

Economic Structure and Livelihood Pattern of Basirhat Block-I, North 24 Parganas

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Abstract: *The present research article examines the economic structure and livelihood pattern of Basirhat Block-I in North 24 Parganas district, West Bengal. The study is based mainly on secondary data from Census 2011, district profile data, government sources, and selected academic literature on rural livelihood diversification, agricultural labour, rural non-farm employment, and allied activities. Basirhat Block-I is a predominantly rural block with a total population of 171,613 persons, of whom 150,520 live in rural areas and 21,093 in urban areas. The occupational structure shows that agriculture remains an important livelihood base, but non-farm activities are increasingly significant. Among main workers, 7,957 are cultivators, 12,552 are agricultural labourers, 4,311 are household-industry workers, and 27,934 are other workers. Thus, while farming and agricultural labour together account for a major share of work, the largest single category is "other workers," indicating diversification into services, transport, trade, repair work, garments, rice mills, brick fields, medical-item production, and other rural non-farm activities. The study finds that Basirhat Block-I represents a transitional rural economy: agriculture and pisciculture continue to provide livelihood security, but rural households increasingly depend on multiple sources of income. The paper concludes that future development should focus on farm modernization, pisciculture, rural enterprise promotion, women's employment, market infrastructure, skill training, credit access, and small-scale manufacturing*

Keywords: Basirhat Block-I, North 24 Parganas, rural economy, livelihood pattern, agriculture, pisciculture, rural non-farm employment, household industry, West Bengal

I. INTRODUCTION

Rural economies in India are no longer purely agricultural. Although agriculture continues to remain important for food security and employment, rural households increasingly depend on a combination of farming, wage labour, petty trade, migration, household industry, services, transport, repair work, construction, and small manufacturing. This process is commonly known as livelihood diversification. It is especially visible in densely populated districts of West Bengal, where landholdings are small, agricultural employment is seasonal, and households must combine farm and non-farm activities for survival.

Basirhat Block-I is located in the Basirhat subdivision of North 24 Parganas district. North 24 Parganas has five subdivisions: Barasat, Barrackpore, Bangaon, Basirhat, and Bidhannagar. The district administrative profile records Basirhat-I as a block under Basirhat subdivision with 7-gram panchayats. The district is economically diverse because it contains urban and semi-urban zones near Kolkata as well as rural and riverine areas where agriculture, fishery, and small enterprises remain important. NABARD's district planning document notes that North 24 Parganas consists of 22 development blocks over five subdivisions and that 52% of the district population lives in urban or semi-urban areas while 48% lives in rural areas.

Basirhat Block-I, however, is mainly rural. According to Census-based district data, the block has a population of 171,613 persons, with 87,717 males and 83,896 females, 38,033 households, literacy of 72.1%, and sex ratio of 956 females per 1,000 males. Its rural population is 150,520, while the urban population is 21,093. This rural base strongly influences the livelihood pattern of the block.

The economy of Basirhat Block-I is shaped by agriculture, pisciculture, rice milling, readymade garments, brick fields, vehicle servicing and repairing, and manufacturing of gauze and bandage as medical items. The district profile specifically lists agriculture and pisciculture as important sources of earning for Basirhat-I and identifies paddy, jute, pulses, and oilseeds as important agricultural products.

The occupational data show that the block has 52,754 main workers, 10,749 marginal workers, and 108,110 non-workers. Among main workers, 7,957 are cultivators, 12,552 are agricultural labourers, 4,311 are household-industry workers, and 27,934 are other workers. These figures show that the block's economy is not dependent on agriculture alone. A substantial section of the working population is engaged in non-farm and service-related occupations. This makes Basirhat Block-I an important case for studying rural economic transition in West Bengal.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sl. No.	Scholar / Researcher	Year	Main Contribution	Relevance to Basirhat Block-I
1	Thomas Reardon	1997	Explained the role of income diversification and rural non-farm labour markets in developing economies.	Helps explain why rural households in Basirhat-I combine agriculture with non-farm work.
2	Frank Ellis	1998	Defined livelihood diversification as the process by which rural families construct a portfolio of activities and support capabilities to survive and improve living standards.	Useful for understanding mixed livelihood strategies in Basirhat-I.
3	Barrett, Reardon and Webb	2001	Argued that asset, activity, and income diversification are central to rural livelihood strategies.	Supports analysis of agriculture, pisciculture, household industry, and service work together.
4	Lanjouw and Shariff	2004	Studied rural non-farm employment in India and its relation to access, income, and poverty impact.	Relevant because "other workers" form the largest occupational category in Basirhat-I.
5	Lanjouw and Murgai	2008	Analysed poverty decline, agricultural wages, and non-farm employment in rural India.	Helps connect agricultural wage labour with non-farm opportunities.
6	Haggblade, Hazell and Reardon	2010	Showed that rural non-farm economies can reduce poverty but require market linkages and regional growth.	Useful for policy suggestions on rural enterprise and agro-processing.
7	Himanshu, Lanjouw, Mukhopadhyay and Murgai	2011	Studied the evolution of rural non-farm sectors in India and their contribution to poverty reduction.	Explains the rise of diversified rural employment beyond agriculture.
8	Banasree Biswas, S. K. Das and Amit Mandal	2014	Studied socio-economic dimensions of composite fish farming in North 24 Parganas.	Directly relevant because pisciculture is a major earning source in Basirhat-I.
9	Ghosh and Ghosal	2021	Examined household choices and drivers of rural non-farm livelihood diversification in West Bengal.	Provides West Bengal-specific support for livelihood diversification.
10	Recent rural non-farm employment studies	2023–2025	Recent studies continue to show movement from agriculture to non-farm work in rural India and West Bengal.	Supports the interpretation that Basirhat-I is undergoing economic transition.

The literature shows that rural livelihood diversification is not accidental; it is a response to small landholdings, seasonal agricultural work, market opportunities, poverty risk, and changing aspirations. In Basirhat Block-I, this is visible in the combination of cultivators, agricultural labourers, household-industry workers, and other workers.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the demographic and socio-economic profile of Basirhat Block-I.
2. To analyse the occupational structure of the block.
3. To identify the main sources of livelihood and earning.
4. To examine the role of agriculture and agricultural labour in the local economy.
5. To study the importance of rural non-farm employment and household industries.
6. To assess gender differences in workforce participation.
7. To suggest development strategies for strengthening the livelihood base of Basirhat Block-I.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It is based on secondary data.

4.1 Sources of Data

The main sources are:

Source	Type of Data Used
Census 2011 / district profile	Population, literacy, sex ratio, workers, non-workers, rural-urban population
North 24 Parganas district profile	Administrative structure, block-level economic activities, sources of earning
NABARD district planning document	District agriculture, credit, infrastructure and livelihood context
Academic literature	Rural livelihood diversification, rural non-farm employment, pisciculture, agricultural transition

4.2 Method of Analysis

The study uses simple percentage analysis, ratio analysis, and descriptive interpretation. Worker categories are analysed as percentages of main workers and total population. Gender differences are studied by comparing male and female workers in major occupational categories.

4.3 Limitations

The study mainly uses Census 2011 data because detailed block-level Census 2021 data is not available. Therefore, the findings should be read as a structural analysis of the block's economy rather than a real-time employment survey. However, the data remain useful because they show the basic livelihood structure of the block.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Objective 1: Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile

Basirhat Block-I has a population of 171,613 persons. Males constitute 87,717 and females constitute 83,896. The block has 38,033 households and a sex ratio of 956. The literacy rate is 72.1%, with male literacy at 75.86% and female literacy at 68.18%.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Basirhat Block-I

Indicator	Value
Total population	171,613
Male population	87,717
Female population	83,896
Total households	38,033
Sex ratio	956
Total literacy rate	72.1%
Male literacy rate	75.86%
Female literacy rate	68.18%
Children aged 0–6	21,094
Scheduled Caste population	22,070
Scheduled Tribe population	1,268
Illiterate population	63,083

The data show that Basirhat Block-I has a large population base and a relatively balanced sex ratio. However, female literacy is lower than male literacy. This educational gap has implications for women's participation in skilled employment, entrepreneurship, household industries, and formal-sector activities.

Table 2: Rural-Urban Composition

Category	Population	Percentage of Total Population
Rural population	150,520	87.71%
Urban population	21,093	12.29%
Total	171,613	100.00%

Basirhat Block-I is overwhelmingly rural. Nearly 88% of the population lives in rural areas. This explains why agriculture, agricultural labour, pisciculture, and small rural enterprises remain central to local economic life.

Objective 2: Occupational Structure of Basirhat Block-I

The occupational structure of Basirhat Block-I shows three broad groups: main workers, marginal workers, and non-workers. Main workers are those who worked for a major part of the reference period, while marginal workers worked for a shorter duration.

Table 3: Worker and Non-Worker Composition

Category	Number	Percentage of Total Population
Main workers	52,754	30.74%
Marginal workers	10,749	6.26%
Total workers	63,503	37.00%
Non-workers	108,110	63.00%
Total population	171,613	100.00%

The total work participation rate is 37%. This means that 37 out of every 100 persons are recorded as workers, while 63 are non-workers. The high share of non-workers is partly due to children, elderly persons, students, homemakers, and persons outside the labour market.

Table 4: Main Worker Categories

Worker Category	Number	Percentage of Main Workers
Cultivators	7,957	15.08%
Agricultural labourers	12,552	23.79%

Household-industry workers	4,311	8.17%
Other workers	27,934	52.95%
Total main workers	52,754	100.00%

The most important finding is that “other workers” form the largest category, accounting for 52.95% of main workers. This category includes workers in services, trade, transport, construction, small business, repair work, and other non-agricultural activities. Agricultural labourers form 23.79%, cultivators 15.08%, and household-industry workers 8.17%. This indicates that the economy of Basirhat Block-I is not purely agrarian. It is a mixed rural economy where non-farm activities have become central.

Objective 3: Main Sources of Livelihood and Earning

The district profile identifies the main earning sources of Basirhat-I as agriculture, pisciculture, manufacturing of gauze and bandage as medical items, rice mills, readymade garments, brick fields, and servicing and repairing of vehicles. The main agricultural products include paddy, jute, pulses, and oilseeds.

Table 5: Main Livelihood Sources in Basirhat Block-I

Sector	Activities
Agriculture	Paddy, jute, pulses, oilseeds
Allied activity	Pisciculture
Agro-processing	Rice mills
Small manufacturing	Gauze and bandage manufacturing
Rural industry	Readymade garments
Construction-linked activity	Brick fields
Services	Vehicle servicing and repairing
Informal work	Wage labour, petty trade, transport, local services

The table shows that Basirhat Block-I has a diversified livelihood base. Agriculture remains important, but non-farm occupations are also significant. This supports the idea of a rural economy in transition.

Objective 4: Role of Agriculture and Agricultural Labour

Agriculture remains a central livelihood source in Basirhat Block-I. The district profile identifies paddy, jute, pulses, and oilseeds as important agricultural products. NABARD also notes that North 24 Parganas has paddy, vegetables, jute, onion, wheat, mustard, and other crops as important agricultural products and that the district has a high proportion of small and marginal farmers.

Table 6: Agricultural Workers among Main Workers

Category	Number	Percentage of Main Workers
Cultivators	7,957	15.08%
Agricultural labourers	12,552	23.79%
Total agriculture-dependent main workers	20,509	38.87%
Non-agricultural main workers	32,245	61.13%
Total main workers	52,754	100.00%

The data show that 38.87% of main workers are directly dependent on agriculture either as cultivators or agricultural labourers. However, agricultural labourers outnumber cultivators. This is significant because cultivators usually indicate access to land, while agricultural labourers depend on wage employment. The higher number of agricultural labourers suggests that many households may not own sufficient land or may depend on seasonal wage work. This has important implications. Agricultural labour is often seasonal and vulnerable to fluctuations in rainfall, crop cycles, wage rates, and local demand. Therefore, households depending only on agricultural labour may face income insecurity. This is one reason why many rural households diversify into non-farm work.

Objective 5: Rural Non-Farm Employment and Household Industry

Rural non-farm employment is a major feature of Basirhat Block-I. The occupational data show that 27,934 main workers are classified as other workers and 4,311 are household-industry workers. Together, they form 61.13% of main workers. This confirms that the local economy is strongly diversified.

Table 7: Farm and Non-Farm Main Workers

Category	Number	Percentage of Main Workers
Farm workers: cultivators + agricultural labourers	20,509	38.87%
Non-farm workers: household industry + other workers	32,245	61.13%
Total main workers	52,754	100.00%

This pattern is consistent with wider rural India, where non-farm employment has become an important source of income. Haggblade, Hazell and Reardon argue that the rural non-farm economy includes manufacturing, construction, commerce, transport, services, and agro-processing, and can become a pathway for poverty reduction when linked to market growth.

In Basirhat-I, this is reflected in rice mills, readymade garments, brick fields, vehicle servicing, medical-item manufacturing, and local service work. These activities provide supplementary income and reduce dependence on agriculture alone.

Objective 6: Gender Differences in Workforce Participation

Gender differences are visible in the workforce data. Male workers dominate all categories except household industry, where female participation is comparatively higher.

Table 8: Gender-wise Main Workers

Category	Male	Female	Total	Female Share
Main workers	45,683	7,071	52,754	13.40%
Cultivators	7,566	391	7,957	4.91%
Agricultural labourers	11,320	1,232	12,552	9.81%
Household industries	2,408	1,903	4,311	44.14%
Other workers	24,389	3,545	27,934	12.69%
Marginal workers	6,100	4,649	10,749	43.25%
Non-workers	35,934	72,176	108,110	66.76%

The female share among main workers is only 13.40%. In cultivation, female participation is especially low at 4.91%. However, women account for 44.14% of household-industry workers and 43.25% of marginal workers. This suggests that women are more likely to be engaged in part-time, home-based, informal, or seasonal work rather than stable main work.

This finding is important for policy. If women's skills, credit access, self-help groups, garment work, food processing, fishery-related activities, and micro-enterprises are strengthened, female economic participation can increase significantly.

VI. DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The study reveals six major findings.

First, Basirhat Block-I is a predominantly rural block. About 87.71% of its population lives in rural areas. This rural character explains the continuing importance of agriculture and allied activities.

Second, the work participation rate is moderate. Total workers form 37% of the population, while non-workers form 63%. This shows that a large section of the population is outside recorded employment.

Third, agriculture is important but not dominant in the narrow sense. Cultivators and agricultural labourers together form 38.87% of main workers. This is a significant share, but it is lower than the share of non-farm main workers.

Fourth, agricultural labourers outnumber cultivators. This indicates that many working households may depend on wage labour rather than land ownership. Such households are vulnerable to seasonal unemployment and low wages.

Fifth, the largest category is “other workers,” at 52.95% of main workers. This is the clearest sign of livelihood diversification. It suggests that Basirhat-I has moved beyond a purely agricultural economy.

Sixth, female workforce participation is low in regular main work but higher in household industries and marginal work. This indicates both an opportunity and a challenge. Women are already connected to informal and household-based work, but they require better access to training, markets, finance, and institutional support.

VII. DEVELOPMENT SUGGESTIONS

The following measures may strengthen the economic structure of Basirhat Block-I:

- Agriculture should be strengthened through better irrigation, improved seeds, soil testing, crop insurance, storage, and mechanization suitable for small farmers. Since paddy, jute, pulses, and oilseeds are important crops, crop-specific support can improve productivity.
- Pisciculture is already listed as a major earning source. Better pond management, fish seed supply, training, cold storage, fish feed, and market linkages can increase income.
- Rice mills and agro-processing units can create local employment. Value addition in paddy, pulses, oilseeds, fish, and vegetables can reduce distress selling and increase rural income.
- Readymade garments, medical-item manufacturing, brick fields, and repair services can be strengthened through training, credit, registration, digital payments, and marketing support.
- Women’s participation can be improved through self-help groups, tailoring, garment work, food processing, fishery support activities, micro-credit, and home-based enterprises.
- Youth should be trained in vehicle repair, electrical work, mobile repair, computer skills, tailoring, packaging, retail management, and entrepreneurship.
- NABARD notes that farmers in North 24 Parganas often face problems related to market infrastructure, storage, and dependence on informal finance. Strengthening rural credit, cooperative marketing, storage, and organized haats can improve household income.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Basirhat Block-I has a mixed and transitional rural economy. Agriculture and pisciculture remain important, but the occupational structure clearly shows the rise of non-farm activities. Among main workers, only 15.08% are cultivators and 23.79% are agricultural labourers, while 52.95% are other workers and 8.17% are household-industry workers. This means that the block’s livelihood structure is already diversified.

The economy can therefore be described as agriculture-linked but not agriculture-dependent alone. Rural households combine farming, wage labour, pisciculture, small manufacturing, household industry, repair services, rice milling, garment work, brick-field labour, and local trade. This diversification is both a survival strategy and a development opportunity.

The main challenges are low female workforce participation, dependence on agricultural wage labour, limited formal employment, seasonal income insecurity, and insufficient market infrastructure. The main opportunities lie in agriculture modernization, pisciculture, agro-processing, readymade garments, household industries, medical-item manufacturing, rural services, and women-led micro-enterprises.

A balanced development strategy for Basirhat Block-I should therefore combine farm development with rural non-farm employment. The block needs investment in irrigation, fishery, storage, skill training, rural credit, women’s enterprise, market infrastructure, and small-scale industries. Such an approach can make the local economy more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable.

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