light and cheap materials so that goods are protected against sunlight or rainfall.

Socially and economically, participation and social activities of individuals in periodic markets are different in terms of market organization and population of sellers and buyers in comparison with other markets. They also differ in terms of the type of activity, in which they have a smaller number and of local scale but the relationships are warmer and closer to one another (Sommer, Herrick, & Sommer, 1981). Periodic markets are a socioeconomic venue for numerous villagers and city dwellers. In these markets, both men and women participate in trade, and in some regions where industrial products are important, most often representative of the industry themselves (Khosravi, 1979).

B. Weekly Markets

The weekly market is direct marketing centre for farmers, in which they sell agricultural produce to consumers (Saran & Gupta, 2003). It is characterized by relatively low priced goods and services, poor infrastructure facilities, undefined stalls, lack of store house, absence of credit in transaction and poor transport and communication medium (Deka & Bhagbati, 2010). The market site is located within the area which is produced by intersection of the locality. Generally

the site of a market place is situated at most favourable site both for sellers and buyers in terms of accessibility and connectivity the grid intersection of roads and corridors are most probable site for location of market places. In such place a market can be held periodically that may be daily, weekly, biweekly, monthly and so on (Mukharjee,1970). They are usually for direct sales of small quantities of produce by farmers to village traders and rural consumers (Sinha & Pardhan, 2009). But it caters to all requirements and needs of village people by acting as the centripetal centres for collection of small marketable surpluses of the farmers and as centrifugal centres in terms of providing grocery and allied consumer articles apart from agricultural inputs to the producer seller (Rao & Rajgopal, 2001). It becomes a main center for exchange of common goods and services in both the sub-urban as well as countryside all over the world (Roy & Basu, 2010).

Rural consumers on the other hand has considered price as most important factor and they have low purchasing power as compared to urban consumers (Sayulu & Reddy, 1998). Therefore, consumers in the rural weekly market often seek information (Kulkarani & Murali, 1996). Sarkar, Banik & Dattagupta (2014) found that the rural weekly markets can be credited to exert an indirect impact on the productivity by acting as centres of social gatherings, which happen seldom in rural areas. Even though, the markets being a force of social dissolution, any new trading practices or free market policies have not weakened community relations among the small farmer neighbors and kin. Rather the spatial and temporal patterning of rural weekly market has served to strengthen intra-community bonds (Perry, 2000). The weekly market also provides numerous platforms for community gatherings and showcasing the specialties of such various communities of nearby regions travelling beyond their home zones (Kashyap & Raut, 2006). Similarly, the Garos of Meghalaya also procure articles such as cow, bulls and poultry from weekly market which are required for ceremonials and social gatherings (Kar, 2018).

C. Farmer's market and its impacts

The farmer's market has many potential benefits as it provides fresh organic foods at affordable prices through direct marketing by avoiding intermediaries. It also helps the consumers in supporting local farmer producers thereby vitalizing the rural economies (Trobe, 2008). It allows rural individual entrepreneurs and their families in providing goods and services that are not readily available through formal and mass markets to the rural masses which support the local economic life and it also bring producers and consumers together enhancing the bonds of local identity and solidarity (Lyson, Gillespie & Hilchey, 1995). Participants support farmer's market to bring down the ecological costs of food production and to sustain the livelihoods of individuals ethically. Individuals relinquish their lucrative business in order to participate in organic farming or to sell at a low-income market are considered regard (Alkon, 2008).

The survey conducted by Conner, Colasanti, Ross & Smalley (2010) in Michigan’s found high participation in farmers markets, driven in part by demand for high quality locally grown foods, and constrained by lack of convenience. The participants bought locally grown foods identifying as a significant constraint to greater sales. The research emphasized the difficult tradeoffs between attributes associated with all purchases against those more closely associated with local food and farmers markets.

The attributes varied among the demographic groups and appeared to affect consumer participation in the markets. Goyal (2010) evidenced the importance of information in increasing the efficiency of rural markets and claimed potential benefits from direct interaction between farmer producers and processors in Indian context.

In many parts of the world, forest products are an income source of rural farmers. But it is highly affected to this income source in many different ways when the ecological restoration and resource development programs are taken up (Liu, Lu & Yin, 2010). However, such development programs are very important for sustainable eco-system. The incomes of farmers can be enhanced with systematic and strategic use of fertilizer such as “micro-dosing” and inventory credit system other than using the recommended application (Tabo, Bationo, Gerard, Ndjeunga, Marchal, Amadou, & Diallo, 2007). Contract farming is also can be considered as another income improvement strategies for the rural farmers. It overcomes the financial barriers often face by poor farmers and idiosyncratic market failures that occurred frequently among the farmers community (Wainaina, Okello, & Nzuma, 2012). A study on farmers’ income by Olawepo (2010) in Nigeria found that besides being the area a lucrative place for farm business, the production is often delayed by poor credit facilities and the ruthless circle of poverty affected the farmers negatively.

III. METHODS

The source of information of the weekly markets is Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC). As per the official record of GHADC, a total of 175 markets are currently operating in Garo Hills of Meghalaya and serving as a medium of commodity transaction among thousands of villages. Out of this total, 147 markets are operating on weekly basis which is known as weekly markets. The present study selected 35 weekly markets, 7 (seven) markets each from 5 (five) districts namely West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills, South West Garo Hills, North Garo Hills and South Garo Hills. The basis for selection of market was settlement amount allocated in the year 2017-2018 to the market. Those markets which allocated with a minimum of 1 (one) lakh rupees were selected. From each of these weekly markets, 5 farmers were randomly picked for the survey and they were interviewed face-to-face based on the schedule prepared for data collection. A total of 175 (5*35) respondents were interviewed. The respondents are farmer producers who participate in the weekly markets regularly throughout the year or seasonally. The responses are recorded using closed ended answers along with five points likert scale however; few data are collected using open ended questions. For the

analysis of data, statistical tools like mean, standard deviation, percentage, one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov t-test and one way ANOVA test are used.

IV. RESULTS

Table 1: Profile of the markets for the study:

Sl. No.	District	Name of the Market	Market Day
1	East Garo Hills	Rongsakgre	Tuesday
2		Doburunggittim	Thursday
3		Mangsang Bamil	Wednesday
4		Nangapa	Monday
5		Songsak A'gitok	Tuesday
6		Samanda	Monday
7		Nogolpara	Monday
8	North Garo Hills	Gabil	Wednesday
9		Kharkutta	Saturday
10		Rari	Thursday
11		Bajengdoba	Wednesday
12		Gokolgre	Friday
13		Sakware A'dokgre	Saturday
14		Thapa	Wednesday
15	South Garo Hills	Chokpat	Tuesday
16		Silkigre	Thursday
17		Sibbari	Thursday
18		Gasuapara	Wednesday
19		Dalu Dimapara	Monday
20		Siju	Friday
21		Rongara	Tuesday
22	South West Garo Hills	Damalgre	Thursday
23		Melim	Monday
24		New Garobadha	Tuesday
25		Gopinathkila	Monday
26		Jarang Purakhasia	Tuesday
27		Katuli	Monday
28		Kalaichar	Thursday
29	West Garo Hills	Phulbari	Monday
30		Kalchenggre	Thursday
31		Gambegre	Thursday
32		Chengapara	Thursday
33		Kherapara	Wednesday
34		Babadam	Monday
35		Jengjal	Thursday

The respondent farmers are travelling from a minimum distance of half kms to 14 kms to reach the nearest market places. However, average distance is computed approximately as 2 and half kms with standard deviation of 2.7 kms

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Distance from village to market	175	0.5	14.0	2.626	2.7805

* N= Sample population of farmers.

The data are checked using one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov t-test. It is found normal, uniform, Poisson and exponentially distributed with significant values of 0.000. This value is acceptable for necessary analysis. To start with analysis, a preliminary analysis is done to find the frequencies of each data set.



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The maximum farmer respondents are in the weekly markets for more than 6 years (92%) and the rest are experiencing a minimum of 2 years. Among them 61% are participating only in one weekly market and remaining are participating in other weekly markets as well. Total of 164 which is 93% of the respondents are seasonal participants.

88% are selling only what they produced and rests are dealing with other than what they produced. This means some farmers are interested in trading for more profit. However, 50% of these farmers are earning Rs 5000 to Rs 8000 monthly as income from the weekly markets and 17% above Rs 8000 a month. With this, 81% of them are growing their business even though 72% of them are claiming weekly markets not a significant profitable business. The family economic status of 64% is improving but 70% of farmers claim that they are not able to increase their properties.

The markets are not only meant for transaction of goods and commodities but it is also a place where people interact, communicate and create relationships among the market participants as a transaction of social life enhancing the bonds of local identity and solidarity (Lyson, Gillespie & Hilchey, 1995). The farmers are well assisted by their family members in the market (62%) and are highly interactive with other people (62%). Also they make friends with other sellers (99%) as well as make numbers of friends with other customers (86% makes more than 5 numbers of friends). However, they don't receive much moral supports from the markets (below normal) and information sharing is also on an average (above normal). Although, the farmers' involvement in market related activities is high (71%), only few of them involved as a member of market association (4.6%). Moreover, they helped each other on the event of problems in the market (64%) and also they invited each other for social occasions (friends from market).

From the above preliminary analyses, certain results need to be verified in terms of significance. Hence, in order to explore the impact of years in the market on average monthly income, one-way ANOVA between-groups was conducted. Respondents were divided into three different groups according to their years of selling commodities in weekly market (Group of 2-4 years; Group of 4 to 6yrs and Group of above 6yrs). There was a statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level for the three groups: $F(2, 172) = 4.317$, $p = 0.015$ (Figure A).

Using these same groups, one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of years in the market on economic status. Statistical significant difference is found at $p < 0.05$ for the three groups: $F(2, 172) = 3.787$, $p = 0.025$ (Figure B).

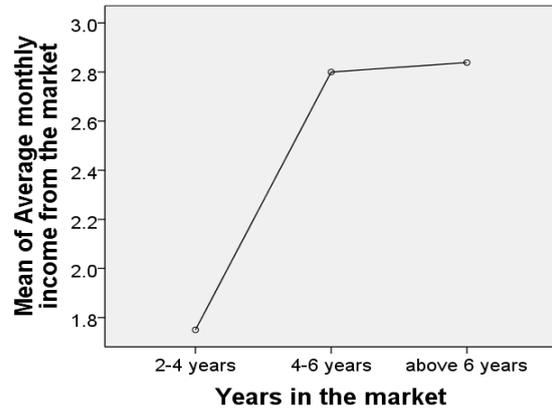


Figure A: Average monthly income over the years in market.

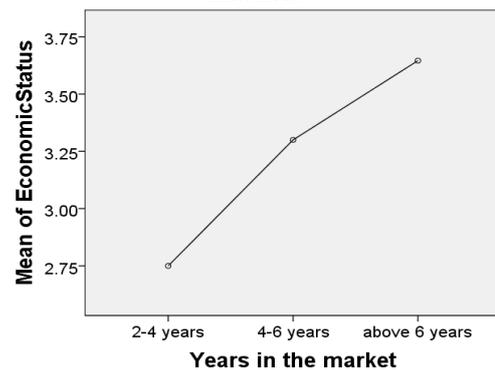


Figure B: Economic status of the farmers over the years in the market.

The monthly income of the respondents is group into 4 different groups (Less than Rs 2000, Rs 2000 to 5000, Rs 5000 to 8000 and Rs 8000 & above. One-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of average income on economic status. There is statistical significant difference at $p < 0.05$ level for the four groups: $F(3, 171) = 23.209$, $p = 0.00$ (Figure C).

Again, the respondents were divided into two groups according to their participants in weekly market (Group of Throughout the year; Group of Seasonal) to explore the impact of participant frequency on average monthly income. There is no statistical significant difference at $p < 0.05$ level for the two groups: $F(1, 173) = 0.75$, $p = 0.39$ (Figure D).

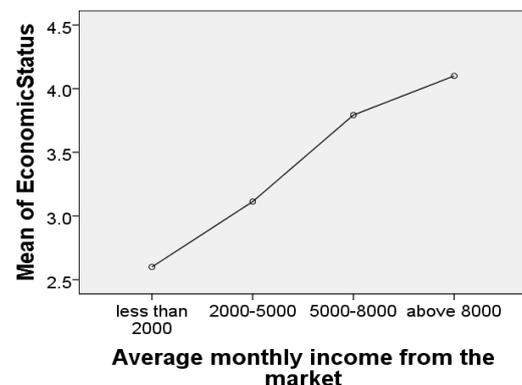


Figure C: Economic status of the farmers vs. average monthly income from the market.

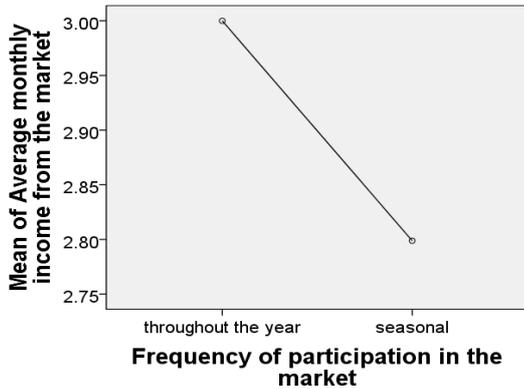


Figure D: Average monthly income with the participation in the market.

Using the same groups, the impact of years in the market on level of information sharing was explored with one-way ANOVA. Whereas, there is no statistical significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ for the three groups: $F(2,172) = 0.309$, $p = 0.735$ (Figure E).

Using the same groups again, the impact of years in the market on moral support received from market was explored with one-way ANOVA. However, there is no statistical significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ for the three groups: $F(2,172) = 0.282$, $p = 0.755$ (Figure F).

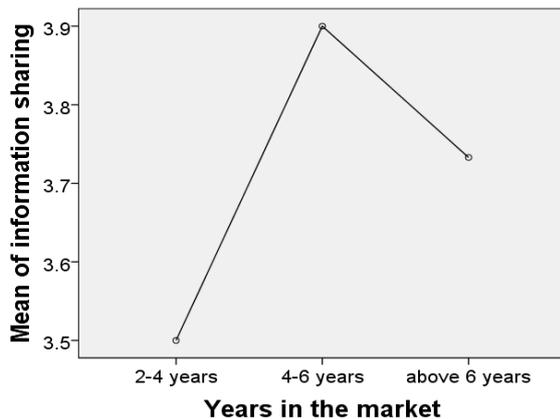


Figure E: Level of information sharing over the years in the market.

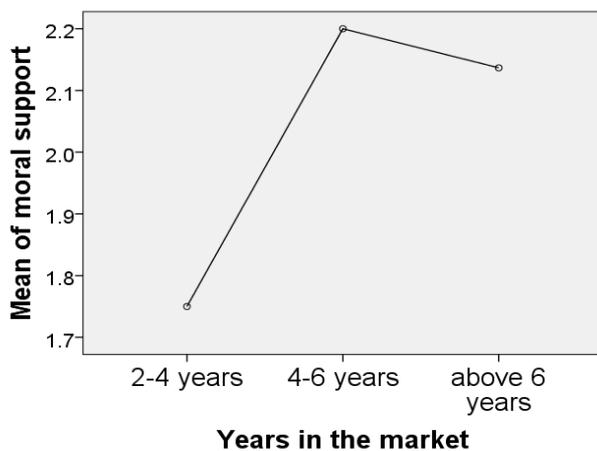


Figure F: Level of moral support received over the years in the market.

On the basis of making friends with customers, the respondents are divided into two groups (Less than 5 and

More than 5) and impact of customer friends on moral support was explored using One-way ANOVA. There is statistical significant difference at $p < 0.05$ level for the two groups: $F(1, 173) = 12.28$, $p = 0.001$ (Figure G).

Using these same groups, the impact of customer friends on level of information sharing was explored with one-way ANOVA. There is statistical significant difference at $p < 0.05$ level for the two groups: $F(1, 173) = 36.68$, $p = 0.000$ (Figure H).

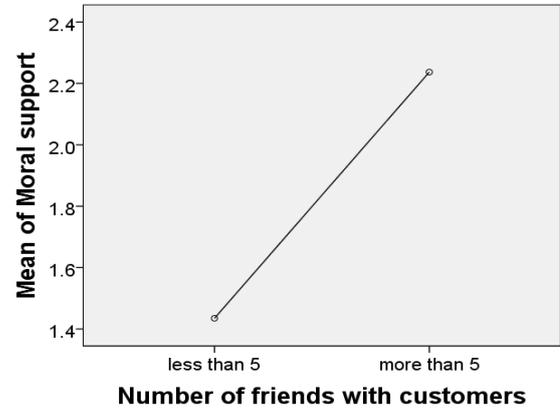


Figure G: Level of moral support with the number of friends (Customers).

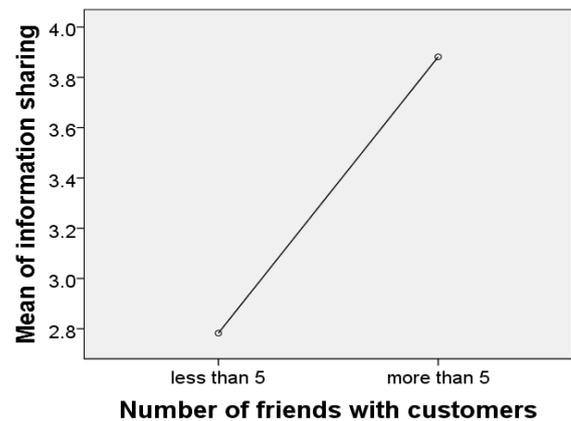


Figure H: Level of information sharing with the number of friends (Customers).

On the basis of the interaction with people in the market, respondent farmers are divided into three groups (Low, Neutral and High) and the impact of interaction on moral support is explored with the help of one-way ANOVA. There is statistical significant difference at $p < 0.05$ level for the three groups: $F(2, 172) = 4.37$, $p = 0.014$ (Figure I).

The same groups are used for impact of interaction on information sharing. Statistical significant difference is found at $p < 0.05$ level for the three groups: $F(2, 172) = 22.73$, $p = 0.000$ (Figure J).

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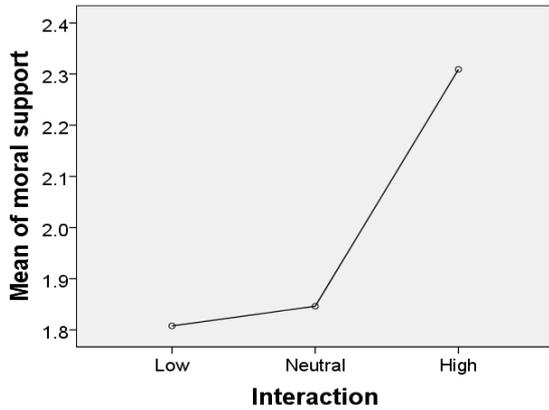


Figure I: Level of moral support received with the level of interaction in the market.

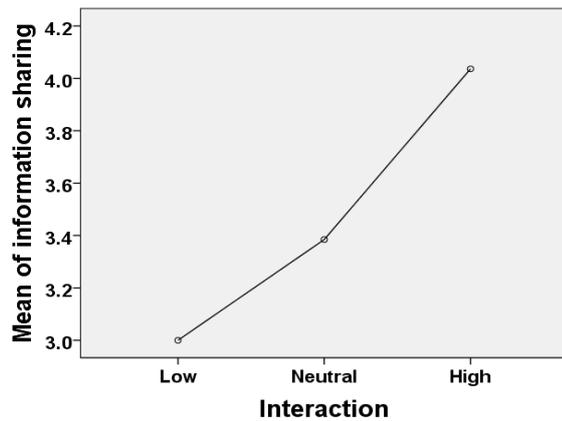


Figure J: Level of information sharing with the level of interaction in the market

V. DISCUSSION

The farmers travel a minimum distance of half a km to a maximum of 14 (fourteen) kms from the respective weekly markets with an average distance of 2.6 kms. Most of them have an experience of weekly markets more than 6 (six) years and they also participate other nearby weekly markets but seasonally, which means their produce are mostly seasonal. However, some farmers are interested in dealing with others produce for extra profit. Although weekly markets business of the farmers is growing, they claimed it not significantly profitable. The farmers are able to improve their economic status through it but they are not able to save for buying extra assets. With the increase in the number of years in the market, the average income of the framers from the weekly market is also increased. But after experiencing a certain years, the monthly income becomes stable. On the other hand, the economic status of the farmers improves over the years in the market. Their economic status increases with the increase in their income. The monthly income is affected by the frequency of the participation. Those who have active market participation throughout the years are getting more income from those who participate seasonally. The weekly market farmers have become highly interactive with other people and make friends with other sellers and customers as well. The level of information sharing as well as moral support increases up to a certain period i.e. up to a of maximum 6 (six) years and decreases gradually in both the

cases. However, the level of information sharing and moral support increases with increase of number of friends they made with customers in the market. Their interaction in the market also helps them in getting moral support and better information sharing. Also, they have become more active in market related activities helping each other in the event of problematic situation.

VI. CONCLUSION

The weekly markets in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya being a market place since pre-colonial period is a traditional market for the Garo people and people from neighbouring states. The farmers mostly participate in the market seasonally as they depend upon the seasonal vegetables and fruits and other agricultural produce. Even if they cannot acquire extra assets from the profit, their economic status is improving. Probably they spend the money in children education and medical purposes. Like others, the farmers are socialising themselves in the market with other market participants, sharing information and giving moral supports. The weekly markets continue to serve as a source of income for livelihood and a platform for socializing among the market participants through the market activities. The farmers and the particular market have common scenarios as other market does. However, questions can be raised as to why there is a slight decline in performances like income, moral support, information sharing, etc. of few markets over the years of participation in the market. Also, questions can be asked on the relationship between other market elements and the mentioned elements. This could be the future research implications of the study.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



Dr. Sunildro L.S. Akoijam is currently working as an Assistant Professor in the area of Marketing and Strategy at the Department of Management, North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU, A Central University), Tura Campus, Tura, Meghalaya (India). He has more than 8 years of teaching experience at University level. He has presented research papers and

case studies in various international and national seminars and conferences. He has also participated in various workshops, symposiums, Faculty Development Programmes, short term certificate courses and academic related activities organized by premier management institutes in different parts of the country and abroad. He has visited foreign countries like South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Mauritius, Indonesia and Myanmar for various academic programmes. His research papers have been published in various refereed international and national journals. He has also organized various academic events like seminars, conferences, workshops, training courses, symposium, management fest etc. He is a member of esteemed management associations like All India Management Association (AIMA), Rural Marketing Association of India (RMAI), Delhi Management Association (DMA), International Society for Development & Sustainability, Japan, The Society for Management Education, Kurukshetra etc. He is associated as a reviewer and editorial board member with various International Journals like International Journal of Social Economics, Tourism Review (both Emerald Publication, UK), Standard International Journals, Coimbatore, Journal of Reviews on Global Economics, Canada, International Journal of Management and Development Studies etc. He has published seven books in various fields of management. Currently four research scholars are pursuing PhD under his supervision.