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Non-market economic valuation in developing countries: Role of participant observation method in CVM analysis [☆]

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Abstract

Developing countries have high proportion of black money and related corruption in the society in comparison to the developed ones. This aspect has to be kept in mind while conducting contingent valuation method (CVM) questionnaire survey (in-person) at the site whose economic valuation is being done. Participant observation method (POM) and unstructured interview schedule (UIS) are the two means, which must be used in addition to structured interview schedule during CVM studies in developing countries to arrive at a reasonable non-market economic valuation figure of an environmental amenity. It has been observed that researchers generally ignore this fact during survey for primary data collection among respondents who are quite well off, educated and belong to countries of huge parallel economy. However in the present study, we have utilized these two means during primary data collection for a CVM study and reached the conclusion that CVM has to be used with caution even among educated masses in the developing countries.

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Introduction

During the last three decades a number of valuation methods have been developed to derive monetary measures of the value of the changes in the quality or quantity of unpriced goods or services or to place monetary value on their recreational benefits. Applications include assessing the value of: the effects of changes in environmental amenities (such as scenic vistas, water quality, wildlife habitat, etc.), on recreational activities; the effects of environmental attributes on property values (e.g., air pollution, water and noise pollution, acid rain, etc.). In addition, attempts have also been made to estimate the value of endangered species, rainforests, urban forests and the preservation of wetlands. The non-market valuation techniques can be classified into two major groups, *direct* and *indirect* method. The direct approach uses surveys or interviews to obtain individual valuations for hypothetical changes in natural resources and environmental amenities and is based on the assumption that the respondents understand the good/service to be valued, its present situation and the hypothetical changes in quantity or quality of good/service. The indirect approach, also known as market approach, relies on the use of market information. The assumption of weak complementarity between market goods and environmental goods or services is at the heart of all indirect methods.

This assumption implies that some market goods as a fishing rod, fishing tackle, etc., are purchased because they are complementary to a fishing trip (an environmental good). Thus, behaviour in actual markets can be used to reveal the value of non-marketed goods and services.

The most popular direct method to estimate the value of non-market goods is known as the contingent valuation method (CVM). CVM relies on survey techniques designed to estimate consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) during a given time period. This method requires survey techniques to simulate market-like conditions for the solicitation of value information. Typically, in-person, telephone or mail questionnaires are used to estimate the public's monetary value of a resource. In developing countries, in-person interview among respondents is generally preferred in comparison to telephonic or mail questionnaire due to socio-economic background of people. A hypothetical market situation is presented and accompanied by choices with respect to the amount of money one feels the resource is worth. The hypothetical market includes three key features (Loomis, 1993); a description of the resource being evaluated, how payment would be made, and elicitation procedure. The elicitation procedure is a key feature of CVM and refers to how, in effect; the respondent would bid on the resource.

A study was designed and conducted during 2002–2003, mainly to find out use value of urban forests/parks of the Chandigarh city of India, a planned and modern city. Although there are a number of studies on the topic of assessing recreational value, majority of them have been carried out on a specific Wildlife National Park, Protected areas, City forests, and places of scenic beauty and cultural heritage in developed countries of North America, Europe and Australia. No such study on valuation of recreational aspects of urban forestry has been carried out in any city of India so far. Outside India, a limited number of references have been found when

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