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COST-BENEFIT ASSESSMENT OF COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES (CPRS) IN RURAL WEST BENGAL: AN EVALUATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The importance of Common Property Resources (CPRs) to the dwellers of the villages is no longer in question but the quantification in monetary terms of CPRs collection from various sources is a very crucial task. In this paper an attempt has been made to measure the collected CPRs from different sources by the villagers in different parts of West Bengal. Their quantification and actually how far the dwellers are benefited from the collected commons or more benefited from the opportunity man-days with local wage rate in their locality compare to cost incurred for collection of CPRs are analyzed here along with tables and diagrams. The ratio of benefit in cost is the highest in case of minorities and the lowest in case of OBC groups. Both total cost and total benefit measured in terms of money are the highest in case of minorities. But in case of OBC groups, the money value of benefit is the lowest, as compared with the cost associated with it. Poor as well as a section of middle class depends largely on this commons.

KEYWORDS

benefit, cost, common property, employment, income.

INTRODUCTION

Lack of natural resources available to the poor of any country is the main cause of poverty of the world. That is, most poor people are poor because they do not possess any income-generating Private Property Resources (PPRs) and do not have access to Common Property Resources (CPRs) or CPRs are not locally available at all in their area. Even today, most of the rural poor of the earth depend, to a great extent, for their livelihood on CPRs.

Though many of these poor people, whether they belong to general caste or schedule caste or tribes, have been allotted vested land and ownership rights (called Patta) particularly in West Bengal, the land amount is so small and the quality of the land is so poor and that they can hardly manage their families with the income from the property. Seasonal character of agriculture and lack of attention gainful employment opportunities forces these poor families to look for some other sources of income and CPRs become an important source for them. But while we recognize the importance of CPRs in the life of these poor rural people, it is also painfully observed that the areas under CPRs are gradually declining. Another important observation is that there is lack of quality management and overall planning of these resources, which has not been given adequate attention earlier. Beck and Ghosh² (2000) makes several observations on the basis of a study of CPRs in seven villages in West Bengal carried out between 1993 and 1996, selected from different agro-ecological zones of West Bengal. The main findings from this study were: -

CPRs made about 12% of poor household's income. Fuel and fodder were the most important CPRs accessed by the poor and women and girls are mainly responsible for collection of CPRs. Although it is crucial for the poor people livelihood, but there is no proper management for these resources and the dictum is very fruitful here that 'every body's property is nobody's property'. So the village people over graze or overuse the resources and conflict arises in time of collection, which is particularly mentioned in the Beck's³ (1994) study in three villages of west Bengal. He pointed out that, despite in West Bengal there is a lack of local common's land (found in other states of India) it is very important for subsistence of poorest households and particularly for woman and children and or poor people, and it add between 19 and 29 percent to household income of very poor villagers.

Although the rich people enjoy a significant amount of these resources in different ways, they are not dependent on these resources like poor for their livelihood sustenance.

The importance of CPRs described by Singh¹⁰(1996) as "in the past the peasants who had small piece of land, who couldn't eke out enough from it for their survival, who used to eat fruits from their nearby forests and used to collect leaves, flowers and dried branches, and by selling these to others supplemented their income from other sources. They also used to maintain a couple of cows, goats and were living happily in their villages depending on their village common grazing land."

The poor people collect, free of charge, firewood, crop wastes, cow dung, weeds, fodder, organic manure [dry leaves' forest litter], building materials [polls, thatch and silt], fruits and vegetables, herbs, fiber etc. from CPRs. Water which is essential for survival is also collected from community ponds, lakes, rivers, canals etc. Besides, CPRs also provide raw materials for traditional occupations including art and craft, and thus indirectly support employment in these occupations.

Collection of food, fuel as well as fodder like spinach, vegetables, mushrooms, small fish, grass, green leaves, dry leaves and dry branches of trees, small timber, building and constructional materials directly from common places as well as private places helps the dwellers by strengthening their daily livelihood sustenance and generate income from sales of these excess items after fulfilling their daily needs.

These Common Property Resources (CPRs) like playground, various types of roads, bathing (in the ponds, river, canals etc.), defecation, Sansan (places of burning dead bodies), Bhagard (a wasteland for depositing dead bodies of animals), Hariparia (depositing place of unshaped & unused clay pot and other unused materials), market / haat, school / college, grazing places etc. help the mass directly in different way.

In urban areas, people also depend on the CPRs like playground, parks, roads, lakes, footpath, dustbin and vats, hawker's corners, parking places, canals, river and drainages etc. They have some direct contribution as well as indirect. They not only contribute amenities to the city dwellers but also help the poor to earn their livelihood utilizing those places and corners.

The CPRs in different forms and manifestations play a crucial role in providing livelihood to the people of that locality. In urban area CPRs play an important role of a different kind. But there is a pertinent question that, in what way do CPRs help the mass of that locality?

The CPRs help the people of any locality by generating income and employment by way of collection of commons apart from another source of income and employment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The CPRs become a topic of considerable interest since the publication of 'the tragedy of commons' by Hardins⁴ in 1968 where he focused on the overexploitation of the Common Property Resources (CPRs). David Hume was among the earliest to mention the problem of overexploitation of Commons in respect of grazing cattle on village pastures.

Ever since the publication of Garrett Hardin's influential article 'The Tragedy of Commons' (Hardin, 1968), there has been a great deal of research on poverty, environment and natural resource degradation.

Chhatrapati Singh⁹ (1986) showed that till the end of the 19th century, at least 80 percent of India's natural resources were common property. The CPRs then formed the backbone of India's economy, which was predominantly non-cash, and a non-market economy. Freely available wood, shrubs, and cow / buffalo dung were used for cooking and heating, mud, bamboo and other timber and palm leaves for housing, wild grasses and shrubs as fodder; and a variety of fruits and vegetables as food. Thus, no cash expenditure was required to meet the basic needs of food, fuel, housing and fodder; only physical labour and energy were necessary.

N.S. Jodha⁵ in the mid 1986's and 1990's on the CPRs has shown that CPRs contribute to employment generation, income generation and asset accumulation for rural poor. A study of 550 households in 60 villages of the state of Madhya Pradesh conducted by Urvashi Narain⁶ (spring-2006), pointed out that: Dependence on common natural resources does not decrease as income of the families rises. The rich depend heavily on fodder collection and on constructional wood because they have larger animal's holdings and therefore a greater demand. Rich households are just as dependent on natural resources as the poor, though the rich and the poor depend on different resources. Among the households that collected natural resources, the poorest derive about 12% of their total income from resources. And the wealthier households depend on the commons as much as the poorest ones.

B Agarwal¹ (1989) studies on various field works throughout India pointed out that 30 millions people or more depend wholly or substantially on non-timber forest products, which are of particular importance in the lean season. Woman and children play a central role in accessing CPRs, and have a more detailed knowledge of non-cultivated and wild crops than men in some cases. Access to CPRs has declined across India over the last 30 years. He describes the CPR in India as – a wide variety of essential items are gathered by rural households from the village commons and forests, for personal use and sale: food, fuel, fodder, fiber, small timber, manure, bamboo, medicinal herbs, oils, materials for house buildings and handicrafts, resin, gum, honey, spices and so on.

The World Resource Institute¹¹ (1990) states that the CPRs provide a significant portion of income and growth of the people of India. They also observed that merely 500 million Indian people depend upon Non-timber Forest product (NTFP) for their daily livelihood maintenance and this NTFP collection generates about 1063 million man-days of employment in India.

In a study of three villages in Karnataka, Pasha⁸ (1992) observed the CPRs contributed 10 percent of gross income of poor households. The CPRs are very important for poor village people for their income and employment generation, although it is declining at very alarming rate.

Singh¹⁰⁰ (1996) pointed out that CPRs contributed about 27 and 22 percent to the total gross income of landless and 22 percent to that of cultivating households respectively.

NSSO⁷ reports 1998 states that CPRs refer to all such resources that are accessible to the whole community to which no individual has exclusive property rights. The rights relating access to these resources are generally conventional. This report also states that, resources held or owned by an individual or a family or an organization are not considered as CPRs, but the CPLR within the boundary of the village and by legal sanction or official assignment held by village panchayat are treated as CPRs. It includes grazing land; pasture land, go-char, village forest and woodlots, village sites and threshing floor etc.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This present paper has been carried out to achieve the specific objectives mentioned below.

1. To make an attempt to enquire into the nature and existence of CPRs in rural areas of West Bengal.
2. To investigate the contribution of CPRs towards the employment and income generation for the dwellers of the surveyed area.
3. To examine the importance of CPRs to the poor in rural West Bengal.

METHODOLOGY

The present study shows that they require data on benefits drawn from CPRs. For data on benefits from CPRs, basic unit of investigation was households. Multistage Sampling Technique has been used here. At the first stage four districts of West Bengal have been selected for collection of data. These are Paschim Medinipur, Purba Medinipur, Bankura and Purulia. Below the district level in the second stage 08 Blocks were selected out of 96 blocks in total of four selected districts using Random Number Table. In the third stage 10 mouzas were selected out of 1437 mouzas of 08 selected blocks.

The selected Blocks and their corresponding selected Mouzas of the four districts and other various sources provide necessary information and other demographic data.

The list of selected Districts, Blocks and Mouzas which gives necessary information are given below (Table 1):

Not only the poor household, but also the middle class and rich households have been taken into consideration for our study. The sample households are drawn from the total households of the selected mouza for our study. The data has been collected through direct interview using a suitably designed structured questionnaire. Pilot survey was conducted in one Mouza. Results have been reviewed and the final questionnaire was prepared. Samples of households were chosen following stratified random sampling techniques. However in this paper we present an analysis of CPR based on the data collected from ten villages of four districts out of the southern part of West Bengal.

In the present study 345 households were surveyed from the ten villages. For this purpose a structured questionnaire was framed. Apart from the questionnaire, the oral history about Commons was collected directly from the old aged persons of the respective villages and about the problems of collection of commons from the woman and children, who are the main collector of CPRs.

TABLE 1: LIST OF SELECTED DISTRICTS, BLOCKS AND VLIAGES / MOUZAS

Name of the District	Name of the Block	Mouza / Village	J.L. Number
Paschim Medinipur	Midnapur Sadar	Bagdubi	139
		Mohanpur	071
		Kharagpur-I	Ch. Kalakai
Purba Medinipur	Egra-I	Gokulpur	143
	Bhagwanpur-II	Ramchak-	248
	Kolaghat	Baisnabchak	257
	Ramnagar-II	Dadanpatrabarh	284
Bankura	Bishnupur	Hikimdanga-Gopalpur	133
		Gholardanga	NA
Purulia	Kashipur	Jorapukur	11

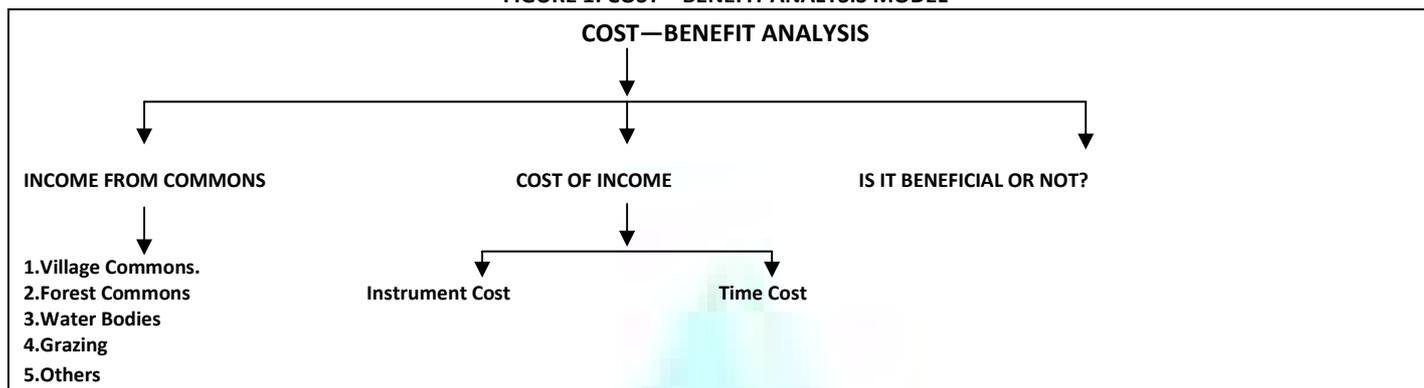
Source: Primary Survey 2010-11

COSTS AND BENEFITS FROM COMMONS

Cost Benefit Analysis is an economic tool to aid social decision-making, which enables systematic comparison to be made between the estimated costs and estimated benefits and values which may arise from any operation. Systematic and quantitative appraisals are necessary to determine whether the estimated

benefits justify the estimated costs for any operation or not. It is particularly mentioned that this study has interdisciplinary relevance and is associated with commerce and the cost, benefit, accounts etc. needs to be introduced. A model of cost-benefit analysis was depicted in the following manner for our study.

FIGURE 1: COST – BENEFIT ANALYSIS MODEL



This analysis explains the cost of drawing associated with the drawing benefits from CPRs, in the time of collection and in the time of processing of commons i.e. time cost. Also the earnings or benefits drawn by the people who has been collected from CPRs in various forms after excluding the collection cost, analyses here. Time spent on for collection of benefits from the CPRs is the main cost. That means how much time they devote for their collection? The alternative option before the collectors is to engage themselves in other employment of various sources (five sources) of commons (namely village commons, forest commons, water bodies commons, grazing commons and other commons) and their collection cost (instruments which were used in the time of collection plus the time cost for collection of commons) in monetary terms and also to assess the number of man days created by considering the information on the time spent for collection of different items from CPRs.

ANALYSIS OF COLLECTED DATA

Here an attempt has been made for quantify the collected items from village premises, forests, water bodies, livestock grazing and other commons in monetary terms and also to assess the number of man days created from the information on the time spent by the members of any households for collection of different items from CPRs and to analyse the cost required for the collection of commons.

The grazing income from commons and other collected materials for the cattle were deliberately considered as common income of the households.

Then we have collected data in relation to Commons' Income and Employment. We have segregated the common income into following five categories. This are-

1. Collection of different types materials from Village as commons in a particular year,
2. Collection of different types materials from Forests as commons in a specific year,
3. Collection of different types materials from Water Bodies as commons during the year,
4. Income generated through Grazing of the Household animals for this year,
5. Collection of different type materials from Other Sources, apart from the above four sources as commons for the same year.

The Total Common Income of any family was computed with the sum total of the above five sources of Common.

Average collection of benefits per day per member × approximate market value × number of approximate days in a year (say 300 days).

As they earn from the occupation reflect the total income similarly the employment generation from the collection of commons also reflect their total income.

The Per Capita Total Income and Per Capita Common Income was calculated in the following way-

Per Capita Total Income = Total Income of a family / Total number of family members.

Per Capita Common Income = Total Commons Income of a family / Total number of family members.

The annual average amount of instrument expenses was calculated on the approximate rate of various instruments like ropes, chopper, net, mallet, boat, etc. used by the dwellers for collection of commons. The approximate use rate of the instruments were calculated by dividing its value by its life expectancy (in years approximately). This is per year cost. Then maintenance cost, if any, that is included with the per year costs.

Annual average time spent for collection of commons (in hours) was calculated on the basis of the information available from the sample households.

Then the total required hours for collected commons transform into working man days. The total working man-days requirements are calculated by the following formula:

Total hours requirement / 8 hours for one working man days.

The opportunity cost or wages cost has been calculated on the basis of average daily wage rate prevailing in that sample area.

Total cost means amount of expenses plus the total opportunity cost or wages cost at specific areas wages rate. All of these are depicted in **Table 2**. From this table it is observe that the overall maydays (item no. 4) spent for commons collection is 185 days. But it is the highest in Purba Medinipur i.e. 204 days, which is on the above of overall standard. Bankura is the below in rank (152 man days) of the overall position. So it can be said that the Purba Medinipur district generate maximum man-days and Bankura generate minimum man-days for collection of CPRs. From the point of collection expenses, Purba Medinipur is very high by their instrument as well as time cost. But the time cost is very low in Purulia district. From the point of net benefit it is examined that Purulia get the highest benefit and Purba Medinipur earns the lowest benefit and interestingly Purulia earns more than their total costs.

TABLE 2: COSTS OF AND BENEFITS FROM THE COLLECTIONS FROM COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES (CPRS) IN THE SAMPLE FAMILIES IN THE SAMPLE DISTRICTS

Items /Districts	Paschim Medinipur	Purba Medinipur	Bankura	Purulia	Over All
Number of Families	86	164	65	30	345
1. Average amount of expenses (Rupees)	159.00	584.00	159.00	159.00	265.25
2. Average value of Benefits (Rupees)	15887.79	14905.57	14673.91	19035.30	15455.91
3. Average time spent for collection of commons (hours)	1439.24	1635.06	1213.68	1349.17	1481.99
i) Village Commons	281.22	433.51	279.69	192.50	345.61
ii) Forests Commons	617.67	117.07	272.14	1096.67	356.26
iii) Water bodies Commons	47.67	414.42	74.31	0.00	222.88
iv) Grazing Commons	398.49	425.85	380.23	60.00	378.62
v) Other Commons	94.19	244.21	207.31	0.00	178.62
4. Time spent (in Days): Row 3 / 8 hours	179.91	204.38	151.71	168.65	185.25
5. Opportunity cost at mouza average wage rate: (Rs)	53.00	65.00	55.00	50.00	55.75
6. Total opportunity cost (Rupees.) (Row4 * Row 5)	9534.97	13284.86	8344.05	8432.31	10327.69
7. Total costs (1+6) (Rs)	9693.97	13868.86	8503.05	8591.31	10592.94
8. Net Benefits (2-7) (Rs)	6193.83	1036.71	6170.86	10443.99	4862.97
9. Benefit- Cost Ratio (8/7)	0.64	0.07	0.73	1.22	0.46

Source: Primary Survey 2010-11

Districts of Paschim Medinipur, Purba Medinipur, Bankura, Purulia and over all sample family are shown in X-axis and in Y-axis benefits and costs are measured in monetary terms. The monetary cost-benefit analysis from collection of commons is shown in the Figure 2. The costs (opportunity cost of labour hours spent plus equipment cost in the form of depreciation and maintenance) are well below the total benefits, generating surplus from collections. The cost-benefit ratio is very high in case of Purulia and is very low in case of Purba Medinipur. This may be due to high amount of expenses on one hand and high opportunity cost (average wage available from next alternative). In case of Purulia complete reverse situation is witnessed. The gross monetary value of collection is very high in Purulia combined with least total cost associated with it.

FIGURE 2: TOTAL COSTS AND BENEFITS FROM THE COLLECTION OF COMMONS IN DIFFERENT DISTRICTS OF SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS: COSTS AND BENEFITS FROM THE COLLECTION OF COMMONS IN THE SAMPLE DISTRICTS

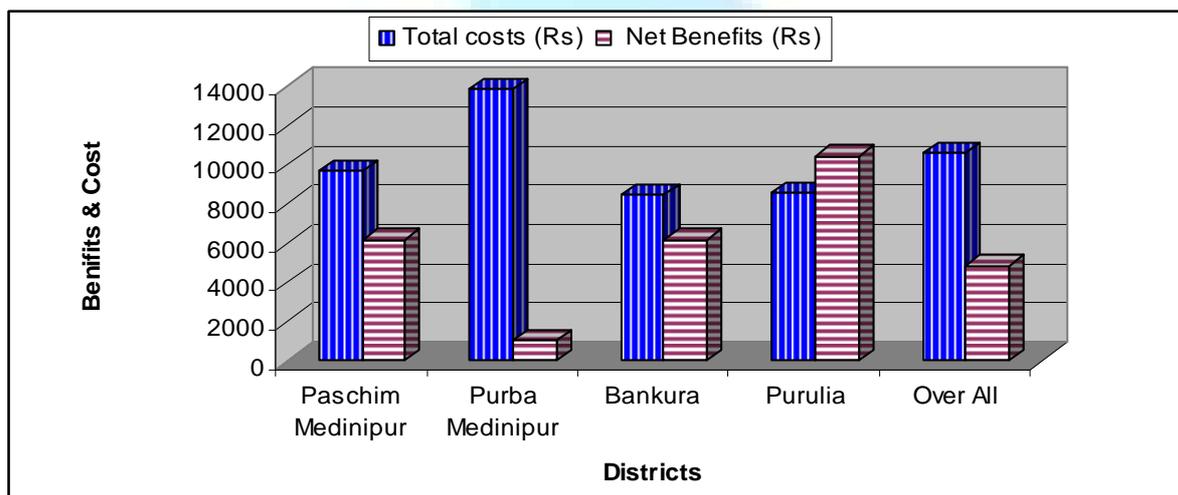


Table 3 examines more or less equivalent results like district wise cost-benefit analysis in the above Table 2. Here General and OBC families are less depended for collection of commons in man days than all other family like SC, ST and minority family who are generated maximum days (more or less 60 % days in a year) for collection of commons in man days. The benefits earned by the minorities are highest in all castes families but it is lowest in OBC families. And the ratio of cost and benefit is the lowest in case of OBC families and the highest in minority families.

TABLE 3: CASTE WISE COSTS OF AND BENEFITS FROM THE COLLECTIONS FROM COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES (CPRS) IN THE SAMPLE FAMILIES

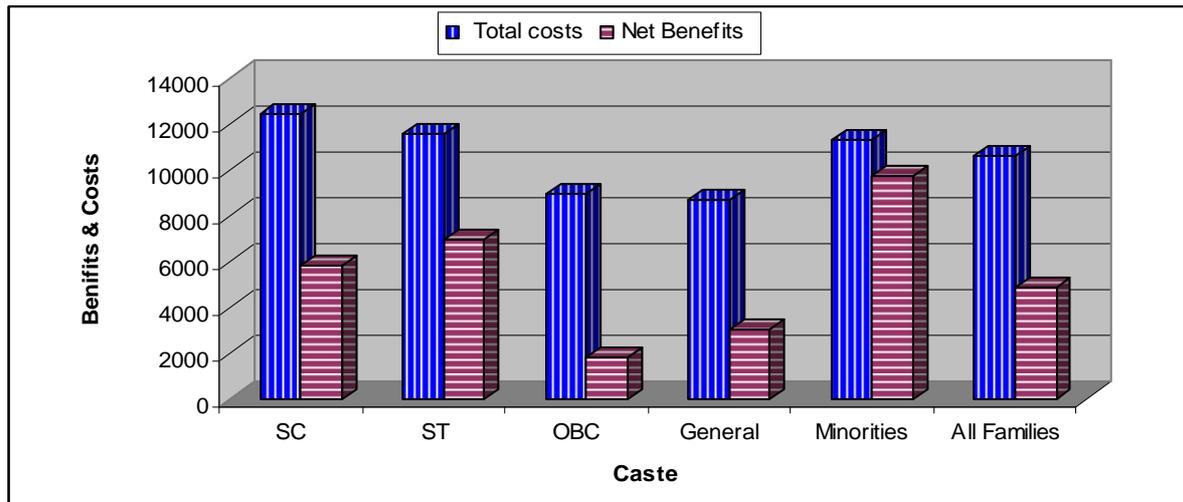
Caste	SC	ST	OBC	General	Minorities	Over all
Number Of Families	128	23	29	130	35	345
1. Average amount of expenses (Rupees)	265.25	265.25	265.25	265.25	265.25	265.25
2. Average value of Benefits (Rupees)	18289.84	18551.83	10788.34	11730.93	21045.09	15455.91
3. Average time spent for collection of commons (hours)	1752.88	1629.57	1245.70	1215.02	1581.69	1481.99
i) Village Commons	352.85	349.57	415.52	329.61	318.00	345.61
ii) Forests Commons	644.76	501.74	129.31	100.00	345.40	356.26
iii) Water bodies Commons	263.32	50.00	195.69	197.80	304.29	222.88
iv) Grazing Commons	341.56	586.96	331.04	390.69	371.86	378.62
v) Other Commons	150.39	141.30	174.14	196.92	242.14	178.62
4. Time spent (in Days): 3/8 hours	219.11	203.69	155.71	151.88	197.71	185.25
5. Opportunity cost at mouza average wage rate:	55.75	55.75	55.75	55.75	55.75	55.75
6. Total opportunity cost (Rupees.) 4*5	12215.38	11355.72	8680.83	8467.31	11022.33	10327.69
7. Total costs (1+6)	12480.63	11620.97	8946.08	8732.56	11287.58	10592.94
8. Net Benefits (2-7)	5809.21	6930.86	1842.26	2998.37	9757.51	4862.97
9. Benefit- Cost Ratio (8/7)	0.47	0.60	0.21	0.34	0.86	0.46

Source: Primary Survey 2010-11

Various castes in our sample families has been shown in X-axis whereas benefits and costs are shown in Y-axis in monetary terms. The caste-wise cost-benefit analysis shows the varied performance by different social groups. The ratio of benefit in cost is the highest in case of minorities and lowest in case of OBC

groups. Both total cost and total measured in terms of money are the highest in case of minorities. But in case of OBC groups, the money value of benefit is the lowest, as compared to the cost associated with it (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: TOTAL COSTS AND BENEFITS FROM THE COLLECTION OF COMMONS IN DIFFERENT CATEGORY OF SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS:



FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The above two Tables (02 & 03) is depicted that the benefit collected from Common Property Resources (CPRs) is always high in compared with the cost required for collection of commons. And it is always benefited to collection of commons when the dwellers of the villages get opportunity to work in their locality on the rate except in case of OBC families; they are more benefited if there is opportunity to work in their locality for collection of commons. These Tables also shown in above that it is more beneficial to collect commons than the opportunity to work in their locality in above two rates. In caste wise and mouza wise classification of the households, it is observed that the benefit is always high compared to the cost required for collection of commons. Though, the people of different localities derive more benefit out of collection of commons, than to earn wages by employing themselves in other daily jobs in their respective localities. Although the wage /day is not available in different areas in lean season.

The caste-wise cost-benefit analysis shows various performances by different social groups. The ratio of benefit in cost is the highest in case of minorities and the lowest in case of OBC groups. Both total cost and total benefit measured in terms of money are the highest in case of minorities. But in case of OBC groups, the money value of benefit is the lowest, as compared with the cost associated with it.

District wise cost-benefit analysis shows the same situation like caste wise table that it is more beneficial to collect from commons than the opportunity to work in their locality / mouza at a specific wage rates which is normally lower than monetary benefit from commons.

And it can be said that if the dwellers of any mouza are working in their locality in the rate fixed by the government or is worked in the NREGS, they must be more benefited for collection of commons. The CPRs makes a substantial contribution to the total annual income not only to the rural poor but also on rural rich and generates substantial employment in particular for the rural poor.

CONCLUSION

So it is of great importance that the dwellers of the villages engage major portion of their working days for the collection of commons for their income generation. It is clearly envisaged from the study that the significance of Commons has several dimensions. 'Commons' happens to be least important concern for the administration and policy makers. Poor as well as a section of middle class depends largely on this commons. It requires clear quantification to properly manage these resources. Further studies on each specific aspect are also needed before taking major decisions in this direction.

Note: According to "West Bengal Land Reforms Act-1955", Agricultural Year means the whole Bengali Year, which comprises the date from 1st Baisakh to 30th Chaitra.

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