



**LIVELIHOOD AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE  
SUNDARBANS' DEPENDENT PEOPLE: CASE STUDIES ON NALIAN  
AND BURIGOALINI RANGES OF THE SUNDARBANS**

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**Abstract:** The *Sundarbans* Reserved Forest (SRF) is playing a significant role in local and national economy and is providing protection to the coastline as well as to the people living in the *Sundarbans* Impact Zone (SIZ). Presently, the area provides a livelihood to an estimated 3.5 million people. This study deals with the livelihood pattern of the people using both primary and secondary data sources. The study identifies people with different livelihood activities such as *munda*, fishermen, *bawali*, *golpata* collectors, salt farmer etc. Most of them are seasonal workers and their over all socio-economic conditions are below standard.

**Key words:** Livelihood, mangrove forest, socio-economic conditions, natural resources

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**Introduction**

The *Sundarbans*' dependent people live in the *Sundarbans* Impact Zone (SIZ). The Multidisciplinary Action Research Centre (MARC) Survey (1995) showed that 78% of households within a 0-2 km from the forest were dependent upon the forest for income generation and the number decreases with the distance from the forest. *Golpata* is the major resource collected by the households within 0-2 km from the forest while shrimp fry collection was almost uniform.

Presently, the forest provides livelihood support to estimated 3.5 million people, working generally as wood-cutters, fishermen, *moual*, *golpata* (*Nipa fruticans*) collectors and grass. The people who are involved in various resource collections from the *Sundarbans*, have separate identity and traditional cultural practices to harvest resources in a sustainable manner. This study deals with the livelihood pattern and socio-economic condition of the *Sundarbans* dependent people of the *Nalian* and the *Burigoalini* ranges.

**Materials and Methods**

**The Study Area:** The *Sundarbans* - the largest single track mangrove forest in the world - is located in the southwestern part of Bangladesh in the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta between the latitudes 21°30' N and 22°30' N, and longitudes 89°00' E and 89°55' E. Considering its rich floral and faunal diversity UNESCO has declared three wildlife sanctuaries (139,000 hectares) as World Heritage in 1997. The *Sundarbans* forms an important corridor south of the Himalayan massif, between the sub-continent of India to the west and the sub-continent of Southeast Asia to the east. The study areas *Nalian* and *Burigoalini* lies at the southwestern part of the *Sundarbans* (Fig. 1).

**Data source:** The primary sources of data are observation and interview with questionnaire. Secondary data are collected from various sources. Forty households from each community were selected to study their livelihood, culture and socio-economic conditions. The communities are *mundas*, *fisherman*, *moual*, *bawali* and *golpata* collectors.

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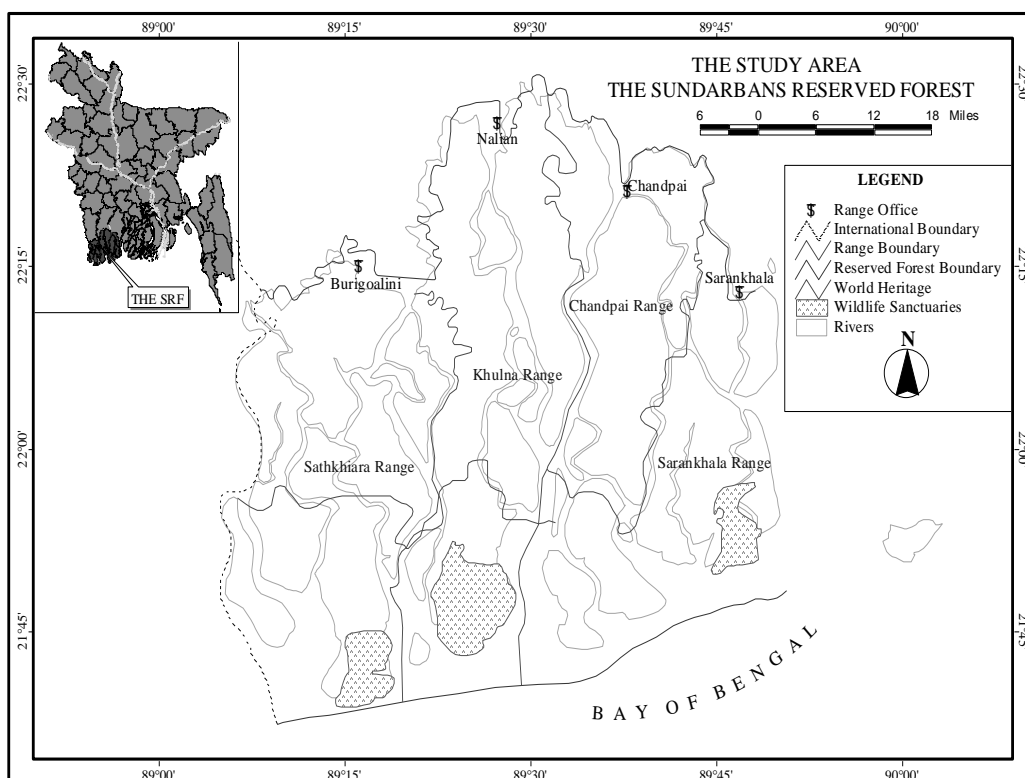


Fig. 01. The *Burigoalini* and *Nalian* range of the Sundarbans.

## Results and discussion

**Mundas:** *Mundas* are a very small group of aboriginal people living in different parts of Bangladesh. About 1,163 *mundas* are living in scattered villages of *Koyra* and *Dumuria* upazila of *Khulna* and *Shyamnagar*, *Debhata* and *Tala* upazila of *Satkhira* district - within the *SIZ*. *Mundas* are not totally dependent on the *Sundarbans*' resources for their livelihood but mostly they are involved with crop agriculture (Table 1). There are six *Patshalas* (unregistered primary education institutes) in the study area, running with private financial assistances. The medium of teaching is *Bangla* because *munda* language (*Nagri*) does not have their alphabets. However, most of the respondents are illiterate (75%) (Table 2). The *mundas* are the followers of the *Sanatan* religion.

Table 1. Occupational status of the *munda* Community

Occupation	Number	%
Agriculture	18	45
Earth Cutting	05	12.5
Catching fishes	04	10
Crabs	03	7.5
Others	10	25

Table 2. Literacy among the *munda* respondents

Level of Literacy	Number	Percentage
Illiterate	30	75
Primary	08	20
Secondary	02	05
Higher Secondary	0	0

They were the worshipers of the god *Shiva* (symbol of energy and life) in ancient time but now they worship different gods and goddesses like that of Hindus. The cultural heritage of *mundas* is now disappearing. Early marriage is common and takes place only within the community. Most of the *mundas* live under the poverty line (Table 3).

Table 3. Income status of the *munda* community

Social Status	Number	%
Rich	00	00
Medium	05	12.5
Poor	34	85
<i>Matbar</i>	01	2.5

Table 4. Sanitation pattern of the *munda* Community

Pattern	Number	%
Pucca	02	05
Ringslub	10	25
Thatched	13	32.5
Hanging	15	37.5
Open space	00	00

There is no open space toilet in the study area (Table 4). Hanging sanitation pattern is more (37.50%) in the study area followed by thatched toilet (32.50%) and ringslub (25%).

The *munda* community has various types of house structures. Tin-straw houses predominates in the study area (65%) (Table 5).

Table 5. House structure of the *munda* Community

Pattern	Number	%
Building	00	00
Tine Seat	10	25
Half building	00	00
Straw made	26	65
Others(Kitchen)	4	10

Table 6. Literacy status of the fishermen

Level of Literacy	Number	%
Illiterate	26	65
Primary	11	27.5
Secondary	03	7.5
Higher Secondary	0	0

**Fishermen:** The fishermen are mostly illiterate (65%) in the study area followed by primary (27.50%) and secondary (7.50%) level (Table 6).

Table 7. Religion status of the fishermen

Religion	Number	Percentage
Muslim	28	70
Hindu	08	20
Others	02	05

Table 8. House structure of the fishermen households

Pattern	Number	Percentage
Building	00	00
Tin Sheet	14	35
Half building	01	2.5
Straw made	22	55
Others(Kitchen)	3	7.5

Most of the fishermen of the study area are Muslim (Table 7). Only male catches fish inside the forest and certain cases they may remain in the forest for 15-20 days. However, the fishermen believe in many god, goddess and *peer-awlias* (Muslim saint or Sufi). The fishermen who not

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own a boat (about 57%) has an average monthly income of Tk 20,000-40,000. Those people who have small boat earn within the range of Tk 40,000-60,000 a year . Those who have big boat can earn more than Tk 80,000 a year. Different types of house structure are found with the fishermen in the study area. Most house are of tin straw structure (55%) followed by tin sheet houses (35%). Building and half building is not found in the study area.

**Moual:** *Moual*, the traditional honey collectors earn their livelihood through collecting honey from the forest. Around 2000 local people are employed or engaged in gathering honey and bee-wax in the season from April to June. Generally, *mouals* remain busy during late spring, when the weather becomes sufficiently warm to allow bees to gather pollen and when early blooming plants and flowers are rich in nectar. *Mouals* in the Sundarbans impact zone collect honey during mid March to mid June (Bengali month *Chaitra* to *Joistha*). They also collect *Golpata* for the boats' roof. The literacy status of among *mouals* is not satisfactory and most households also are not interested to send their children in the school. Survey detail for the present study is shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Literacy status of the *mouals* .

Level of Literacy	Number	Percentage
Illiterate	27	67.5
Primary	10	25
Secondary	03	7.5
Higher Secondary	0	0

Table 10. House structure of the *moual* Community

Pattern	Number	%
Building	00	00
Tine Seat	15	37.5
Half building	01	2.5
Straw made	20	50
Others(Kitchen)	4	10

The honey collectors, who have no boat, work in share with others earns an average of Tk 20,000 *per* year, those who have small boat earn within the range of Tk 30,000-40,000. Those who have big boat earn more than Tk 40,000 in one season. Different types of house structure are found of the *moual* community (Table 10). However tin straw houses predominates (50%).

**Bawali:** *Bawalis* are the woodcutters of the Sundarbans. They are called *bawalis* as they invoke the help of *bauls* for protection against wild animals and other hazards. It is commonly believed that *bauls* know *mantras* to control tigers and that they can confine tigers within a circle or shut their jaws by reciting these magic spells. *Bawalis* collect *gewa*, *garan*, *keora* and other trees from a wide area of the Sundarbans. *Bawalis* are as well deprived of education and most of the people are illiterate (Table 11).

Table 11. Literacy status of the *Bawalis*

Level of Literacy	Number	%
Illiterate	30	75
Primary	08	20
Secondary	02	5
Higher Secondary	0	0

Table 12. Religion status of the *Bawalis*

Name	Number	%
Muslim	23	57.5
Hindu	12	30
Others	05	12.5

*Bawalis* are from both muslim and hindu religion. Among the 40 respondents most are muslim (28) (Table 12).

Different types of house structure are found with the *Bawali* community. However, the tin sheet houses are more common (Table 13).

*Bawalis* collect wood from the forest and their main source of fuel is wood (Table 14).

Table 13. House structure of the *Bawali* community

Pattern	Number	
Building	00	00
Tine Seat	19	47.5
Half building	02	5
Straw made	16	40
Others(Kitchen)	03	7.5

Table 14. Main source of fuel of the *Bawalis*

Sources of Fuel	Number	%
Natural Gas	00	00
Wood	19	47.5
Straw	12	30
Others	09	22.5

***Golpata Collectors:*** *Golpata* or Nypa palm (*Nypa fruticans*) important source of non-wood produce of plant origin. The *Golpata* collectors receive permission in mid November to mid March. Most of the *Golpata* collectors work as *labour* of the *Mohajon*.. Most *golpata* collectors are illiterate (Table 15).

Table 15. Literacy status of the *golpata* collectors

Level of Literacy	Number	%
Illiterate	25	62.5
Primary	10	25
Secondary	05	12.5
Higher Secondary	00	00

Table 16. Religion status of *golpata* collectors

Name	Number	%
Muslim	30	75
Hindu	07	17.5
Others	03	7.5

Table 17. House structure of the *golpata* collectors

Pattern	Number	%
Building	00	00
Tine Seat	09	22.5
Half building	02	5
Straw made	24	60
Others(Kitchen)	05	12.5

The *golpata* collector, who has no boat, works in share with other boatman and earns an average Tk 10,000 *per* season. Those who have small boat earn within the range of Tk 10000-150000 *per* season. . Those who have big boat earn Tk 25000-45000 in a season. However, only a small number who has boats and engage people as laborer without middleman earns more than Tk

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45000 in a season. *Golpata* collectors are both muslims and hindus however, majority are muslims (Table 16).

Different types of house structures are found of the *golpata* collectors community. However, the tin straw house is dominant (60%) (Table 17).

### **Conclusion**

The study reveals no major differences in the livelihood pattern among the different communities around the *Sundarbans*. All the communities are deprived of their basic livelihood support and needs.

### **References**

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