



Final Baseline Assessment Report of 'Mein Pragati Assam' Programme

CRISIL Foundation

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List of acronyms

APL	Above Poverty Line
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CAPI	Computer Aided Personal Interview
CFL	Centre for Financial Literacy
CI	Confidence Interval
CIF	Community Investment Fund
CRP	Community Resource Person
CSP	Customer Service Point
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DFL	Disease Free Laying
FD	Fixed Deposit
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
FPO	Farmer Producer Organisation
FY	Financial Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GP	Gram Panchayat
HH	Household
IDI	In-Depth Interview
INR	Indian National Rupee
MPA	Mein Pragati Assam
NFHS	National Family and Health Survey
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NRLM	National Rural Livelihood Mission
OBC	Other Backward Caste
PHH	Priority Household
PMJAY	Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana
PMJJBY	Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana
PMSBY	Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana
PW	Price Waterhouse
PWCALLP	Price Waterhouse Chartered Accountants Limited Liability Partnership
RD	Recurring Deposit
RF	Revolving Fund
RGVN	Rashtriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi
SC	Scheduled Caste
SeSTA	Seven Sisters Development Agency
SHG	Self Help Group
SRLM	State Rural Livelihood Mission
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UT	Union Territory
VO	Village Organisation

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1. Executive summary

CRISIL Foundation was set-up in 2013 to steer the CSR commitments of CRISIL Limited. In 2014, CRISIL Foundation launched the Mein Pragati Programme in Assam to help marginalised rural women gain greater control on their finances, create awareness about the fundamentals of personal finance and empower them to take independent and informed financial decisions. Till 2022, the Mein Pragati Assam (MPA) programme was being implemented in 6 districts of Assam and now, CRISIL Foundation plans to expand the MPA into 22 new blocks in 12 districts.

CRISIL Foundation has engaged PWCALLP to undertake baseline and endline assessment of the MPA programme. As part of this assessment, the prevailing situation of the beneficiaries and the associated stakeholders (Resource Persons/ Sakhis) will be studied at two separate timeframes. The **phase 1: baseline assessment study** was planned to be conducted from March onwards to evaluate the project requirements from the community in the new intervention areas of Assam and provide recommendations at the initial stages of the project. Accordingly, this baseline assessment study report is prepared to map the current situation of the local communities in Assam and record the baseline indicators from the perspective of evaluating the project requirements from the community. The **phase 2: endline assessment study** will be done in December 2024 to observe the impact of the programme on the beneficiaries by measuring the difference in their conditions between the baseline and the endline.

For conducting the baseline assessment study, a mixed methodology combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies was adopted. Quantitative research was used to capture the value of the selected indicators (identified and finalized in consultation with CRISIL Foundation) whereas qualitative research helped in validating the quantitative findings and understand the rationale and reasoning behind them. The team selected a sample of **11 blocks from 6 districts for the study (50% of the total coverage)** in consultation with CRISIL Foundation team. In total, **909 respondents were interviewed** as a part of quantitative research. Team also carried out **47 qualitative interactions** with the key project stakeholders identified in discussion with CRISIL Foundation.

The following were the key findings from the baseline study:

Profile of the respondents- key highlights:

- Though the MPA programme focuses on empowering the women in the rural areas of Assam, the study took holistic approach by including the male respondents as well to gauge their perception towards the financial literacy and empowerment. Out of 909 respondents, **77% respondents are female** whereas the rest 23% respondents were male.
- Majority of the respondents (65%) are between the age group of 26-45 years.
- An average household in the study area has ~2 children with almost equal gender ratio between boys and girls.
- 36% (n=909) have reported to be 8th pass while another 21% have reported being completing matriculation. Only 14% of the respondents have completed higher secondary and 4% sharing of being graduates. 17% of the total respondents reported of not receiving any education. The highest illiteracy rate was observed in Dhubri district with 42% of the respondents (n=166) reporting to have not received any education whereas the lowest illiteracy is reported in Majuli district with only 1% (n=166) having received no education.
- 71% of the respondents follows Hinduism as their religion while 28% of the respondents follows Islam (n=909).

- Majority of the respondents (38%, n=909) represents OBC social category while 37% of them are from general category.

Socio-economic conditions- key highlights:

- 66% of the respondents (n=909) reported that they own either Antodaya or BPL (Priority Households) ration card. As per the Government, Antodaya and BPL cards are allocated to households with less than 1 lakh of annual income^{1&2}.
- Majority of the respondents i.e. 85% of the total respondents (n=909) mentioned that their households have a male member as the chief bread winner.
- 71% of the women respondents (n=697) reported that their primary occupation is homemaker and they don't generally get engaged in livelihood activities of the household.
- 49% have reported non-farm labour as one of their income sources whereas 46% of the respondents reported that agriculture and allied activities (including dairy, poultry, piggy, fishery, etc.):
 - The dependence on non-farm labour is high in Udalguri (81%), Dhubri (71%), Karbi Anglong East (66%), and Nagaon (52%). It is to be noted that non-farm labour includes daily wage labour work in construction sites, warehouses, loading-unloading, etc.
 - Agriculture and allied activities see the highest involvement in Majuli with 92% reporting it as one of their major income sources.
- Out of 909 respondents, 77% have reported of not having any secondary income sources available to them.
- 71% of the total respondents (n=909) reported that they own land. Land ownership is low in Tinsukia, Dhubri, and Udalguri districts. Tinsukia is a district with large number of tea gardens and since, they are provided accommodation by the tea estates, most of them don't own any land. Similarly, Dhubri and Udalguri districts have high prevalence of non-farm labour which implies that many of the respondents in these districts don't own any land.
- 12% of respondents who have reported that member(s) from their household migrate to different places in search of work. The non-availability of local employment opportunities and limited access to irrigation facilities were reported by the local communities (during FGD) as the main reasons behind people migrating in search of work.

Financial and digital literacy- key highlights:

- 98% of the 909 respondents have their own bank accounts and knows how to use them. Further, saving is an important element of household financial management. Hence, it was important to understand the perception of respondents towards saving money. 68% of the total respondents (n=909) save money on regularly basis. The major reason for saving money is to meet the family needs as indicated by majority of the female and male respondents.
- Among 617 respondents (68% of the total respondents who reported to regularly save money), it was analyzed that a household saves INR 1903/- per month. Udalguri district has the lowest savings per respondent household (INR 497/- per month) followed by Karbi Anglong East (INR 869/- per month). It was noted from the FGDs that the local communities generally use this nominal savings for purchasing agricultural inputs in the next season.
- Among 617 respondents, 61% of the respondents reported that they keep their entire savings in bank accounts while 33% reported that they keep some of their savings in bank accounts and the remaining as cash at their home.

¹ <https://pds.assam.gov.in/portal/ration-card-information.html>

² <https://pmmodiyojana.in/antyodaya-anna-yojana/>

- 51% respondents confirmed that they are aware about various financial services such as fixed and recurring deposits. Further, only 50% respondents reported that they have opted for social security services such as life/ health insurance.
- The number of respondents who have reported of visiting an ATM to withdraw cash is also very low. Only 35% of the total respondents (n=909) reported that they have visited an ATM.
- 42% (n=909) have reported taking loans in the last 3 years from any available source including banks, SHG, MFIs, etc. 66% of the respondents (n = 385) have reported of taking the loan from the SHGs whereas only 27% reported of taking loans from banks whereas 15% of the respondents (n=385) have reported of taking loans from microfinance institutions. The reason behind the inclination towards taking loans from SHGs is the ease associated with getting loans from SHGs.
- It was noted that 76% of the respondents (n=697) are part of SHGs. The penetration of the SHG movement is quite high in districts such as Majuli, Tinsukia, and Nagaon districts as more than 90% of the respondents confirmed to be part of SHG in their villages.
- 73% of the respondents (n=385) have reported that they have used the loans to start or expand their existing income generating activities. However, upon analysing this data with respect to the total respondents (n=909), only 31% of respondents took loan to start/ expand an income generating activity.
- Almost all the respondents showed interest in taking more loans if it is available at low interest rates. They shared that they plan to start new business activities or expand their existing business activities.
- 76% of the respondents (n=909) reported that they know how to use a mobile phone with 67% of the respondents reported using Smartphones. However, use of internet banking including UPI/ e-wallets is low with only 20% of the total respondents (n=909) reporting of using these services.

Access to entitlements- key highlights:

- Out of 909 respondents, 16% of the respondents reported not having availed to such schemes showcasing the need of creating more awareness to ensure the accessibility to such schemes. In this regard, the major reason cited by the respondents is the accessibility of community to banks and post offices on regular basis as they reside in interior (far-flung) villages. CRISIL Foundation's project interventions may strengthen the government's efforts to reach out to such community members to create awareness around accessibility of such schemes especially scheme pertaining to the financial inclusion and social security.

Gender balance- key highlights:

- The male members take decisions on their own without consulting with the female members in 71% of the total respondent (n=909) households.
- Only in the decisions related to purchase of daily use items it was seen that a significant percentage of the respondents (42%) have reported of the involvement of women in the decision-making process. Otherwise, in most of the cases, male members play the role of decision maker.
- This difference in gender roles can be attributed to the limited involvement of women members in income generating activities.

Income and expenditure- key highlights:

- The average annual household income among 909 respondents was calculated to be INR 1,57,935/-. On further analysis of the household income-related data, Majuli reported the highest average annual household income with INR 2,64,741/- whereas the lowest was reported in the case of Karbi Anglong East with INR 1,00,419/- per annum. During the interactions, respondents highlighted that:
 - High literacy rate in Majuli along with the availability of fertile land and year around irrigation facilities are the major drivers of growth among the respondents. Agriculture is the mainstay of economy of Majuli and 92% of the respondents are dependent upon Agriculture (and allied

activities) for the livelihood purpose. Since this is a river island, it has suitable natural conditions of agriculture as the soil and climate are quite suitable for cultivation³.

- Karbi Anglong East being a district with high forest cover of 76%⁴, low connectivity, and minimal irrigation, its people have limited opportunities for income with high dependence on non-farm labour (as discussed in figure 19).
 - Nagaon and Dhubri districts are among the top districts with higher population concentration in Assam.⁵ The high population density in Dhubri and Nagaon are among the important elements (along with annual floods) which are leading to the low land ownership (Patrick H. Kavanagh, 2021) in the respective districts, thereby creating challenges for the local community pertaining to the income generation activities.
 - Tinsukia and Udalguri both have high percentage of respondents who are dependent on labour (both farm and non-farm). The low ceiling of income associated with hired labour along with unavailability of work through the year significantly affects the income earning capacity of the respondents in these two districts.
- The majority of the respondents reported 'Food' as one of their top 3 monthly expenditure heads. Healthcare (77%), Utilities including rent, electricity, gas, etc. (76%), and education of children (71%) are also considered by many households as one of their major expenditure heads.

Perception towards supporting services- key highlights:

- 83% reported that it would be very beneficial if someone from their locality starts providing help around getting loans, insurance, schematic benefits, etc. 51% of the respondents expressed that they are willing to pay towards availing such services. The reasons behind their willingness were:
 - Many of them have to go to the Customer Service Points (CSP) which are generally located at the block level and thus, there is the cost of transportation in addition to the fee that needs to be paid at the CSP for applying for any scheme/ service.
 - The extension workers (SRLM CRPs, Bank Mitras, Bima Sakhis, and Business Correspondent) in many places are not active and hence, the community members don't have this option available to them. As understood from the discussions with SRLM CRPs and other Sakhis, they face several challenges while discharging their duties and due to those challenges (discussed in section 4.7), many of the CRPs/ Sakhis are unable to serve all the households in their working areas.
 - A large number of people are dependent on the local internet shops for applying for these schemes/ services who also charges around Rs. 100-200/- per application. **Respondents have reported that if they can get these services at a similar price without having to go to the internet shops, that it would be beneficial to them.** Additionally, they shared that one more positive of someone known to them providing these services is that there won't be any risk of misusing their personal information.

For detailed findings and project level recommendations, please refer to the respective sections in this report. Further, this report details the background of the study, the methodology adopted and project key findings from the study. This report also entails broad level recommendations for the management's consideration.

³ Organic Farming in Majuli under cluster approach: https://agri-horti.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf_utility_folder/departments/agriculture_medhassu_in_oid_3/menu/right_menu/right_menu/dpr_of_majuli_organic_hub.pdf

⁴ Assam State Biodiversity Board https://asbb.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf_utility_folder/departments/asbb_lipl_in_oid_7/portlet/level_2/Booklet_%20Karbi%20Anglong.pdf

⁵ About Assam: <https://assam.gov.in/about-us/393>

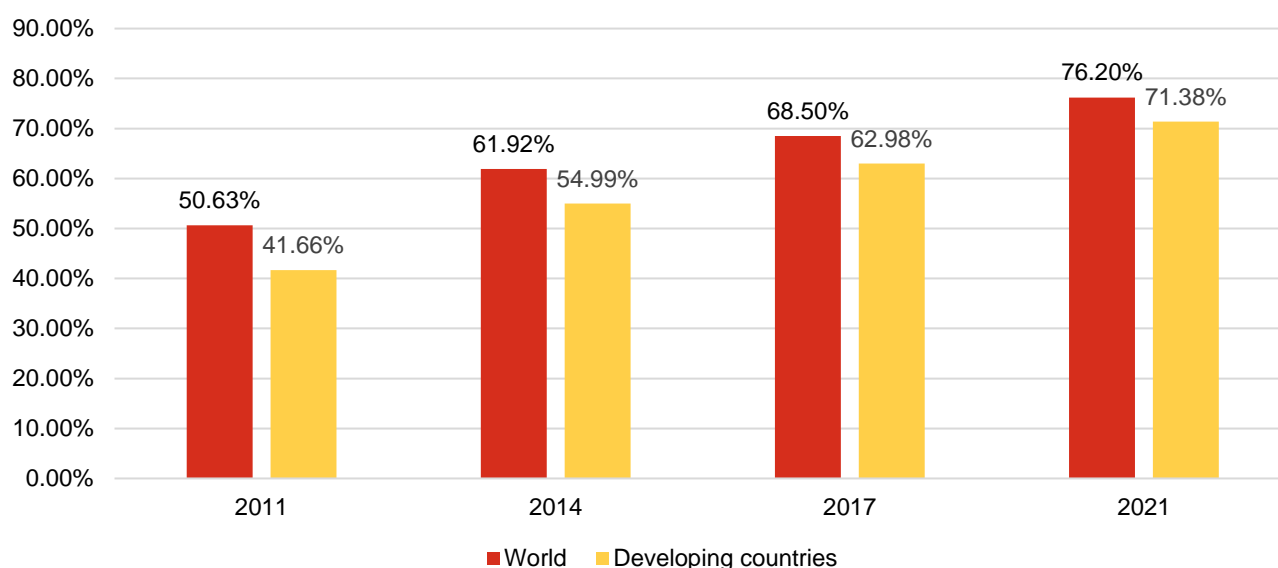
2. Introduction and background

2.1. Setting the context

Financial literacy is the ability to understand and use financial information for making informed decisions about money. It is an important aspect of financial inclusion, which is the access and use of formal financial services by the poor and marginalized sections of the population. Both **financial literacy and financial inclusion** are important **cornerstones of social development** and have been recognized as essential ingredients for the **financial empowerment of individuals** and the overall stability of the financial system.

Having an account in a regulated financial institution allows people to safely store, withdraw, invest, and transfer money in addition to accessing various financial and social security services rolled out by government and other stakeholders. It is pertinent to note that financial inclusion is accelerated by more adults having a bank account than before. The **Global Findex Database 2021 on Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the age of COVID-19 by the World Bank Group**⁶ highlights that bank account ownership is increasing at the rapid pace at the global level. In 2021, **76% of the adults had an account at a bank or any regulated institution which increased from just 51% in 2011 at the global level**. The developing countries are also not lagging behind this growth and due to various governmental/ non-governmental measures, the average rate of **adults having bank accounts in developing countries have increased from 42% to 71%**⁷. This surge has been largely due to the countries like **China and India**, where most of the new bank accounts are opened⁸.

Figure 1: Adults with a bank account (%), 2011- 2021



Despite promising growth in account ownership, **Education, work employment and gender diversity** are among the barriers to financial inclusion. **Employment is one of the primary reasons** for not having a bank account. Global Findex Database 2021 revealed that 77% of working adults at the global level have an account as compared to the just 65% without a job with one bank account.

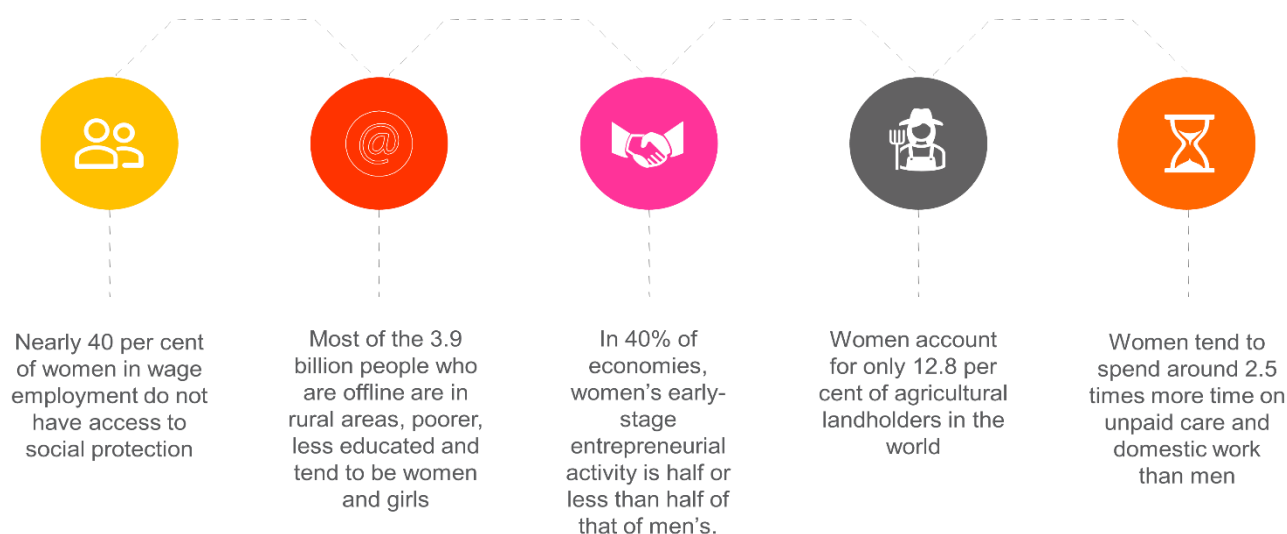
⁶ Demirgüç-Kunt, Asli, Leora Klapper, Dorothe Singer, and Saniya Ansar. 2022. The Global Findex Database 2021: Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1897-4 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/globalfindex/Report>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

Gender diversity is also another major factor here as **55% of the unbanked population worldwide are female**. The gender finance gap has been narrowing in recent years, but it is evident that **women have been excluded from the financial system disproportionately** in the past. Gender gaps also affect both developing and developed economies and women in all regions. UN Women also specified the **women economic empowerment** as the need of hour and is central to realizing women's rights and gender equality as⁹:

Figure 2: Gender disparity across the globe



Hence, it will be critical to enhance the **financial capabilities of women** by **creating more awareness and linking them to financial institutions**. This would **reduce gender and economic disparities** and allow women to **gain financial independence and enable economic empowerment**.

Lastly, **education** is one of important barriers in financial inclusion as adults with a primary education (or less) were less likely to have a bank account. These adults are more likely to fall in fraud as the victim as they are financially inexperienced users and lacks awareness on using financial services. **~2/3 of unbanked adults** were using the bank account with someone's help. **Women are 5% more likely** to need someone's help using their bank account than men signifying the requirement of undertaking measures around financial empowerment of adults especially women as indicated by the Global Findex Database 2021.

In India, although various measures have been taken by government and other key stakeholders **to bridge the prevailing gender gaps**, there still exists large scale disparities with respect to gender especially, around financial literacy. As per National Family Health Survey - 5 (NFHS-5)¹⁰, Almost half of the women in India (49%) mentioned that they alone **can't decide how to use their money**. Although **79% of the adult women in India have their own bank account, only 51% are aware about microcredit sources available to them (SHG/ MFI/ NBFC)**. Furthermore, only **11% of the women** have ever taken a microcredit loan. This gap in financial empowerment have been contributing to various social issues. In India, only **43% of the women owns a house/ land (alone or jointly) and 29% of them face domestic violence from spouse**. Hence, in order to address with these gender-based inequalities, empowering the women by creating financial awareness and ensuring financial inclusion will be essential.

The Reserve Bank of India has taken several measures to improve financial literacy and inclusion among the public. Through its bank networks and business correspondents, this central bank has been conducting various awareness generation measures to reach out to underserved communities. Despite the increased momentum in opening of bank accounts due to these measures, access to credit was restricted to only 20 crore borrowers

⁹ UN Women: Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>)

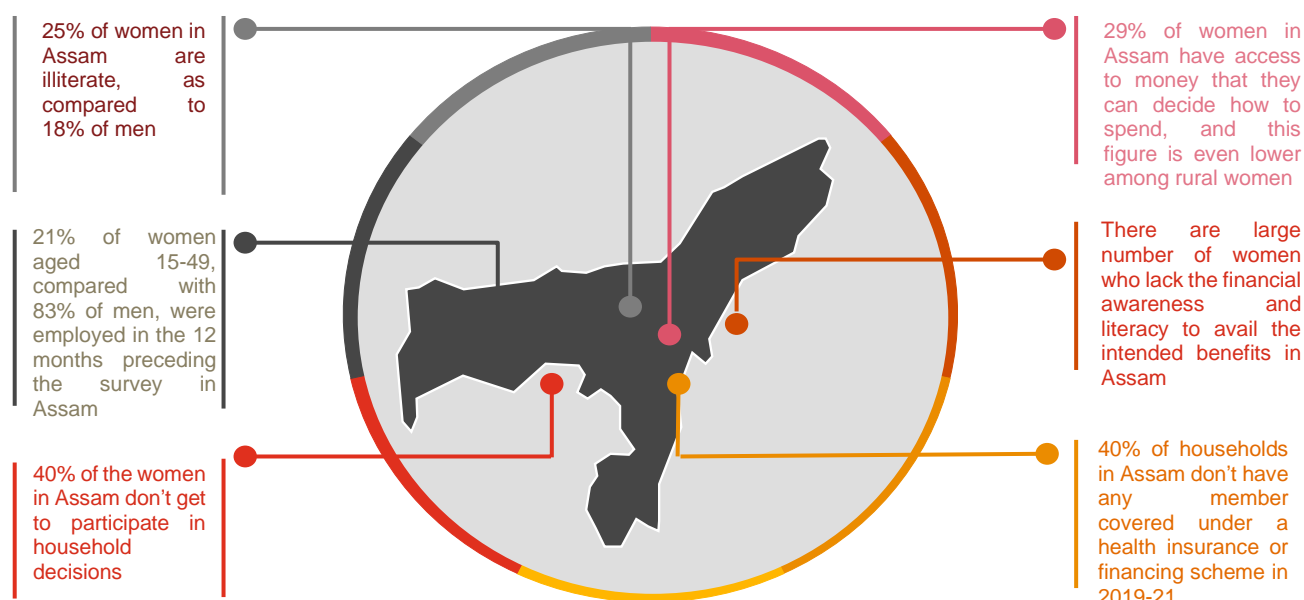
¹⁰ NFHS-5 (http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5_FCTS/India.pdf)

within the country¹¹. The extent of financial inclusion also varies from region to region within the country. As per the **CRISIL Inclusix report 2018**, the **north-east region of India** attained the **lowest score with respect to financial inclusion**. **Assam**, which is the most populous state of the region, stood at **27th out of 34 (including states and UTs) in the CRISIL Inclusix ranking**. The financial infrastructure in Assam is still evolving. In 2019, there were 2924 bank branches in Assam. However, the spread is still significantly below the national average. In Assam, there are **~37 bank branches on average per 1000 sq. km.** while in India, there are **~44 bank branches on average per 1000 sq. km.** Additionally, the population per bank branch has been significantly declined from 22,130 to 11,893 in Assam and 15,289 to 9,468 in India¹².

According to the NFHS - 5, **78% of women aged 15-49 years in Assam had a bank or savings account that they themselves used in 2019-21**. This shows that there is still a significant part of the population who don't have a bank account. To make growth inclusive for all sections of the society, initiatives have been taken by the Government of Assam to make banking and other financial services easily accessible. Through various government and non-governmental interventions, a total of **2.20 crores beneficiaries have been covered under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)**¹³, focused on providing affordable financial services such as bank account, credit, insurance, pension, etc.

However, the **challenge pertaining to the gender inequality across Assam is hindering the development of rural areas due to the lack of quality of education, employment opportunities for women, social barriers and attitude of society towards women empowerment**. As per **NFHS-5 by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India**^{14,15,16}:

Figure 3: Landscape of financial empowerment of women in Assam



Further, households with any usual member covered under a health insurance or financing scheme is an indicator of health coverage and access to health care in Assam. Health insurance or financing schemes include government schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima

¹¹ CRISIL Inclusix report 2018 - <https://www.crisil.com/content/dam/crisil/our-analysis/reports/Research/documents/2018/march/crisil-inclusix-financial-inclusion-surges-driven-by-Jan-Dhan-yojana.pdf>

¹² (Maity & Sahu, 2022) <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/XJM-09-2020-0118/full/pdf?title=financial-inclusion-in-north-eastern-region-an-investigation-in-the-state-of-assam>

¹³ Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana website- <https://pmjdy.gov.in/statewise-statistics->

¹⁴ NFHS-5, 2019-20- https://main.mohfw.gov.in/sites/default/files/NFHS-5_Phase-I.pdf

¹⁵ Assam, NFHS-5, 2019-21, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

¹⁶ NFHS-5 https://nhm.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf_utility_folder/departments/nhm_lipl_in_oid_6/menu/document/factsheet_as.pdf

Yojana (PMSBY), Ayushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), and state-specific schemes, as well as private or employer-provided schemes. **Although the Government has rolled out many social security schemes, many people are yet to get linked to these schemes due to either lack of awareness or lack of access.**

Besides, as per the **Niti Aayog's report on National Multidimensional Index¹⁷** at the national, state/ UT and district level revealed that **an estimated 19.35% of Assam's population live in multidimensional poverty and face deprivation from adequate health & nutrition.** The percentage of population categorised as multidimensionally poor in Assam has decreased significantly from 32.65% in 2015-16 to 19.35% in 2023. However, there is still a lot of scope for improvement as the state ranks 6th in the country in terms of highest percentage of population living in multidimensional poverty. It further shows the extent of vulnerability existing among the state's population and in such a situation, access to institutional credit facilities becomes essential to keep the communities from falling into the trap of poverty.





Although the state has a rich deposit of natural resources (alluvial soil, minerals, oil and gas, forest cover, etc.), it is still one of the most underdeveloped states in India. The **net state GDP per capita of Assam in 2017-18 was INR 74,204 which is significantly lower than the national average of INR 1,12,835¹⁸.** One of the major reasons behind the low GDP per capita is the damage created by annual floods. Being situated in Brahmaputra and Barak River valleys, large tracts of the state are prone to annual flooding. The average annual area flooded in Assam is 9.31 lakh hectares which is which is around 12% of the state's total land area. On an average, 45.86 lakh people in the state gets affected by flood annually and the state incurs losses to a tune of INR 200 crores per year. It is thus important that the local communities have access to institutionalized finance and schematic assistances of the government in order to deal with the current vulnerabilities.

Overall, there is a significant part of the population who needs support to get access to institutional credit and social security measures. Hence, **a strategic and measurable approach is required towards enhancing the capacities of rural women, building awareness on financial aspects (e.g., savings and expenses) & entitlements and enhancing the participation of women in households' decisions making.**

2.2. About Mein Pragati Assam Programme

CRISIL Foundation is the CSR arm of CRISIL Limited which works towards reaching out to socially and economically disadvantaged communities within and beyond its areas of operations. Since its inception in 2013 as the trust in 2013, CRISIL Foundation implements projects with a vision to build awareness and capacities of

Figure 4: Themes of CRISIL Foundation

	FINANCIAL INCLUSION	Empowering disadvantaged communities by creating access to institutionalized finance
	ENVIRONMENT	Funding various activities to promote conservation of environment
	DISASTER MANAGEMENT	Conducting awareness and rehabilitation activities in disaster affected areas
	ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT	Largely focuses on empowerment of women by promoting entrepreneurial activities

¹⁷ NITI Aayog Multidimensional Index, 2023- <https://niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-07/National-Multidimensional-Poverty-Index-2023-Final-17th-July.pdf>

¹⁸ Reserve Bank of India- https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/Publications/PDFs/9T_HB15092019C2D5A67270EB4543949815919E8FE72F.PDF

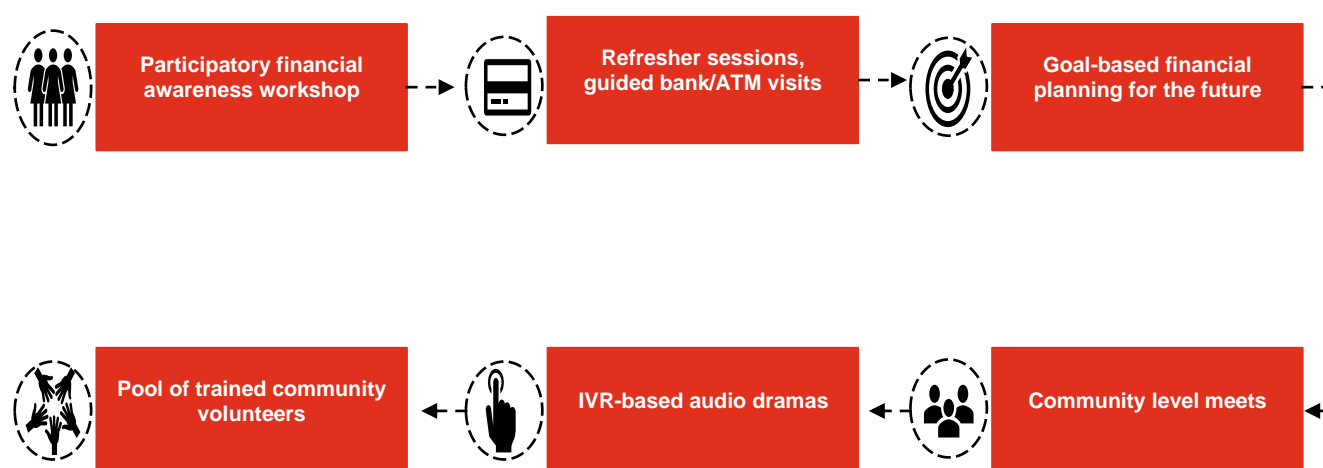
the financially excluded in India and empower people to make informed decisions. CRISIL Foundation majorly works on four themes as illustrated below¹⁹:

The Foundation has rolled out **Gram Shakti** (technology-based certification) with an aim to increase the knowledge and skill sets of Sakhis and build this cadre to enable last-mile financial inclusion. In 2017, it partnered with **RBI for implementing MoneyWise Centres for Financial Literacy (CFLs)**. CRISIL Foundation is also implementing CRISIL RE which is an environment conservation programme focusing on tree plantation and several other initiatives.

Under its thematic area of Financial Inclusion, CRISIL Foundation has established a robust scalable intervention called **“Mein Pragati” Programme to strengthen the financial capabilities of >1.2 million community members in Assam and Rajasthan**. In Assam, the programme was started as **“Mein Pragati Assam”** in 2014 to offer financial capacity building support to disadvantaged communities.

The Foundation has built an ecosystem under this programme to sustain the behavior change through a well-trained community cadre called Sakhis. The unique approach of CRISIL Foundation towards financial inclusion includes multiple touch points to reinforce behavior change with the support of front-line workers such as CRISIL Mitras, Sakhis. The Programme has been developing a skilled community cadre at the grassroots creating a multiplier effect on the ground.

Figure 5 : Multiple touchpoints to reinforce behavior change

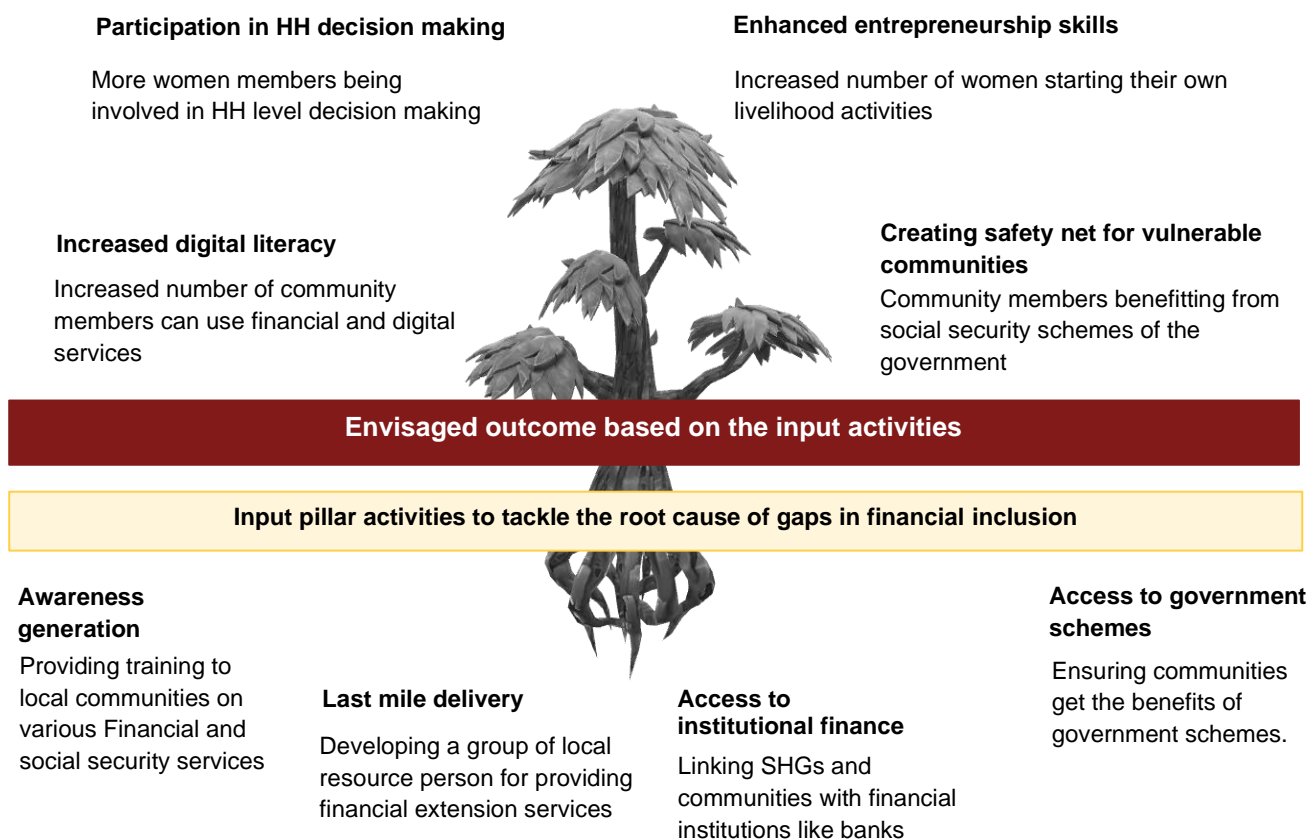


Mein Pragati Assam Programme has adopted a **unique approach to building financial capabilities, financial inclusion and driving positive financial behaviour** through a **'Hub & Spoke' model**, where 'Spokes' comprise a trained all-women community cadre known as 'Sakhis'. As a responsible corporate citizen, CRISIL Foundation's aim is to reach out to disadvantaged and excluded communities to strengthen their financial capabilities. The programme Mein Pragati Assam acts as a driver for financial empowerment and inclusion which acts a force for the marginalized households for a better quality of life.²⁰ The objective of Mein Pragati Assam is to **help marginalized rural women gain greater control on their finances, create awareness about the fundamentals of personal finance and empower them to take independent and informed financial decisions**.

Figure 6 depicts the main fundamentals of the Mein Pragati Assam programme and how the programme envisages to create impactful changes among the local communities in Assam:

¹⁹ CRISIL Foundation- <https://www.CRISIL.com/en/home/CRISIL-foundation.html>

²⁰ CRISIL Foundation - <https://www.crisil.com/crisil-foundation/Mein-Pragati-Flipbook/mobile/index.html#p=2>

Figure 6 : Pillars and Envisaged Outcome of Mein Pragati Assam

Till date, the programme has an **outreach of 10,310 Self Help Groups (SHGs) covering 103,658 women**²¹. The programme has been working with a range of stakeholders including the women community members, CRISIL Sakhis, bank officials, implementing partners, PRI members etc.

During the previous phase, the programme was implemented in **6 districts of Assam**. Based on the impact created during the previous phases of the programme, CRISIL Foundation has planned to expand the **“Mein Pragati Assam” programme into 12 new districts in Assam**. To assess the existing situation of these new interventions areas in Assam and also evaluate the impact created by the programme, CRISIL Foundation engaged PWCALLP to undertake the baseline and endline assessment. As part of this assessment, the prevailing situation of the beneficiaries and the associated stakeholders (Resource Persons/ Sakhis) will be studied at two separate timeframes. The first assessment i.e., the baseline was conducted during **March-October 2023 whereas the endline will be done in December 2024**. This would assist CRISIL Foundation to **observe the impact of the programme on the beneficiaries by measuring the difference in their conditions between the baseline and the endline**. The overall objectives of the baseline and endline assessments are as follows:

- Assess the relevance of the interventions for the new geographical locations in Assam
- Measure the baseline values of the programme indicators against which the performance of the programme shall be assessed
- Measure the impact of the interventions on the beneficiaries of the programme and the CRISIL Sakhis (through quantitative & qualitative surveys)
- Provide recommendations for course correction, improvements and optimizing the processes and suggesting way forward

²¹ CRISIL Foundation website- <https://www.CRISIL.com/en/home/CRISIL-foundation/mein-pragati/mein-pragati-our-outreach.html>

3. Approach and Methodology

3.1. Scope of the study

In order to achieve the said objectives enlisted previously, CRISIL Foundation engaged PWCALLP (PW) to carry out the baseline and endline assessment of “Mein Pragati Assam” Programme on **22 February 2023** through performing following scope of activities:

Phase - 1: Baseline assessment study (to record and establish baseline)

- Meeting with project team of CRISIL Foundation to develop a deeper understanding of the project, understand their expectations, build consensus on scope of work and assistance to be provided.
- Conduct desk review of the documentation provided by CRISIL Foundation and consultations with CRISIL Foundation's CSR team/NGO partners i.e., implementing partners of CRISIL Foundation (if any) for this project and agree with the management the parameters/ indicators to be assessed for the baseline assessment.
- Stakeholder mapping to identify key stakeholder groups to be interacted with during the assessment.
- Finalize the data collection plan including sampling criteria and representative sample for identification of the respondents of the baseline assessment in consultation with CRISIL Foundation.
- Data collection on field and through virtual interactions (as relevant) based on the questionnaires developed and consultations done.
- Based on the field visits and virtual interactions and discussions, the qualitative and quantitative information would be analysed, and assessment of outcome/ impact would be done.
- Baseline assessment report developed based on the overall findings including the recommendations for management's consideration.

Phase - 2: Endline assessment (to assess the impact of the programme)

- Understand the scope and boundary of the CSR project to be evaluated and the assistance to be provided. Conduct desk review of the documentation provided by CRISIL Foundation and consultations with CRISIL Foundation's CSR team/NGO partners i.e., implementing partners of CRISIL Foundation (if any) for this project and agree with the management the parameters to be assessed for the Impact Assessment/ end line assessment.
- Stakeholder mapping to identify key stakeholder groups to be interacted with during the assessment.
- Based on the above, develop the questionnaires (quantitative and qualitative) to be used during the assessment for conducting face to face interactions, Focus group discussions/In-depth interviews and meetings (as relevant) with the stakeholders and beneficiaries of the programme.
- Finalize the sampling criteria and representative sample for identification of the respondents of the assessment in consultation with CRISIL Foundation.
- Data collection on field and through virtual interactions (as relevant) based on the questionnaires developed and consultations done.
- Based on the field visits and virtual interactions and discussions, the qualitative and quantitative information would be analyzed, and assessment of outcome/impact would be done.
- Report developed based on the overall findings including the recommendations for management's consideration.

The current report is prepared for the first phase i.e., the baseline assessment which has been conducted to map the current situation of the local communities in Assam and record the baseline indicators. The progress made by the Mein Pragati Programme against these key indicators shall be tracked by the CRISIL Foundation team which then shall be compared to the findings in the endline assessment (to be done in December 2024) to gauge

the impact of the Mein Pragati Assam programme. The detailed methodology adopted for conducting the baseline assessment is discussed below.

3.2. Overall methodology

Team has adopted **coherent and integrated approach** to deliver the scope of work under the Phase – 1: Baseline Assessment Study of the engagement. The following **4-stage approach** ensured that baseline assessment study was carried in systematic and consultative manner:

Figure 7: Our approach for baseline study



The team organized an **inception meeting with CRISIL Foundation** team to introduce the engagement team and defined the roles and responsibilities. Discussions were also held during the meeting to align on the scope of work and expectations from this baseline study and further, **to finalize expectations, timelines, and**

deliverables. Basis the meeting, the PW team **requested documents/ information relevant for conducting baseline assessment** to develop a deeper understanding of the **Mein Pragati Assam programme**. Following documents were received from the CRISIL Foundation project team for the desk review:

- Proposals submitted by implementation partners
- Project Memo from implementation partners
- Details of project geography
- Gram Panchayat-wise distribution of CRISIL Sakhis

Post receiving the documents, the team **initiated the desk review** of project. Simultaneously, the team also initiated the **desk review of the available secondary literature** (Global Findex Report by World Bank, CRISIL Inclusix Report, NFHS-5 etc.) on the **prevailing situation of livelihoods, social and financial inclusion across the global and national level with a focus on Assam**. This helped the team with the following:

- Develop understanding of the programme details
- Mapping of stakeholders to be interacted with during the study
- Selection of study geography and finalization of sampling plan for primary research
- Strengthening our understanding on the socio-economic and demographic scenarios in the select geography
- Understand the relevance of the intervention with local problems, and national and state priorities
- Understand the coherence of the programme with other similar interventions especially government schematic assistances

Stage 2: Planning and tool preparation

Post mapping of key stakeholders in the previous phase, we finalized the study design comprising of a **mixed methodology (combining both quantitative & qualitative aspects) as per the nature of project**. Quantitative research was used to capture the value of the selected indicators whereas qualitative research helped in validating the quantitative findings and understand the rationale and reasoning behind them. The adopted sampling methodology for the baseline assessment is described below:

Sampling methodology

Quantitative study

NRLM database had been taken into consideration to arrive at the number of SHGs in Assam in consultation with CRISIL Foundation Project Team. As per NRLM database²², there are **68,978 SHGs** in the selected geography of Assam. The average number of members in a **SHG ranges from 10-25**. Taking a minimum average of **10 women per SHG**, the universe for this study came out to be around 689,780. A statistically significant sample was proposed from the above universe using a **confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 3.25%**. Basis this, **the total sample size for the baseline assessment was 909**. The sample size for quantitative was calculated using the following:

$n' = n/1 + \{[z^2 * p (1-p)]/m^2 * N\}$ where the parameters are:

- n' – sample
- z is z score depending on Confidence Interval (in this case, $CI = 95\%$ and $z = 1.96$)
- $n = z^2 * p(1-p)/m^2$

²² NRLM database- <https://nrlm.gov.in/>

- N = population size (total SHG members in the study geography, 689,780 in this case)
- m = margin of error (3.25%)
- p = population proportion (considered as 50% or 0.5)

As per the information obtained from the CRISIL Foundation team, expansion of Mein Pragati Assam is planned to be done in 22 blocks across 12 districts. **12 districts are spread** across the state covering the north and south banks of Brahmaputra, and the upper and lower parts of Assam. For conducting the quantitative study, we opted for **a cluster-based sampling methodology in consultation with CRISIL Foundation Project team** as these 12 districts can be categorized into 4 clusters based on their geography, local regional similarities, and connectivity. For the study purpose, districts and blocks were selected from all 4 clusters to ensure an appropriate geographical spread of the sample size.

Table 1: List of project districts and blocks in Assam

Cluster	District	No. of blocks	Name of the blocks
Cluster 1	Dhubri	3.	Agomoni, Golakganj, Bilashipara
	Goalpara	3	Kharmuja, Rongjuli, Lakhipur
Cluster 2	Nagaon	4	Khagorijan, Batadraba, Dolonghat, Lawkhawa
	Morigaon	1	Mairabari
	Darrang	2	Pub Mangaldoi, Dolgaon
	Udalguri	1	Koliapani
	Biswanath	1	Chakomatha
Cluster 3	Golaghat	1	South Golaghat
	Karbi Anglong	1	Bokajan
	Majuli	2	Majuli, Ujani Majuli
Cluster 4	Tinsukia	2	Guijan, Itakhuli
	Dhemaji	1	Sisiborgaon
Total	12	22	

Selection of districts and blocks

Selection of the districts was carried out on various parameters such as number of project blocks, Aspirational Districts, Tribal Districts, and the districts which were not covered under previous impact assessment studies for

MPA. Basis these parameters, we selected **6 out of the 12 districts (50% of the project districts)** during the study. The selection of these 6 districts (as indicated in Figure 8, Table 2) was carried out in a proportionate manner to ensure each of the 4 clusters are properly represented which implies that clusters having greater number of project districts were given a larger representation within the sample.

Figure 8: List of blocks selected as sample for baseline study

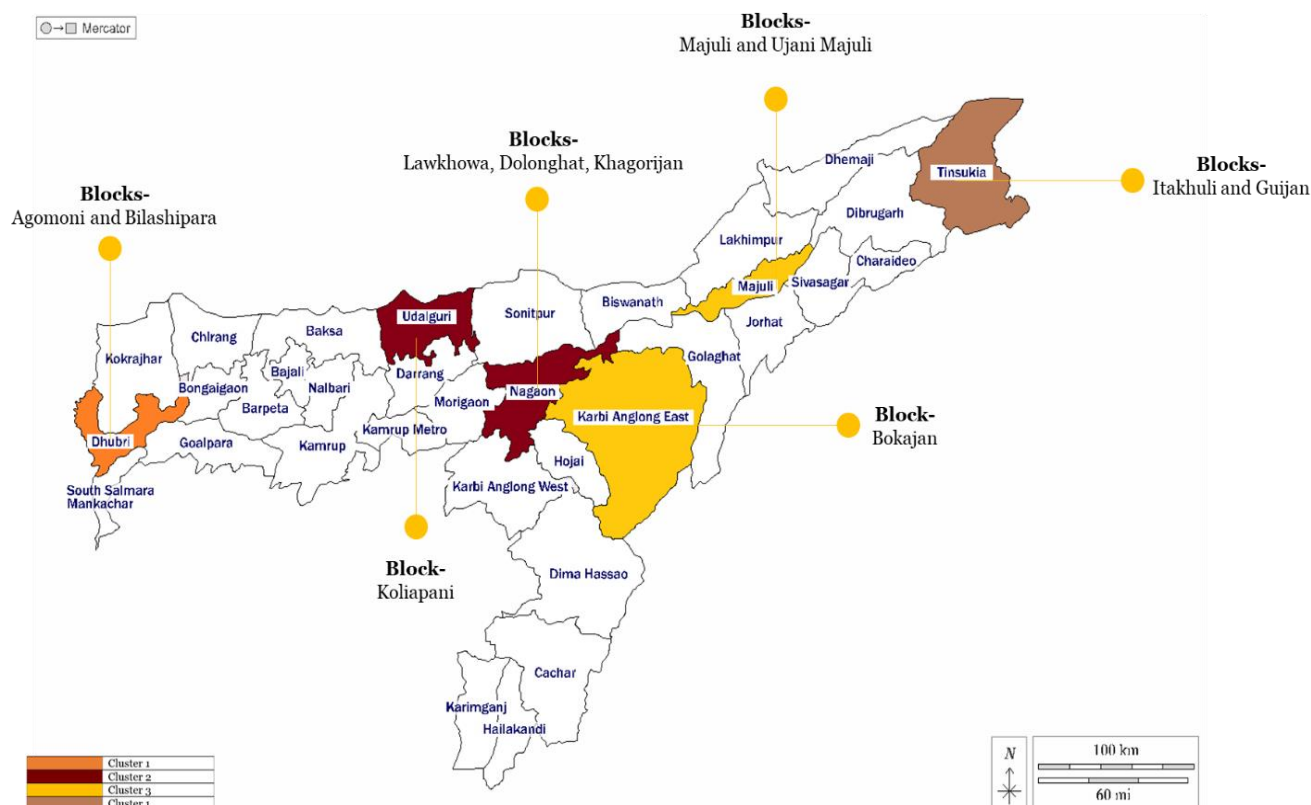
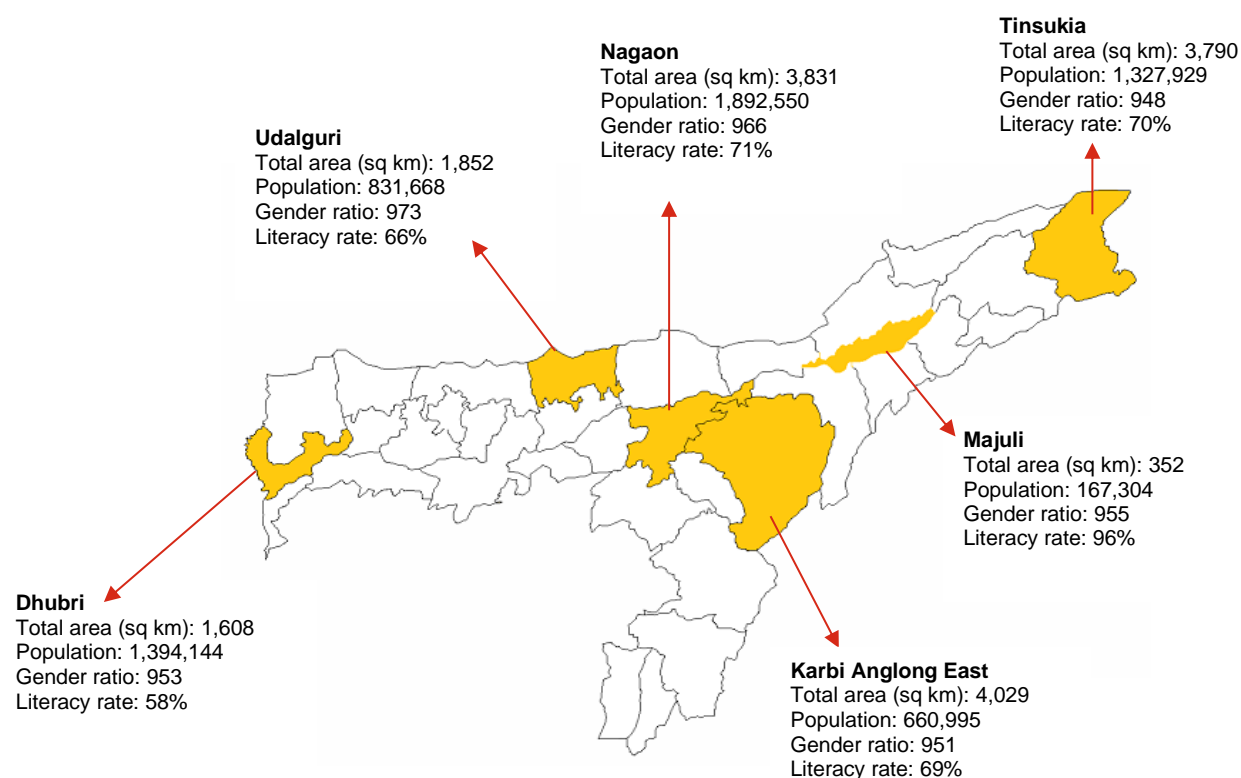


Table 2: List of sample districts for baseline study

Cluster	Shortlisted districts (Nos 6)
Cluster 1	Dhubri
Cluster 2	Nagaon
	Udalguri
Cluster 3	Majuli
	Karbi Anglong
Cluster 4	Tinsukia

The six selected districts present very district geographic and demographic scenarios. As indicated in Figure 8, the upper, middle, and lower assam regions are well represented by these six districts. Additionally, **this selection also takes into account the tribal dominated districts of Karbi Anglong, and the Aspirational District of Udalguri.** The basic demographic details of the six districts are given in the below table:

Figure 9: District-wise demographic details (as per census 2011)

Selection of blocks was done in a similar manner, and in total 50% of the total intervention blocks were covered i.e., 11 blocks out of 22. The selection of blocks from within one district was done based on the total number of NRLM SHGs present in the blocks i.e., Preference was given to blocks with a greater number of SHGs. Basis this, the following blocks were selected for the study:

Table 3: List of blocks selected for the study

Districts	Implementation Partner	Blocks
Majuli	Seven Sisters Development Assistance (SeSTA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ujoni Majuli Majuli
Dhubri	Rashtriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi (RGVN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bilasipara Agomani
Nagaon	Rashtriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi (RGVN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dolonghat Khagorijan Lawkhowa
Udalguri	Seven Sisters Development Assistance (SeSTA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kalaigaon
Tinsukia	Seven Sisters Development Assistance (SeSTA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Itakhuli Kakopathar
Karbi Anglong East	Seven Sisters Development Assistance (SeSTA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bokajan

Selection of gram panchayats (GP) and villages

It was understood that the programme already identified CRISIL Sakhis in some gram panchayats and certain programme activities had already started. Based on the extent of the programme interventions, the gram panchayats were segregated into three categories:

1. **Intervene GPs:** GPs where CRISIL Sakhis have been identified and they have started interacting with the target beneficiaries.
2. **In-transition GPs:** GPs where CRISIL Sakhis have been identified but they have not started interacting with the target beneficiaries.
3. **Non-intervene GPs:** GPs where no intervention till now under the programme.

The study refrained from selecting the Intervene GPs as part of the geography to eliminate biasedness in data as agreed with the CRISIL Foundation team. **The study was strictly restricted to the In-transition GPs and non-intervene GPs where there have not been any interventions but are selected for the programme.** This allowed the study to remove biasedness but at the same time, present the most relevant baseline conditions. **Within one block, 2-3 GPs were selected for the quantitative study which was done randomly from the list of in-transition and non-intervene GPs.**

While selecting the villages for quantitative study, it was ensured that 10-20 respondents were selected from one village based on the availability of respondents. It implies that minimum 2-3 villages were selected from within one GP depending upon the number of GPs selected from one block. **The selection of villages from within a GP was done on a random basis.**

- **Qualitative study**

In addition to the respondents interacted during the quantitative study, the following stakeholders were covered during the qualitative part of the study. Similar to the quantitative study, the qualitative study was conducted in the selected 6 districts and 11 blocks.

Table 4: Sampling plan for qualitative study for baseline study

Type of tool	Stakeholder	Sample per district/ block	Total
FGD	SHG women	1 per block	11
IDI	PRI members	1 per district	6
IDI	Programme team members	-	1
KII	NRLM CRPs	1 per block	11
KII	Bank official	1 per district	6
KII	SRLM staff	1 per district	6
KII	CFL SPOC	1 per district	6
Total			47

As indicated in **table 4**, total 47 interactions were planned to be conducted as part of the qualitative study. This stage also involved **identification of the key indicators** based on which information was collected along with the finalization of quantitative and qualitative research tools and the **translation and digitization of quantitative questionnaire into Computed Aided Personal Interviews (CAPI) enabled version.**

Stage 3: Data collection and field visit

Before starting the actual quantitative and qualitative survey, the PW team did a pilot survey to test the quantitative tool and customize it to the local needs. The pilot survey was done in Dolonghat block of Nagaon district and covered 10% of the total quantitative sample size for the block i.e., 83. The pre-testing of tool was done with 8 respondents in the Dolonghat block.

Post the pilot survey, the quantitative tool was updated to include the local anomalies and add/ delete certain questions and options to make the tool more concise and relevant to the local geography.

The field visits started with mobilizing the stakeholders at the field which was done in consultation and support of CRISIL Foundation to capture the present conditions of the stakeholder's and their perceptions towards the project.

Data collection process was done through research team with the support of in-house subject experts (if required). The field investigators visiting the site were sensitized and trained beforehand for ensuring smooth interaction with the community. The team **conducted survey, IDIs and FGDs in the sampled locations** as per the finalized sampling frame and tools to capture the data. The team analysed the collected data and summarised the key findings.

Table 5: Final coverage of the Baseline assessment study

Districts	Implementation Partner	Blocks	Sample covered	Baseline Approach
Majuli	Seven Sisters Development Assistance (SeSTA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ujoni Majuli Majuli 	Quantitative covered : 166 Qualitative : Target – 8 ; covered – 8	Mixed method approach^
Dhubri	Rashtriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi (RGVN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bilasipara Agomani 	Quantitative : 166 Qualitative : Target – 8 ; covered – 8	Mixed method approach^
Nagaon	Rashtriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi (RGVN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dolonghat Khagorijan Lawkhowa 	Quantitative : 246 Qualitative : Target – 10 ; covered – 10	Mixed method approach^
Udalguri	Seven Sisters Development Assistance (SeSTA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kalaigaon 	Quantitative : 83 Qualitative : Target – 6 ; covered – 6	Mixed method approach^
Tinsukia	Seven Sisters Development Assistance (SeSTA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Itakhuli Kakopathar 	Quantitative : 166 Qualitative : Target – 8 ; covered – 8	Mixed method approach^
Karbi Anglong East	Seven Sisters Development Assistance (SeSTA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bokajan 	Quantitative : 82 Qualitative : Target – 6 ; covered – 6	Mixed method approach^

Note: - ^ Mixed method approach - Quantitative & Qualitative approach

Stage 4: Data analysis and report writing

The next step was to analyse and test the related internal control procedures on the data collected and the process followed w.r.t., the same and check the aggregation of the collected data and the consistency of the applications for the collection and aggregation of the data and other contents of the report. Draft baseline assessment report was shared with CRISIL Foundation detailing the process adopted, the results, key findings, and suggestions for the Mein Pragati Assam programme. Basis the inputs received from CRISIL Foundation team, the report was finalized and submitted for management's consideration.

3.3. Assumptions and limitations

General assumptions:

- The information transmitted, including any attachments, are intended only for the person or entity to which it is addressed and may contain confidential and/or privileged material. Any review, retransmission, dissemination, copying, paraphrasing, reproduction, or distribution in any manner or form, whether by photocopying, electronically, by internet, within another document or otherwise; or other use of or taking of any action in reliance upon this information by persons or entities other than the intended recipient or for purposes other than as stated in the LoE, is prohibited. Further, any quotation, citation, or attribution of this publication, or any extract from it to any third party unless expressly agreed in the LoE is strictly prohibited. PW makes no representations or warranties regarding the information and expressly disclaims any contractual or other duty, responsibility or liability to any person or entity other than its client in accordance with the agreed terms of engagement.
- The nature of service provided under this engagement does not in any manner constitute provision of legal service or/ advice as the term is generally understood under various laws for the time being in force. The intent of PW was to provide assistance and support in accomplishing the stated objective of the assignment and as an adjunct activity may have included research of applicable laws, regulatory compliance requirements and an understanding of the process and procedure as per local statutory enactments without in any way rendering any specialist legal advice. Our report is not a substitute for legal advice, that may be provided by a duly qualified independent legal practitioner.
- We have not been engaged to, nor we have, provided any management functions or made management decisions.
- PW have not acted in the capacity of the client management; client had identified qualified personnel responsible for overseeing the project. We have not assigned responsibilities to client personnel. It was the responsibility of the client to identify the core member team who assisted us in this assignment. We have not acted in a supervisory capacity over members of client.
- We have not chaired any internal meeting of client or represented the client / client management in meetings with the implementation partners and/or beneficiaries.
- We have not provided any solution/recommendation for dispute resolution, for Company, with the NGOs.
- We should not be held responsible for slippage of schedule due to non-availability of personnel from client side and delay in providing information or obtaining feedback.
- Our scope of work, including any advice / assistance, was limited to the scope of services specifically defined in the Letter. We were not responsible for the implementation of our recommendations.
- By giving our consent to the publication of our report and opinion on the Company's website ('your website') we do not accept any duty of care and deny any liability.
- You are responsible for the controls over and the security of your website and, where applicable, for establishing and controlling the process for electronically distributing Baseline Assessment Report. We remind you that the examination of controls over the maintenance and integrity of your website is beyond the scope of our examination. Accordingly, we accept no responsibility for the completeness and accuracy of the Baseline Assessment Report as they appear on your website.

- This report/deliverable is solely for CRISIL Foundation's internal use and benefit and is not intended to nor may they be relied upon by any other party ("Third Party"). Neither this report/ deliverable nor its contents shall be distributed to, discussed with, or otherwise disclosed to any Third Party, unless expressly agreed in the Letter of Engagement (LoE). PW accepts no liability or responsibility to any Third Party who benefits from or uses the Services or gains access to the report/deliverable.
- We are responsible only for providing options for consideration of client and not make any management decision for selection, prioritization, and implementation of the same.

Assumptions pertaining to this report:

- The report prepared by the PW is based upon the (a) information/ documents provided by CRISIL Foundation and NGO partners and (b) data collected during the field visit to the project location by the PW team. PW performed and prepared the Information at the client's direction and exclusively for the client's sole benefit and use pursuant to its client agreement. Our report is based on the completeness and accuracy of the above-stated facts and assumptions, which if not entirely complete or accurate, should be communicated to us immediately, as the inaccuracy or incompleteness could have a material impact on our conclusions.
- PW team has used the data of district-wise number of women involved in SHGs procured from the NRLM Database to create the universe for the study as part of the study methodology.
- The total respondents for the study were 909 and for every indicator, the data point denoting 'Total' has been analysed based on the data/ responses obtained from 909 respondents i.e., N=909. Additionally, wherever it was relevant, the indicators have been analysed separately for each district. In such cases, the data for each district has been analysed based on the number of respondents covered for each district as given in **Table 5**.

4. Key findings

This section discusses the key findings emerged from the baseline assessment to depict the current situation of the local communities which are **based on the quantitative interactions with 909 community members as well as the 47 qualitative discussions** done with various stakeholders. The findings are categorized into **seven sub-sections** namely:



1. Profile of respondents	2. Socio-economic conditions	3. Financial and digital literacy
4. Access to entitlements	5. Gender balance	6. Household income and expenditure
7. Perception towards supporting services		

The total respondents for the study were 909 and for every indicator, the data point denoting 'Total' has been analysed based on the data/ responses obtained from 909 respondents i.e., N=909. Additionally, wherever it was relevant, the indicators have been analysed separately for each district. In such cases, the data for each district has been analysed based on the number of respondents covered for each district as given in **Table 5**.

4.1. Profile of respondents

Below analysis presents the comprehensive profile of the respondents based on the various demographic indicators:

- Out of 909 respondents, **77% respondents were female whereas the rest 23% respondents were male (Figure 10)**. Though the Mein Pragati Assam Programme focuses on empowering the women in the rural areas of Assam, the study took holistic approach by including the male respondents as well to gauge their perception towards the financial literacy and empowerment. This was mutually agreed with the CRISIL Foundation project team.
- Figure 11 represents that **34% of the respondents** were from the **age group of 26-35 years** and 31% respondents were between the age group of 36-45 years.
- Further, **88% of the respondents** have reported to be married (Figure 13). Respondents with marital status of 'married', 'widowed' and 'divorced' from Figure 10 i.e., **96% of the respondents** were further probed on the number of their children. It was noted that **85% of the respondents (n=873)** reported to have children (Figure 12). **An average household in the study area has ~2 children** with an equal gender ratio between boys and girls. **Dhubri district** (most densely populated district in India) has the highest average number of children per respondent household i.e., **~3 children**.

Figure 10: Gender of the respondent [N=909]

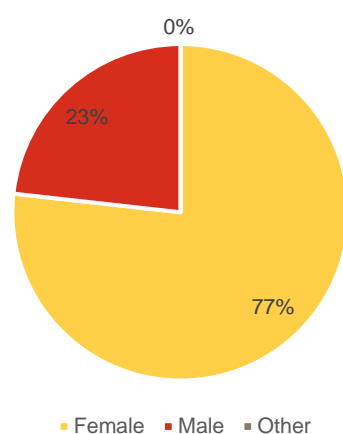


Figure 11: Age of the respondents [N=909]

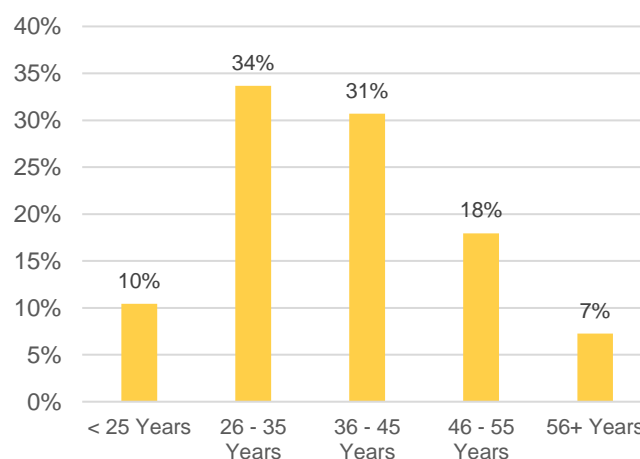


Figure 13: Marital status of the respondents [N=909]

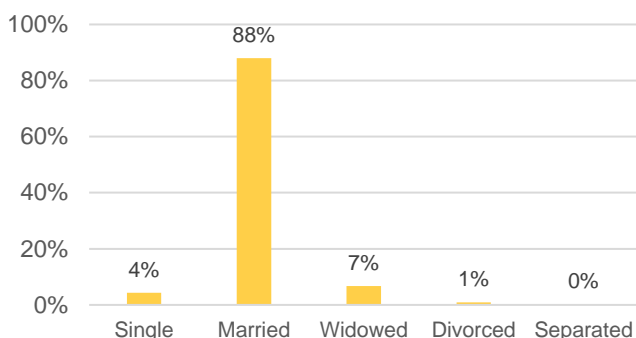
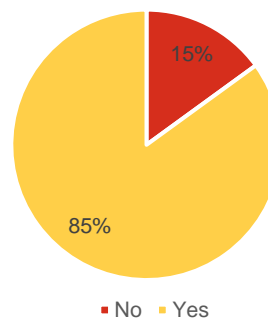
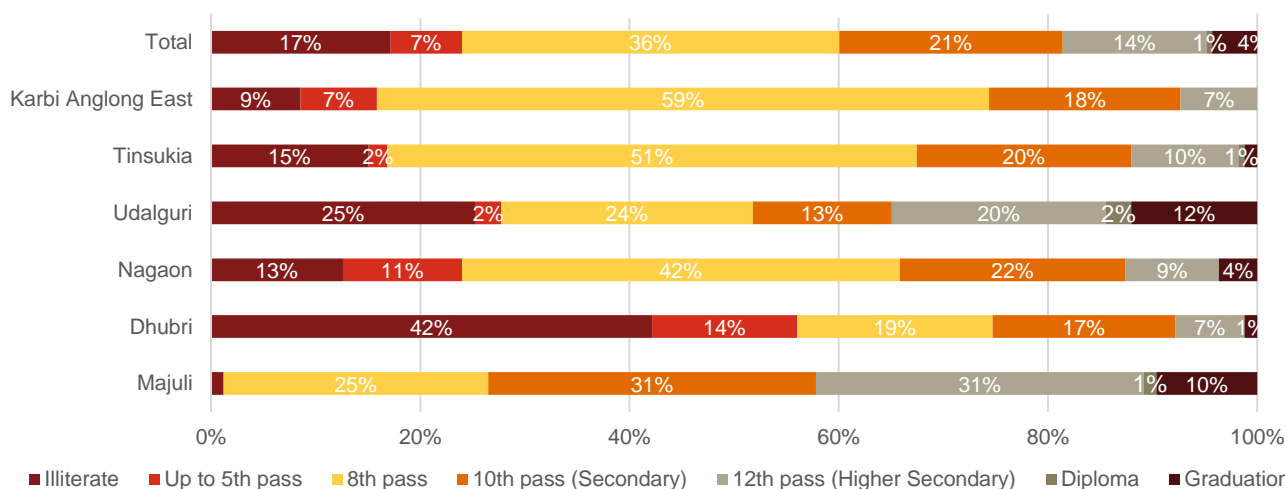


Figure 12: Respondents having children [N=873]



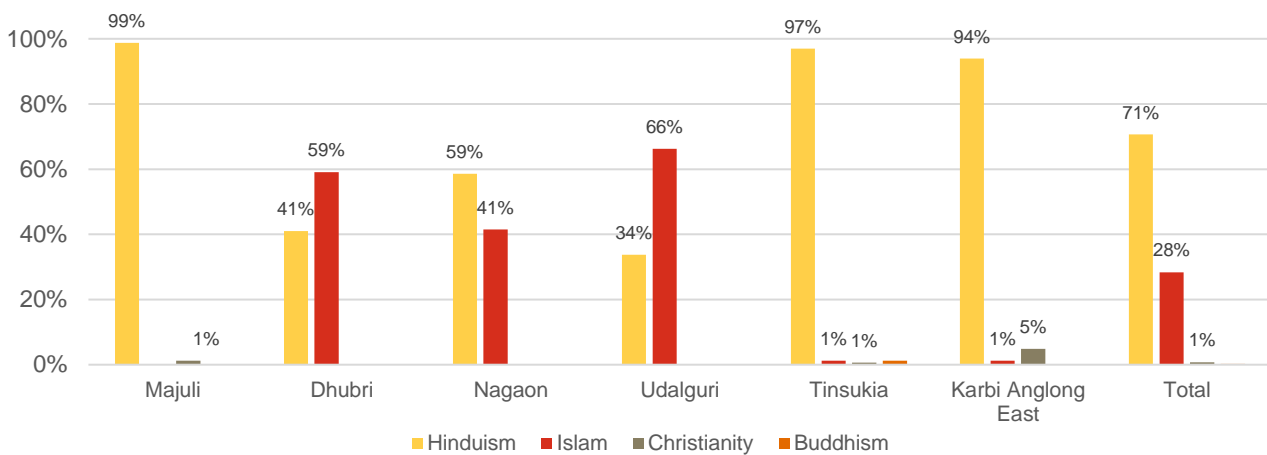
- Education (and financial literacy)** plays an important role in developing understanding of individuals in managing and using their savings in economic and financial decisions, hence, study involved gathering the current education status of respondents. Below Figure 14 depicts the overall education scenario of study area as well as 6 districts which were part of assessment:
 - 36% of the total respondents (n=909)** have reported to be 8th pass while 21% reporting of being matriculate i.e., 10th pass. **17% of the total respondents reported of not receiving any education.**
 - The highest illiteracy rate was observed in Dhubri district** with 42% of the respondents (n=166) reporting to have not received any education. There are multiple reasons associated with the lack of education opportunities in Dhubri district. As per the Census 2011, Dhubri district is the most densely populated district in India and primarily dependent on agriculture and forest products for major source of income. Further, this district is considered to be a poor district and lacks any industrial production.
 - The lowest illiteracy is reported in Majuli district** with only 1% (n=166) having received no education.

Figure 14: Education level of the respondents [N=909]



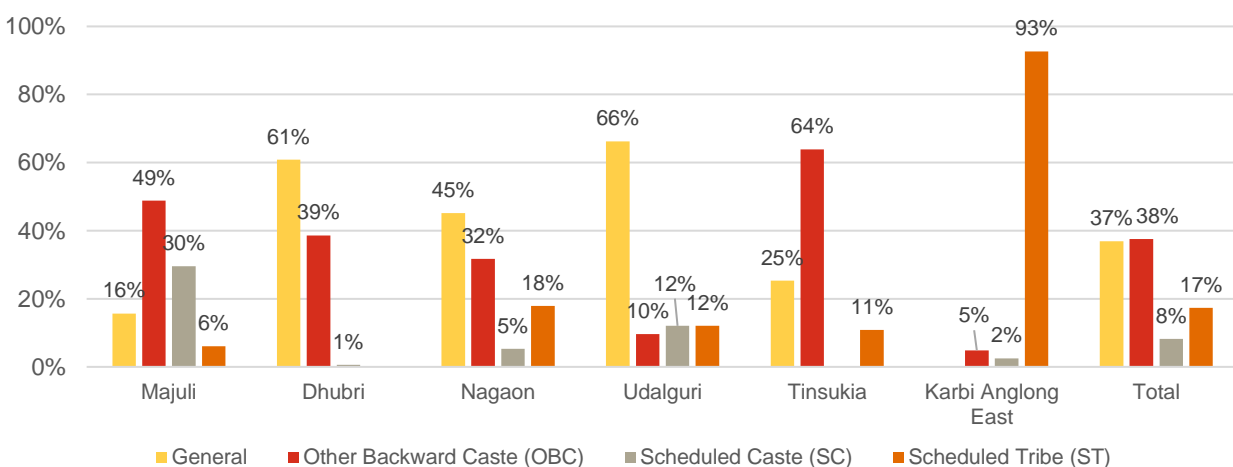
- Figure 15 shows that the **majority of the respondents (71%) follows Hinduism** as their religion while 28% of the respondents follows Islam. **Majuli, Tinsukia, Karbi Anglong East districts** have maximum respondents following **Hinduism** whereas the **maximum respondents following Islam** were from **Dhubri, Nagaon, and Udalguri districts.**

Figure 15: Distribution of respondents based on their religion [N=909]



- As depicted in the Figure 16, **38% of the total respondents (n=909) represents OBC social category** whereas **37% respondents** belong to the **general category**. Further the analysis indicates that:
 - Out of total **82 respondents in Karbi Anglong East district, 93% of the respondents were from Scheduled Tribe social category**. This is due to the presence of **large number of tribal communities** (such as **Karbhis, Dimasas, Bodos, Kuki, Tiwas, Garos, Rengma Nagas etc.**) residing in the district.
 - Udalguri district is multi-ethnic and multi religious in nature having presence of various ethnic groups such as Bodos, Adivasi, Bengali Muslims, Assamese, Bengali Hindus, Gorkha etc. **66% of the respondents (n=83) were from General social category**, whereas **rest 34% of the respondents were from other social categories such as OBC, SC and ST**.

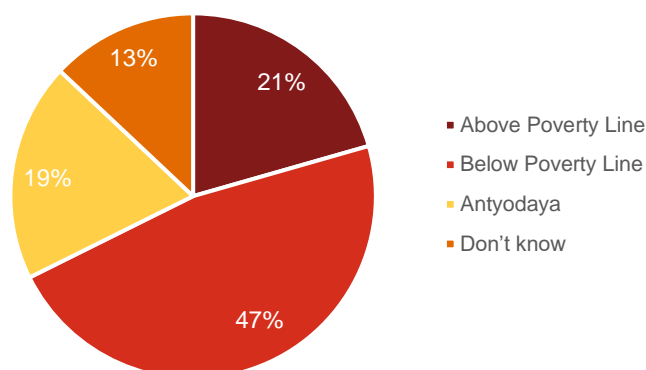
Figure 16: Distribution of respondents based on their caste [N=909]



4.2. Socio-economic conditions

The below sub-section provides an overview of socio-economic conditions of respondents:

Figure 17: Ration card status among the respondents [N=909]



- It was analyzed that **47% of the total respondents** (n=909) own a BPL/ PHH (Priority Household) ration card while 19% of the respondents own an Antodaya ration card. As per the state government, BPL/ PHH and Antodaya ration cards are allocated to households with annual income less than 1 lakh²³. Additionally, **21% of the respondents** own 'Above Poverty Line' ration cards which means these respondents have **annual income of more than INR 1 lakh**.
- These respondents were also further probed to understand the chief bread winner in the family. **85% of the total respondents** (n=909) mentioned that their households have a **male member as the chief bread winner**. Also, **71% of the women respondents (n=697)** reported that their primary occupation is that of a homemaker and they don't generally get engaged in livelihood activities of the household.
- We are commenting on the BPL status of respondents based on their ration card ownership. And as per the state government, only households with income less than 1 lakh can own BPL and Antodaya cards. In this study, 66% respondents reported that they own a BPL or Antodaya card and thus, they have less than 1 lakh income annually.
- The Figure 18 shows the district-wise distribution of respondents reporting of belonging to BPL/PHH and Antodaya categories. It is important to note that:
 - **All the respondents in Karbi Anglong East district (n=82) belong to BPL (including PHH and Antodaya) category.** This low-income rate in Karbi Anglong East can be attributed to its hilly terrain and remote location along with small landholding among its population. The region is situated in the Karbi hills and has large tracts of undulated land offering limited water retention. This along with non-existent irrigation facilities restricts the farm productivity of the region adding to the vulnerability of the population.
 - Further the analysis from figure 18 highlights that the percentage of respondents belonging to BPL (including PHH and Antodaya) is also quite high in case of Tinsukia district with **96% of the respondents (n=166)** reporting of earning less than 1 lakh income annually. **With a large part of the population being tea garden labourers, they have limited earning capacity with average wage rate being Rs. 217 per day²⁴ thus, it can act as one of the contributors to the low-income levels.** However, given the local context, the tea-garden labourers are provided with free accommodation, education, and healthcare services. Thus, with some of their basic

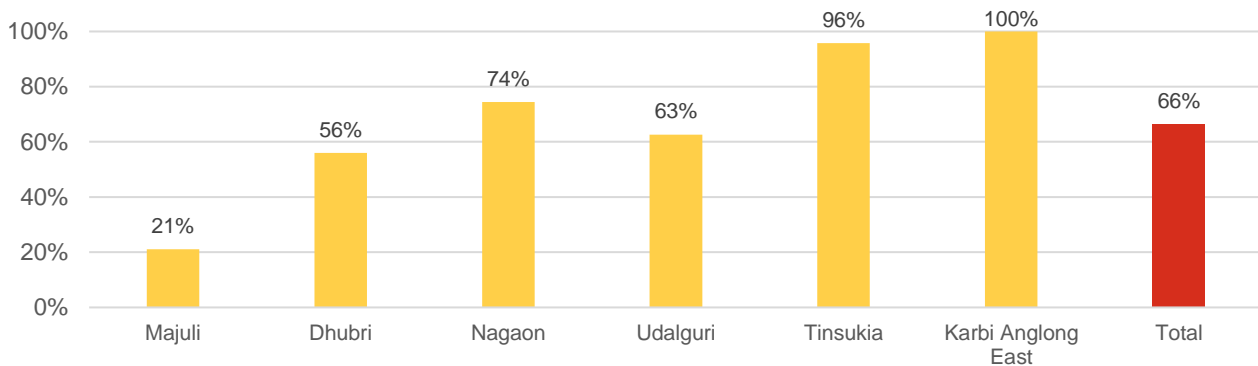
²³ <https://pds.assam.gov.in/portal/ration-card-information.html>

²⁴ https://labour.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf_utility_folder/departments/coi_labour_uneecopscloud_com_oid_14/menudocument/notification_of_interim_wages_for_plantation_workers.pdf

necessities already covered, the income that they get for their work is mostly used for utilities, food, travel, leisure, etc.

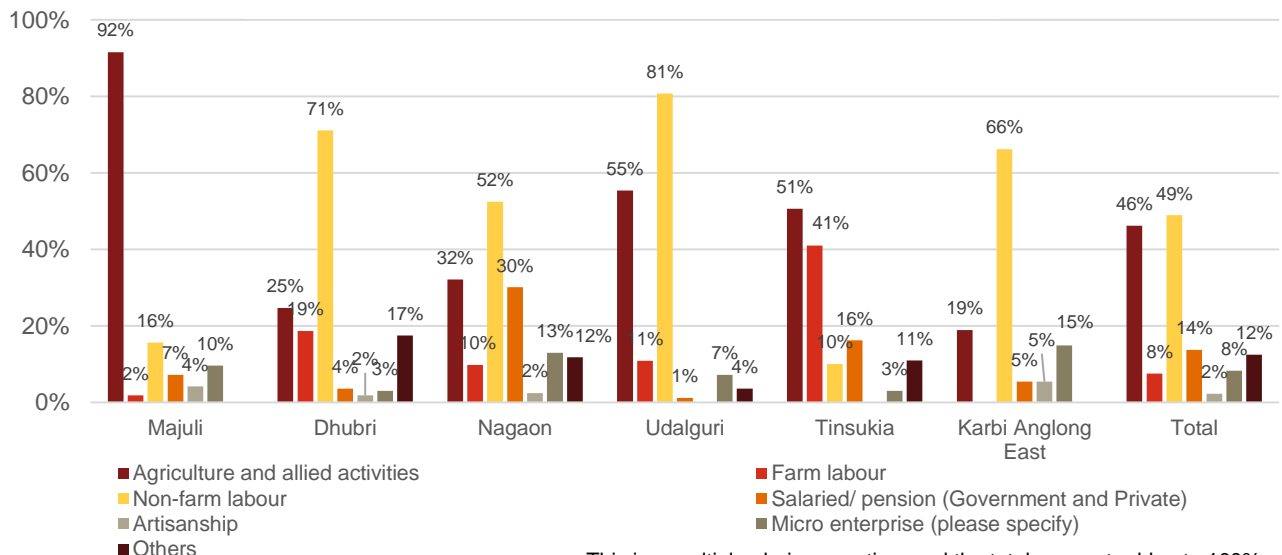
- The lowest percentage of respondents owning BPL ((including PHH and Antodaya) cards is seen in **Majuli district** where **21% of the respondents reported of owning a BPL/ PHH or Antodaya ration card**. The land ownership in Majuli is relatively higher along with higher literacy rates which have allowed the local communities to have a higher household income.

Figure 18: Respondents owning BPL/ PHH or Antodaya ration cards [N=909]



- It was also important to understand the sources of income available to the local communities in the study area. An analysis (Figure 19) highlights that among 909 respondents, **49% (maximum) have reported non-farm labour as one of their income sources. Agriculture and allied activities (including dairy, poultry, piggery, fishery, etc.) have been reported by 46% as their income source.** Only 14% have reported of having income from Salary/ Pension. Further,
 - The **dependence on Agriculture and allied activities is highest in Majuli district with 92% of the respondents (n=66)** reporting this as their income source.
 - Respondents from districts such as **Udalguri (81%, n=83), Dhubri (71%, n=166), Karbi Anglong East (66%, n=82), and Nagaon (52%, n=246)** have reported to be **dependent on non-farm labour** as their income source. **Working in construction sites** in cities such as Guwahati, Nagaon, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, and Tinsukia were reported as the **major activity of non-farm labour**. Generally, **male members migrate to these cities for a short period of time (especially during the winter months) in search for work in construction.**

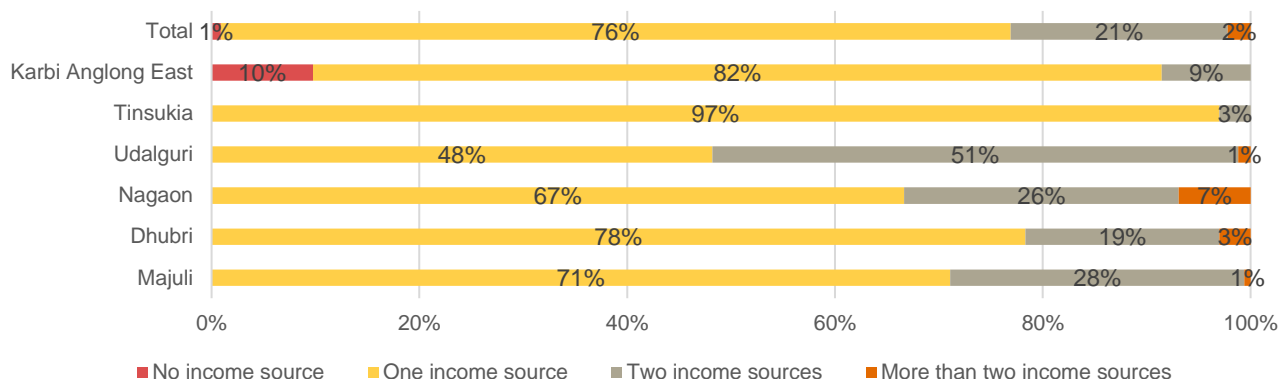
Figure 19: Different income sources available to the respondents [N=909]



This is a multiple-choice question, and the total may not add upto 100%.

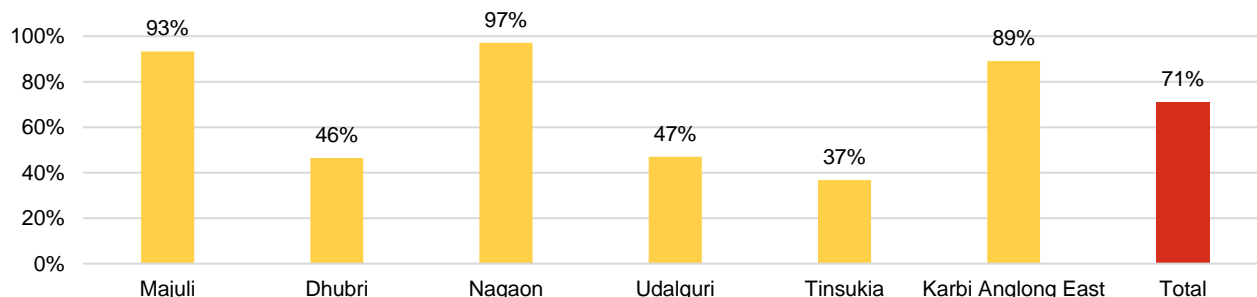
- Respondents were further probed **to understand number of income sources available to them** as depicted in Figure 20. Out of 909 respondents, **77% have reported of not having any secondary income sources available to them**. Only 23% of the respondents reported having alternate income sources. This was generally seen in Udalguri and Nagaon districts where the local communities have the options to work in construction sites, brick kilns, etc. post the harvesting of kharif crops since, rabi cultivation is very less in most areas in Assam. With 77% of the respondents having no additional income sources, the local communities are highly vulnerable to social and economic shocks. This is in line with the findings related to ownership of ration cards where 66% of the respondents have reported of having BPL (including PHH and Antodaya).
- The analysis further indicates that:
 - **10% of the respondents in Karbi Anglong East (n=82)** reported **having no income source** as they are involved in subsistence farming i.e., growing crops for their own consumption.
 - **52% of the respondents (n=83) in Udalguri district** reported **having more than 1 income source** which was the **highest among all the six districts**.

Figure 20: Number of income sources among the respondents [N=909]



- In relation to the land ownership, **71% of the total respondents (n=909)** reported that they own land as depicted in Figure 21. Further the analysis indicates that:
 - Land ownership is **low in Tinsukia, Dhubri, and Udalguri districts**. Tinsukia is a district with large number of tea gardens and as can be seen from Figure 19, 41% have reported of working as a farm labourer. **The tea garden labourers (major portion of farm labourers) are provided accommodation by the tea estates and therefore, most of them don't own any land.**

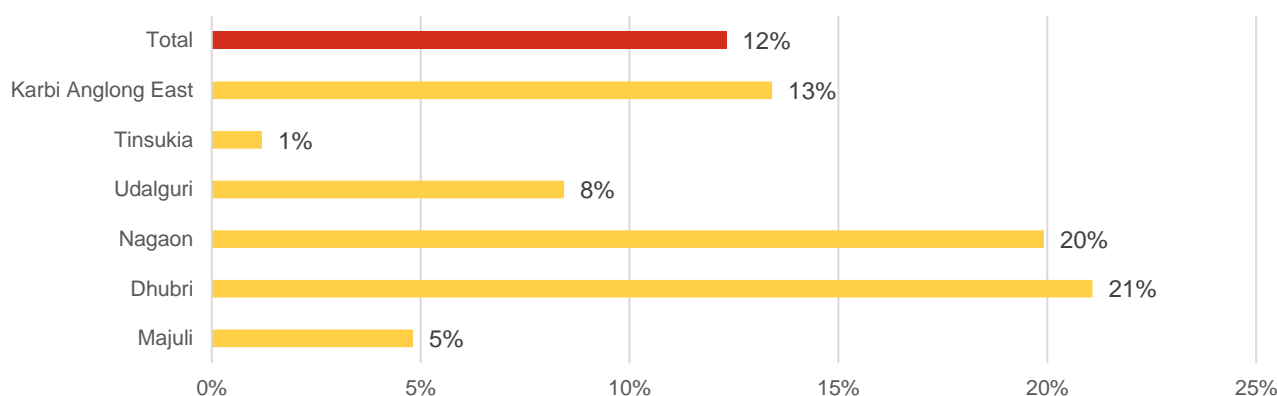
Figure 21: Percentage of people owning land [N=909]



Similarly, **Dhubri and Udalguri districts have prevalence of non-farm labour** which implies that many of the respondents in these districts don't own any land.

- Figure 22 illustrates **12% of respondents who have reported that member(s) from their household migrate to different places in search of work** wherein:
 - **12% of the respondents (n=909)** indicated that member(s) from their household migrates to different place. **The non-availability of local employment opportunities and limited access to irrigation facilities were reported by the local communities (during FGD) as the main reasons behind people migrating in search of work.**
 - Maximum respondents (or their family members) **migrated from Dhubri (21%, n=166) and Nagaon (20%, n=246) districts is in line with the findings emerged from Figure 19 where dependence on non-farm labour is also high in these districts.** Also, Low land ownership, literacy levels, and availability of employment are major contributors towards higher migration rates in Dhubri.
 - The case of **Udalguri district is different** as compared to other districts as the study area (Kalaigaon block in Udalguri district) is surrounded (within the radius of 80 km) by **many industrial areas such as Guwahati, Mangaldoi, and Nalbari** allowing the workers to do daily commute.

Figure 22: Migration status in respondent households [N=909]



4.3. Financial and digital literacy

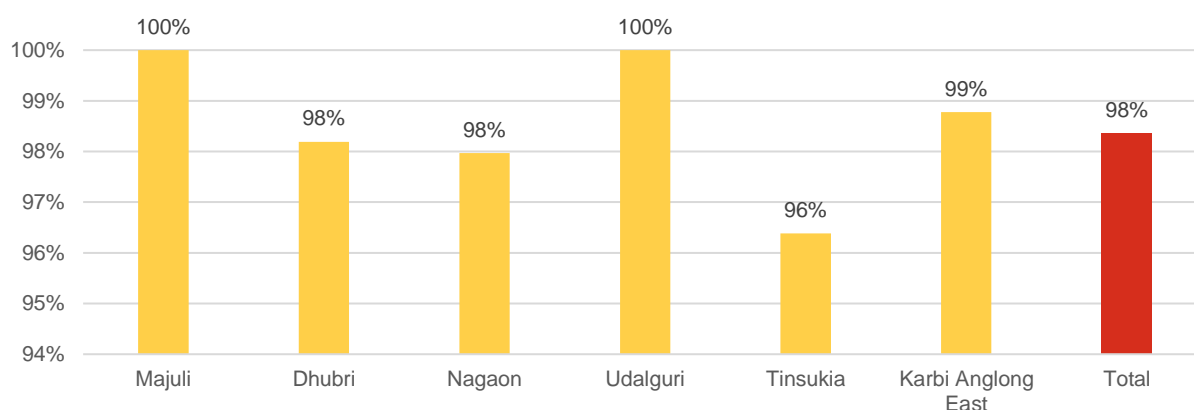
One of the major objectives of the Mein Pragati Assam programme is **to enhance financial and digital literacy among the women** and also, **ensure these women have the necessary support to access the available financial services.** Thus, it becomes **important to understand the current level of awareness among the sample group with respect to financial management and digital literacy.** Also, it is essential to map the existing scenario related to access to financial services among the sample group. Accordingly, the study integrated approach to provide an overview of financial literacy, inclusion, and digital literacy based on the various indicators as discussed below:

- Having a bank account is the first step of accessing financial and social security services and the responses obtained in this regard has been very encouraging. Almost all the respondents (**98%, n=909**) **reported to have a bank account in their name, and they use the account themselves.**
- **100% respondents** from Udalguri (n=83) and Majuli (n=166) districts mentioned that they have the bank account in their name while **99% respondents from Karbi Anglong East district (n=82)** have reported

to have account in their name. **98% of the respondents from Dhubri (n=166), Nagaon (n=246)** reported to have bank account in their name.

- It was reported by the local communities that the majority of the bank accounts of the respondents were opened by the Bank Mitras/ SRLM Sakhis. More than their own demand, **it was the awareness created by the Bank Mitras/ SRLM Sakhis that was pivotal for the opening of bank accounts by most of the respondents.**

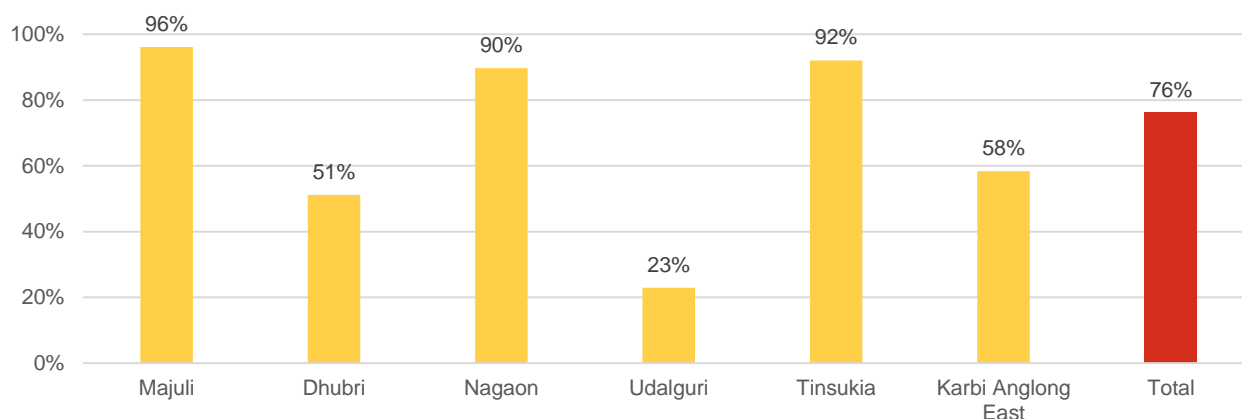
Figure 23: Respondent having their own bank account [N=909]



Female respondents (n=697) across all the six districts were probed to understand their association of any SHGs in the village (figure 24). It was noted that 76% of the respondents (n=697) are part of SHGs who further highlighted that they have been benefited by joining SHGs. This has also improved the access to banks and other financial institutions in addition to gaining knowledge about financial management. The analysis further indicates that:

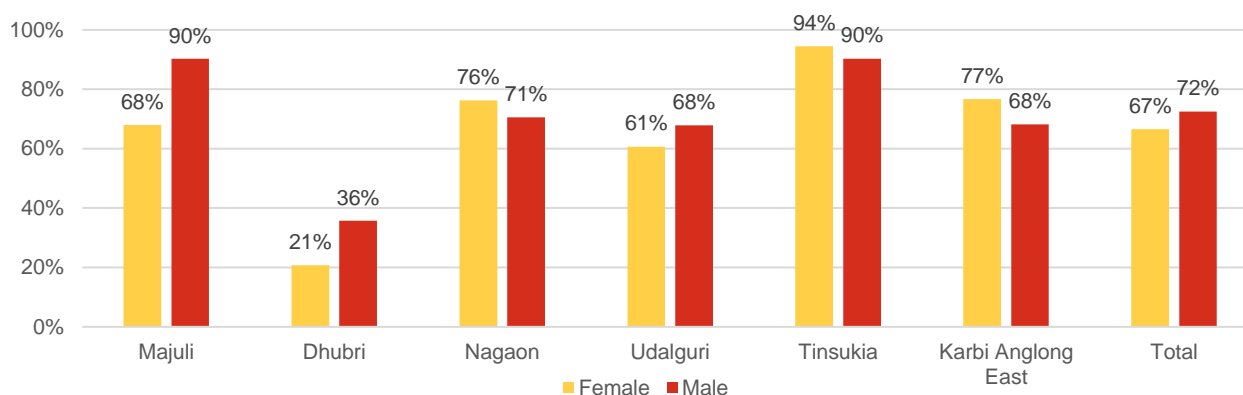
- The penetration of the **SHG movement is quite high in districts such as Majuli (n=125), Tinsukia (n=109), and Nagaon (n=217) districts as more than 90% of the respondents confirmed to be part of SHG in their villages.**
- In **Udalguri (n=58), only 23% of the respondents reported to be a SHG member.** When probed on **low SHG penetration in Udalguri district**, it was noted during the discussion with a **district level SRLM official**, the coverage under NRLM within Udalguri was restricted to only a few blocks till late 2010s due to prevalence of insurgency movements in the Bodoland region which has led to many people still not being mobilized into SHGs.
- Similarly, **51% of the respondents confirmed to be part of a SHG in Dhubri district (n=128) whereas 58% of the respondents confirmed to be part of a SHG in Karbi Anglong East (n=60).**

Figure 24: Female respondents being part of SHGs [N=697]



- Savings is an important part of household financial management; hence, it was important to understand their perception towards saving. In total, **around 68% of the total respondents (n=909) save money** where in **67% female (n=697) and 72% male (n=211) respondents have reported that they regularly save money for family needs**. The variance in relation to gender is quite minimal in most of the districts except in **Majuli district where 90% of the male respondents** have reported of doing **regular savings as compared to 68% of the female respondents**.

Figure 25: Respondents reporting they regularly save money [N=909]



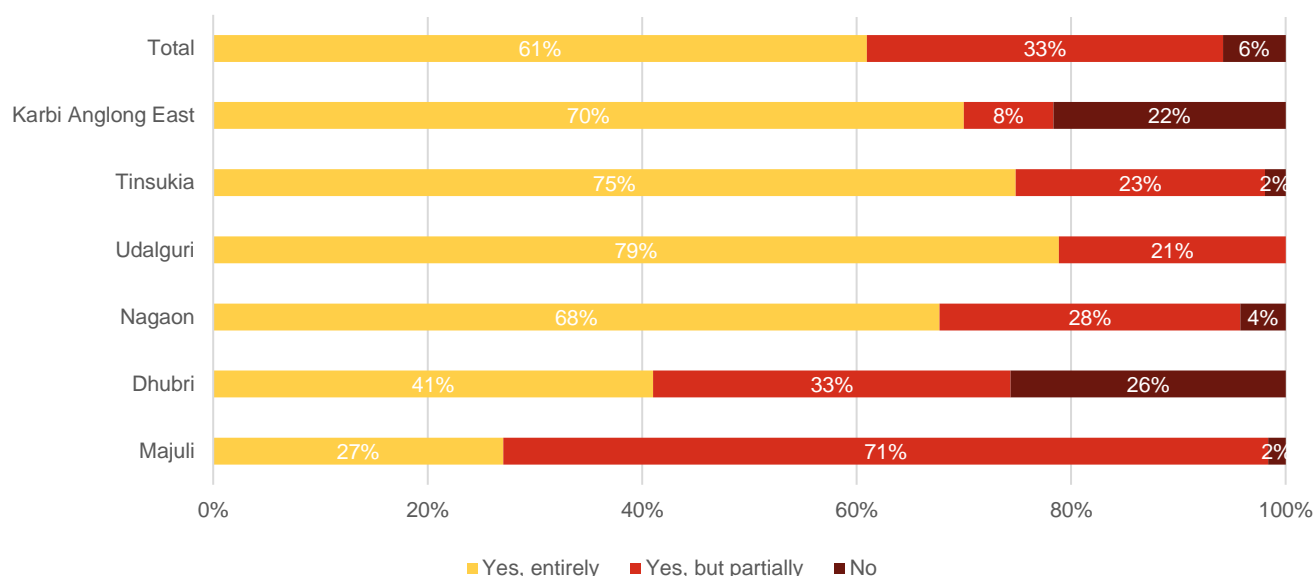
- Among 617 respondents (68% of the total respondents who reported to regularly save money), it was analyzed that a **household saves Rs. 1,903/- per month** which is around 15% of the average annual income of the respondents (as indicated in section 4.6). It can be seen that 85% of the income earned during a year is being spent by the respondents. The major expenditure heads as reported by the respondents are healthcare, education, and utilities (please refer to figure 34). It was noted from the FGDs that the local communities generally use this nominal savings for purchasing agricultural inputs in the next season. The **highest average savings per month is reported in Tinsukia district (INR 3,918/-)** which can be attributed to the high disposable income available to the tea-garden labourers (who constitutes a major part of the sample size in the district) since they free accommodation, healthcare, and education from the tea estates. **The lowest is reported in Udalguri district (INR 497 per month)**. Low participation in SHGs (less financial awareness) and most of the respondents being dependent on non-farm labour came out as the main reasons behind the low savings into these districts.

Table 6: Average household monthly savings [N=617]

District	Majuli	Dhubri	Nagaon	Udalguri	Tinsukia	Karbi Anglong East	Total
Average household monthly savings (INR)	1260	1202	1295	497	3918	869	1903

- Among 617 respondents, **61% of the respondents** reported that **they keep their entire savings in bank accounts** while **33% reported that they keep some of their savings in bank accounts** and the remaining as cash at their home. Only in **Majuli (n=122)**, most of the respondents refrain from keeping all their savings in bank accounts. When probed, it was reported that **due to local conveyance issues (limited public transport services)**, the respondents could only visit the bank 1-2 times a month and it becomes a **challenge to reach the banks during emergencies**. Thus, they prefer to keep some of their savings at home. Further, 26% respondents from Dhubri (n=39) and 22% respondents from Karbi Anglong (n=60) mentioned that don't save their money in banks. **This can be largely attributed to the low financial literacy among the population in these districts**. Even if we see the education level of the respondents (**in Figure 14**), only 25% of the respondents in these districts are matriculate and above.

Figure 26: Deposit savings in bank accounts [N=909]



Rumi Das (name changed to maintain anonymity) is a **resident of Sri Luhit panchayat in Majuli district of Assam**. She lives in family of 7 members which comprises of her husband, children, and in-laws. Her family's primary source of income is agriculture. She cited that she **has been a member of SHG since 2015 and opened her bank account in 2016 with the help of SRLM Sakhi**.

She shared that **her husband prefers to keep most of their savings at home as they don't own a vehicle and public connectivity being a big issue in Majuli, it is quite hard to reach their nearest bank which is 8 km away. She also shared that during COVID-19, they struggled a lot to reach the bank to withdraw money because of lack of local transportation options. Post that experience, her husband has decided to keep very little money at the bank as it becomes difficult for them to withdraw money in case of emergencies. She shared that she learnt to use her bank account through the SHG meetings and now, she withdraws/ deposits money on her own.**

- In addition to the opening and using of bank accounts, awareness and use of other financial products is also a crucial aspect of financial inclusion. Hence, the respondents were further probed on the level of awareness and usage of various financial products (Table 7). Analysis indicates that the general level of awareness across all the major financial products is very low. Further,
 - **51% of the total respondents (n=909)** mentioned that they were aware of recurring deposit, however, only 45% have opened recurring deposit to invest their money.
 - **49% of the respondents (n=909)** were aware about fixed deposit but only **22% of the respondents** invested their money in the fixed deposit.
 - Except these two financial products (recurring deposit and fixe deposit), a very **low % of respondents have reported that they were aware of the other financial products** such as National Savings Certificate, Mutual Funds, and Pension Accounts. The lack of awareness has also **directly impacted and attracted low investment in such schemes as only less than 10% of the respondents were investing in each scheme.**

Table 7: Level of awareness and use of financial products [N=909]

Financial product	% of the respondents reporting that they are aware of these products	% of the respondents reporting that their household members have invested in these products
Pension account	12%	4%
Mutual funds	3%	0%
Public Provident Fund (PPF)	3%	1%
Sukanya Samrudhi Deposit	22%	9%
Kisan Vikas Patra	8%	6%
National Savings Certificate	6%	4%
Post Office Savings Certificates	30%	8%
Recurring Deposits	51%	45%
Fixed Deposits	49%	22%

- The number of respondents who have **reported of visiting an ATM to withdraw cash is also very low**. Only **35% of the total respondents (n=909)** reported that **they have visited an ATM**. Further,
 - The use of **ATM is the lowest in Dhubri district** with only **9% of the respondents (n=166) reporting of visiting an ATM**. This can be attributed to the low number of ATMs with one ATM serving around 867 people on average as shown in the Table 8.
 - It is followed by **27% of the respondents (n=)** from **Karbi Anglong East district** confirming that they have **visited to the ATMs**.

Table 8: Percentage of respondents who have visited an ATM [N=909]

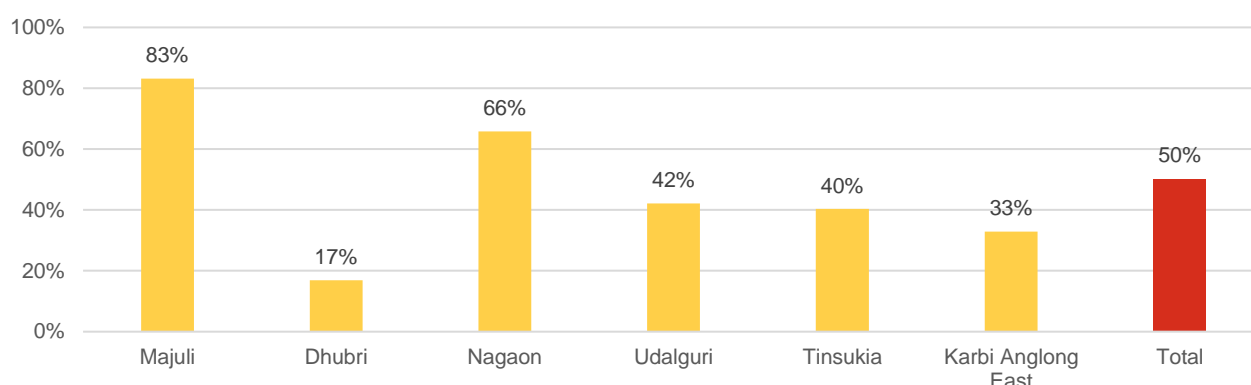
District	Majuli	Dhubri	Nagaon	Udalguri	Tinsukia	Karbi Anglong East	Total
Respondents who have visited an ATM [N=909]	52%	9%	34%	50%	44%	27%	35%
Population per ATM ²⁵	475	867	494	449	350	164	409

- In addition to financial inclusion, use of social security services is also important in mitigating social and financial challenges. However, among the 909 respondents, **50% reported that none of the family members have life/ health insurance**. Although there has been a lot of effort from the SRLM CRPs to open PMJJBY and PMSBY accounts for the SHG members, the progress has been limited till now. Further, the Figure 27 depicts that:
 - The **use of social security measures is low in Dhubri district** as only 83% of the respondents (n=166) indicated that none of the family members has the life/ health insurances which can be **attributed to the low level of education and awareness related to financial and social security**.

²⁵ Reserve Bank of India (data retrieved on 11.05.2023)
https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/STATEREGION_ATM/PDFs/QUARTERLYDEPLOYMENTMARCH20235761DDB923954B3380394425C4F24C5E.PDF

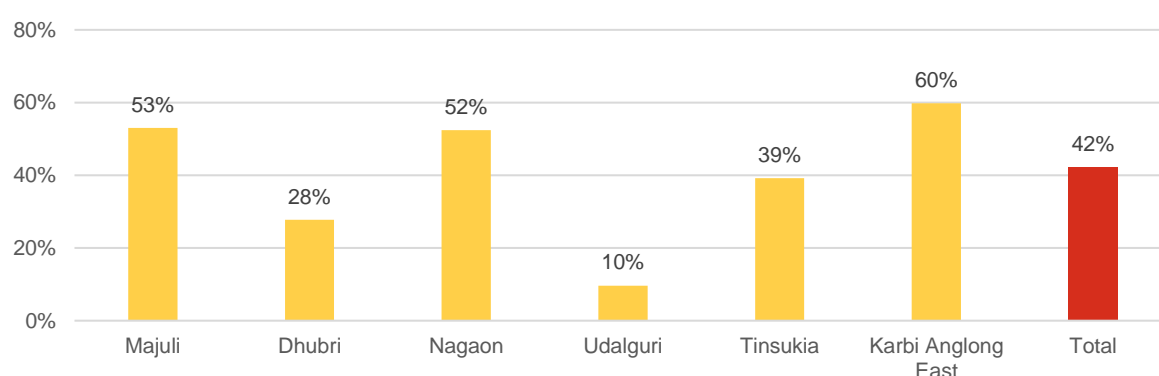
- This is followed by **67% of the respondents from Karbi Anglong East (n=82)** confirming that none of the family members has the insurance.

Figure 27: Respondents reporting at least one household member has life/ health insurance [N=909]



- Access to affordable credit is an important part of social upliftment. Among the 909 respondents, **42% have reported taking loans in the last 3 years (Figure 28)**. Further, the analysis highlights that:
 - **28% of the respondents from Dhubri district (n=166)** confirmed that they took loan whereas only **10% of the respondents from Udalguri district (n=83)** mentioned about taking loan. This percentage is quite low in case of Dhubri and Udalguri which can be because of **low financial awareness in these districts and limited penetration of the SHG movement**.
 - It is also important to note that **low awareness and restricted access to financial institutions is not the only reason behind people not taking loans**. It was reported by many community members during the FGDs that **they refrain from taking loans due to the high interest rates and the fear of falling into a debt trap**. Additionally, **lack the know-how on use of the loan money is also a major factor behind people's reluctance to take loans**.

Figure 28: Respondents who have taken loan in the last 3 years [N=909]



- When 385 respondents (42% of total respondents who took loan) were further probed to understand the various sources of loans that they have used (Table 9, multiple choice options), it was analyzed that:
 - **66% of the respondents (n = 385)** have reported of taking the loan from the SHGs whereas **only 27% reported of taking loans from banks**. **The reason behind the inclination towards taking loans from SHGs is the ease associated with getting loans from SHGs**.

As shared by SRLM and bank officials, an SHG is given INR 50,000 as RF (Revolving Fund) under NRLM to initiate savings, credit, and rotation of funds. Based on the performance of the SHGs, they become eligible for CIF (Community Investment Fund) that ranges between INR 2 lakh to INR 5 lakh. Also, the active SHGs can take loan from banks in the name of the group to

the tune of INR 2-3 lakhs initially. The interest on taking loans from RF and CIF is 1% per month and the interest on bank loans to SHGs varies between 0.75% to 1% per month. It was reported by respondents that **taking loans from banks is a very tedious process due to the documentation involved and need for collateral.**

- **Further, only 1% of the total respondents have reported of taking loans from local moneylenders.** The prevalence of taking loans from **local moneylenders is highest in Udalguri with 38% reporting to have taken loan from them.** In Udalguri, the percentage of respondents taking loan from SHG is quite low in comparison to other districts. As highlighted previously as well, the **penetration of SHGs is lower in Udalguri and the unavailability of this source for taking loans** has contributed to people turning to the local moneylenders.

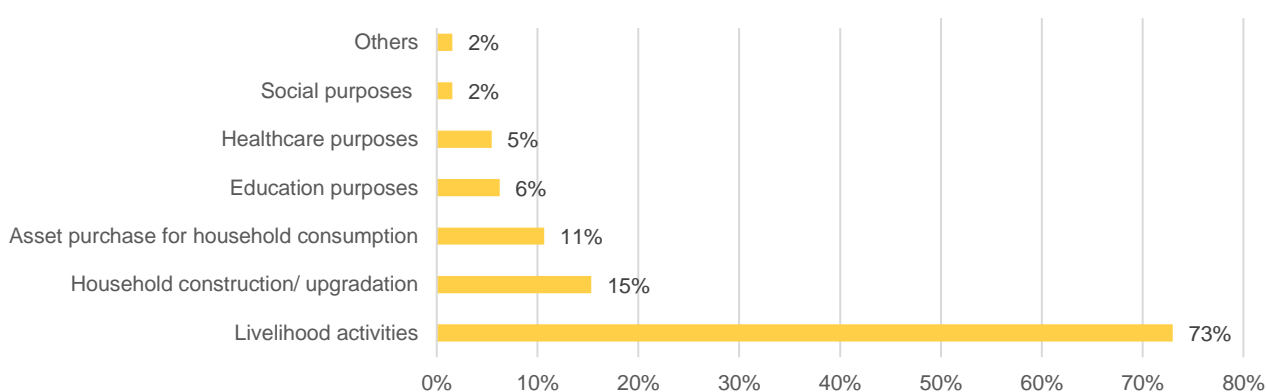
Table 9: Source of loan [N=385]

Source	Majuli	Dhubri	Nagaon	Udalguri	Tinsukia	Karbi Anglong East	Total
Bank	22%	48%	12%	50%	51%	18%	27%
Micro Finance Institutions	0%	2%	26%	13%	0%	41%	15%
SHG	84%	43%	74%	13%	49%	67%	66%
FPO	1%	0%	0%	13%	0%	0%	1%
Local moneylender	0%	2%	0%	38%	0%	0%	1%
Friends	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Relatives	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	0%	1%
Others	0%	13%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%

This is a multiple-choice question, and the total may not add upto 100%.

- Post understanding the different sources of availing loans, it was essential to gauge the views on purpose/ utilization of availing the loans. Figure 29 illustrates the different means of utilization by the respondents after receiving the loans in the last 3 years. It was analyzed that-
 - **73% of the respondents (n=385) have reported that they have used the loans to start or expand their existing income generating activities.** However, if we analyse this data with respect to the total respondents (n=909), only **31% of respondents took loan to start/ expand an income generating activity. Investing in agriculture that includes purchasing of agri-inputs and hiring of labourers has been cited as one of the major reason for taking loan.** Respondents in Dhubri district and Laokhowa block of Nagaon have mostly used their loans for this purpose.

Figure 29: Purpose of taking loan [N=385]



- Many respondents have also availed **loans to start/ expand their livestock activities.** This is more common in the districts of **Majuli, Tinsukia, and Karbi Anglong East** as the piggery and poultry are the major livestock activities in these areas.

- It was also shared during the FGDs that respondents in **Majuli and Nagaon have used the loan money to purchase looms and threads to start their own small artisan shops.**
- In case of Khagorijan block in Nagaon, most respondents **have taken loans for purchasing DFL (Disease Free Layings) and other inputs required for silkworm rearing.** Additionally, there are respondents throughout the six districts who have used the loan money to start small businesses such as grocery shop and meat shop.
- **Most of the respondents shared during the FGDs that they take only one loan at a time.** This may be because most of the people take loans only from SHG and an SHG allows only to take one loan at a time. Generally, the repayment period is for 12 months but it varies depending upon the loan amount. A bank loan of 5 lakh taken by a SHG can have a repayment period upto 3-5 years. Majority of the respondents shared that they have taken 2-3 loans in the last 5 years and almost exclusively from the SHGs.
- **Almost all the respondents showed interest in taking more loans if it is available at low interest rates.** They shared that they plan to start new business activities or expand their existing business activities. Many respondents **expressed interest in starting handloom business with a hope that the programme/ government would help them in marketing of their products.** Additionally, many of them also showed interest in expanding their livestock activities by purchasing more livestock. There were quite a few women who intends to build their own fishery in their backyards.
- When probed further on requirement of money at a specific time of the year, most of the respondents reported that loan is availed based on the requirements and hence, there is no specific time during the year. The general trend is that they **start planning their activities/ investments after getting** to know about the provision of getting loans from SHGs through the weekly meetings or CRPs (Community Resource Persons). However, there were some respondents, mostly engaged in agriculture, who shared that they require money during the months of May and June when it is time for purchasing agriculture inputs to start their kharif farming.

Reema Mopi (name changed to maintain anonymity) is a resident of Moiso Killing village in Bokajan block of Karbi Anglong East district. She resides with her husband and 3 children. Her family has 3 bigha land where they cultivate agricultural crops such as summer paddy, spring onion, and seasonal vegetables. Farming has been her family's primary source of income although they could only grow crops between March and November due to unavailability of water for irrigation during the winter months. They come under the BPL category and owns a BPL card based on which they get free ration from the government.

Reema joined a SHG formed under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission in 2014 hoping to get some sort of financial assistance from the government. Earlier, no one in her family had a bank account but after joining the SHG she had her account opened. In 2018, she got to know that their SHG is eligible to take INR 2 lakh of loan from the nearby Assam Gramin Vikas Bank at an interest of 1% per month. The total loan amount was divided among the 10 SHG members amounting to INR 20,000 per member. She along with her husband planned to use the loan amount to start a small piggery business. They bought 3 piglets (1 male and 3 female) and built a shed using the loan money.

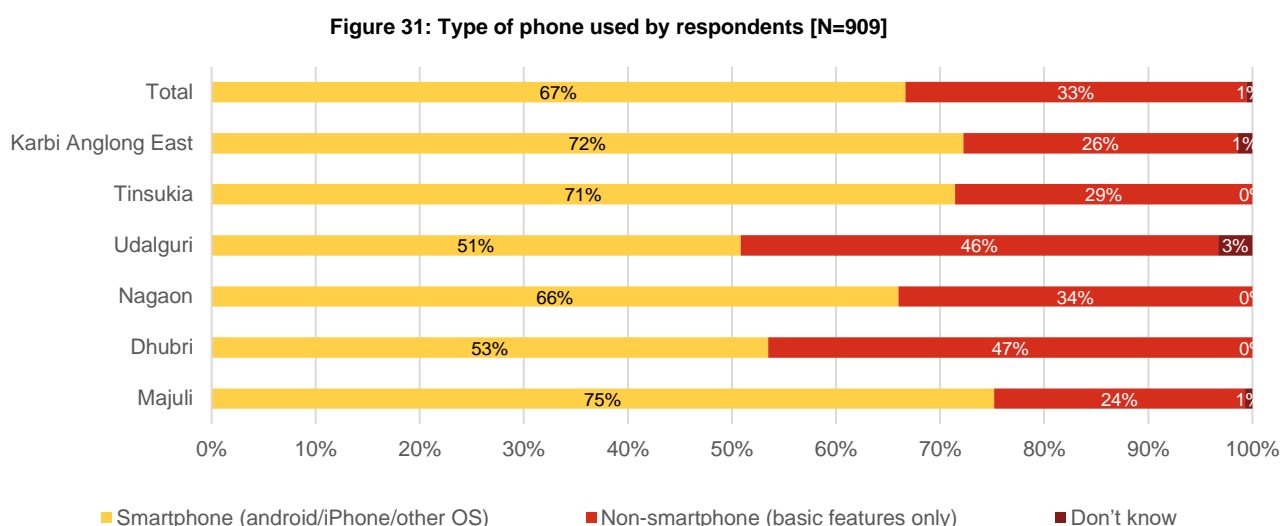
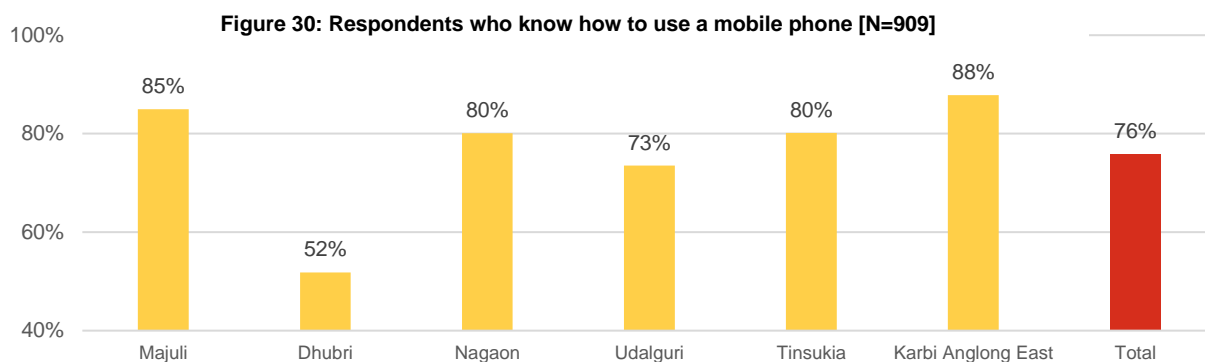
Currently, Reema and her family earns around INR 30,000 per year from their piggery business. She shared that all the SHG members repaid the loan in 12 months as agreed. However, they have not received any loans after that. She hopes to receive more such assistances from the government and other stakeholders so that her family can expand the piggery business by building a larger shed and purchasing more feed.

- There is also a caveat to the high percentage of respondents reporting to have taken loans for livelihood purposes. It was pointed out by the CRPs during the IDIs that many SHG members take loan in the name of livelihood activities but in actual, use the money for consumption purposes such as house construction, social events, etc. As part of the process of taking loan

from the SHGs, the applicants must submit a Micro Investment Plan (MIP) detailing out the purpose of taking the loan. This plan in turn, go to the concerned Village Organisations (VO) for approval. It was shared by the CRPs that the VOs only approve the applications where the purpose of taking the loan is for doing income generating activities. Many SHG members in order to get the approval claim the purpose of the loan to be for income generating activities but upon receiving the money, they spend it on other purposes. The absence of an effective monitoring mechanism at the SHG and VO level does not allow these institutions to keep track of how the loan money is being utilised. The major effect of this practice is that many members face difficulty in repaying the loan after utilising the loan money on non-income generating purposes making the member and the SHG defaulting on its loan repayment.

- Digital literacy:** Government of India has undertaken various programmes like Digital India Programme which attempts to empower people of India with basic digital education skills. The Reserve Bank of India had constructed a composite Financial Inclusion Index (FI-Index) to capture the extent of financial inclusion across the country. The value of FI index for March 2022 stands at 56.4²⁶ which indicates that half of India's population is online and has ease of access, usage of online services and receives quality services. To a great extent, India has covered digital literacy grounds, digital financial inclusion remains the need of the hour for the country. This assessment also studied respondents' views on various indicators pertaining to the digital literacy

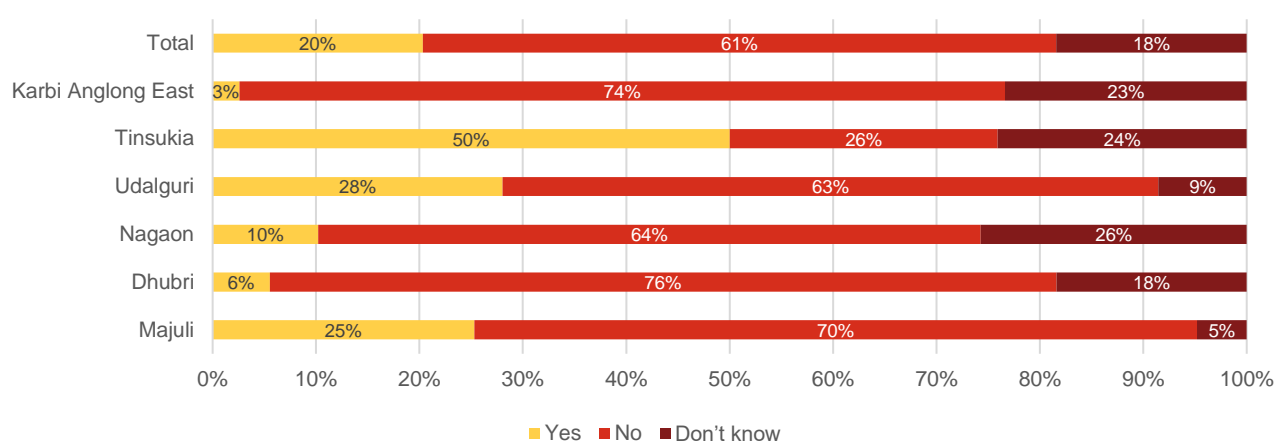
As depicted in **Figure 30**, **76% of the respondents (n=909) reported that they know how to use a mobile phone**. This % is lower in case of Dhubri which can be attributed to its low education level. When probed further on the **type of mobile phones used by the respondents (n=691)**, **67% of the respondents reported using Smartphones (Figure 31)**.



²⁶ Financial Inclusion Index for March 2022 (https://www.rbi.org.in/Scripts/BS_PressReleaseDisplay.aspx?prid=54133#)

- Further, figure 32 shows the use of internet banking including UPI/ e-wallets is low with only **20% of the total respondents (n=909) reporting of using these services**. The major reasons behind the low usage of internet banking services are discussed below:
 - Low awareness among the local communities resulting in limited use of internet was observed to be the main reason behind low usage of internet banking services.
 - Fear associated with losing money because of their own negligence and internet fraud was also reported by many FGD respondents as the reason behind them not using internet banking.
 - Many areas, especially in Karbi Anglong, have limited internet connectivity thus creating challenges among the local communities.
 - Internet is seen by many respondents as a luxury they can't afford. As most of the households are living below the poverty line, they don't have the financial capacity to spend on internet facilities.

Figure 32: Use of internet banking among respondents [N=909]



- Largely, people use the mobile phones for voice calling (75%) and social media applications (56%) such as WhatsApp, Facebook, etc. As can be seen in Table 10, **the rate of internet users among the respondents is 41% which is a lower than the national average of 48.7%**²⁷.

Table 10: Purpose of using mobile phones [N=909]

Purpose	Majuli	Dhubri	Nagaon	Udalguri	Tinsukia	Karbi Anglong East	Total
Voice calling	55%	81%	77%	41%	89%	100%	75%
Sending and receiving text messages	35%	30%	72%	72%	4%	50%	44%
Internet surfing	61%	26%	41%	59%	44%	3%	41%
Social media including WhatsApp	72%	24%	62%	70%	35%	71%	56%
Gaming	32%	7%	15%	3%	11%	0%	14%
Work	22%	34%	5%	5%	29%	3%	16%
Education	12%	13%	10%	43%	24%	0%	15%
Other	0%	0%	9%	2%	0%	0%	3%

This is a multiple choice question, and the total may not add upto 100%.

²⁷ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/792074/india-internet-penetration-rate/>






4.4. Access to entitlements

It is essential to leverage the existing government schemes and entitlements in order to enhance financial literacy and inclusion of underserved communities. Creating awareness around the government schemes and linking the local communities to them is an integral part of the Mein Pragati Assam programme. Thus, it was important to understand the current level of awareness around various government schemes among the sample group and also, map the access of the respondents to these schemes.

Table 11: Awareness & access to various schemes (n=909)

Schemes/ entitlements	Majuli		Dhubri		Nagaon		Udalguri		Tinsukia		Karbi Anglong East		Total	
	*AW	**AC	AW	AC	AW	AC	AW	AC	AW	AC	AW	AC	AW	AC
Atal pension yojana	76%	38%	31%	2%	55%	30%	31%	28%	55%	12%	10%	6%	48%	21%
Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan	6%	1%	4%	2%	18%	6%	35%	35%	0%	0%	5%	0%	10%	5%
Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana	93%	0%	24%	0%	96%	0%	71%	28%	50%	1%	96%	0%	71%	3%
Integrated Child Development Scheme	72%	37%	7%	5%	64%	16%	36%	36%	2%	0%	17%	0%	37%	15%
Livestock Insurance Scheme	13%	1%	1%	1%	11%	1%	38%	31%	1%	0%	0%	0%	9%	3%
MGNREGA	98%	91%	39%	14%	69%	36%	36%	13%	20%	12%	0%	0%	50%	32%
National Pension Scheme	25%	2%	7%	5%	28%	6%	22%	16%	10%	1%	5%	2%	18%	5%
Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana	11%	0%	1%	0%	13%	0%	28%	22%	3%	0%	1%	0%	9%	2%
Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana	16%	1%	2%	0%	24%	6%	38%	17%	2%	0%	0%	0%	13%	3%
Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana	32%	2%	1%	1%	24%	5%	27%	18%	2%	0%	4%	0%	15%	3%
Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana	55%	2%	4%	3%	87%	57%	18%	6%	5%	1%	67%	6%	42%	18%
National / State Rural Livelihood Mission	75%	65%	54%	46%	68%	55%	35%	28%	73%	64%	58%	51%	61%	52%
Sukanya Samridhi Yojana	75%	27%	9%	2%	64%	5%	31%	12%	3%	1%	15%	0%	37%	8%
Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana	94%	76%	42%	29%	97%	49%	44%	16%	9%	5%	99%	45%	65%	38%
Ayushman Bharat	91%	88%	11%	8%	90%	64%	44%	39%	8%	7%	98%	67%	56%	45%
Swachh Bharat Abhiyan	99%	68%	44%	1%	94%	21%	62%	27%	40%	21%	99%	63%	73%	30%
*AW- Awareness level among respondents														
**AC- Respondents having access to the schemes														
Legend	More than 80%		Between 60-80%		Between 40-60%		Between 20-40%				Less than 20%			

- There is a lot of opportunity to improve the awareness level of local communities around the various government schemes. Out of 909 respondents, **16% of the respondents reported of not having access to any of the schemes** showcasing the coverage of these schemes on ground needs to be made more efficient and inclusive. The schemes that seem to have better coverage than the rest are Ayushman Bharat, National Rural Livelihoods Mission, MGNREGA, Ujjawala Yojana, and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. **The schemes focusing on financial inclusion and social security have a lot of ground to cover emphasizing the point that interventions focusing on promoting access to financial and social security schemes are of utmost need.** The major reasons behind low access to government schemes among the respondents are discussed below:

1	Lack of awareness about the schemes, where and how to apply for the schemes was the biggest reason.	
2	The main sources of information for the local communities are television, social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook, Panchayat/ SHG meetings, banks, post office, and peer-to-peer discussions. Therefore, not having access to these platforms affects the ability of the local communities to be aware and having access to the various schemes.	
3	Communities residing in interior places don't have regular access to banks and post offices and are dependent on the local internet shops for applying to various schemes. However, in many cases, these internet shops charge large sum of money for applying which acts as a demotivating factor for many people.	
4	Many of the schemes are yet to reach a lot of places especially far-flung areas, thus, many people are deprived of their benefits till now.	
5	It was reported by CRPs and Bank Mitras that many low-income households don't have ration cards and because of this, they are not eligible to be registered under schemes such Ayushman Bharat, Sukanya Samridhi, Orunudoj, etc.	

Parveen Khatun (name changed to maintain anonymity) lives in Bebaripara village in Bilasipara block of Dhubri with 7 other family members. Parveen's husband works as a daily wage labour and is the sole income earner in the family. She shared that although their household's average monthly income is around Rs. 6000, they have not received ration card yet even after applying many times. They go to the nearest internet shop situated 4 km away where they charge Rs. 100 for each form.

Parveen also reported she has come to know about schemes such as Ayushman Bharat and Sukanya Samridhi Yojana through the weekly SHG meetings. But the SRLM Sakhi has let her know that since her family don't have a ration card, they are not eligible for these schemes.

4.5. Gender balance

It is also a focus of the Mein Pragati Assam Programme **to promote financial independence and economic empowerment among the women members of the community**. Thus, mapping the gender disparities persisting in the society becomes important to understand the status of women in the society. Empowerment starts from one's own household and therefore, the assessment endeavored to **comprehend the household level gender gap by assessing the involvement of male and female members in various household level decision making**.

- Below Tables (Tables 12-19) depict that most of the respondents have reported male members taking the decisions on their own without consulting with the female members of the household. The involvement of women in household level decision making was done by mapping their involvement in 8 key decisions as given below:
 - Purchase and sale of long-term assets such as house and land
 - Purchase and sale of consumer durables such as Fridge, Television, Machines
 - Purchase of daily needs items
 - Education of children
 - Health expenses
 - Family planning
 - Agriculture & allied activities (Production & market related)
 - Loan, mortgage, and investments
- The combined analysis of all the above **8 decision making points confirmed that the male members take decisions on their own without consulting with the female members in 71% of the total respondent (n=909) households**. Only in Majuli and Udalguri, it was observed that **a significant percentage of the respondents have reported that male members consult with their female counterparts before taking a decision**.
- As reflected in Table 12, **75% of the total female respondents (n=697) reported that their male counterpart decides about purchasing and sale of long-term assets such as house and land on his own** without consulting with the respondent. Involvement of women in this aspect has been reported to be higher in Majuli with 50% of the female respondents (n=125) reporting this. **The trend is quite similar for most of the decision points as well with male members playing the role of decision maker. Only in the decisions related to purchase of daily use items it was seen that a significant percentage of the respondents (42%) have reported of the involvement of women in the decision-making process.**
- **This difference in gender roles can be attributed to the limited involvement of women members in income generating activities**. As mentioned in the sub-section of 'Profile of respondents', only 15% of the respondent households have a woman as the chief bread winner. Moreover, **only in 29% of the households, the women members are involved activities other than homemaking**.
- It was shared by a woman from Dolonghat block in Nagaon district that her husband works more than 8 hours a day as a labourer in addition to working 2-3 hours in their own farm to earn the money. She feels that it is his right to decide how the money should be spent as he is the one who is earning it. Such perceptions are very common among the women of the six districts and hence, **it will be pivotal for these women to have some sort of**

financial contribution to their household in order to have more involvement in their households. The responses for the various household level decisions reported by the female and male respondents are given below:

Table 12: Purchase and sale of long-term assets such as house and land

Particulars	Majuli		Dhubri		Nagaon		Udalguri		Tinsukia		Karbi Anglong East		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Female member takes the decision on her own	50%	15%	7%	2%	3%	0%	25%	18%	0%	0%	0%	5%	13%	6%
Female member takes decision by informing male members	1%	0%	9%	0%	2%	0%	8%	11%	1%	0%	5%	5%	4%	2%
Mutual decision	0%	5%	2%	2%	3%	6%	2%	14%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	4%
Male member takes decision by informing female member	5%	44%	6%	10%	6%	15%	21%	11%	5%	8%	0%	0%	6%	15%
Male member decides without consultation from female members	44%	36%	76%	86%	86%	79%	44%	46%	94%	92%	95%	91%	75%	73%

Table 13 : Purchase and sale of consumer durables such as Fridge, Television, Machines

Particulars	Majuli		Dhubri		Nagaon		Udalguri		Tinsukia		Karbi Anglong East		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Female member takes the decision on her own	51%	15%	5%	5%	11%	9%	11%	4%	0%	0%	12%	14%	15%	7%
Female member takes decision by informing male members	1%	0%	11%	0%	3%	0%	5%	0%	1%	0%	5%	0%	4%	0%
Mutual decision	0%	5%	2%	0%	2%	6%	8%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	3%
Male member takes decision by informing female member	4%	46%	4%	7%	4%	12%	23%	36%	6%	8%	0%	0%	6%	18%
Male member decides without consultation from female members	44%	34%	78%	88%	80%	74%	52%	54%	93%	92%	83%	86%	74%	73%

Table 14 : Purchase of daily needs items

Particulars	Majuli		Dhubri		Nagaon		Udalguri		Tinsukia		Karbi Anglong East		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Female member takes the decision on her own	51%	15%	7%	2%	17%	6%	13%	25%	2%	2%	45%	50%	21%	12%
Female member takes decision by informing male members	1%	0%	11%	2%	7%	9%	11%	4%	1%	0%	38%	23%	9%	4%
Mutual decision	0%	5%	3%	7%	5%	12%	8%	7%	0%	0%	0%	9%	3%	6%
Male member takes decision by informing female member	4%	44%	15%	17%	10%	15%	34%	32%	2%	15%	0%	14%	10%	22%
Male member decides without consultation from female members	45%	37%	64%	71%	61%	59%	33%	32%	94%	84%	17%	5%	58%	55%

Table 15 : Education of children

Particulars	Majuli		Dhubri		Nagaon		Udalguri		Tinsukia		Karbi Anglong East		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Female member takes the decision on her own	51%	15%	4%	0%	4%	3%	16%	7%	1%	0%	27%	41%	14%	8%
Female member takes decision by informing male members	1%	0%	11%	2%	3%	3%	5%	0%	1%	0%	13%	0%	5%	1%
Mutual decision	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	3%	18%	21%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	3%
Male member takes decision by informing female member	3%	46%	2%	5%	2%	3%	15%	39%	17%	19%	0%	5%	6%	20%
Male member decides without consultation from female members	45%	37%	81%	93%	91%	88%	46%	32%	81%	81%	60%	55%	73%	68%

Table 16 : Health expenses

Particulars	Majuli		Dhubri		Nagaon		Udalguri		Tinsukia		Karbi Anglong East		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Female member takes the decision on her own	51%	15%	4%	0%	2%	3%	13%	7%	0%	0%	3%	0%	11%	4%
Female member takes decision by informing male members	1%	0%	10%	2%	3%	0%	10%	0%	1%	0%	7%	0%	5%	0%
Mutual decision	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	20%	14%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%
Male member takes decision by informing female member	5%	46%	13%	14%	3%	3%	36%	50%	5%	11%	0%	0%	8%	21%
Male member decides without consultation from female members	44%	37%	72%	83%	92%	94%	21%	29%	94%	89%	90%	100%	74%	73%

Table 17 : Family planning

Particulars	Majuli		Dhubri		Nagaon		Udalguri		Tinsukia		Karbi Anglong East		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Female member takes the decision on her own	51%	15%	1%	0%	0%	0%	11%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	3%
Female member takes decision by informing male members	1%	0%	10%	0%	3%	0%	8%	4%	2%	0%	7%	0%	4%	0%
Mutual decision	0%	2%	0%	0%	2%	0%	11%	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%
Male member takes decision by informing female member	3%	46%	1%	2%	1%	6%	21%	39%	35%	39%	0%	0%	9%	25%
Male member decides without consultation from female members	45%	37%	88%	98%	94%	94%	48%	39%	63%	61%	93%	100%	76%	69%

Table 18 : Agriculture & allied activities (Production & market related)

Particulars	Majuli		Dhubri		Nagaon		Udalguri		Tinsukia		Karbi Anglong East		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Female member takes the decision on her own	51%	15%	4%	2%	15%	3%	25%	11%	1%	0%	0%	0%	16%	5%
Female member takes decision by informing male members	1%	0%	10%	0%	5%	3%	7%	4%	1%	0%	10%	0%	5%	1%
Mutual decision	0%	5%	1%	5%	9%	18%	3%	21%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	7%
Male member takes decision by informing female member	4%	44%	19%	21%	14%	21%	41%	29%	6%	10%	8%	9%	13%	22%
Male member decides without consultation from female members	45%	37%	67%	71%	57%	56%	25%	36%	93%	90%	82%	91%	62%	66%

Table 19 : Loan, mortgage, and investments

Particulars	Majuli		Dhubri		Nagaon		Udalguri		Tinsukia		Karbi Anglong East		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Female member takes the decision on her own	51%	15%	4%	0%	3%	0%	11%	18%	0%	0%	0%	5%	11%	5%
Female member takes decision by informing male members	1%	0%	10%	2%	3%	0%	5%	0%	1%	0%	8%	0%	4%	0%
Mutual decision	0%	2%	2%	2%	0%	3%	8%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%
Male member takes decision by informing female member	3%	46%	1%	2%	3%	9%	33%	43%	1%	3%	0%	0%	4%	16%
Male member decides without consultation from female members	45%	37%	83%	93%	91%	88%	43%	36%	98%	97%	92%	95%	79%	76%

4.6. Income and expenditure

Although the Mein Pragati Assam programme primarily focuses on creating access to financial and social security services among the local communities, the interventions will certainly have an impact on the income and expenditure of the beneficiary households. Therefore, the current income and expenditure level of the sample group was needed to be calculated in order to compare the impact of programme during the endline assessment. Hence, following steps were undertaken to capture income and expenditure at the household level:

Step 1: In order to gauge the household level income, different income sources available to the household were mapped. The income sources that were probed are listed below:

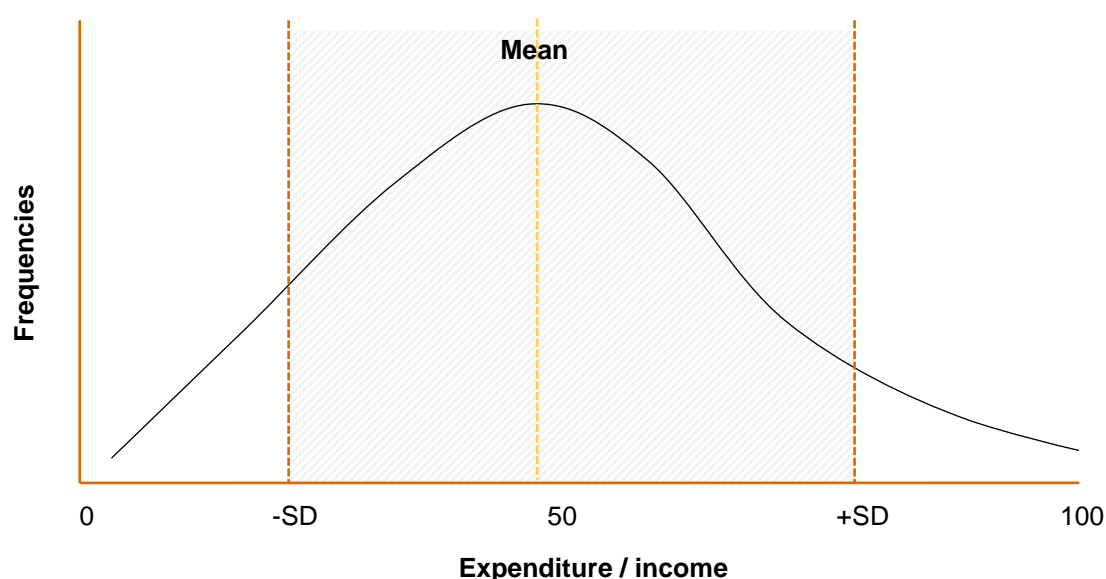
- Agriculture and allied activities including livestock rearing, fishery, silkworm rearing, etc
- Farm labour (serving as agriculture labourers)
- Non-farm (construction, loading/ unloading, repair, etc)
- Salaried/ Pension
- Artisanship
- Micro enterprise (shops, trading, etc)
- Others (such as rent)

Step 2: The investment/ expenditure per year that goes onto these income generating activities was captured. At the same time, the revenue generated from each of the income generating activities of the household was calculated.

Step 3: The income of a household from various activities were added to find the annual household income.

Step 4: The respondents were asked to calculate and share the amount of expenditure they do on a monthly basis all things combined. It is understood that it becomes difficult for anyone to remember the list of expenditures on a yearly basis and thus, hence it was preferred to capture the data on a monthly basis and convert it to annually.

Step 5: The income and expenditure were then separately plotted in a graph and in order to eliminate skewedness in data, the outliers outside \pm Standard Deviation (SD) of the mean were removed and only the frequencies between the $-SD$ and $+SD$ were kept for calculating the net income and expenditure.



- As can be seen from Table 20, **households earning income through salary/ pension has the highest average income followed by agriculture and allied activities.** Average income from agriculture and

allied activities is the highest in Majuli. This is due to the **availability of water throughout the year which allows the communities of Majuli to cultivate agricultural crops throughout the three seasons of Kharif, Rabi, and Zaid. Dhubri has the lowest average income from agriculture** which can be attributed to low landholding among the respondents.

- The **wage rates in for farm and non-farm labour is lower in Udalguri** than the other districts because of abundance of daily wage labour. It was reported by the participants of FGD that the **average daily wage rates for non-farm labour in Karbi Anglong is around Rs. 450/- whereas in Udalguri many labourers agree to work for even Rs. 300/- per day.**
- The majority of the respondents involved in artisanship consider it as a secondary source of income. With mostly women being engaged in this activity, they get involved in it only they could spare some time after their daily homemaking.

Table 20: Average income per household from different sources (in INR)

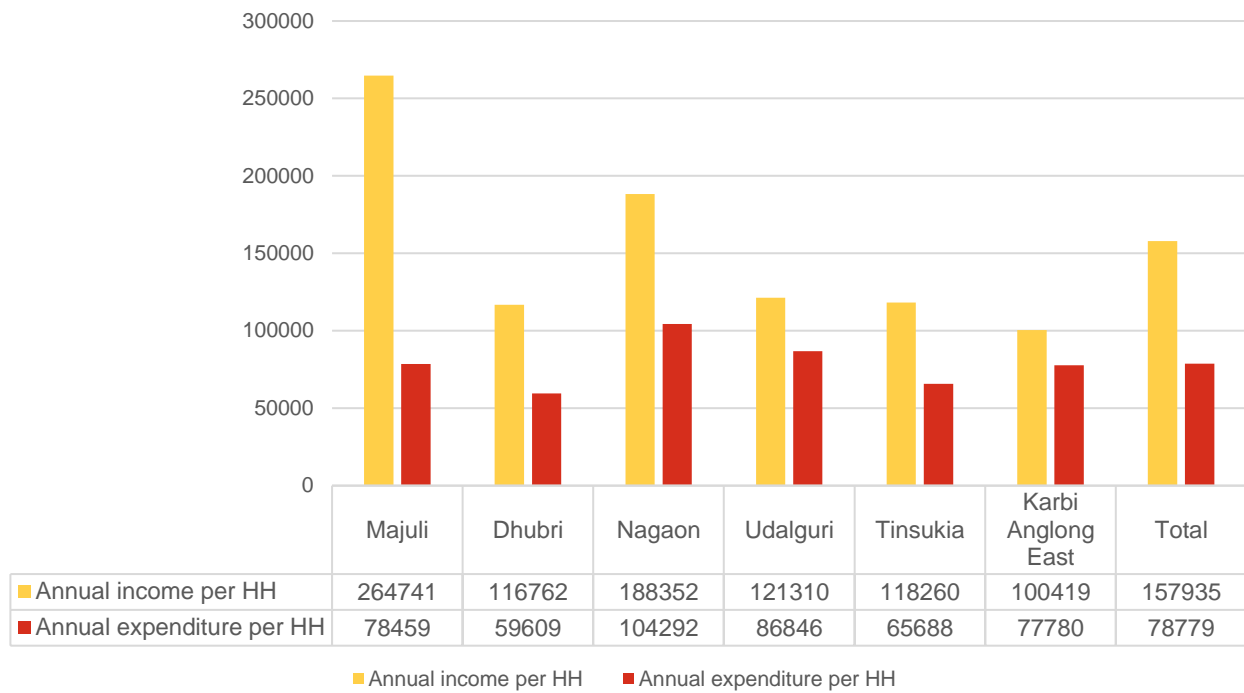
Sources of income	Majuli	Dhubri	Nagaon	Udalguri	Tinsukia	Karbi Anglong East	Total
Agriculture and allied	2,54,535	61,166	1,69,526	1,30,750	1,47,833	1,38,733	1,74,134
Farm Labour	66,667	89,735	69,388	39,076	70,000	-	66,973
Non-farm labour	1,08,356	94,995	95,862	52,629	71,269	1,13,848	89,493
Salaried/ pension	1,59,550	2,43,600	2,45,757	1,20,000	1,17,067	1,56,000	2,06,996
Artisanship	27,114	7,000	15,417	-	-	12,750	15,570
Microenterprise	1,08,804	49,200	1,50,936	66,396	25,500	1,33,200	1,20,876
Others	-	6,150	5,741	3,000	4,733	-	4,906

The **average annual household income among the 909 respondents was calculated to be INR 1,57,935.** On further analysis of the household income-related data as illustrated in the figure 33, Majuli reported the highest average annual household income with INR 2,64,741 whereas the lowest was reported in the case of Karbi Anglong East with INR 1,00,419 per annum.

- High literacy rate in Majuli along with the availability of fertile land and year around irrigation facilities are the major drivers of growth among the respondents.
- Karbi Anglong East being a district with high forest cover of 76%²⁸, low connectivity, and minimal irrigation, its people have limited opportunities for income with high dependence on non-farm labour (as discussed in figure 20).
- The high population density in Dhubri and Nagaon have led to low land ownership which is a major challenge along with annual floods. Tinsukia
- Tinsukia and Udalguri both have high percentage of respondents who are dependent on labour (both farm and non-farm). The low ceiling of income associated with hired labour along with unavailability of work through the year significantly affects the income earning capacity of the respondents in these two districts.

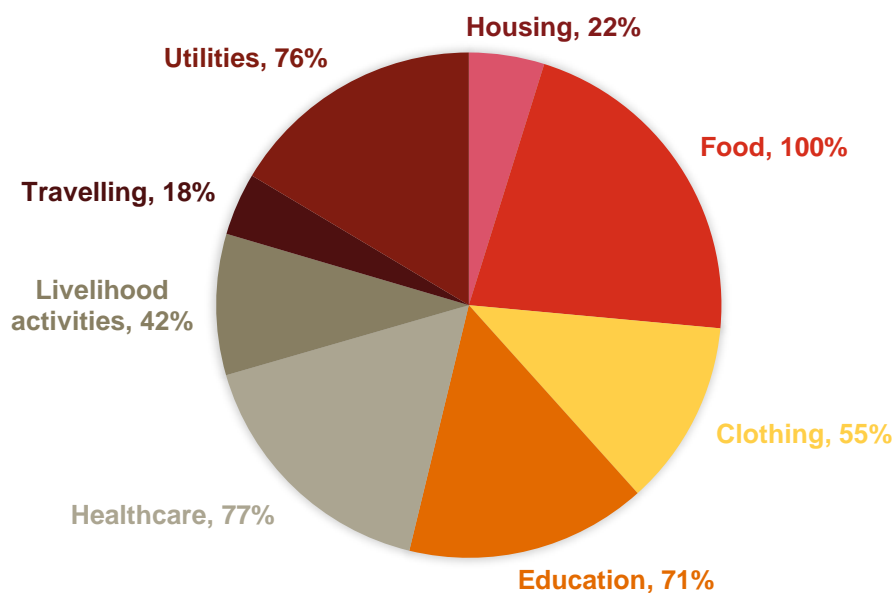
²⁸https://asbb.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf_utility_folder/departments/asbb_lipl_in_oid_7/portlet/level_2/Booklet_%20Karbi%20Anglong.pdf

Figure 33: Average annual income and expenditure per respondent household (in INR)



- The majority of the respondents reported **Food as one of their top 3 monthly expenditure heads**. Healthcare (77%), Utilities that includes rent, electricity, gas, etc. (76%), and education of children (71%) are also considered by many households as one of their major expenditure heads.

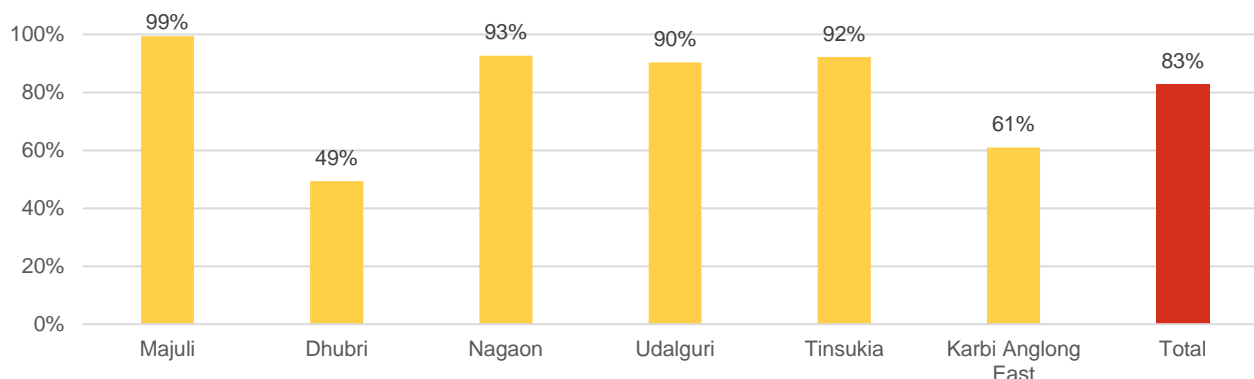
Figure 34: Top 3 expenditure heads reported by respondents



4.7. Perception towards supporting services

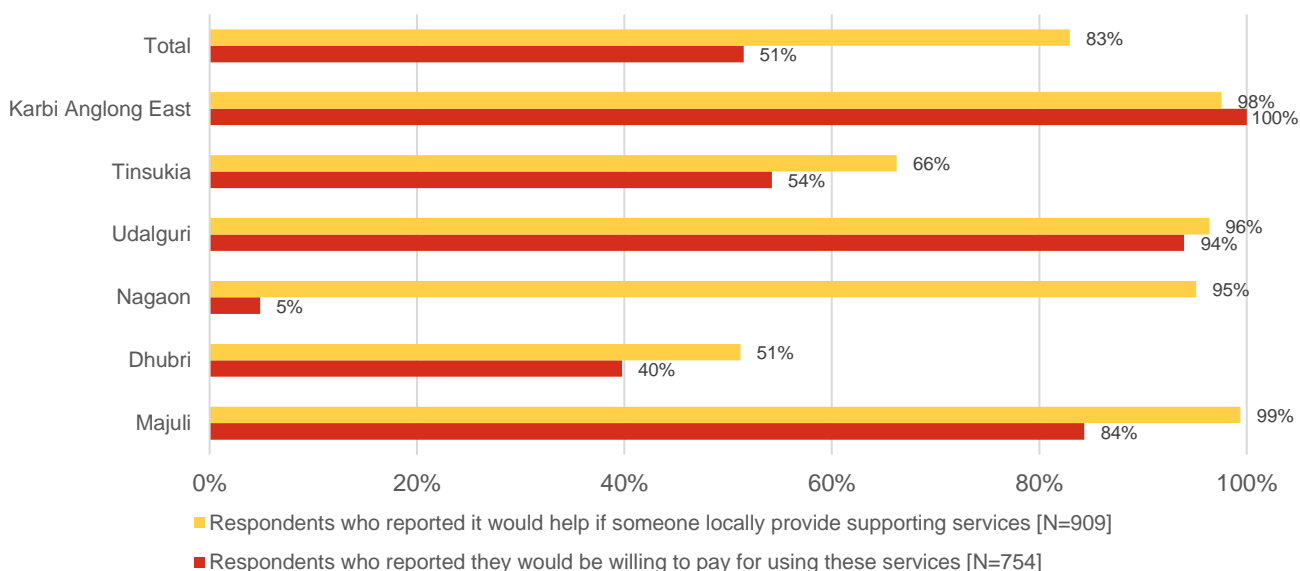
As the Mein Pragati Assam Programme plans to provide supporting services to the communities on financial awareness and linking them to financial and social security services through the CRISIL Sakhis, it was important to understand the perception of the communities related to the need of such services and their willingness to opt for such services. The below sub-section attempts to capture the same through various indicators:

Figure 35: Interested in attending trainings



- In total, 83% of the respondents reported that they would be interested in attending trainings on banking, business, financial management, government schemes, etc. **The respondents shared that their willingness is subjected to the trainings taking place within their gram panchayat as it would be difficult for them to go to block/ district/ state level locations to attend such trainings.**
- The low percentage of response in Dhubri and Karbi Anglong East can be attributed to the limited awareness of the communities around benefit of such trainings. A significant percentage of respondents in Dhubri (44%) and Karbi Anglong East (30%) reported that they don't know if they would be interested in attending such trainings. In such cases, it will be important for the programme to conduct the initial repo building activities and awareness generation activities so that the community members get the basic knowledge on the importance of financial management and inclusion.

Figure 36: Need and willingness to pay for supporting services



- Above Figure 36 represents the analysis on the perception of respondents regarding the need for locally available supporting services for getting loans, insurance, schematic benefits, etc. Out of 909

respondents, **83% reported that it would be very beneficial if someone from their locality starts providing help around the abovementioned areas.** Additionally, these 83% of the respondents were also asked if they will be willing to pay to obtain such services. On this, 51% of respondents reported 'Yes' towards paying to obtain such services.

- The major reasons reported by the respondents who are willing to pay for these services are:
 - Many of them have to go to the Customer Service Points (CSP) which are generally located at the block level and thus, there is the cost of transportation in addition to the fee that needs to be paid at the CSP for applying for any scheme/ service.
 - The extension workers (SRLM CRPs, Bank Mitras, Bima Sakhis, and Business Correspondent) in many places are not active and hence, the local communities don't have this option available to them. As noted from the discussions with SRLM CRPs and other Sakhis, they face several challenges in discharging their duties and due to those challenges, many of the CRPs/ Sakhis are unable to serve all the households in their working areas. The major challenges as cited by the CRPs/ Sakhis in discharging their services are discussed below:
 - Connectivity issues: Not all the CRPs/ Sakhis have their own vehicles and with limited availability of public connectivity in the rural areas, they find it difficult to commute between villages.
 - Delay in payment for their services: This point was mostly raised by the SRLM CRPs. In some cases, the CRPs have to wait a long time (even for a year) to get their payment from the VOs (Village Organisations) which acts as a demotivating factor for the CRPs.
 - A large number of people are dependent on the local internet shops for applying for these schemes/ services who also charges around Rs. 100-200 per application. **Respondents have reported that if they can get these services at a similar price without having to go to the internet shops, that it would be beneficial to them.** Additionally, they shared that one more positive of someone known to them providing these services is that there won't be any risk of misusing their personal information.
- However, 49% of the respondents who expressed their unwillingness to pay towards such services were probed on the reasons in this regard and it was identified that:
 - There are already different community resource persons such as **SRLM CRPs, Bank Mitras, Bima Sakhis, and Business Correspondent who are providing these services free of cost** as the government or banks are paying them to provide these services.
 - The respondents who reside closer to banks feel since they can avail most of these services from the bank itself, there is no need for them to pay the extra money.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this baseline assessment was to **identify the key indicators based on which the effectiveness and impact of the Mein Pragati Assam programme can be assessed**. The baseline assessment enabled to identify and calculate the value of these indicators based on the current context of the study geography. These indicators then shall be re-measured during the endline assessment (to take place after completion of the programme) to assess the difference in the conditions of the targeted beneficiaries between the baseline and endline.

Although **98% of the 909 respondents have their own bank accounts and knows how to use them**, it was analysed that the level of awareness around various financial services, social security services, and government schemes is very limited across the six districts. **51% of the total respondents (n=909)** mentioned that they were aware of recurring deposit, however, only **45% have opened recurring deposit to invest their money**. 49% of the respondents (n=909) were aware about fixed deposit but only **22% of the respondents invested their money in the fixed deposit**. Except these two financial products (recurring deposit and fixe deposit), a very low % of respondents have reported that they were aware of the other financial products such as National Savings Certificate, Mutual Funds, and Pension Accounts. **The lack of awareness has also directly impacted and attracted low investment in such schemes as only less than 10% of the respondents were investing in each scheme**. The reason **behind the low awareness and use of financial/ social security/ schematic assistance is the low literacy rates** (only 40% have education till matriculate and above) in many areas compounded by the lack of handholding support and logistical services have contributed to the low awareness levels and inclusion

The majority of the **respondents are dependent on agriculture and allied activities (46%) and non-farm labour (49%) for their income**. In such a scenario, **access to institutional finance and government social security schemes is important to deal with the vulnerabilities related to climate and social shocks**. Currently, only **31% of the 909 respondents have taken loan to invest in their livelihood activities**. It was reported by many respondents that although they have access to credit facilities, they have not taken any loan till now because they don't know where and how to invest the money. This shows that **lack the know-how of enterprise promotion and business planning is also a major factor behind people's reluctance to take loans**. Among the respondents who have taken, the major source is the SHGs with 66% of the respondents who have taken loan reporting of taking their loan from the SHGs whereas only **27% reporting of taking loans from banks**. The reason behind the inclination towards **taking loans from SHGs is the ease associated with getting loans from SHGs without any requirement for collateral**.

With an average household income of INR 1,57,935 per annum in the study geography, effective utilisation of institutional credit facilities and schematic benefits will be essential for the communities to improve their livelihood activities and having a safety net to reduce the impact of social and environmental shocks. **Involvement of women in livelihood generation is also one area that has significant scope of improvement with only 29% of the respondent women** reporting of getting involved in such activities. Their limited involvement in economic activities has also led to the women members being subsided by the male members while making household level decisions. **71% of the 909 respondents** reported that **the male members take decisions on their own without consulting with the female members**. Thus, **economic empowerment of the women members through creating awareness and providing handholding support will be important in making them empowered socially**. Looking at the current scenario, the key focus areas considered under the Mein Pragati Assam programme seems very relevant. Also, the model of implementation which has the CRISIL Sakhis **as the important stakeholder, seems to be in tandem with the need of the local communities (83% of the respondents reported that they need support to attain the financial and social security services)**.

Overall, the study has identified following list of key indicators which should be considered for measuring the progress for tracking purpose during the endline assessment:

Table 21: Compiled list of key programme indicators

#	Indicator	Theme	Baseline value
1	% Respondents reporting they regularly save money	Finance & Digital literacy	68%
2	Average monthly savings done by respondent households (INR)	Finance & Digital literacy	1,903
3	% Household who are aware about financial products such as fixed deposit or recurring deposit	Finance & Digital literacy	51%
4	% Household who have invested in fixed deposit or recurring deposit	Finance & Digital literacy	45%
5	% Respondent who have visited an ATM to withdraw money	Finance & Digital literacy	35%
6	% Respondents reporting at least one household member has life/ health insurance	Finance & Digital literacy	50%
7	% Respondents who have taken loan in the last 3 years	Finance & Digital literacy	42%
8	% Respondents who have taken loan from financial institution such as Banks/ NBFCs	Finance & Digital literacy	27%
9	% Respondents reporting to have taken loans to start or expand their existing income generating activities	Finance & Digital literacy	31%
10	% Respondents that they know how to use a mobile phone	Finance & Digital literacy	76%
11	% Respondents who uses digital banking services	Finance & Digital literacy	20%
12	% Respondents reporting of not having access to any of the government schemes	Access to entitlements	16%
13	% Respondents who have been registered under Ayushman Bharat Scheme	Access to entitlements	45%
14	% Respondents who have been registered under Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana	Access to entitlements	3%
15	% Respondents who have been registered under Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana	Access to entitlements	3%
16	% Respondents who have been registered under Sukanya Samridhi Yojana	Access to entitlements	8%
17	% Respondents who have been registered under Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana	Access to entitlements	18%
18	% Respondents reporting that women members are consulted by the male members before taking a household decision	Gender balance	29%
19	% Household having more than one income source	Income and expenditure	23%
20	Average annual net income of the households	Income and expenditure	157,935
21	Average annual expenditure of the households	Income and expenditure	78,779
	Denotes that these indicators are quite low in the current context.		

Further, although the understanding gained from the project team of CRISIL Foundation and its implementation partners on the Mein Pragati Assam programme show that the programme has appropriately **included the necessary needs of the local communities into the design, the interactions with the communities and other key stakeholders have brought into some additional points for management's considerations which may further help in strengthening the overall impact and sustainability of the programme.** These points are discussed in the below section:

1. Linking the CRISIL Sakhis with the CFL points

In addition to the Mein Pragati Assam programme, CRISIL Foundation is also implementing a programme called 'Centre for Financial Literacy (CFL)' in partnership of the Reserve Bank of India. Under the CFL programme, CRISIL Foundation has created CFL points to create financial awareness among the local communities. However, their reach to the intervention blocks is largely due to only 3 persons being positioned at each CFL point. Connecting the CRISIL Sakhis to these CFL points to create a hub and spoke model where the Sakhis can be tasked with furthering the awareness can help broaden the reach of both these programmes. At the same

time, the CFL points can act in the model of Customer Service Points promoted by various banks where community members can be provided with the service of applying for various financial services and government schemes. Since both these programmes have a similar goal, the alignment of resources can help reaching out to a larger audience and speed up the process of financial inclusion at the ground level.

2. Empowering the CRISIL Sakhis to act as a one-stop solution for all government-scheme related services

Access to government schemes is still restricted to a limited section of the people in most of the areas. Lack of awareness and access to 'application centres' are the major reasons behind the low penetration. CRISIL Sakhis with the help of the Mein Pragati Assam programme can take up the task of linking local communities to the different government scheme (not restricted to financial and social security). Schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission, Livestock Insurance Scheme, and other livelihood related schemes have very less coverage within the study geography. Providing services around these schemes will not only increase the visibility of the Sakhis and allow them to cover more people, but also, help the communities in getting support around their livelihood activities also.

3. Incentivisation of the CRISIL Sakhis for the initial project period

There are already different community resource persons such as **SRLM CRPs, Bank Mitras, Bima Sakhis, and Business Correspondent who are providing the services** related to getting loans, insurance, schematic benefits, etc. **to the local communities free of cost** as the government or the banks are paying them to provide these services. In such a scenario, many people won't be willing to pay for using the services of CRISIL Sakhis as illustrated in the sub-section 4.7 of this report where 49% respondents expressed their unwillingness to pay for the supporting services. This can become a significant challenge for the CRISIL Sakhis as they may find it difficult to convince the local communities to get associated with the MPA programme for availing their services. Although, contributing towards social development can be a major motivation among the CRISIL Sakhis for getting involved with the MPA programme, however, some form of monetary incentivisation would be important for keeping them motivated to perform their roles and responsibilities. The MPA programme may explore the possibility of having an incentive-based payment structure for the CRISIL Sakhis in the form of Business Correspondents (BC) where they are given a fixed compensation per month in addition to target-linked incentives. The MPA may refer to the commission structure of the State Bank of India (SBI) for the BC²⁹. This type of a model will allow the CRISIL Sakhis to have a steady flow of personal income and also, cater to a larger audience including the community members who are not willing to pay for their services.

4. Providing training and handholding support to local communities on livelihood enhancement and micro enterprise development

In the similar line to the second point, the local communities also need technical and handholding support to utilise the available financial services in an effective manner. Many of the respondents of the baseline study mentioned that they haven't taken loan because they don't see any opportunities to utilise the loan amount. This only goes on to show that the lack of know-how among local communities around enterprise development and business planning. In addition to supporting the local communities in availing credit facilities, the programme can also include the component of supporting them in using the loan amount through micro-level investment planning and providing them with the exposure to develop entrepreneurial ideas.

5. Linking the newly formed SHGs under the Mein Pragati Assam programme with NRLM

It is understood that the programme plans to mobilise the women members into SHGs to build social capital and creating a platform to efficiently disburse trainings and other programmatic support. These SHGs in turn, can be linked with NRLM and registered in the NRLM SHG portal. This would allow the SHG to receive additional support in the form of Revolving Fund and Community Investment Fund.

²⁹ https://nict.ind.in/SBI_Commission_Structure.pdf

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