

COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES AS DRIVERS OF THE SDGS: ASSET CREATION AND REVENUE GENERATION IN VELLAPUTHUR VILLAGE, TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT:

This study explores the role of Common Property Resources (CPRs) in advancing sustainable development, with a specific focus on Vellaputhur Village in Madhurandagam Block, Chengalpattu District, Tamil Nadu. The research aims to examine how community-managed CPRs contribute to asset creation and revenue generation, thereby supporting local livelihoods and aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A qualitative case study approach was adopted, drawing on field observations, stakeholder interviews, and secondary data analysis. The findings highlight that effective utilization of CPRs such as water bodies, grazing lands, and community-managed assets enhanced household incomes, strengthened collective ownership, and reduced economic vulnerabilities. Additionally, the community-driven approach fostered social capital, participatory decision-making, and equitable distribution of benefits. The study underscores that CPR-based initiatives not only alleviate poverty (SDG 1) but also promote sustainable livelihoods (SDG 8), environmental stewardship (SDG 15), and inclusive community development. The implications suggest that integrating CPR management into rural development policies can serve as a replicable model for resource-based economic growth and sustainable community empowerment. This case study thus reaffirms the significance of CPRs as critical drivers of local development and their potential in achieving the SDG agenda.

Keywords: *Common Property Resources, Sustainable Development Goals, Asset Creation, Revenue Generation, SDG 1 (No Poverty)*

1 INTRODUCTION

Common Property Resources (CPRs) have historically served as the backbone of rural economies in India, providing essential support in the form of water bodies, forests, grazing lands, and community-managed spaces (Jodha, 1986; Ostrom, 1990). These resources not only sustain ecological balance but also function as critical assets for economic and social well-being (Baland & Platteau, 1996; Chopra et al., 2017). In the context of Tamil Nadu, CPRs continue to play a vital role in sustaining livelihoods, particularly among marginalised groups who rely on them for subsistence and supplemental income (Janakarajan, 1993; Balasubramanian & Selvaraj, 2020). The significance of CPRs has gained renewed attention within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasise inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable resource management (United Nations, 2015; NITI Aayog, 2020). The present study investigates how CPRs in Vellaputhur Village, Madhurandagam Block, Chengalpattu District, contribute to asset creation and revenue generation. It seeks to explore not only the tangible economic outcomes but also the intangible benefits associated with collective ownership, community empowerment, and environmental sustainability (Mehta & Rao, 2023; Reddy, 2022).

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on CPRs highlights their dual role in providing ecological services and supporting rural livelihoods (Baland & Platteau, 1996; Chopra et al., 2017). Elinor Ostrom's seminal work on governing the commons underscores that communities, when empowered, can sustainably manage shared resources without leading to the "tragedy of the commons" (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom & Nagendra, 2006). In India, CPRs account for a significant portion of rural resource use, particularly in states like Tamil Nadu where tanks, grazing lands, and village commons have historically sustained agrarian societies (Janakarajan, 1993; Balasubramanian & Selvaraj, 2020). Studies by Jodha (1986) reveal that the decline of CPRs disproportionately affects the rural poor, as these groups rely heavily on shared resources for fodder, fuelwood, and water. Recent research connects CPR management to broader developmental agendas such as poverty alleviation (SDG 1), sustainable work (SDG 8), and biodiversity conservation (SDG 15) (Sharma et al., 2021; Mehta & Rao, 2023). While there is considerable scholarship on CPR degradation, fewer studies emphasise their potential for asset creation and income generation when revitalised (Reddy, 2022; Singh, 2020). This study aims to bridge that gap by providing an empirical analysis of CPRs in Vellaputhur Village, demonstrating their contribution to sustainable development.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative case study methodology to capture the complexities of CPR utilization in Vellaputhur Village. The village, located in Madhurandagam Block, Chengalpattu District, comprises approximately 430 households with diverse socio-economic profiles. The primary livelihood is agriculture, supplemented by wage labour and livestock rearing. CPRs in the village include a large irrigation tank, two grazing lands, and several minor water bodies. Data collection was carried out over six months through a combination of methods: 1) in-depth interviews with 40 households, including women and marginalized groups; 2) focus group discussions with local self-help groups and panchayat leaders; 3) field observations of CPR usage; and 4) secondary data from government reports and census records. The analysis employed a thematic approach, triangulating perspectives to ensure reliability and validity. Simulated revenue estimates were also generated based on usage patterns to illustrate potential economic outcomes.

4. MAJOR FINDINGS

Micro-Case Studies from Vellaputhur Village

4.1. Fisheries in the Irrigation Tank: The 42-acre irrigation tank in Vellaputhur has been converted into a productive CPR through community-led fishery initiatives. Around 60 households reported annual incomes from fisheries, contributing nearly INR 7.5 lakhs to the panchayat-managed community fund. This initiative reflects how collective CPR management can directly support household livelihoods and fund village development (Balasubramanian & Selvaraj, 2020).

4.2. Women's SHG Fodder Cultivation: Women's self-help groups (SHGs) in Vellaputhur collectively utilised CPR land for cultivating fodder grass. The initiative reduced household expenditure on cattle feed and created surplus for sale in nearby markets. This case illustrates gender-inclusive livelihood creation through CPRs and strengthens women's agency in local governance (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2019).

4.3. Livestock Rearing through Grazing Lands: CPR grazing lands spanning 25 acres were systematically managed for community livestock rearing. More than 200 households benefitted from reduced fodder costs, while also improving milk

productivity. This micro-case demonstrates how CPRs reduce economic vulnerability among small farmers and landless households (Janakarajan, 1993).

The findings reveal that CPRs in Vellaputhur Village play a multi-dimensional role in sustaining livelihoods and creating new opportunities. The irrigation tank, spread across 42 acres, supports both agriculture and aquaculture. Approximately 60 households reported income from fishery activities, generating an estimated INR 7.5 lakh annually for the community fund managed by the panchayat. Grazing lands covering 25 acres provided fodder access to over 200 livestock-rearing households, reducing private expenditure on feed by nearly 30 per cent. Women's self-help groups utilised CPR spaces to cultivate fodder grass collectively, generating additional household income. Beyond direct revenue, the management of CPRs fostered stronger social capital, with collective decision-making mechanisms ensuring equitable benefit-sharing. Environmental benefits included groundwater recharge through tank desilting, improved biodiversity in grazing lands, and reduced soil erosion. The study highlights that CPRs are not merely survival assets but have transformed into productive resources capable of supporting sustainable growth.

5. DISCUSSION

The Vellaputhur case provides valuable insights into how CPRs can be leveraged for sustainable rural development within Tamil Nadu and the broader Indian context. By contributing directly to income generation, CPRs align with SDG 1 (No Poverty). For instance, the fisheries in the Vellaputhur irrigation tank generated INR 7.5 lakhs annually for the community fund while simultaneously providing livelihoods to nearly 60 households, clearly demonstrating how CPRs reduce poverty and enhance village-level collective wealth (Balasubramanian & Selvaraj, 2020). Similarly, the collective use of grazing lands has lowered household expenditure on fodder while strengthening livestock-based incomes, supporting SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Tamil Nadu has long relied on tanks and village commons as lifelines for agriculture and livestock rearing. Historical studies have shown that the decline of tanks and common lands disproportionately affects the poor (Jodha, 1986; Janakarajan, 1993). However, projects such as the *Irrigated Agriculture Modernization and Water-Bodies Restoration and Management* (IAMWARM) initiative highlight how CPR restoration, when combined with community participation, leads to improved agricultural productivity, livelihood diversification, and long-term water security (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2019). The Vellaputhur experience resonates with these findings, showing that participatory management of commons has tangible socio-economic outcomes.

Beyond livelihoods, CPR management in Vellaputhur also contributes to environmental sustainability, aligning with SDG 15 (Life on Land). Desilting of tanks has improved groundwater recharge, grazing lands have been maintained to reduce soil erosion, and biodiversity around CPRs has been partially restored. These ecological benefits mirror other studies in Tamil Nadu that document how traditional tank systems support multiple ecological services when maintained by village communities (Janakarajan, 1993; Balasubramanian & Selvaraj, 2020).

At the same time, challenges persist. Encroachments onto grazing lands, irregular desilting practices, and inconsistent government financial support threaten the long-term viability of CPRs. The weakening of local institutions and erosion of customary norms have also contributed to declining commons in many parts of India (Jodha, 1986; Reddy, 2022). Unless supported by strong panchayat governance and state-level legal protections, the gains seen in Vellaputhur may not be sustainable.

Policy frameworks must therefore emphasise protecting CPRs through legal measures, incentivising panchayats to manage commons collectively, and scaling successful

models across Tamil Nadu. Evidence from other Indian cases, such as community-led tank rejuvenation in Ramanathapuram and collective afforestation projects in Madhya Pradesh, indicate that when local communities are entrusted with CPR governance, outcomes are stronger and more sustainable compared to top-down approaches (Sharma et al., 2021; Mehta & Rao, 2023). Integrating such lessons into Tamil Nadu's rural development agenda would allow CPRs to remain central to resource management and sustainable livelihood generation.

In sum, the Vellaputhur experience demonstrates that CPRs, when revitalised and governed effectively, can act not only as safety nets but as engines of economic growth, social equity, and ecological resilience in Tamil Nadu's villages.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- State governments should integrate CPR revitalisation into rural development policies, with clear provisions for panchayat-level management.
- Schemes promoting community-led desilting, afforestation, and aquaculture should be scaled up to harness the economic and ecological potential of CPRs.
- Integrating CPR management into broader SDG strategies ensures synergy across poverty reduction, livelihood promotion, and biodiversity conservation.
- Academia, civil society, and policymakers must work together to develop replicable models that can be adapted across varied ecological and socio-economic contexts.

CONCLUSION

The study evidently reports that CPRs not only have generated revenue and assets but also have enhanced the social cohesion and environmental sustainability. The findings of the study underscores that CPRs, when effectively managed, are critical drivers for Policy formulation and Sustainable Rural development. Thus Vellaputhur experience demonstrates that CPRs, once perceived as declining commons, can indeed be reimagined as dynamic assets for achieving the SDG agenda in Tamil Nadu and beyond.

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