

Abstract

The natural resources on which a vast majority of the rural poor depend for their livelihood are under severe stress because of population growth, adverse climatic conditions, over-exploitation of resources, and unscientific use of land resources, forest degradation, non-utilization of local human resources and lack of effective institutional support. This is further compounded by depleting common property resources which offer fuel, fodder and food to the disadvantaged sections of the rural society. As a result, natural resources have degraded, vegetation cover is lost, soil nutrients have disappeared and above all, environment degradation has assumed alarming dimensions, which if effectively not addressed to, may result in unimagined human catastrophe. Integrated Watershed management in this context, is one of the critical factors, which is experimented in a comprehensive way with institutional support and people's involvement for conserving and managing natural and common property resources on sustainable basis to benefit the rural marginal's in particular, and the rural society in general.

The study is based on primary data collected from a sample of 200 (150 from Gurguripal and 50 from Enayetpur) randomly drawn respondents from Gurguripal and Enayetpur villages in the fringe of the forest areas of the West Medinipur district, West Bengal. The results reveal that after 1995, with the introduction of the Flood Prone River Ganga Basin scheme in the catchment area of Rupnarayan and Kangsabati, rivers, massive afforestation and construction of erosion prevention structure like check-dams and gully plugs have been undertaken resulting in rehabilitation and conservation of natural resource base and creation of direct and indirect sources of sustainable livelihood. With increased vegetative cover, soil moisture and availability of water from the man-made tanks have considerably improved. Besides, ecological rehabilitation, a variety of non-farm employment opportunities have been created for the people of the area with legal right to collect non-timber forest products. Kendu leaves are now available for Bidi(a local cigarette made of tobacco wrapped in kendu leaves) making to women as an alternative source of earning. Pisciculture is another source of income which has been developed in the area along with fishing in the water tanks. As a result of improved income, people have become concerned and cautious about sanitation, education, recreation and health etc. The study further establishes the essentiality of institutional setup with detailed guidelines for natural resource management on the basis of sustainability. The logit estimation to determine the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in

Forest Protection Committees indicates that senior members influence the functioning of the institutions more compared to other members. Similarly, the determinants of women's participation in household decision making suggest that women's participation in household's decision making is more from higher income household's compared to women from the lower income branches.

Key words: Integrated Watershed management, institutional sustainability, participation, livelihood, natural and community resource conservation and management.