

Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Under Joint Forest Management (JFM) Programme: Some Evidence from West Bengal, India

Debnarayan Sarker

The objectives of this article are to assess linkages and impact of participatory JFM Programme on Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (SRL) across socio-economic group of forest fringe communities. The study is based on four sample FPCs – one female FPC and three joint FPCs - in Midnapore and Bankura districts in West Bengal. The results suggest that the JFM Programme under the sample FPCs/villages in West Bengal is participatory. With regard to the SRL framework, strong sustainability criteria meet for very poor and poor households, which live below poverty line and are dependent on forest resource for their livelihood security. The study suggests that force or law cannot effectively control illegal collection of TFPs by the households living below poverty line, until a considerable increase in the collection of legal forest products – NTFPs, fuelwood etc. – and wage income from forest are ensured.

Introduction

To protect natural forests from degradation due to commercial exploitation, participatory programme in forest management is fundamentally a decentralized grassroots movement initiated by forest communities. Decentralized community participation has been globally accepted as a concept and an essential tool for the sustainability of natural resources. In keeping with this, a consensus has emerged both in academic and policy-making bodies about the desirability of decentralized participatory model for management of forest resources. Regarding decentralized planning and participatory programme in JFM (Joint Forest Management), it is said that forestry can play a significant role for the well being of the people living in and around forest areas. Conversely, these people can play a major part in making forests around them more productive under partnership management the state and local communities. The involving new policy lays emphasis on meeting the local needs, in particular of the tribal and rural poor living near forests and in safeguarding their traditional rights and concessions subject to the carrying capacity of forests. The concept of participatory forest management programme, tied closely with sustainable livelihood (SL)

Debnarayan Sarker, Professor and Secretary, Center for Economic Studies, Department of Economics, Presidency College, 86/1, College Street, Kolkata 700073, West Bengal, India.
Email: sarkar_d_n@reddifmail.com