Growth of Population in Assam with Special reference to Char Areas: A Threat

Dr. M. Seik Mozibar Rahman
Assistant Professor
Department of Economics
F.A. Ahmed College, Garoimari (Assam)

1. Introduction:

Population is the most important component of economic development in a country. Development is consumed by human being either horizontally or vertically. With the rapid growth of population, vertical development has become an alternative way of living for the people. With each addition of population, it is creating pressure on earth. There is no doubt that manpower is essential for economic development, but excess supply of unskilled labour and larger dependent population may not be in the best interest of the country in this juncture (Misra & Puri: 2001). That is why, population may either be an asset or a liability. In case of India, country's existing population is regarded as a liability rather than an asset considering the available utilisable resources and technological progress. Further increase of population will increase burden on the economy. Therefore, it is very important to know about the population structure of a country so as to minimize problems to be arisen. Age and sex structure are one of the most important characteristics of population composition. The usefulness of data on age is more noticeable for other reason also. Apart from purely demographic concerns, the data on age and sex are required for age specific analysis for planning, scientific, technical and commercial purposes. What percentage of population is dependent[1] and what percentage is engaged in productive activities is very important to know from economic point of view. Knowing about the population as per the age composition is very important for more than one reason as;

   a) Population of age 0-14 years is dependent group,
   b) Population of age 15-60 years is working group and
   c) Population of age above 60 years is old-aged and hence dependent group

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[1] Dependency ratio is the ratio of economically active to economically inactive persons.

Population of age 0-14 years is interpreted as gauge of birth rate, while population within the second age group is meant for larger labour force. However, larger population in the age group of 60+ is also dependent group but meeting the criteria of HDI for development.

Population growth in Assam has been a prolonged debate since last decade, i.e., whether it is caused due to immigration or natural growth is a matter of enquiry. Here in this research paper, it is tried to find out the extent of natural growth of population in Assam in general and Char Areas[2] in particular. Char areas are one of the most backward areas of Assam experienced with high birth rate (Begum: 2022), poor living standard (Rahman: 2021), and blamed to be illegally migrated (Islam: 2022).

2. Objectives: Following are important objectives of the present study;

    i) To find out age-wise population structure in Assam and Char Areas.

    ii) To put policy suggestion on the study

3. Research Methodology: Present study basically depends on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary sources are collected through direct personal interview using a suitable 'schedule' while secondary data are collected from different secondary sources like books, journal, newspaper, government sources, internets etc.

Char areas of Kamrup District are regarded as the population of the study. There are 15 number of Development Blocks under Kamrup District of Assam of which 5 blocks have char areas. Since, present study is proposed to cover the livelihood of the char people, hence the Development Blocks having char areas are taken as the population of the study.

Households were regarded as the sample unit of survey. The sample was designed on the representation basis. Since, population in the study is quite large, 'sample' had to be selected from some selected blocks as well as villages, therefore, multi-stage random sampling technique was used to select the sample sizes. The villages were selected purposively while the sample households were selected at a random on the basis of simple random sampling. Sample villages were selected purposively for the convenience of data collection. The sampling process undergoes through certain stages. In the first stage, 60% of the char blocks were selected. The selected blocks are Goroimari, Chamaria and Rampur. In the second stage, sample villages were selected shown in the flow chart 3.1. In the third stage, sample households were selected.

Sampling Strategic Table: 3.1

Nos. of Char-chapori Villages of the Blocks	% of Selected Villages	Size of Household in the Selected Villages	% of Selected Households
Having<15 Villages	25	Having<100 HHs	25
Between 16 to 100 Villages	15	Between 101 to 300 HHs	12
>100 Villages	5	>300 HHs	7

Note: HHs implies 'Households'

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[2] Char Areas are basically meant for the sandy land area in the river Brahmaputra where people can live and cultivate. The people dwelling in such areas are isolated from the main land passes a very vulnerable life style frequently affected by flood and river erosion. Most of such people are illiterate and dependent on agriculture.

25 per cent of the villages were selected from those blocks having less than 15 villages, 15 per cent of villages from those having 16 to 100 villages and 5 per cent from those having more than 100 villages. However, 25 per cent households were selected from those villages having less than 100 households, 12 per cent households were selected from those villages having 101 to 300 households and 7 per cent households were selected from those villages having more than 300 households. The process of sample selection is shown in Table 3.2. Accordingly, the total number of sample size would be 240.

TABLE 3.2

Selected Sample Blocks, Sample Villages and Sample Households

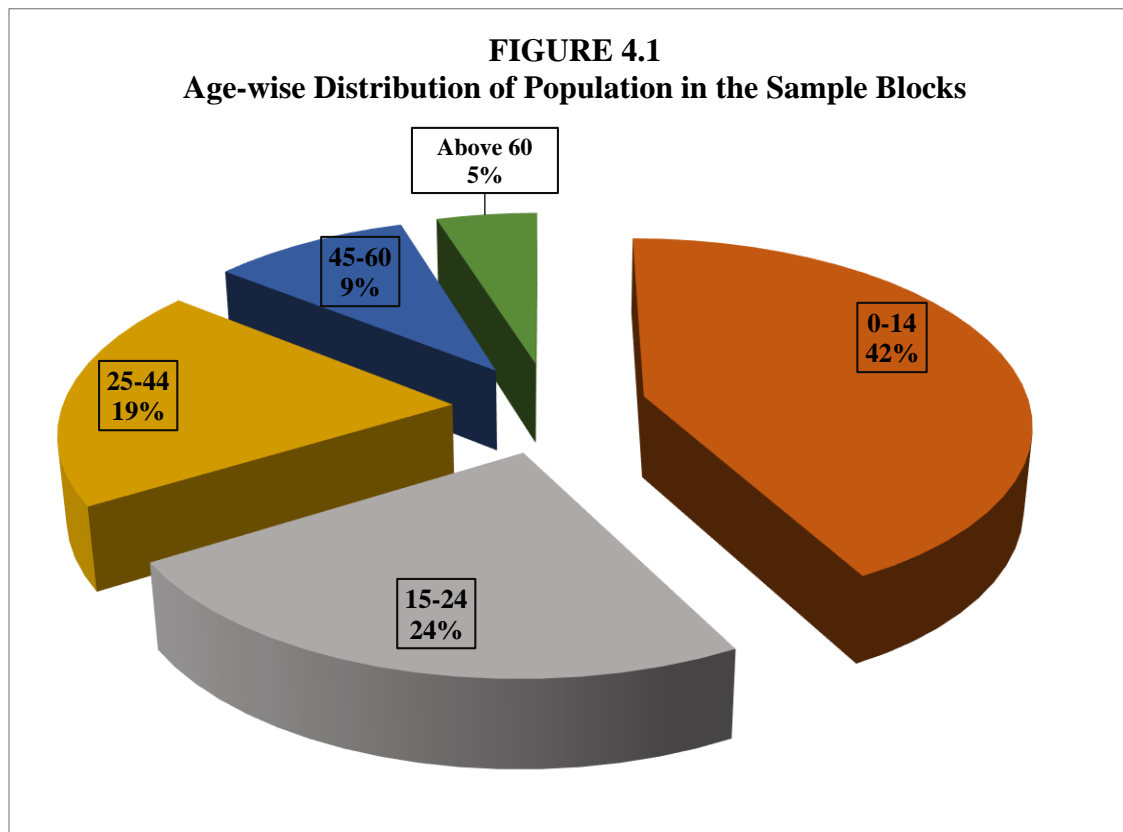| SL. Nos.	Selected Blocks	Villages			HHs of Sample Villages	
		Total	Char	Selected	Total	Selected
1	Goroimari	70	30	4	721	90
2	Chamaria	88	11	3	586	70
3	Rampur	60	13	3	518	80
	Total:	218	54	10	1825	240

4. Data Analysis

The children of age below 15 years are supposed to be the dependency group who are out of working purview. Besides, it is very important indicator in measuring natural growth rate of population by the rationale of, there is a fair amount of confidence that population at this age is least likely be affected by unnatural growth. Table 4.1 & fig-4.1 give age-wise population distribution in the Sample Blocks.

TABLE 4.1

Percentage of Population in different Age Group in the Sample Blocks

Name of Blocks	Age Group					Total
	0-14	15-24	25-44	45-60	Above 60	
Goroimari	46.03	30.49	11.83	8.50	3.14	100
Chamaria	38.67	22.67	22.93	8.53	7.20	100
Rampur	40.68	17.56	25.48	11.35	4.93	100
All Blocks:	42.23	24.01	19.45	9.47	4.84	100

Source: Compiled from Filed Survey, 2017.

FIGURE 4.1
Age-wise Distribution of Population in the Sample Blocks

The table 4.1 reveals that population age below 15 years are 42.23 per cent in the Sample Blocks. It diverges from 38.67 per cent in Chamaria Block to 46.03 per cent in Goroimari Block. It is 40.68 per cent in Rampur Block. In 42.23 per cent population of age group 0-14 years, share of population below 7 years is 15.18 per cent (shown in Appendix 4.1) which may be interpreted a little decline in the growth rate of population at present.

However, population in the age group 15-24 years, 25-44 years & 45-60 years are 24.01 per cent, 19.45 per cent and 9.47 per cent respectively. Percentage of population in age group 15-24 years & 25-44 years show skewed against having a similarity in age group 45-60 years among the blocks. Aged population (above 60 years) records only 4.84 per cent in the surveyed blocks that might designate lower value of HDI in terms of longevity of life. People are less conscious about their health and education. Most of times they remain busy in agricultural field. The Char people are realised to be physically olden even before 60 years due to poor and unconscious diet pattern. There are hardly any people seen who is health sensitive. Consequence to it, people fall in sick in their old age and easily embrace death. That is why number of population in the age group above 60 years is less. Table 4.2.gives age-wise comparison of population between the surveyed blocks and Assam.

TABLE 4.2

Percentage of Population in different Age Group in Assam and Sample Blocks

State/ Blocks	Age Group					Total
	0-14	15-24	25-44	45-60	Above 60	
Assam	32.84	19.16	29.60	11.68	6.72	100
Sample Blocks	42.23	24.01	19.45	9.47	4.84	100

Sources:

i) Compiled from Field Survey, 2017.
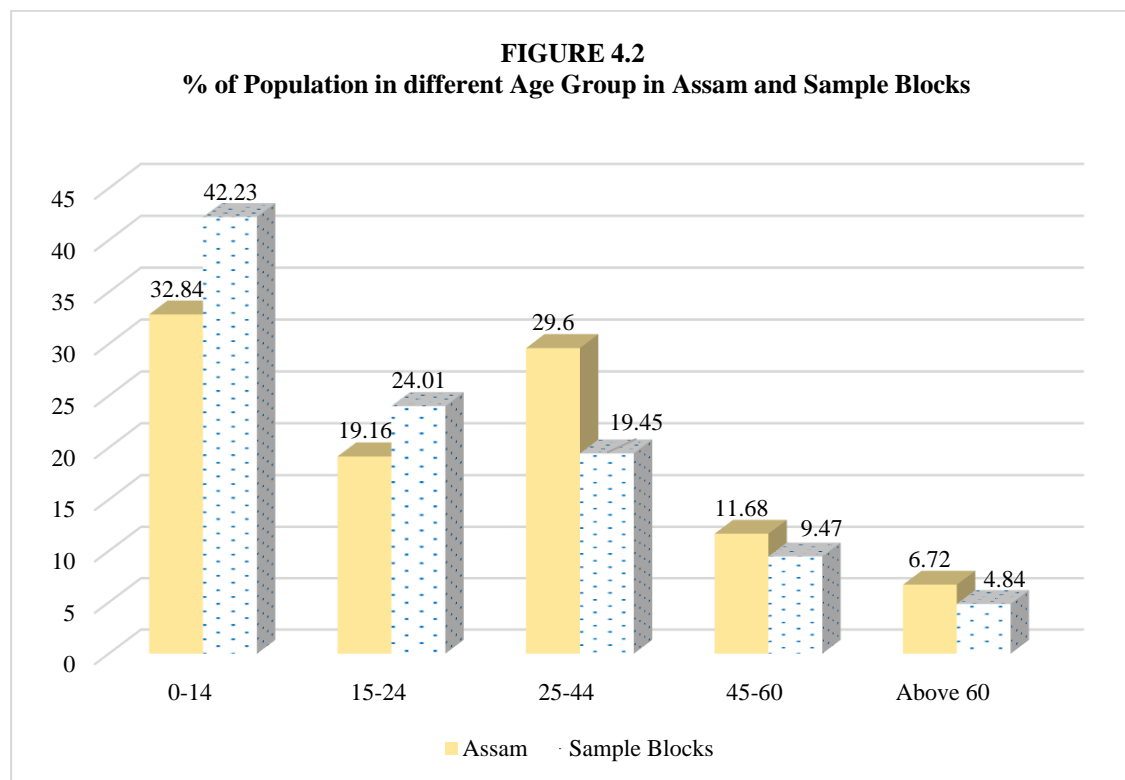ii) Population Census, 2011.

Note: Population of Assam of age group (45-60) actually includes in age group (45-59

Percentage of child population (0-14) in the studied area (42.23%) is considerably higher compared to state figure (32.84%). National figure in the corresponding age group was 29.5 per cent in 2011. It shows that growth rate of population is much higher in the surveyed area. There are several reason such discrepancy in the growth of population. First of all, there is cent per cent Muslim people dwelling in the area, "growth rate among Muslims is much higher than that of Hindus as a whole. But when we separately examine the growth rates of SC and ST (within Hindus), it is seen that their growth rates area still higher than that of Muslims. This trend exists almost everywhere in India (Mannan: 2017." Secondly, it is the poverty, illiteracy and other social backwardness works in such rapid growing population in the area.

Population at the age group of 15-24 years are supposed to be in the early working stage and the age group of 25-44 are full working stage. The population in this two groups are 24.01 per cent & 19.45 per cent in the Sample Blocks against 19.16 per cent & 29.60 per cent in the state. Percentage of population in the early working age is more in the studied area and lower in the full working age compared to state.

Population in the age group 45-60 years also fall within the working group but as age nears to 60 years, their physical fitness decays and consequently productivity also starts to decline. Percentage of population above 60 years is very important as the indicator of measuring economic development. Higher the percentage of population above 60 years of age, its HDI value increases and vice-versa. Figures in the age group of 60 years for all India, Assam and Sample Blocks are 8%, 6.72% and 4.84% respectively. It may be interpreted that there is gradual deteriorated longevity of life in rural India.

Actually, population in the age group of 15-60 years are supposed to carry the dependency load of the population below 15 years as well as population above 60 years of age. The population within the age group 15-60 years for all India, Assam and Sample Blocks register 62.5%, 60.44% & 52.93% respectively. While, figures of dependency age group (population of age below 15 years & above 60 years) in all India, Assam and Sample Blocks register 37.5%, 39.56% & 47.07% respectively. Population structure of Norway (the country with world highest HDI) in the age group 0-14 years, 15-64 years and above 65 years register 18.8%, 66.2% & 15% in 2010 respectively (Wikipedia: 2017). It exhibits an opposite picture with India inferring faster growth rate of population in the country. In this study, some more phenomena would be investigated which will clear for such discrepancy of population structure in different age group. Fig-4.2 shows bifurcation of population in different age group in Assam & surveyed area.

FIGURE 4.2
% of Population in different Age Group in Assam and Sample Blocks

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that countrywide growth rate of population is faster which is intensified in the rural areas. About 99 per cent of the total land masses in the state belongs to the rural area and 50 per cent of the total land area is utilized for cultivation GOA: 2012). High birth rate works behind sky figuring of population in the age group below 15 years for which precaution is urgently needed. Women and children are very vulnerable in the Char areas of Assam. Char people are less bothered about their physical & health condition. Most of the people in the area are the victim of malnutrition. Even pregnant woman as well as children don't get any special care in the way of living.

Children are regarded as the present asset in the Char area. In most of the cases, children are seen to be used as the source of income. In agrarian society, certain factors work behind inducing more children. Coal & Hoover rightly remarked, "These beliefs and customs are reinforced by the economic advantages to a peasant family of a larger number of births. The burden of child care rests primarily on women in a peasant society and cost of educating children are minimal because of the level of education given. Children contribute at an early age to agrarian production and are to traditional source of security in the old age of parents (Coale & Hoover: 1985). They are engaged in earnings hence either not sent for schooling or immediately drooped out from the field of schooling.

IMAGE 4.1
Women and Children in the Char of Goroimari Block

5. Findings: Following are some of the findings summarised of the present study.

i)   Percentage of population in the age group 0-14 years was found to be higher (42.23 %) in the Char areas compared to Assam (32.84 %) in the corresponding age group.

ii)   Population in the working age group (25-60) was found to be lower (28.92%) in the surveyed areas compared to state (41.28%) in the corresponding age group.

iii)   Population in the age group of 60+ was found to be 4.84% in the studied area and 6.72% in the state.

iv)   The population within the age group 15-60 years for all India, Assam and Sample Blocks register 62.5%, 60.44% & 52.93% respectively.

v)   Population in the dependency age group (population of age below 15 years & above 60 years) in all India, Assam and Sample Blocks register 37.5%, 39.56% & 47.07% respectively.

6. Suggestions:

i)   Population policy of Assam should be properly implemented in the state Assam especially in rural areas. Char areas should by no means be neglected in this regard.

ii)   Way of population control should be familiarized among the rural population in the state. There should be organized awareness camp among the illiterate people in the state in general and char area in particular.

iii)   Proper health facility should be provided among the people of the rural areas. Facility related to population control should be easily accessible among the rural people.

iv)   Idle family norms should be implemented among the people of Assam. However, people who are going for sterilization may be encouraged and awarded in this regard. Incentive may be offered to such family who are implementing such policy.

vi)   Population education should be important priority of the government policy. RTE should properly implemented in the char areas of Assam.

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