

Market Mechanism and Functionaries of Local Haats: An Empirical Study in the Garo Hills Districts of Meghalaya

Mridul Barman¹ and Dr. Abhigyan Bhattacharjee²

¹PhD Research Scholar, Department of Management, North-Eastern Hill University, Tura Campus, Meghalaya

²Associate Professor, Department of Management, North-Eastern Hill University, Tura Campus, Meghalaya

ABSTRACT

Haats play a significant role in tribal settings since the market is not just a mere place of buying and selling but it is also a place for socializing, meeting distant friends and relatives. It is also a medium for passing down information from urban to rural communities. The present paper tries to explore the market mechanism in the functioning of the local haat system and the role of market functionaries which play a vital role in maintaining the effective functioning of market centers and in the development of the local haats in the Garo hills region of Meghalaya. The study reflects on the commodity structure of local origin as well as commodity brought from outside of Garo Hills Region. The study further brings out the dynamics of local haat participants, market agents and middlemen. Empirical findings reflect the vital roles that they play in the haats of Garo hills region.

Key words: Haats, Garo hills, Market Participants, Market Mechanism, Market Functionaries

Introduction

Haats are the lifeline in the socio-economic milieu of the village people. They are essential in the chain of commodity distribution, strengthen the economic base of a village and also sustain the tax base of the local authority. Market mechanism and the market functionaries of a haat system are a complex phenomenon which includes various commodities of different origin, their distribution to various channels and participants in different markets centers. As a result, analysis of market functions and its mechanism is important for marketing studies mainly to understand the magnitude of markets for spatial interactions point of view (Mulimani & Belgaum, 2012). The market centers deal with a variety of goods ranging from agriculture, artisan and industrial products. The commodities arriving in market centers such as cereals, pulses, oilseeds, milk, edible oil, etc. are the indicatives of the agriculture mode of

living while the forests based products such as honey, meat, wild vegetables and fruits reflect the tribal mode of living. All these commodities of various regions need to pass through the market process by which the commodities are supplied from producers to consumers (Mulla & Mulimani, 2014). The role of market-centers has a long history of existence and development within the gamut of socio-economic milieu, and it is widely believed that human society's inclination to exchange is one of its defining characteristics. Contextualizing marketplaces within the history of a region is critical for understanding the local society. A study by Velayudhan (2007) found that mainly fixed location retail shops are used to reach the rural consumers and due to high costs incurred by the marketer results in use of alternative channels to reach rural consumers. Haats play a significant role in tribal settings since the market is not just a mere place of buying and selling but it is also a place for socializing, meeting distant friends and relatives; it is also a medium for passing down information from urban to rural communities. Rural haats developed as a result of internal demand for exchange of goods and services among local communities are preferred as out shoppers expect variety, entertainment and reciprocity. It is found that all states in the country except Haryana, Western Rajasthan and some North Eastern States, conducted periodic haats (Krishnamacharyulu & Ramakrihna, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

To facilitate the present study, some of the important segments have been conceptualized as below:

Haats

Periodic markets in the form of haats are the oldest marketing channel of India. They continue to play a vital role in the rural economy as they provide people an opportunity not only to purchase consumer goods but also to sell surplus agricultural and allied products. There are 47000 haats all over India, catering almost 50 percent of rural population. Each haat caters to the need of a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 50 villages, drawing around 4000 persons who come to buy and sell a range of daily necessities and services. Haats are held on weekly bases. Sunday markets are the most popular, while middle of the week haats are the most infrequent. (Kashyap & Raut, 2010).

Market functionaries

The market centers generally deals in a variety of goods and services of divers' origins. All the supplies of various local and non-local origins are supplied through different channels from producers to consumers. In the process of marketing various commodities, many people have to perform different roles and are treated as market functionaries/intermediaries. They

are identified as traders, Commission Agents, Dalals, Auctioneers, Wholesalers, Retailers and Peddlers. They are broadly classified into two categories as full time traders and part-time traders (Hugar, 2000).

Market Mechanism

The functional structure of a haat refers to the mechanisms of market functions that exist in each market centers. Each market centers hold its own functional structure and functional structure of one market center differs to another. The market centers in a region deals in a range of goods and services of varied origin. All the commodities of various local and non-local origins are supplied through different channels from producers to consumers (Hugar, 2000).

Significance of the Study:

Haats in the villages of Meghalaya link to small towns and their surroundings to create grass roots level networking of trade systems. The producer farmers not only depend on these markets for disposal of their produce for cash, but also for the farm products which they do not produce themselves. As a centre of diffusion, they play a significant role in the habitat, economy and life of the people and act as basic building blocks of the complex market place exchange system. The growths of market centres always follow the development of agriculture, transportation and industries. Numerous studies on the dimensions of haats and its functioning in India and abroad have been conducted, while barring few studies, viz., (Borthakur, 1993; Ryngha et al, 2012) who restricted their studies in the haats of North-East India for the state of Assam in the case of former and Khasi hills of Meghalaya in the case of latter. In Meghalaya, more than 80% of population live in rural areas and sell their product in nearby weekly markets and therefore weekly haat plays a major role in the State economy of Meghalaya There is also practically no systematic study on the haats of Garo Hills of Meghalaya in particular. Hence, the study hold significance in understanding the rural economy of Meghalaya through the activity of the haats, where many small farmers whose purchasing power is generally low, sell their limited surplus to people in the hinterland as well as to buyers from outside the area..

Review of Literature

Literature on market mechanism and market functionaries pertaining to rural haat system has been briefly reviewed in the following paragraphs:

Smith (1971) in a study found that in many societies there exist systems of peasant markets which at their lowest level function only periodically. These market places play a vital role in the integration of the regional marketing system and the spatial organization of economic

activities. They are one of the basic types of exchange mechanisms found in these societies; mediating exchange among different groups of local producers on the one hand and itinerant traders and wholesalers on the other. In another study (Velayudhan, 2007) reflects the tradition of haat bazaars which is still in continuity and a major source of attraction for consumers and tourists. This has been the specialty of the rural sector, and a special market zone where several vendors would sit in a row and sell different types of commodities. Kashyap & Raut (2006) tried to study market mechanism of haats in terms of community participation in the rural haats and found out that haats provide numerous platforms for community gatherings and showcasing the specialties of such various communities of nearby regions. Sinha & Pradhan (2009) in their study highlighted the market mechanism of haats from the point of view of goods transactions and opined that haats are usually for direct sales of small quantities of produce by farmers to village traders and rural consumers. They often form part of a network arranged on a periodic basis, such as on a specific day of each week. They are commonly organized at a central place in a village or district centre or beside a village's access road. Deka & Bhagbati (2010) also highlighted the significance of haat system in the socio-economic life of rural communities in rural areas of Bhamaputra-Valley, Assam. Their study finds that haats are characterized by relatively low priced goods and services, poor infrastructure facilities, undefined stalls, lack of store house, absence of credit in transaction and poor transport and communication medium. Sarkar et al (2014) found that the rural haats can also be credited to exert an indirect impact on the productivity by acting as centres of social gatherings, which happen seldom in rural areas. A similar research was conducted by Roy & Basu (2010) and found that haats are main centers for exchange of common goods and services in both the sub-urban as well as countryside all over the world. Ali (2009) has conducted a research study on vegetables transaction through haats and the findings of his field surveys of selected periodic markets reveal high transaction of vegetables (62.71%), due to freshness and perishable nature which discourage long distance for the trade and handled by small famers and pity traders.

The following studies give a brief review on the market functionaries:

Wanmali (1987) in her study found that important functionaries at a market place are the buyers and sellers. Some people even visit the market places just to meet friends and relatives. The participants in a haat can be grouped into: consumers, traders, administrators and bystanders. Shrivastava (2008) observed that marketing for consumption starts from wholesalers to consumers through retailing. However, the nature of the system will vary according to the type of produce. Kashyap & Raut (2010) in their study observed that haats

are the oldest marketing channels of India. They continue to play a vital role in the rural economy; these markets provide people an opportunity not only to purchase consumer goods, but also to sell surplus agricultural and allied products. Ali & Neka (2012) observed that haats are the most important nodal points for transaction of the livestock and their products. They play role in linking the livestock trade with the terminal markets where large scale livestock transaction as wholesale is undertaken. The marketable surplus of livestock like cattle, buffalo, sheep, and goats are brought through walking by producer sellers from different villages of rearing centres. Long distance transport of the livestock increases heavy transport over head cost, and bad weather push livestock trade in nearby rural markets at large proportion. Saha (2014) in his article argued that rural haats are the nerve centre of the rural marketing in India as it is a readymade distribution system which caters to the need of the rural population of India. The author also hinted at the challenges and possibilities for the Haats in the era of retail boom. The periodic markets are well served by the mobile traders as they deal with both the regional and inter-regional products and the producer sellers and service sellers also play their dominant role in market functions. Finally, both the full-time and part-time traders regularly take their participation in the marketing activities and serve the market area with the diversity of the market functions in different market centers as market functionaries. Therefore, all the market functionaries are maintaining the effective functioning of market centers (Mulla & Mulimani, 2014).

Research Gap

Reviews of the existing literature indicate that 'haat as a system' has been explored in different corners of the world. But, the haat as a system in a tribal setting has got least attention. Therefore, the present study has been taken up to understand the functionaries and mechanisms of haat system in the Garo Hills Districts of Meghalaya.

Objectives of the Study

The study is an attempt to explore the following objectives:

1. To explore the market mechanism in the functioning of the local haat system in the Garo Hills region of Meghalaya.
2. To understand the role of market functionaries in the development of the local haats of the region.

Research Methodology

Area of the Study

Garo Hills is located between latitude 25⁰9' and 26⁰1' North and longitude 89⁰49' and 91⁰2' East and covers an area of 8167 sq. km comprising 16 towns and 19 Community Rural

Development Blocks in 6 sub-divisions of five districts (East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, North Garo Hills, South-West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills) of Meghalaya state. The Garo Hills forms the western part of Meghalaya State, bounded on the north by Goalpara, Kamrup and Nowgong districts; on the east by Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts, all of Assam; and on the south and west by Bangladesh.

Population

The study constitute all the five districts in Garo Hills, viz., East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, North Garo Hills, South-West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills. As per data available up to February 2016 from the Office of Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, Tura, there are a total 170 Haats in operation. These 170 Haats shall comprise the total population of the study. (Refer Table1).

Table 1: District wise Number of Haats in Garo Hills, Meghalaya

Sl No.	Name of Districts	Head Quarter	Area (Sq. KM)	Population	No. of Haats/Weekly Markets
1	East Garo Hills	Williamnagar	1490	132259	30
2	West Garo Hills	Tura	2163	418390	69
3	North Garo Hills	Resubelpara	1113	118325	11
4	South Garo Hills	Baghmara	1887	100980	27
5	South West Garo Hills	Ampati	N.A	N.A	33
Total					170

Source: Office of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, Tura, Dept. of Land and Revenue, (2014-2015)

Sample size

After a geographic segmentation of the total 170 haats operating in Garo Hills, Meghalaya, it is found that there exists 30, 69 11, 27 and 33 haats (operates on seven day interval cycle) respectively from East Garo Hills district, West Garo Hills district, North Garo Hills district, South Garo Hills district and South West Garo Hills district. Haats having bidding price (Sorkari dak) amount of ₹ 1lakh (Rupees one lakh and above) has been considered as representative sample units out of the total population (170). Under this estimation, a total 49 Haats have been derived across the five (5) districts. Finally, with a representative sample size of 30 per cent, a final estimated figure of 15 Haats has been taken.

Table 2: Population and Sample Size of Haats in Garo Hills Districts, Meghalaya

Districts	No of Haats	No of Haats having Auction/sarkari dak amount ₹ 1 lakh and above)	Sample size (30%)	Name of the Haats	Day
East Garo Hills district	30	07	02	Samanda	Monday
				Rongjeng	Daily
West Garo Hills district	69	20	06	Dalu	Thursday
				Gherapara	Wednesday
				Tikrikilla	Daily
				Rongram	Friday
				Halidayganj	Sunday
				Jengjal	Thursday
North Garo Hills district	11	04	01	Bajengdoba	Wednesday
South Garo Hills district	27	06	02	Chokpot	Tuesday
				Gasuapara	Wednesday
South West Garo Hills district	33	12	04	Ampati	Wednesday/Saturday
				Mahendraganj	Daily
				Garobadha	Tuesday
				Kalaichar	Thursday
Total	170	49	15	15	15

Source: Office of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, Tura, Dept. of Land and Revenue (2014-15).

The reason for restricting sample selection upon bidding price of (Sorkari dak) amount of ₹ 1 lakh and above is mainly for two reasons:

1. Such haats are relatively larger in size and operation; also include almost every class of marketers dealing in varied products.
2. To avail proportionate representation of haats from all the five districts of Garo Hills.

Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data has been considered for the purpose of the study. The primary component of the study has been obtained by participant observation by visiting the sites of the 15 Haats of the Garo Hills Districts, Meghalaya. Direct interaction both with the sellers and consumers has been made by means of informal conversation as well as pre-determined schedule.

Secondary information has been collected from sources such as articles, books, various reports, and websites.

Discussion

The haats are controlled and monitored by the Department of Land and Revenue of Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), Tura. These haats are auctioned every year at the premise of the Office of GHADC, Tura. For this purpose, tenders are generally invited from the local people either in the month of October or November. The highest bidder who wins the auction normally administers the Haat. The lease session is valid only for one year.

The operation of the haats starts from early morning at 6.30 am and continues to 2.30 pm. But in some remote areas haats start from morning 6.00 am and ends by 12.30 pm compared to other haats held in Garo Hills Regions. The inhabitants gather in the Haat place belong to different communities. The majority of the community belongs to Garo community and the rest are Hajong, Koches, Bengalees, Bihari and Nepali. Haats serve the village in which they are located and also the surrounding villages. Each haat caters to the needs of a minimum of 15 to a maximum of 20 villages in the radius of 15 kilometers on an average. Each Haat on an average has 3500 population on the Haat Day. The haats are mostly held in either side of the main P.W.D road of the existing permanent markets and in some haats, market sheds are constructed by the GAHDC, Tura. As the market shed are not sufficient for the traders, some traders usually seat under temporary sheds made of bamboo walls and thatched -roof and in some cases plastic- roof made by the traders themselves. Every shopkeeper is to pay market fees set by the GHADC, Tura for participating in the Haat and on an average there are 250 stalls in the haat places.

The market participants (current study confined only to buyers and sellers) play an important role in the functioning and carrying out of transactions in the haat. The strength of the participants directly or indirectly indicates the importance of the haats and in the recent past number of haats have increased that give an indication of the corresponding increased dependence of local people on them (also evident from GHADC, Tura Auction List of Haats in Garo Hills Region). The study also finds that despite the same products being available in the permanent shops of the villages, 70 percent of the visitors preferred to buy from the haats because of the freshness of produce, economic price, quality, variety of items, buying in bulk and the opportunity for bargaining. Apart from petty local traders of the region, the traders from Dhubri and Goalpara districts of Assam make the haat place a successful one. Through personal observation it is noticed that the participation of the local traders in the haat is very less and because of this reason the outside traders become the backbone of the local haats. It is also noticed that the local traders are not very much interested in farming activities. The valid reasons behind this may be lack of entrepreneurial attitude, lack of skill, lack of finance, etc. The traders coming from outside generally commute mostly by private pick-up van as there is no specific government or private transportation means specified for any Haat. The local traders from hilly areas bring the vegetables or commercial crops by carrying conical bamboo basket in their back depending upon the proximity to the haat from their villages but most of them use private auto-rickshaw in all the haat places of Garo Hills. Local people participate in the Haat by means of auto-rickshaw, personal car, bicycle, two-wheelers and the people from nearby areas come on foot. However, for the traders coming from border state of Assam, use pick-up vans which are systematically planned to ferry with the Haat.

The outside traders become the backbone of the local Haats because of the following reasons:

1. The traders of Assam have a good command over local language as a result they can persuade the local consumers. They have also very high skill and keen business knowledge. Their main motto is to earn profit and by earning so they sustain their livelihood.
2. The traders of Assam are in this business for a long period. They have learned this business skill from their ancestors. Though they are not well educated, but their experience in the business made them competent and profit motivated.
3. The traders of Assam cater to the needs of the customers of the region by supplying the variety of items including necessities of daily life, e.g., dry fish, electronic goods, cosmetics, foot wear, umbrella, grocery, bidi, etc.
4. The commodity structure of the Haats gives a reflection of the geographical environment of the Garo Hills Region around the Haat area. The amount of rainfall, temperature, soil

conditions influences the growth of different types of products. Again, the nearness to urban centres, available infrastructural facilities like road, market sheds, storage, etc facilitates the availability of different products in the local Haats.

Table 3: Availability of Amenities in all 15 Local Haats of Garo Hills Districts, Meghalaya

Amenities	Total Number of 15 Haats			
	Yes		No	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Market place fencing	0	0	15	100
Parking space	5	33.3	10	66.7
Metallic road	15	100	0	0
Permanent Drinking water/Sanitation facilities	3	20	12	80
Permanent Toilet facility	8	53.3	7	46.7
Permanent market shed	5	33.3	10	66.7
Reserved place for cattle	5	33.3	10	66.7
Transport facility(Auto, pick up) only	15	100	0	0
Security arrangement	0	0	15	100
Godown and storage facility	0	0	15	100
Arrangement for fire prevention	0	0	15	100
Measurement facility	0	0	15	100
Grading facility	0	0	15	100
Banking facilities	8	53.3	7	46.7
Post office	5	33.3	10	66.7

Source: Field Survey

Flow of Commodities into Local Haats in the Garo Hills Districts of Meghalaya

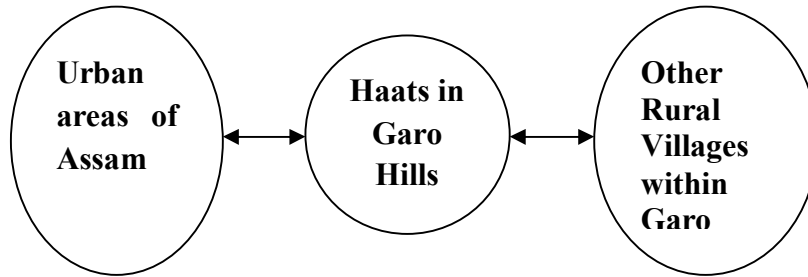


Figure 1: Flow of Commodities through Local Haats in Garo Hills Region, Meghalaya

The age-old traditional haats in the Garo Hills region of Meghalaya that are in existence even in today's 21st century are known as exchange centres of goods and services, which flow from rural to urban, urban to rural and within the rural areas. The network system of the haat is very simple and popular. Figure 1 shows the flow of commodities into local haats in the Garo Hills region of Meghalaya.

Market Functionaries in the Haats of Garo Hills Region

The functional structure refers to mechanisms of market functions that exist in each market centers. Each market centers possess its own functional structure. The market centers in the study region (Garo Hills) deals in a variety of goods and services of diverse origins. All the commodities of various local and non-local origins are supplied through different channels from producers to consumers. In the process of marketing of fruits, vegetables and commercial crop in a haat system, the produce undergoes a change in respect of time, place, form and ownership adding up their values at respective stages. Therefore, the chains of intermediaries constitute the channels of marketing system. They are petty traders, commission agents and middlemen. These chains of functionaries play a vital role in exporting the fruits, vegetables, commercial crops and the forest products of the Garo Hills regions to the neighboring states. Among the fruits, Banana, Pineapple, Jackfruits, Mango, Orange, Tamarind, Amla, Litchi, and Wooden-Apple are the major export items of Garo Hills Regions. From vegetables, the major items are Green Chillies, Yam, Tapioca, Drum stick and Arum. Among the commercial crops, Betel Nut, Betel Leaves, Ginger, Cashew Nut, Turmeric, Black-Pepper are the centre of attraction for the intermediaries. The Brooms and Bamboo (both small and big size) are also very much in demand in neighboring State of Assam.

Table 4: Commodity Structure of Local Origin in the Garo Hills Region

Sl No	Commodities	Items
1.	Food Grains:	Rice, Maize, millets, Pulses-Green gram, Black Gram and Pigeon Pea/Arhar, Oilseeds- Mustard, Sesamum and Sunflower.
2.	Spices:	Chillies –Both Green and Red, Ginger, Turmeric, Bay Leaves, Cumin, Black Pepper and Garlic
3.	Seasonal Vegetables	Cucumber, Pumpkin, Brinjal, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Tomato, Peas, Bitter Gourd, Radish, Drum stick, Carrot, Squash, Yam, Lady’s Finger, Arum, Tapioca , Guard etc.
4.	Seasonal Fruits	Banana, Pears, Coconut, Pineapple, Jackfruits, Litchi, Mango, Orange, Sweet potato, Wooden Apple, guava, Papaya, Plum, Lemon, Lodka, Custard apple, Strawberry etc
5.	Commercial/Plantation Crops	Betel nut, Betel leaves, Cashew nut, sugarcane, tea, Cotton, Jute
6.	Bamboo and cane products	Tarai/small bamboo, conical carrying basket (kok), Murah, Sieve, Mat, Chair and Table
7.	Forest products	Brooms, Wood, Finished wooden furniture, thatch, Plough, Honey, Medicinal herbs.
8.	Livestock	Hen/cook, pigeon, Duck, goat, pig, cow and Buffalo
9.	Milk and Milk related products	Milk, Curd, Ghee, Sweet
10.	Local Garments	Dakmanda, Garo Mafler, Gamcha, Patin

Source: Field Survey

Table 5: Commodity brought from outside of Garo Hills Region

Sl No	Commodities	Items
1.	Vegetables	Potato, onion, chillies, radish, Brinjal, Bitter gourd, cucumber, carrot, cauliflower, cabbage, Lady's Finger, Guard, Tomato, Beans, peas, Podina leaves, etc
2.	Fruits	Apple, Grapes, Water melon, Plum, Mango, Cherry.
3.	Grocery and FMCG	Edible oils, Salt, Spices, Hair oils, Tooth paste, Tooth Brush, Soap, Biscuits, Atta, Sugar, Dal, Match Box, Bidi, Cigarette, Molasses, Pickles, Fried rice, Beaten rice
4.	Stationeries	Mirror, Comb, Hair belt, nail cutter, Scissor, note book, Lock and key, Perfume, Lipstick, Powder, Eye liner, pen, School Bag. Umbrella
5.	Manufactured Goods	Electronic items like Battery, charger, torch light, Plastic items like Mug, Bucket, Chair, tool, Fishing nets, Readymade garments(Both New and Second Hand) Aluminium utensils, Foot wear, rope
6.	Raw Fish	A variety of Raw fish brought from outside
7.	Dry Fish	A variety of Dry Fish brought from outside
8.	Pottery	Earthen lamp, Earthen pot, Dolls, Pot for accumulated coins, Flowers 'Pot
9.	Iron Implements	Knife/dao, Spade, Saw, Hook, nail, Hammer
10.	Services	Barbers, Medicine Sellers, shoe repair , cycle repair, Astrologer, Ayurvedic medicines.

Source: Field Survey

There are mainly two types of marketing channels operating in the 15 Haats of Garo Hills region. The direct channel exhibits consumers' purchase of the produce directly from the actual growers or farmers giving them cent percent share in the consumers' rupee. There is another link with the village petty traders who purchases produce from the farmers and sells in the Haats. The commission agents of big Mahajans of Mankachar, Dodhnoi and Krishnai regions of Assam are in operation in Garo Hills in two ways. These agents cum contractors generally enter the growing areas and purchase the produce offering monopsony prices to the actual growers of fruits, vegetables and commercial crops. The producers are not fully aware

of the prices prevailed in the permanent market or haats. Secondly, the agents as a ploy to get the produce at reasonable rates catch hold of the farmers with goods loaded on their backs who are being waylaid in the middle way of the haat. After a reasonable bargaining, the agents are often successful in getting the produce offloaded before reaching haats. These agents then go back to the respective Mahajans and get their commissions on the basis of per jute bale. The only difference between agents and middlemen is that the middlemen do not report to the Mahajans and are profit motivated and sell the bulk quantities themselves where they get good remuneration.

Conclusion

Haats in the Garo Hills Region of Meghalaya play an important role in catering the needs of not only the indigenous people but also the people coming from neighboring state of Assam. It is also the centre of goods of local origin and goods brought from outside. The market functionaries play a vital role in maintaining the effective functioning of market centers. Market agents and middlemen are in the business for a long period although there is no proper documentation that supports the role and functions of these intermediaries, however empirical findings from the present study reflect the vital roles that they play in the haats of Garo hills region. The District Council should take proper note of the buying and selling mechanism within the haat and should ensure provisions of amenities and basic facilities viz., drinking water, sanitation, storage, weigh of goods etc., are made available in adequate time and space. This will ensure the farmers and market participants congregate in the haats on the haat days and take part comfortably in local haats of the region.

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