Chapter: 7
SUMMERY AND CONCLUSION

Livelihoods and diversity have become popular topics in development discourse. The livelihoods framework does not constitute an entirely new approach to the problem of addressing rural poverty in the realm of rural development. Rather, this approach mainly focuses on people, their assets, activities and access, instead of insisting on several economic sectors and subsectors which are conventional for policy implication for rural development programmes. So far, a very few attempts have been made to link the livelihood framework in a systematic way to get an insight of indigenous poverty management policies at micro level. The present study has been done based on empirical research on livelihood patterns of the rural poor in selected parts of Birbhum district of West Bengal in order to explore the nature of diversity as well as the indigenous livelihoods strategies to cope with crisis. The research argues that without understanding the indigenous strategy of the poor, mere formulation and implementation of poverty alleviation programme is not going to be viable. This section presents the summary of the main findings given in foregoing chapters and identifies the overall trend captured by the research.

Vast literature exists on poverty, vulnerability and livelihoods but these are not always linked to each other dealing those aspects as disparate in development dialogue. The existing literature, besides helping to formulate the research questions and objectives of this research, informs us that rural livelihoods approach has wider connotation and greater relevancy for framing rural development policies and practice significant for the third world countries even in contemporary period. For this an in-depth micro-level research is a necessary precondition before formulating new programmes for the livelihood provision of the poor especially in places with limited resource endowment.

The research examines the possible factors responsible for the incidence of poverty and backwardness and the low status of development in the Birbhum district especially in the Mohammad Bazar block which found to be one of the most poverty stricken blocks of Birbhum. Moreover, understanding poverty from different
perspectives also tells the fact that the blocks located in the western part of Birbhum are more prone to poverty and backwardness due to certain environmental constrains and related resource crisis. Analysis from composite scores and human development measures reveals that blocks namely Mohammad Bazar, Khoyrasol, Murarai-I, Rajnagar, Dubrajpur requires special attention for enhancing health status, educational attainment, better standard of living and improved irrigational facilities. In Mohammad Bazar, the western, northern and some southwestern parts are much affected by poverty situation. Viewing this wide range of spatial disparities and regional imbalance, the planners and the policy makers should make comprehensive attempt to reduce the inequality and at the same time to make development fruitful in real sense.

Livelihood diversification is an important aspect of the livelihoods of the poor. In that context the research tries to understand how households pursue diversification to cope with poverty, vulnerability and crisis. Case studies from a variety of different locations suggest that the poor households are often engaged in multiple activities and rely on diversified income portfolio to address the lean season crisis. Focusing on diversification as a key component of livelihood, our study argues that more the value of diversification more is the magnitude of vulnerability. The findings related to crisis management policy show that poor always give emphasis on two main financial strategies to cope with crisis i.e. either borrowing or using savings done their day-to-day earning. In dealing with the debate on the ability of the poor to save, this research demonstrates the fact that the poor can save even while living in poverty and vulnerability condition. One interesting illustration finds the fact that during lean season crisis, the role of centrally or state sponsored poverty alleviation scheme or other social safety net approach are found to be less effective to provide the means of subsistence. The present research also demonstrates that instead of supporting particular economic activities it would be more effective to facilitate the poor to gain better access to opportunities they already developed or to create new opportunities of their choice for enhancing quality of life.

In exploring the livelihood strategies to cope with lean season crisis, the research focuses on seasonal/circulatory migration as a dominant livelihood strategy
of the rural poor in the study region. The research indicates that although there is a positive relationship between migration and livelihood management, the practice of mobile livelihoods seems to be a less efficient option to secure the livelihoods of the poor. This research makes an argument on the issue that mobile livelihoods and remittances can never be a sustainable option for livelihood security in areas which are relatively lacking in resources despite the overall development activities going on to strengthen the rural economy. Rather, mobile livelihoods make the rural livelihoods fragile under seasonal vulnerability and situations of chronic poverty; it also hinders the power of social resilience of the poor. Therefore, the present research argues that along with the capability enhancing and freedom, the agency and structure of seasonal migration is also required to be analysed intrinsically to understand the poverty and deprivation trap which exists in rural settings.

In understanding the impact of state’s intervention in the poverty alleviation of the region, the study investigates the impact of Self- Help microcredit programme for the generation of livelihoods and in household’s poverty management. In spite of its several limitations, the research explores that self-help micro credit programme have induced improvement in certain circumstances. Women’s participation in SHGs enabled them to discover inner strength, gain decision making ability, self-confidence, social and psychological empowerment and capacity building. Moreover, Self-Help credit based economic activity has facilitated the women to think about their households’ financial management policy in a better way. However, the role of SHGs in household resource generation, financial well-being and income earning capacity and crisis management, the microfinance were found to not sufficient enough to facilitate people to cope with poverty situation and lean season crisis. The present research finds that there are several factors acting against the proper functioning of SHG programme in our research area. The fear of falling in certain economic uncertainty in near future and lack of unity among the group members in availing project loan are making the microfinance strategy a less viable sustainable livelihood option for the poor. Moreover, lack of efficiency and effectiveness of the group leader is also found to be a significant negative factor in the success of microfinance in the region. The study shows that lack of effective participation and irregularities in
monthly deposit are also affecting the overall performance status of the SHGs especially in availing loan and enhancing group saving etc.

The research explores several livelihood issues of the rural poor in stone quarry areas of Birbhum district. The present study demonstrates the fact that because of lack of government control, the stone quarries of Mohammad Bazar area of Birbhum have a devastating impact on its overall regional environment. The physical environmental quality is rapidly deteriorating day by day for this illegal operation of pathar khadan and stone crushers. The empirical research explores that the less visible impacts are social in character, having a great bearing especially on the survival of poor indigenous tribes living in this region. Costs of several occupational diseases, accidental costs put great hardships on the livelihoods of the poor. In all spheres quarrying activity has annihilated the social fabrics of tribal life. If this continues, the tribal community will be at the verge of extinction in near future. The research suggests some environment friendly sustainable livelihood measures such as fishing in abandoned quarries, food possessing from available palm trees, intervention of tribal women in SHG related activities both for the environmental sustenance as well for the sustainable livelihoods of the tribal community.

From the above discussions it is evident that all the research questions and the some specific objectives which have been taken into account at the time of commencement of research are found to be well established.

The present research concludes that the poor households have their own financial instrument and livelihood strategies to cope with crisis and vulnerability condition in order to survive in backward rural settings. Rather than self employment initiatives, poor people prefer wage employment programme where there is no risk of investment. Before formulating any programme, it is necessary to understand the indigenous strategies of the poor on how to deal with extreme poverty and vulnerable situation. Participatory approach of development can work well rather than top down approach of government sponsored development. Besides taking advantage of government sponsored schemes, the poor also have to rely more on some in-situ resources so that their substitution capabilities can enhance their power of resilience.
even if there occurs smaller disturbances in their livelihood systems. In this context, the NGOs can also play a greater role for enhancing the capabilities of the poor.