



RABINDRANATH TAGORE CENTRE FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES



A joint initiative of
University of Calcutta & Institute of Development Studies Kolkata
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Seminar

Dr. Biswajit Ray, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics,
University of Calcutta, will present a paper on :

The Impacts of Forest Income on Rural Livelihoods in West Bengal

Date: **May 18, 2018 Friday**

Time: **3:15PM**

Venue: **IDSK Seminar Room, 5th Floor, Salt Lake**

(All are welcome to participate in the seminar)

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Abstract

Does forest income matter in rural livelihoods? If so, then how do the forest incomes influence poverty and inequality in household income accounts? And, how do these livelihood effects lead to sustaining the local commons? Who is more benefitted from forests: poor or the non-poor? This study draws on the dimensions of poverty, inequality and sustainability and explores the satisfactory answers of the above queries in the context of joint forest management in West Bengal, India. We postulate that forest incomes tend to reduce poverty and inequality of the commoners and that in those forest areas, where inequality in households' total and forest incomes is low and the reduction in poverty is significant, the locals show greater commitment in forest protection. To this end, we studied 372 forest-reliant households located in Alipurduar and West Midnapore Districts of West Bengal between August 2016 and February 2017. Interestingly, we find that the poor are more dependent on local forest in relative terms. Inclusion of forest incomes in the households' income accounts also reduces poverty. However, forest incomes are inequality-reducing only for the poor. Moreover, when a household faces community-level shock and the shock is severe, extraction of forest resources was found to be even greater. The local users also perceive resource extraction as the least-cost coping strategy in time of shocks. Further, experiments show that the more committed individuals use forests more sustainably. We suggest that forest incomes should be taken into account for correct assessment of poverty in resource-dependent societies.