

Sustainable Livelihoods and Economic Opportunities in Rural and Urban Spaces: A Case of Bihar (India)

Dr. Swati Yadav¹, Shaziya Qayum²

¹Sr. Assistant Professor, ²Research Scholar
University Dept. of Geography, T.M.B.U, Bhagalpur (Bihar)

Abstract

Livelihood sustainability has become a critical concern in development discourse, particularly in Bihar, where socio-economic vulnerability coincides with rapid population growth. Bihar, the third most populous state of India, accommodates about 10.4% of the national population, with nearly 88.7% residing in rural areas (Census 2011). Agriculture continues to be the backbone of the rural economy, engaging around 70% of the workforce, yet its contribution to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) declined to nearly 19% by 2020–21. This structural imbalance has intensified livelihood insecurity, resulting in widespread seasonal and permanent migration, with almost 30% of households relying on remittances. Urban livelihoods in Bihar reflect a contrasting but equally fragile scenario. Despite low urbanization (11.3%), cities such as Patna, Muzaffarpur, and Bhagalpur are witnessing rapid in-migration. Employment, however, is overwhelmingly informal, accounting for over 80% of urban jobs. Weak industrial growth and limited expansion of the service sector have led to high unemployment, especially among educated youth, with rates exceeding 13%, above the national average. At the same time, Bihar has shown promising livelihood innovations. The Jeevika initiative under the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Mission has mobilized more than 10 million women through self-help groups, enhancing incomes, financial inclusion, and empowerment. Agricultural diversification into maize, litchi, makhana, and dairy, along with the state's rich cultural and religious heritage, offers potential for sustainable rural and tourism-based livelihoods. Using the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, this paper analyses livelihood assets, vulnerabilities, and strategies across rural and urban Bihar. It argues that integrated planning, skill development, and promotion of inclusive and green employment can convert existing vulnerabilities into long-term opportunities, making sustainable livelihoods central to inclusive growth and socio-economic stability in Bihar.

Keywords: Sustainable Livelihoods, Rural–Urban Linkages, Migration and Remittances, Informal Economy, Bihar Development

1. Introduction

Livelihood sustainability has become a critical theme in development discourse, particularly in the context of economically lagging regions such as Bihar. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets, and activities required to sustain a means of living; it is considered sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses, maintain or enhance capabilities and assets, and provide opportunities for future generations without undermining the natural resource base (Chambers & Conway, 1992). In Bihar, livelihood practices are strongly influenced by historical underdevelopment, agrarian dependence, frequent natural hazards, and increasing rural–urban disparities. Despite having abundant human resources and rich cultural heritage, the state continues to face structural challenges such as poverty, unemployment, low industrialization, and high out-migration.

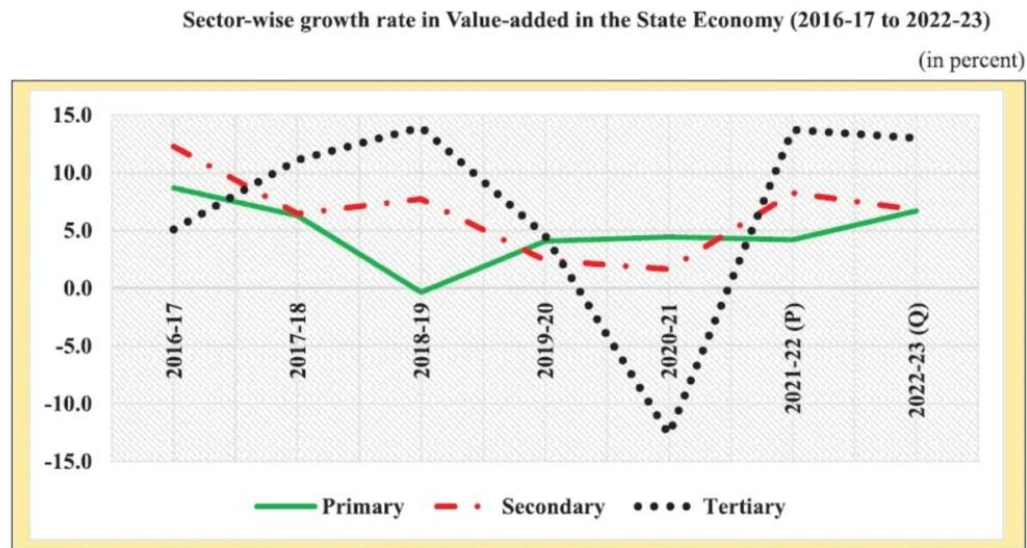
Bihar is the third most populous state in India, with a population of 104.1 million (Census, 2011), of which 88.7% live in rural areas. Agriculture remains the backbone of Bihar’s rural economy, employing nearly 70% of the workforce. However, its share in the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) has declined to around 19% in 2020–21 (Government of Bihar, 2022), indicating the state’s inability to transform its workforce into secondary and tertiary sectors. Small and fragmented landholdings, seasonal unemployment, declining soil fertility, and frequent floods and droughts make rural livelihoods highly vulnerable. Consequently, migration has emerged as a dominant livelihood strategy, with more than 30% of households dependent on remittances for survival and socio-economic security.

Urban livelihoods in Bihar present a contrasting but equally complex scenario. Bihar remains one of the least urbanized states in India, with only 11.3% of its population living in urban areas. Yet, cities such as Patna, Gaya, Bhagalpur, and Muzaffarpur are witnessing rapid rural–urban migration, resulting in increasing pressure on urban infrastructure and services. Employment is predominantly informal, with over 80% of urban workers engaged in unorganized sectors such as street vending, construction, rickshaw pulling, and small-scale trade. The absence of large-scale industries, inadequate investment, and limited growth of the service sector have restricted employment opportunities, particularly for the educated youth. The unemployment rate in urban Bihar was recorded above 13% in 2020–21, higher than the national average (PLFS, 2021).

Despite these challenges, Bihar has demonstrated significant potential for livelihood diversification and innovation. Initiatives like the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (Jeevika) have mobilized over 10 million rural women through self-help groups, improving financial inclusion, income generation, and social empowerment. Agricultural diversification into high-value crops such as maize, litchi, makhana, and dairy farming has opened new avenues for rural livelihoods. Additionally, Bihar’s rich cultural, religious, and historical heritage – including sites like Bodhi Gaya, Nalanda, Rajgir, and Vikramshila – offers immense potential for sustainable tourism-based employment.

Given this background, the present study aims to analyse sustainable livelihoods and economic opportunities in rural and urban spaces of Bihar using the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF). It examines livelihood assets, vulnerability context, strategies, and institutional interventions while exploring the role of migration, informal economy, rural enterprises, and tourism. The paper argues that while Bihar’s livelihood structure is deeply rooted in agriculture and migration, there is substantial scope to transform these vulnerabilities into opportunities through integrated rural–urban planning, skill

development, promotion of green jobs, and strengthening of local economies. Ensuring sustainable and inclusive livelihoods is not only vital for poverty reduction but also critical for achieving long-term economic stability and social equity in Bihar.



Note : For 2021-22, the figures are Provisional estimates (P) and for 2022-23 Quick estimates (Q).
Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, GoB

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of sustainable livelihoods, introduced by Chambers and Conway (1992), emphasizes the importance of capabilities, assets, and activities that help individuals maintain and improve their living conditions, even in the face of shocks and stress. The Sustainable Livelihood Framework (DFID, 1999) further explains how human, natural, social, physical, and financial capital shape livelihood outcomes. In Bihar, studies by Jha and Singh (2019) and Sharma (2012) reveal that rural livelihoods are heavily dependent on agriculture, yet declining productivity, small landholdings, floods, and droughts make them highly vulnerable. Migration has emerged as a key livelihood strategy; Deshingkar and Farrington (2009) note that remittances sustain nearly one-third of rural households in Bihar. Urban livelihood studies by Papola (2013) and Kumar & Prasad (2021) highlight the dominance of the informal sector in cities like Patna and Bhagalpur, where limited industrialization and poor infrastructure result in insecure employment. Meanwhile, livelihood diversification through dairy, horticulture, makhana, litchi cultivation, and self-help groups under the Jeevika project has shown positive results in empowering rural women and increasing incomes (NABARD, 2018; Government of Bihar, 2022). However, there remains a gap in literature that comparatively analyzes rural and urban livelihoods in Bihar using the Sustainable Livelihood Framework, particularly with respect to migration, informal economies, and climate vulnerability.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyse the nature of livelihood patterns in rural and urban areas of Bihar, with emphasis on agriculture, informal employment, and non-farm economic activities.
2. To assess livelihood assets, vulnerabilities, and coping strategies using the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) in the context of Bihar's socio-economic and environmental conditions.

3. To evaluate the role of migration, government schemes, and emerging opportunities in promoting sustainable and inclusive livelihoods in Bihar.

DATA SOURCE & RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach based on both qualitative and quantitative data to examine sustainable livelihoods in rural and urban Bihar. The research primarily relies on secondary data sourced from the Census of India, Bihar Economic Survey, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), NSSO reports, Government publications, and scholarly articles. The Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) is used as the conceptual tool to analyze livelihood assets (human, natural, social, physical, and financial capital), vulnerability factors (poverty, migration, climate hazards), and coping strategies adopted by households. A comparative analysis is conducted between rural and urban livelihood structures, focusing on agriculture, informal employment, migration, and government interventions such as Jeevika, MGNREGA, and DAY-NULM. The study area includes the state of Bihar, with specific reference to districts like Patna, Bhagalpur, and Muzaffarpur to understand varied livelihood dynamics. Data is interpreted through qualitative content analysis and simple statistical interpretation to derive meaningful conclusions.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD FRAMEWORK

This study is based on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), developed by DFID (1999), which provides a holistic understanding of how individuals and communities sustain their livelihoods amidst vulnerabilities. The framework focuses on five types of livelihood assets—human capital (skills, education, health), natural capital (land, water, climate), physical capital (infrastructure, housing, transport), financial capital (income, savings, credit), and social capital (networks, community support, institutions). These assets are influenced by the vulnerability context, which includes poverty, climate-induced disasters, unemployment, migration, and socio-economic inequalities—factors highly prevalent in Bihar. People adopt various livelihood strategies, such as farming, wage labour, migration, self-employment, and small businesses, to sustain their living. These strategies are further shaped by policies, institutions, and government programmes like MGNREGA, NRLM (Jeevika), DAY-NULM, and agricultural reforms. Through this framework, the paper analyses how rural and urban households in Bihar utilize available assets, cope with risks, and seek sustainable livelihood opportunities.

RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN BIHAR

Rural livelihoods in Bihar are predominantly agrarian, with nearly 70% of the population dependent on agriculture and allied activities for survival. However, agriculture in the state is characterized by small and fragmented landholdings, low productivity, over-dependence on monsoon rainfall, and recurrent natural hazards such as floods in North Bihar and droughts in South Bihar. The contribution of agriculture to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) has declined to around 19% (2020–21), creating a mismatch between the agricultural workforce and its economic output. Many households rely on subsistence farming, sharecropping, cattle rearing, fishing, dairy, and seasonal wage labour under schemes like MGNREGA to supplement income. Additionally, agricultural diversification in crops such as maize, litchi, makhana, and vegetables, along with fisheries and dairy cooperatives, has provided new livelihood avenues in districts like Muzaffarpur, Madhubani, and Begusarai. Rural poverty, lack of irrigation, inadequate market infrastructure, and limited access to credit push a large section of the rural workforce

towards migration to states like Punjab, Delhi, Haryana, Maharashtra, and Gujarat. The success of the Jeevika (Bihar Rural Livelihoods Mission) has been a transformative model, mobilizing millions of women through self-help groups (SHGs), promoting microfinance, entrepreneurship, and social empowerment. Despite these developments, rural livelihoods in Bihar remain vulnerable, requiring stronger agricultural reforms, skill development, and rural non-farm employment opportunities.

Table 1: Rural Livelihoods in Bihar – Key Indicators

| Indicator / Aspect | Data / Evidence | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Population dependent on agriculture | ~70% of rural population | NITI Aayog / Economic Survey of Bihar (2023) |
| Agriculture shares in GSDP | 19% (2020–21) | Bihar Economic Survey 2022–23 |
| Average landholding size | 0.39 hectares (very small & fragmented) | Agriculture Census 2015–16 |
| Rainfed agriculture | 60% farmland dependent on monsoon | ICAR & Dept. of Agriculture |
| Major natural hazards | Floods: 68% of North Bihar area prone to floods Drought: South Bihar frequently affected | NDMA, Water Resources Dept. Bihar |
| Households earning through wage labour (MGNREGA) | 73 lakh households employed (2022–23) | Ministry of Rural Development |
| Major diversified crops | Maize: 3rd largest producer in India Litchi: Bihar produces 40% of India's total Makhana: 70% of world production | ICAR, NABARD |
| Livestock & dairy contribution | 11 million tonnes milk per year | BAHS Report, Govt. of Bihar |
| Districts with diversification success | Muzaffarpur (Litchi), Madhubani (Fishery), Begusarai (Dairy & Maize) | Bihar Agriculture Dept. |
| Rural poverty rate | 33.7% (highest in India) | NITI Aayog, MPI Report 2023 |
| Rural migration rate | 29 migrants per 1,000 population | NSSO Migration Report 2019 |
| Women involved in Jeevika (NRLM SHGs) | 1.10 crore+ women in 10 lakh SHGs | Bihar Rural Livelihoods Mission (BRLPS), 2024 |
| Credit disbursed under SHGs (Jeevika) | ₹14,000 crore+ | BRLPS / NABARD |

URBAN LIVELIHOODS IN BIHAR

Urban livelihoods in Bihar present a complex scenario marked by rapid population growth, limited industrialization, and dominance of the informal sector. Despite being one of the least urbanized states in

India (only 11.3% urban population), cities like Patna, Muzaffarpur, Gaya, and Bhagalpur are experiencing rising rural–urban migration due to agrarian distress and lack of rural employment. However, urban areas offer mostly informal and unregulated livelihood opportunities, with more than 80% of workers engaged in activities such as street vending, rickshaw pulling, construction work, small retail shops, domestic services, and daily wage labour. The absence of large industries, underdeveloped service sectors, weak infrastructure, and inadequate investment restrict formal employment growth. Youth unemployment is particularly high, with urban unemployment rates exceeding 13%, higher than the national average (PLFS 2020–21). Slums and informal settlements are expanding due to high housing demand and low-income levels, leading to poor access to water, sanitation, healthcare, and education. Schemes like PMAY-Urban, DAY-NULM, Smart City Mission, and Skill India have been introduced to enhance urban employment, entrepreneurship, and infrastructure, but their coverage and effectiveness remain limited. Thus, urban livelihoods in Bihar are characterized by economic insecurity, low wages, and lack of social protection, yet they serve as crucial spaces for income diversification, migration-based earnings, and emerging service-based economies.

Table 2: Urban Livelihoods in Bihar – Key Indicators

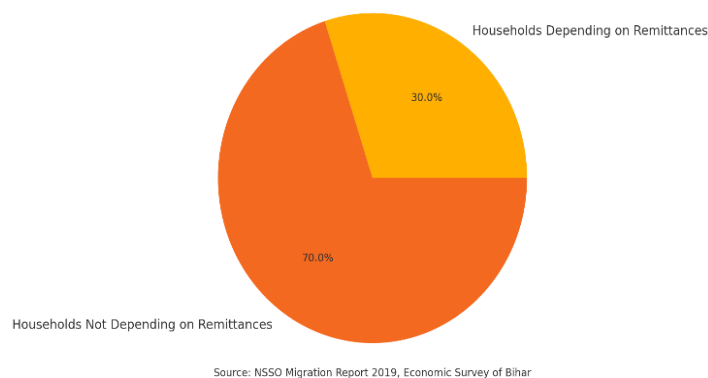
| Indicator / Aspect | Data / Statistics | Source |
|--|---|---|
| Urban population of Bihar | 11.3% (least urbanized major state in India) | Census 2011 / NITI Aayog |
| Major urban centres | Patna, Muzaffarpur, Gaya, Bhagalpur | Census & Bihar Economic Survey |
| Workers in informal sector | 80–85% of urban workforce | Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2020–21 |
| Common informal occupations | Street vending, rickshaw pulling, construction, small shops, domestic work, daily wage labour | PLFS / NULM |
| Urban unemployment rate | 13.5% (higher than national average of 8.7%) | PLFS 2020–21 |
| Urban poverty rate | 15.6% | NITI Aayog, Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023 |
| Growth in slum population | 32–35% of urban residents live in slums (Patna, Gaya, Bhagalpur highest) | Census & HUDCO |
| Housing shortage in urban Bihar | ~3.4 lakh units | Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs |
| Major urban livelihood schemes | PMAY-Urban, DAY-NULM, Smart City Mission, PM SVANidhi, Skill India | MoHUA / Govt. of Bihar |
| Migration to urban areas | High rural-to-urban migration due to lack of rural jobs & agrarian crisis | NSSO Migration Report 2019 |

| | | |
|--|--|----------------------------|
| Contribution of urban Bihar to GSDP | 45–50% | Bihar Economic Survey 2023 |
| Formal industries present | Minimal – Food processing, leather, textile, small manufacturing | DIC Bihar |

MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES AS A LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY

Migration has become one of the most significant livelihood strategies in Bihar, driven by limited agricultural productivity, unemployment, poverty, and recurrent natural disasters like floods and droughts. A large proportion of rural households send male members to metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Surat, Ludhiana, and Kolkata, as well as to states like Punjab, Haryana, and Gujarat for seasonal or long-term employment. These migrants are primarily engaged in low-paid informal jobs such as construction labour, factory work, rickshaw pulling, security services, and domestic work. According to various studies, nearly 30% of households in Bihar rely on remittances as a major or supplementary income source, helping them meet daily consumption needs, education expenses, healthcare, and housing improvements. Migration not only reduces pressure on local labour markets but also acts as a coping mechanism against rural livelihood vulnerability. However, it also brings socio-economic challenges including family separation, exploitation of migrant workers, lack of social security, and feminization of agriculture, where women manage households and farms in the absence of male members. Despite these issues, remittances play a crucial role in strengthening household resilience and contribute significantly to Bihar's rural economy, making migration a vital component of its livelihood system.

Dependency on Remittances among Households in Bihar



CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS IN BIHAR

Sustainable livelihoods in Bihar face multiple challenges arising from socio-economic, environmental, and institutional constraints. The dominance of small and fragmented landholdings, low agricultural productivity, inadequate irrigation, and over-dependence on monsoon rainfall make rural livelihoods highly vulnerable. Frequent natural disasters, particularly floods in North Bihar and droughts in South Bihar, cause severe crop losses, displacement, and economic instability. In urban areas, limited industrialization, high unemployment, overcrowding, and the expansion of informal settlements contribute to insecure livelihoods and poor living conditions. The lack of skill development, low literacy rates, especially among women, and inadequate access to healthcare and education further restrict livelihood

opportunities. Weak infrastructure such as roads, electricity, storage facilities, and market linkages hinders both agricultural and non-agricultural growth. Additionally, bureaucratic delays, corruption, and poor implementation of government schemes like MGNREGA, PMAY, and DAY-NULM reduce the impact of livelihood support programmes. Social issues such as caste-based discrimination, gender inequality, and limited access to credit and land further marginalize vulnerable communities. Together, these challenges create a cycle of poverty, migration, and economic insecurity, making it difficult to achieve sustainable and inclusive livelihoods in Bihar.

Table 3 -Poverty & Economic Hardship

| Indicator | Data | Source |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Rural Poverty Rate | 33.7% | NITI Aayog Multidimensional Poverty Index (2023) |
| Urban Poverty Rate | 15.6% | NITI Aayog MPI (2023) |
| Bihar Rank in Poverty (India) | Highest number of poor households | NITI Aayog |
| Per Capita Income of Bihar | ₹54,383 (2022–23) (India average: ₹1,70,620) | RBI / Bihar Economic Survey |

Table 4- Inadequate Infrastructure

| Indicator | Status | Source |
|--|----------------------|---|
| Rural households with pucca roads | 54% | Ministry of Rural Development (PMGSY Report 2023) |
| Households with electricity access | 77% rural, 97% urban | NSO & Saubhagya Scheme Report (2022) |
| Functional piped water supply in rural areas | 18% households only | Jal Jeevan Mission (2023) |
| Internet Connectivity (Rural Bihar) | 28% households | NFHS-5 (2019–21) |

Table 5- Limited Access to Education & Healthcare

| Indicator | Data | Source |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Literacy Rate (Overall) | 61.8% (National avg: 74%) | Census 2011 / Projected 2023 |
| Female Literacy | 51.5% | Census 2011 |
| Primary Healthcare Centers Shortfall | 32% deficiency in PHCs | Ministry of Health (RHS 2022) |
| Doctor-Patient Ratio | 1:28,000 (Bihar) | NITI Aayog Health Index |

Table 6- Environmental Degradation

| Indicator | Value | Source |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Area affected by annual floods | 68% of North Bihar | NDMA |
| Groundwater Over-exploited Blocks | 11 out of 534 blocks | Central Ground Water Board |
| Deforestation Rate (last 10 years) | ~8% decrease | FSI Report 2021 |
| Soil Erosion-prone districts | 12 districts severely affected | ICAR Research |

Table 7 - Dependence on Traditional Practices

| Indicator | Status | Source |
|--|---------------|------------------------------|
| Average Landholding Size | 0.39 hectares | Agriculture Census 2015–16 |
| Households using modern irrigation (tube wells/drip) | 41% only | Bihar Agriculture Department |
| Tractors per 1,000 farmers | 13 (very low) | Ministry of Agriculture |
| Farmers using chemical-free or scientific methods | <10% | ICAR–KVK Report |

Table 8 -Climate Change & Livelihood Risk

| Climate Issue | Data | Source |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Average annual flood damage | ₹4000+ crore per year | Bihar Disaster Management Dept |
| Drought frequency (South Bihar) | Once every 2–3 years | IMD & ICAR |
| Temperature rise in last 50 years | 0.9°C increase | IMD Climate Report |
| Crop loss due to floods/droughts | 23–30% of annual production | ICAR & State Agriculture Dept |

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND LIVELIHOOD INITIATIVES IN BIHAR

The Government of India and the Government of Bihar have launched several initiatives to strengthen livelihood security, enhance income opportunities, and reduce poverty in both rural and urban areas. One of the most successful initiatives is the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (Jeevika) under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), which has mobilized over 10 million rural women into Self-Help Groups (SHGs), improving access to microfinance, entrepreneurship, dairy cooperatives, and social empowerment. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) provides 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to rural households, acting as a safety net during non-agricultural seasons. Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY), PM-Kisan, and Soil Health Card Scheme aim to enhance agricultural productivity, irrigation facilities, and income stability for farmers. In urban areas, programmes like the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihood Mission (DAY-NULM) support skill development, self-employment, and micro-enterprises for the urban poor. Housing schemes such as PM Awas Yojana (Urban & Rural) provide affordable housing to economically weaker sections. Additionally, initiatives like the Skill India Mission, Start-up India, Mudra Yojana, and

Stand-up India aim to promote entrepreneurship and job creation for youth. Despite these schemes, issues such as fund delays, bureaucratic hurdles, low awareness, and regional disparities often limit their effectiveness. Strengthening implementation, transparency, and beneficiary participation is essential to ensure these programmes contribute effectively to sustainable livelihoods.

Table 9 -Major Livelihood Schemes in Rural Bihar

| Scheme | Objective | Beneficiaries / Coverage | Key Impact (Bihar) |
|--|---|---------------------------------|---|
| MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) | 100 days guaranteed wage employment | 73 lakh households (2023) | ₹6,300 crore wages disbursed; rural employment & asset creation |
| JEEViKA (NRLM – Bihar Rural Livelihoods Mission) | Women SHGs, microfinance & entrepreneurship | 1.10 crore women, 10+ lakh SHGs | ₹14,000 crore credit linkage; dairy, agriculture, small enterprises |
| PM-KISAN | ₹6,000/year income support to farmers | 84 lakh registered farmers | ₹6,900 crore transferred (up to 2023) |
| PMKSY (Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana) | Improve irrigation & water-use efficiency | Covers 38 districts | 2.8 lakh hectares brought under irrigation |
| Soil Health Card Scheme | Improve soil fertility & scientific farming | 1.16 crore farmers given cards | Reduced fertilizer misuse & improved yields |

Table 10 - Urban Livelihood & Employment Schemes

| Scheme | Purpose | Coverage in Bihar | Key Outcomes |
|--|---|---|---|
| DAY-NULM (National Urban Livelihood Mission) | Skill training & self-employment for urban poor | 142 towns in Bihar | 2.5 lakh+ urban youth trained; self-employment loans provided |
| PM SVANidhi | Loans to street vendors | 2.8 lakh applications; 1.9 lakh sanctioned | Formal credit access & digital transactions |
| PMAY–Urban | Affordable housing | 8.5 lakh houses sanctioned | 4.2 lakh completed (2023) |
| Smart Cities Mission | Urban infrastructure & governance | Patna, Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur, Bihar Sharif | Sewerage, e-governance, urban mobility projects |

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE LIVELIHOODS IN BIHAR

Despite structural challenges, Bihar has immense potential to develop sustainable and inclusive livelihood opportunities by leveraging its demographic strength, agricultural base, cultural heritage, and emerging non-farm sectors. Agricultural diversification into high-value crops such as litchi, makhana, maize, vegetables, honey, and organic farming can create profitable rural enterprises. The promotion of dairy, fisheries, poultry, and agro-processing industries can enhance income security and generate local employment. Jeevika's self-help group model shows how women's entrepreneurship, microfinance, and collective marketing can transform rural livelihoods. In urban areas, expanding skill-based employment, digital services, local start-ups, and MSMEs (Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises) can reduce dependence on informal labour. Bihar's rich cultural and religious heritage—such as Bodh Gaya, Nalanda, Rajgir, Sultanganj, and Vikramshila—provides immense scope for eco-tourism, heritage tourism, and rural tourism, which can generate jobs in hospitality, handicrafts, transport, and local markets. Furthermore, investments in renewable energy, green jobs, flood-resilient agriculture, rural infrastructure, and digital connectivity offer new livelihood possibilities. If supported with strong policy implementation, education, skill training, and rural–urban integration, these opportunities can transform Bihar from a migration-dependent economy to a self-reliant and sustainable system of livelihoods.

Conclusion

Sustainable livelihoods in Bihar reflect a complex interplay of agricultural dependency, rural poverty, informal urban employment, and migration-driven income strategies. Despite being one of India's least urbanized and economically backward states, Bihar possesses significant potential for inclusive development through its rich human resources, fertile plains, cultural heritage, and emerging livelihood innovations. The rural economy remains largely agrarian but constrained by small landholdings, natural disasters, and low productivity, leading to seasonal migration. Urban centres, though expanding, are unable to provide sufficient formal employment, resulting in overdependence on informal work and inadequate infrastructure. Government interventions like Jeevika, MGNREGA, DAY-NULM, and PM-Kisan have contributed to livelihood support, but their impact is limited by weak implementation and socio-economic disparities. To move toward sustainable and resilient livelihoods, Bihar must focus on agricultural diversification, rural non-farm enterprises, skill development, promotion of MSMEs, sustainable tourism, renewable energy, and better integration of rural and urban economies. Strengthening education, women's participation, governance transparency, and social protection will be crucial in transforming vulnerabilities into opportunities. Thus, sustainable livelihoods are not merely an economic necessity but a pathway to inclusive growth, social equity, and long-term stability in Bihar.

References

1. Adger, W. N. (2000). Social and ecological resilience: Are they related? *Progress in Human Geography*, 24(3), 347–364.
2. Bebbington, A. (1999). Capitals and capabilities: A framework for analyzing peasant viability, rural livelihoods, and poverty. *World Development*, 27(12), 2021–2044.

3. Birthal, P. S., Joshi, P. K., & Gulati, A. (2014). Diversification in Indian agriculture toward high-value crops: The role of small farmers. *Canadian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 62(4), 489–514.
4. Chambers, R., & Conway, G. (1992). Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century. Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Sussex.
5. Chen, M. (2016). The informal economy: Recent trends, future directions. *New Solutions*, 26(2), 155–172.
6. Deshingkar, P., & Farrington, J. (2009). Circular migration and multi-local livelihoods in rural India. Overseas Development Institute.
7. DFID (Department for International Development). (1999). Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets. London.
8. Ellis, F. (2000). *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries*. Oxford University Press.
9. Government of Bihar. (2022). Economic Survey of Bihar 2021–22. Finance Department, Government of Bihar.
10. Jha, B., & Singh, R. (2019). Agricultural challenges and livelihood insecurity in Bihar. *Journal of Rural Development*, 38(2), 215–229.
11. Kumar, S., & Prasad, R. (2021). Urban informal employment and livelihood insecurity in Bihar. *Indian Journal of Regional Science*, 53(1), 45–57.
12. Kundu, A. (2014). Exclusionary growth, urbanization, and migration in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(24), 124–132.
13. Mellor, J. (2017). Agricultural development and economic transformation in developing countries. *World Bank Research Observer*, 32(1), 1–24.
14. NABARD. (2018). Status of Microfinance and Self-Help Groups in India. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development.
15. Papola, T. S. (2013). Employment in the informal sector in India: Evidence and issues. *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 56(1), 1–22.
16. Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). (2021). Annual Report 2020–21. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.
17. Rodgers, G., & Rodgers, J. (2016). Migration, labour, and changing social relations in Bihar. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(26–27), 62–70.
18. Roy, A. (2011). Migration and remittances in Bihar: Economic lifeline for rural households. *Social Change*, 41(4), 485–503.
19. Sharma, S. (2012). Agrarian crisis and rural poverty in Bihar. *Journal of Economic and Social Development*, 8(2), 56–64.
20. Singh, A., & Mishra, V. (2020). Small landholdings and agricultural stagnation in Bihar. *Agricultural Economics Research Review*, 33(1), 101–109.
21. Singh, P., & Singh, R. (2021). High-value agriculture in Bihar: Opportunities and constraints. *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 76(3), 431–442.
22. Sinha, R., & Mishra, A. (2018). Floods, livelihood vulnerability, and resilience in North Bihar. *Natural Hazards*, 92(2), 1081–1105.
23. World Bank. (2020). Bihar: Urbanization and Poverty Assessment. World Bank Group.