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LEVELS OF LIVING IN RURAL HOUSEHOLDS

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Bihar

There could be several criteria to measure and appraise the levels of rural living and each could be supplementary to one another for rather broader gauge of appraisal. Customarily, levels and kinds of diet, clothing, housing, health and education are common measures frequently adopted to make a sound appraisal for the levels of living. It is commonly observed that the levels maintained in one category by rural households is followed by levels maintained in other categories of living. In other words, if a household maintains a high level of diet, the same level is approximately held in other sources of living. If this is so, let us see the implications having priority assigned to the level of health and education and the level of diet. These would work as indicator for the average level of living in the rural household.

Methods of Identifying the Level of Diet

There are three methods by which level and pattern of diet could be estimated. All of these, of course, supplement each other. First, one could make estimation through consumers' food balance sheet. This shows the estimated per caput supply of a foodstuff in a region as measured by the total production adjusted for in and out movements. When such commodity balances are available for all main foods the calorie value and content of protein and other nutrients can be calculated for the diet as a whole. Second, one could have the consumer survey. These data are based on a representative sample of households in an area or region, and ideally covers consumers' total expenditure in a given period for food and other items, the quantities of food purchased and consumed, and the quantities of food obtained for consumption other than by purchase. This information may be related to data collected at the same time on income, size of family, etc. Third, one could try time series data.

Empirical Findings

Our findings are based on 'Farmers' Expenditure Survey' run by the Government of Bihar. The primary objective behind this survey was to estimate the cost of living indices and the parity price for farm people in Bihar. Data seem to have lot of discrepancies but for drawing inference on the aggregative picture of the levels of rural living in Bihar one could very well make use of it. For the methodology of identifying the levels and patterns of rural living, we are using the funds of expenditure approach. Our data for the State of Bihar reflect an interesting phenomenon in the pattern of rural living. Some of these seem to have *a priori* reasoning behind it. The average estimated figures on household expenditure for the State as a whole suggest that approximately 73.22 per cent of the total household expenditure is allocated on food items (See Table I). This, no doubt, leaves a low margin of funds to be spent on other categories of non-food items. In case of total food items, average rural household is estimated to spend

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TABLE I—ESTIMATED FOOD AND NON-FOOD EXPENDITURE PER RURAL HOUSEHOLD BY DISTRICTS IN BIHAR*

| Districts | Cereals | | Pulses | | Other Foods | | Total Foods | | Clothing | | Bedding and Footwear | |
|----------------|----------|-------|--------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|----------|-------|----------------------|------|
| | (Rs.) | % | (Rs.) | % | (Rs.) | % | (Rs.) | % | (Rs.) | % | (Rs.) | % |
| Patna .. | 912.56 | 52.94 | 150.94 | 8.76 | 660.17 | 38.30 | 1,723.67 | 68.05 | 176.94 | 6.98 | 41.11 | 1.62 |
| Gaya .. | 770.00 | 54.37 | 154.94 | 10.95 | 491.18 | 34.68 | 1,416.12 | 76.12 | 143.24 | 7.70 | 26.58 | 1.41 |
| Shahabad .. | 958.74 | 61.18 | 149.66 | 9.55 | 458.62 | 29.27 | 1,567.02 | 76.14 | 165.73 | 8.05 | 17.54 | 0.85 |
| Saran .. | 885.16 | 64.92 | 136.97 | 10.05 | 341.22 | 25.03 | 1,363.35 | 66.47 | 139.71 | 6.96 | 13.64 | 0.68 |
| Champanan .. | 712.77 | 61.01 | 112.47 | 9.64 | 342.88 | 29.35 | 1,168.12 | 69.07 | 127.47 | 7.53 | 15.53 | 0.91 |
| Muzaffarpur .. | 677.04 | 64.37 | 106.26 | 10.44 | 265.17 | 25.29 | 1,048.47 | 73.40 | 112.65 | 7.95 | 14.35 | 1.01 |
| Darbhanga .. | 640.65 | 65.84 | 96.79 | 9.97 | 235.43 | 24.19 | 972.87 | 77.40 | 98.64 | 7.84 | 3.57 | 0.28 |
| Monghyr .. | 892.64 | 65.95 | 80.20 | 5.93 | 380.60 | 28.12 | 1,353.44 | 68.51 | 178.84 | 9.05 | 25.44 | 1.28 |
| Bhagalpur .. | 1,007.22 | 71.11 | 121.22 | 8.57 | 287.86 | 20.32 | 1,416.30 | 84.18 | 125.22 | 7.44 | 7.57 | 0.45 |
| Saharsa .. | 1,082.76 | 63.36 | 152.52 | 8.93 | 473.56 | 27.71 | 1,708.84 | 80.03 | 151.76 | 7.10 | 21.72 | 1.01 |
| Purnea .. | 612.73 | 61.01 | 97.17 | 9.68 | 294.34 | 29.31 | 1,004.24 | 62.44 | 110.56 | 6.87 | 10.89 | 0.67 |
| S. P. .. | 449.00 | 64.37 | 49.37 | 7.11 | 198.97 | 28.52 | 697.44 | 77.82 | 54.88 | 6.02 | 5.82 | 0.61 |
| Hazaribagh .. | 515.22 | 64.10 | 44.78 | 5.59 | 243.66 | 30.31 | 803.66 | 74.45 | 101.91 | 9.44 | 2.31 | 0.21 |
| Ranchi .. | 525.09 | 79.63 | 23.50 | 3.57 | 110.80 | 16.80 | 659.39 | 77.87 | 59.57 | 7.03 | 6.80 | 0.80 |
| Palamau .. | 511.48 | 72.71 | 41.04 | 5.84 | 150.88 | 21.45 | 703.40 | 73.68 | 49.48 | 5.18 | 11.48 | 1.20 |
| Singhbhum .. | 628.95 | 64.40 | 54.35 | 5.60 | 293.30 | 30.00 | 976.60 | 69.28 | 152.71 | 10.83 | 18.12 | 1.28 |
| Bihar State .. | 716.54 | 63.37 | 94.41 | 8.35 | 319.78 | 28.28 | 1,130.73 | 73.22 | 118.41 | 7.66 | 14.49 | 0.93 |

* Source : Farmers' Expenditure Survey, Government of Bihar.

(Contd.)

TABLE I—ESTIMATED FOOD AND NON-FOOD EXPENDITURE PER RURAL HOUSEHOLD BY DISTRICTS IN BIHAR*—Contd.

| Districts | Household articles | | Miscellaneous items | | Total expenditure Rs. | Per capita expenditure Rs. | Average family members No. |
|-------------------|--------------------|------|---------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Rs. | % | Rs. | % | | | |
| Patna | 38.72 | 1.52 | 552.28 | 21.83 | 2,532.72 | 278.02 | 9.11 |
| Gaya | 7.91 | 0.41 | 266.39 | 14.36 | 1,860.24 | 194.99 | 9.54 |
| Shahabad | 4.31 | 0.21 | 303.27 | 14.75 | 2,057.87 | 239.84 | 8.58 |
| Saran | 20.39 | 0.99 | 513.71 | 24.90 | 2,050.80 | 187.46 | 10.94 |
| Champanan | 57.24 | 3.38 | 322.65 | 19.11 | 1,691.01 | 185.42 | 9.12 |
| Muzaffarpur | 6.39 | 0.45 | 234.22 | 17.19 | 1,416.08 | 145.39 | 9.74 |
| Darbhanga | 6.64 | 0.52 | 175.14 | 13.96 | 1,256.86 | 191.36 | 6.93 |
| Monghyr | 8.96 | 0.45 | 409.68 | 20.71 | 1,975.36 | 200.75 | 9.84 |
| Bhagalpur | 9.78 | 0.58 | 123.50 | 7.35 | 1,682.37 | 181.29 | 9.28 |
| Saharsa | 14.40 | 0.67 | 238.52 | 11.19 | 2,135.24 | 238.31 | 8.96 |
| Purnea | 5.17 | 0.32 | 477.28 | 19.70 | 1,608.14 | 229.73 | 7.00 |
| S. P. | 21.18 | 2.39 | 105.44 | 12.16 | 884.76 | 160.86 | 5.50 |
| Hazaribagh | 33.31 | 3.04 | 138.24 | 12.86 | 1,079.43 | 195.90 | 5.51 |
| Ranchi | 3.97 | 0.47 | 110.96 | 13.83 | 846.69 | 137.82 | 6.10 |
| Palamau | 3.56 | 0.37 | 186.64 | 19.57 | 954.56 | 160.16 | 5.96 |
| Singhbhum | 16.88 | 1.19 | 245.24 | 17.42 | 1,409.55 | 208.51 | 6.76 |
| Bihar State | 16.31 | 1.05 | 264.20 | 17.14 | 1,544.14 | 195.21 | 7.91 |

* Source : Farmers' Expenditure Survey, Government of Bihar.

roughly 63.37 per cent just on carbohydrate cereal food. This is how the burning hunger is appeased. With this relatively high proportion of food expenditure on cereals, it is but natural to expect a low allowance for high protective and nutritive type foods.

As pulse is considered to be the 'poormen's protein food', average rural household is estimated to make an allocation of about 8.35 per cent of the total food expenditure on pulses. After having aggregated the expenditures on cereals and pulses, only 28.28 per cent of the food budget is left for other food items, *i.e.*, vegetables, spices, milk, fruits, meat, etc. It is observed that spices account for high proportion in other food items. This is but natural to expect since daily monotonous diet needs to be added some kind of artificial taste. Correspondingly absolute figures indicate that the estimated range falls from a high of Rs. 716.54 on cereals to a low of Rs. 94.41 on pulses and thereby leaving an interval of Rs. 319.78 on other food items.

District level distribution of expenditure on food items does not reflect at the surface if there is sharp difference. Total food expenditure is estimated to range from a low of Rs. 659.39 per rural household in the district of Ranchi to a high of Rs. 1,723.67 per rural household in Patna district. These two districts represent two diverse regions of the State, one (Ranchi) representing the agriculturally backward pocket of the State, whereas, the other (Patna) representing the agriculturally advance part of the State. It suggests that the level of farm income has its impact on the level of food expenditure. Pointing to the level of cereal consumption, Bhagalpur and Saharsa in the Indo-Gangetic plain seem to have made relatively higher bid (Rs. 1,007.22 and Rs. 1,082.76 per household respectively). The estimated cereal expenditure tends to be Rs. 449.00 for S. P., which is relatively low. Estimates for other districts seem to be evenly distributed. But, of course, there is a margin of regional variation in the level of food expenditure. Relatively high level of food consumption in North Bihar and South Bihar region in comparison to Chotanagpur region could be roughly attributed to the differences in the level of farm income between the regions. Next level of household expenditure is held in miscellaneous items which include education, travel, litigation, ceremonials, etc.

The estimated range falls from a high of Rs. 552.28 in Patna district to a low of Rs. 105.44 in S.P. and thereby leaving an interval of Rs. 264.20 as the State average. Among these items quite high value is assigned to ceremonials. This is but natural to expect from our traditional society where mores, beliefs and customs play predominant role in shaping people's pattern of living. Sometimes, poverty-stricken hungry people get relief and compassion through the observance of traditional customs and festivities. Since level of education is still very low in the rural areas, farm household expenditure on education accounts for a low proportion. There has been strong demonstration effect among farm households for clothings, particularly among the ladies. Formerly, if village women used to wear one pair of coarse sari for the whole year, they now not only tend to wear more than one pair of sari but also little better sari. The State average for expenditure on clothings is estimated to be Rs. 118.41 which accounts for 7.66 per cent of the total household expenditure. Alongwith district-wise comparison, the estimates seem to be uniformly distributed, though little gap is revealed between the low and high estimated range of Rs. 9.48 and Rs. 178.84 per household. The expenditures incurred on bedding, footwear and household articles are estimated

TABLE II—DISTRIBUTION OF CONSUMPTION COST, AVERAGE INCOME AND AVERAGE NUMBER OF PERSONS
BY FAMILY SIZE-GROUPS IN BIHAR*

| Family Size- Groups | Cereals (Rs.) | Pulses (Rs.) | Other Food (Rs.) | Total food expenditure (Rs.) | Total non-food expenditure (Rs.) | Total expenditure (Rs.) | Average income per family (Rs.) | Average per capita income (Rs.) | Average number of persons (Rs.) |
|------------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1 — 2 | 358.84 | 53.00 | 211.17 | 623.01 | 310.50 | 933.51 | 437.67 | 218.84 | 2.00 |
| 3 — 4 | 353.55 | 42.06 | 165.07 | 560.68 | 192.63 | 753.31 | 780.95 | 221.23 | 3.53 |
| 5 — 7 | 604.81 | 75.08 | 285.61 | 965.50 | 363.46 | 1,328.96 | 1,480.72 | 245.15 | 6.04 |
| 8 — 10 | 731.99 | 91.22 | 320.32 | 1,143.53 | 380.18 | 1,523.71 | 1,688.56 | 189.94 | 8.89 |
| 11 — 14 | 1,030.14 | 146.54 | 381.11 | 1,557.79 | 492.45 | 2,050.35 | 2,330.35 | 190.86 | 12.21 |
| 15 — Over | 1,252.89 | 193.22 | 525.36 | 1,971.47 | 890.44 | 2,861.91 | 4,293.36 | 245.76 | 17.47 |

* Source : *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

to be at low levels. The State average for above two items comes to be Rs. 14.49 and Rs. 16.31 respectively. The above expenditure is found to be evenly distributed among the districts. Available data on per capita living expenditure reflect visible difference among the districts. It is estimated to range from a low of Rs. 137.82 to a high of Rs. 278.02 leaving thereby an interval of Rs. 195.21 for the State average. This low level of living expenditure is certainly an indicator of the economically weak condition of our rural folks. Since we find farm people's level of income is just at the margin to provide a bare minimum of living, the immediate challenge before the planners is to provide a change in this structural relationships.

Data on family size groups reveal an interesting trend in the level of household consumption. There seems to be a rising trend in consumption level from one low family size-group to next following bigger family size-group with the exception of the family size-group 3-4. The estimated range in total household expenditure rises from a low of Rs. 933.51 in smaller family size to a high of Rs. 2,861.91 in larger family size. The same trend is maintained in the level of food as well as non-food items of expenditure (See Table II).

There could be one of several reasons to explain this visible disparity. One of the major explanation could be that per household income tends to be relatively low in small family size-groups than in large size-groups of family. This creates an opportunity to have a better level of living. The relative advantage to the larger family group is that there are large number of earning members whose aggregate income makes a pool and thereby helps create conditions to enjoy relatively better level of living. Small family groups are at disadvantageous position in this respect. Furthermore, high asset worth of the big joint family becomes an incentive force for the members to bid for a relatively higher level of living.

LEVEL OF LIVING OF A TRIBAL VILLAGE*

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'Level of living' is simply defined as actual living conditions. It is essentially an idea used for comparative purposes. Since the "actual living conditions" has reference to a very wide and somewhat diverse and elusive phenomenon, "indicators" have to be used for measuring the 'quality' of life. The 'indicators' are not to be misunderstood as the phenomenon itself; indicators suggest but do not represent. In this paper, we have used indicators which though forming a part of the broader category yet show some of the local colour, for example, among the drinks and beverages we have noted "*Tari* and *Mahuwa* wine".

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