

Common Property Resources - Conflict Between Man and Environment

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1.1.0. Man and Human civilization pre historically depend upon the environment. All aspects of humanity can't ignore the presence of nature. Strong relationship between man and environment especially in the present-day scenario turns social scientist into the arena of debate. How much dependence of human society on environment is efficient? This is the pertinent question of time. Over exploitation of nature is not only harmful for present generation but it may also nullify the concept of sustainable development. Again, to whom, the responsibility of environment management be restored upon. We all exploit environment for meeting our needs but are we committing ourselves for environmental up gradation? In this paper we are going to highlight some issues relating to man and environment. The paper contains the better side of the relationship and negative aspects of the relationship also.

1.2.0. Concept of Common Property Resources: - By the term Common Property Resource (CPR), one can easily define it as a resource, that is governed and owned by a group of people i.e. community. In economics, property rights refer to a bundle of entitlements defining the owner's right, privileges, and limitations for use of the resource. A good property rights has following three basic characteristics.

(i) Excludability: - All benefits and costs accrued as a result of owning the property should accrue to the owner, either directly or indirectly.

(ii) Transferability: - All property rights should be transferable from one owner to other.

(iii) Enforceability: - Property rights should be secure from involuntary seizure or encroachment by others. The common property resources also fulfill these three characteristics. The CPRs are non excludable within the community and excludable outside the community.

The CPRs are transferable to other, though it is practically hard to implement. The CPRs are enforceable by act of law. No body can seize or forcefully act upon other communities' resources. Common property resources may be formed under legal guidance or they may be informal, protected traditionally. Whatever may be the status of CPRs, in poor countries like India, CPRs make a valuable contribution to the economy. Lack of industrialization and lack of marketable goods compelled people to depend upon nature. People depend on CPRs for collecting fuel wood, water for drinking, fish, irrigation, grazing etc. In the North East Region, CPRs act as an insurance against uncertainty. In the hilly region from fuel wood to food, from grazing to harvesting people depend upon CPRs.

1.3.0. Review of literature: - Numerous research works are done on CPRs. Some of the research works reviewed are-

In his research work "Common pool Resources current status and future prospects" Bhaskar Vira found CPRs are economically significant to the rural poor of India.

Another study on Bison Harvesting of America gave stresses on the effects of over hunting of bison i.e. over exploitation of CPRs and its negative effects.

1.4.0. While discussing the benefits of CPRs and damage of over exploitation of CPRs, it should be remembered that most of the CPRs are regenerative i.e. these can be renewable within an economically significant time. For example, a forest or a fish pond has a regenerative capacity. Again, it is to be noted that all resources including CPRs has a carrying capacity up to a certain upper limit. Within the carrying capacity of the resource, the exploitation, more precisely consumption is not harmful. But as the

threshold limit crossed the fear of environmental degradation took place. Here we will discuss some of the uses of CPRs with special reference to the North East India context.

1.4.1. CPRs provide food security to the dependent people. Among the tribal people, the dependence on CPRs is seen. In the hilly area of NER people collect and harvest food on CPRs. It provided harvesting Grounds to the people. The hills where the Jhum Cultivation practiced are the common property of the tribes. The forest acts as a vegetable hub to local people. During the major droughts poor people of Chhotanagpur earned their livelihood from local roots and tubers (locally called ghitti), grown in the forests and survived. In the 1987-88 drought period, grasslands saved millions of livestock in India. The poor people depending upon livestock farming viz goat, sheep, cow etc, mostly relied upon CPRs.

1.4.2. The produce of CPRs is used as an input to the household production and consumption activities. Forest is always been important source of fuel wood and raw materials for industries like saw mills, paper mill, plywood factory etc. NER, where paucity of supply of L.P.G. is a cause of concern, there the importance of forest providing fuel wood, is widely recognized. It is seen that most tribes of the region make their huts completely from forest products. The bamboos, the cane, the thatch, all the product used in home making, are supplied by forest, which is a common property resource

1.4.3. One of the important CPR is grazing land. The livestock of the locality completely depend upon CPRs for their food. In NER of India, we could hardly find any private grazing land. The grazing owned by community provide support to the local people in livestock farming, which in turn meet the meat demands of the ration.

1.4.4. CPRs acts as a store of different plants and species of utmost importance. Indian forests comprise of nearly 15000 medicinal plants. Out of these 8000 species are used traditionally by the people. People from NER also use some of the plants as they use some local medicinal treatments like Ayurveda, Unani etc. CPRs also supplies some of the major inputs of herbal production viz tooth paste, hair oil, skin cream etc.

1.4.5. India produces world third highest fishes and second highest inland fish production. Most of the inland fish productions come from common property resources like rivers, natural ponds, reservoirs etc. Fish, being an important diet constituent of the people of north eastern region, the common fish ponds, river facilitate in nurturing balanced food habit of the people.

1.4.6. Above all the CPRs provide environment friendly hydrological, geographical and ecological change. It keeps rainfall in control, temperature in control and save the earth from soil erosion and floods. In this regard we can say that management of CPRs is the management of environment. If environment can be used sustainably the development becomes sustainable itself.

For landless people CPRs is the only available asset, for unemployed it is the employment opportunity, for food strived people it is the source of food, for homeless it provides inputs for huts. For rural people CPRs provide almost everything, which other can't.

1.4.7 Every economic good has optimum level of production and consumption. The CPRs should also have the optimum level of utilization, so that it remains sustainable to future generation. But unlike other marketable goods, the optimum utilization of CPRs is a little bit difficult. As valuation of CPRs are not defined by the market, So the traditional supply demand equalization formula doesn't work in valuing the CPRs. The nature of common property, itself ruled out the proposition of better CPR management. Some of the negative aspects of CPRs are-

1.4.8. CPRs are generally forest based. Large forest and hilly areas are two big components of CPRs. Due to huge dependence on common property forest resources, we loss the percentage area covered under forest. One empirical study had shown that Ivory coast is losing rainforest at the rate 300000 hectares a year. Same is the case for North Eastern Region of India. The loss of due to shifting cultivation is the consequence of poor management of property right. Massive destruction of forest results in degradation of soil quality, reduction of rainfall and thus lowered the productivity of soil. The Jhum cultivation and forest destruction caused flood and sand deposition in the plains of Assam. One can imagine that, if there is

private property right of forest, then so destructive Jhum cultivation can be controlled.

1.4.9 In the underdeveloped countries the poor people mostly depend on forest and common water bodies for their day-to-day activities. Destruction of forest will reduce the home and shelter for non-human life. Again, due to bathing, washing, disposals of wastes will lead to water pollution. These may lead to loss of aquatic life like fish, insects etc. North eastern region is specially enriched with wide variety flora and fauna, endangered living species etc. The unwanted destruction of forest and unethical use of water bodies may annihilate those endangered species. The miserable condition of Deepar Bill of Assam is an example of mismanagement of CRPs.

1.5.0. CPRs are not sustainable from environmental angle. In private property regime people always seek to save at least some part of the property for future generation. But in case of common property who will bother for future use? High consumption and massive destruction of CPRs are always contradictory in nature with other marketable goods.

1.5.1 Though property right is assigned to a particular community but the problem is that there is no clear-cut boundary, no clear definition about the allocation to the community. Having no legal boundary, the CPRs, in many cases caused communal conflict. If somebody from outside the region use property of other community then it may create communal clash, In North eastern region it is seen communal clashes borne, when some individual of a community economically exploits other communities' product.

1.6.0 Management of CPR: -

The CPRs bring men and environment into conflict. The big question is that, whether the CPRs are economically and environmentally sufficient enough for mankind. At the same time, it is clear that, nobody can totally discard economic development or environmental issues. Here the practical solution is the better management of CPRs. It should always be remembered that, in no cases the use of CPRs cross the carrying capacity of it, this implies that the dependence on CPRs should be utmost up to sustainable level. One ideal example of CPR management is the system of allocation grazing right in Switzerland. There over grazing is protected by certain rules

implemented by the community, which limit the amount of live stock permitted on the grazing. The rule of community is significant in this regard. A significant role should be played by NGOs. They should convey the message of environmental degradation and future economic scarcity of the property. Again, government should play active part by reducing poverty which in turn reduces the dependence on common property. For example, the supply of L.P.G. to rural household may reduce the destruction of forest.

1.7.0. The dependence of human being on CPRs or environment cannot be discarded by policy makers at all. In the underdeveloped countries like India CPRs are providing food and shelter to the poor. At the same time nobody can overrule the damage created by over utilization of CPRs. The practical solution is, manage and preserve CPRs, at the best.

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