



COOPERATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE LIVELIHOOD OF THE *SUNDARBANS* DEPENDENT PEOPLE

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Abstract: This study endeavors to find out the factors affecting dependency on forest resources and cooperation that Local Government Representatives (LGR) could extend to the forest dependent people. One hundred households were selected from the *Koyra Sadar* Union adjacent to the *Sundarbans* following deliberate sampling technique to conduct this study and questionnaire survey, focus group discussion and participatory rural appraisal methods were carried out. Most of the people in this *union* lives under the poverty line and about two-third of them predominantly dependent on the *Sundarbans*' natural resources. LGR now is playing no role in the livelihood of the *Sundarbans*' dependent people; however, there is need for cooperation to improve their livelihood pattern.

Kew words: *Sundarbans*, Livelihood, Local Government Representatives, Permission system, *Koyra* Upazila.

Introduction

The forest cover has shrunk to merely six per cent today from twenty per cent in 1927 around the world (Gain, 1998). In recent decades, consumption of most natural resources has grown faster in the south than in the north, although per capita consumption level is far below than those in the north (WRI, 1994). The *Sundarbans* is the largest single tract of mangrove ecosystem in the world which is located in the southwestern corner of Bangladesh (Kamal, 2004). About 600,000 people are directly dependant on this forest for their livelihood (Islam, 1998). In addition conversion of the *Sundarbans* forest to salt ponds or conversion of Sundarbans Reserve forest (SRF) to agricultural or aquaculture purpose (FAO, 1994) deteriorates the situation. On the other hand, at least one third of the population of the SRF lives in poverty (ADB, 1998). Hence, the Sundarbans, stock of diverse resources should be managed for the betterment of forest dependent people. So, the cooperation of LGRs can play a key role for managing the forest resources, increasing the quality of life of the forest dependent people, increasing the alternative livelihood pattern and reducing the pressure on forest. This study deals with the socio-economic conditions, the factors affecting dependency on forest resources and the role of LGRs of *Koyra sadar* Union people.

Materials and Methods

Study area: *Koyra Upazila* of Khulna district covers an area of 1775.41 sq km is peripheral to the *Sundarbans* and is bounded by *Paikgachha Upazila* on the north *Dacope Upazila* on the east and *Assasuni* and *Shyamnagar Upazilas* on the west. The south of the Upazila is covered by the Bay-of-Bengal and the *Sundarbans*. *Koyra Sadar Union* is one of the Union of the *Koyra Upazila* and includes ten villages.

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Data collection: Reconnaissance survey was carried out at the initiation of the research. One-hundred households were selected for questionnaire survey. The livelihood patterns and resources extraction system was recorded through questionnaire survey. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and participatory rural appraisal were also carried out to evaluate the factors responsible for dependency on forest resources and the cooperation need of LGRs in maintaining the livelihood of the people.

Results

Occupational pattern: Occupational pattern of the population was divided into two categories such as primary and secondary occupations. Here the primary occupation included both ‘fishermen’ and ‘*Bawali*’ (wood cutter). But fishermen who have low income from fishing and were landless or had small land, worked as wood cutter during dry season as secondary occupation. Similarly some of the *Bawali* took secondary occupation as fisherman during rest of the year. The occupational pattern of the forest dwellers is shown in Fig. 1. Here we see that about 75% of the surveyed people are fishermen.

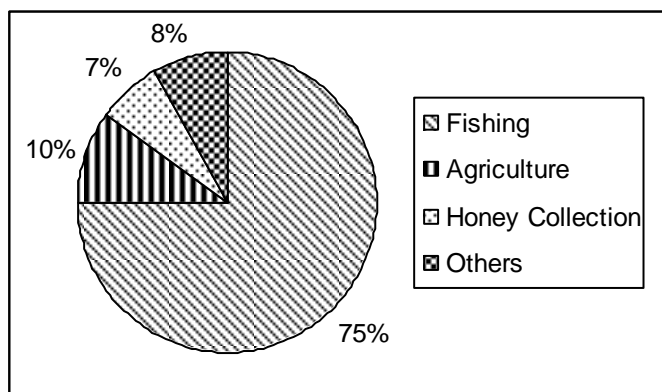


Fig.1. Percentage of population at different types of occupation

Dependency on forest resources: In this study it is observed that, the people of *Koyra Sadar* Union use a large variety of resources from the *Sundarbans* Reserve Forest. Most of the populations are greatly dependent on the *Sundarbans* resources for their livelihood. About 68% of the surveyed people are forest dependent which is shown in Fig. 2 and the number of working population at different occupation is shown in the Table 1.

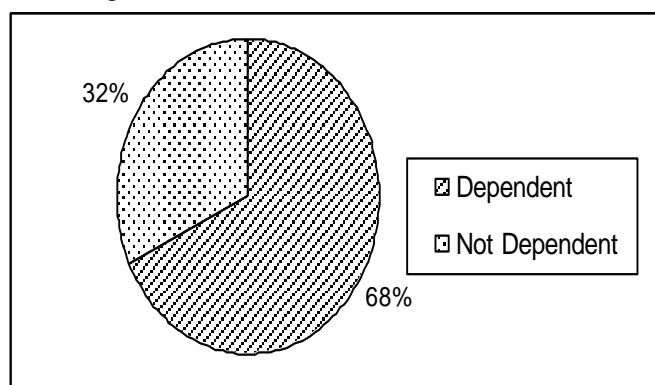


Fig.2. Dependency on forest resources

Table 1. Number of working population in different occupations

Occupation	Number of Population
Forest Fisher	2545
<i>Moual</i>	730
Golpata Collector	400
<i>Bowal</i>	900
Farmer	2108
Others	2942
Total	9625

Economic condition: Most of the forest dependent people are very poor and they have no alternative livelihood facilities. So, they are greatly dependent on the *Sundarbans* resources. In this study, it is found that, the monthly income of the villagers is very low. With this low income, they hardly manage their family. The income from the forest resources is shown in the Table 2.

Table 2. Income from the forest resources at different occupation

Occupation	Percent of Household	Income from Forest Resources		
		Total Income (Tk/yr)	Average Income (Tk/yr)	Monthly Income (Tk)
Fishing	75	2137500	28500	2375
Agriculture	8	208000	26000	2167
Honey Collection	10	230000	23000	1917
Others	7	168000	24000	2000
Total	100	2743500	101500	8459

Extraction of forest resources: The resource utilization pattern of villagers living in close proximity to the *Sundarban* Reserve Forest (SRF) is dependent on the availability of resources and social setting (i.e. their household size, age and sex structure, occupation, income, educational status, cultural pattern etc.). To enter the forest, they have to take permission. The permission procedures and the fees they have to pay at different levels during resource extraction are discussed below.

Fishing: Fishes are especially caught during the spring tide of the new moon and the full moon. Fishermen, who want to go for fishing inside the SRF, they require two things. One is the Boat License Certificate (BLC) and another is fishing permit (PT). BLCs are issued for every year in July (at the beginning of the fiscal year) and are valid for one year. The pre-requirement for BLC is certificate and attested photograph from the local union chairman. After having a BLC, fishermen have to pay annual fee for that BLC which is based on the "*Maundage*" of their boat. The amount of money to enter the *Sundarbans* for fishing they give to the forest department is shown in the Table 3.

Table 3. Fees given to forest department

Fish Type	BLC Certificate Type	Fees in Taka	Govt. Fees in Taka	Day
General Fish	Renew	100-130	75 Tk	7
	New	200	75 Tk	7
Shrimp Fry	New	100-120	76 Tk	7

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Every BLC holder requires PT for fishing inside the SRF. A PT typically has one week validity. Fishing permit specifies the type of gear and kind of fish species (group wise) that may be caught by the permit holder i.e., shrimp fry fishing using drag net (*pata jal*), whitefish fishing using gillnets and crab fishing using hook and line etc. Payment for the PT for entry covers only the entry fee for most fisheries. Payment of the fish catch fee is done at the time of exit and is recorded on the certificate. The exception is the fishing permit of shrimp fishery. Full payment of the catch is done at the time of entry and is recorded on the PT. The fees for entry and fish catch in the SRF are shown in the Table 4.

Table 4. Fees for entry and catch fish in the SRF

Kinds of Fishing	Entry Fee	Catch Fee
White Fish	Tk 3.00 per person per week	Tk 50 per maund
Hilsha	Tk 0.25 per person per day	Tk 75 per maund
Large Shrimp	Tk 3.00 per person per week	Tk 300 per maund
Small Shrimp	Tk 3.00 per person per week	Tk 50 per maund
Crab	Tk 1.50 per person per week	Tk 40 per maund
Shrimp Fry (PL)	Tk 3 x 2 person = 6.00 Tk per week	Tk 0.05 x 100 PL x 7 days x 2 person = Tk 70
Shrimp Head		Tk 2 per maund
Dry Fish		Tk 65 per maund

After seven days, the boat returns to the same Forest Station where the permit was purchased from. The permit is surrendered to the forest officer who gives the fishermen a certificate. It shows the amount of fish is paid and testifies that the fishing was carried out properly according to regulations and the revenue is collected. The fishermen then exit from the SRF and the permit process comes to an end. Those who catch fish along the border of the SRF, have no BLC and permit. The fishermen do not have their own association. They are poor and do not have access to common resources like closed *jalmahal* (State owned water bodies). So, now many of them want to change the professions if there is suitable option to shift.

Honey collection: *Moual*, the traditional honey hunters earn their livelihood by selling honey collected from the forest. They collect honey from mid March to mid June. In the lean period they do agricultural work or become wage labor or rickshaw puller. Before going to the *Sundarbans* they have to get pass from the Forest Department. The pass is given for 7 days (One trip duration). During off season they cut *mele* from *Vadro* to *Kartik* month (mid August to mid November). When they collect honey and wax, they also collect *Golpata* for boats roof. A single trip (seven days) for honey collection Taka 200 is needed as permit fees *per mound* and Taka 1,500 is needed for hiring a boat.

Wood cutting: *Bawalis* are the woodcutters of the *Sundarbans*. They are called *bawalis* as they invoke the help of *Bawalis* for protection against wild animals and other hazards. It is commonly believed that *Bawalis* know mantras to control tigers and 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*. No one is allowed to cut *Sunduri*, *Dhundol* and *Pashur* trees. Yet these are felled by the timber traders with the help of corrupt forest officials. The amount of money that is given to the forest department for cutting different types of wood is shown in the Table 6.

Table 6. Money for Wood Cutting

Tree	Maund	Fees in Taka
<i>Garan</i>	100	1200
<i>Gewa</i>	100	500
<i>Keora</i>	100	550
Brass wood	100	650
<i>Sundari</i>	100	900
<i>Dhundal</i>	100	550

Golpata collection: *Golpata* collectors have similar societal context and socio-economic background and follow the same culture. To collect *Golpata* they use large country boat which can carry 500 to 600 mounds of *Golpata*. During the field survey, the permission was stopped. So, none of them were found.

Factors affecting forest resources dependency: There are many factors affecting the forest resources dependency of the forest people. Most of these people are very poor. From the perception of the respondents it is found that, permit fee for boat is BDT 14 and fishing permit fee is 120. A poor fisherman has to give BDT 100 more as bribe. This is not ending rather starting of bribing. When a fisherman enters into the forest, he has to give additional BDT 50 to the forester on duty and BDT 100 to the checking police per boat. According to forest officials, this money is charged for overstaying and illegal resource extraction. Fishermen also extract many illegal wood resources (50-75 pieces of wood and 600-800 *nypa* leaves) during each trip. They agreed that this is illegal but they claimed it was necessary to compensate losses due to extra payments they usually make. Besides, concerned police station and police outpost will get BDT 100 each per-month. Pirates will get BDT 100 per week from each boat. Forest Department (FD) is supposed to save fishermen from pirates. But FD never does it rather it maintains a good relation with the pirates and gets financial benefit from them. To get into the *Sundarbans moual* must have boat. But cent percent respondents said that they do not have their own boat. Some *moual* work as wage labor and some hire boat from the *Mohajan* (money lender). For one trip, the fare of one boat is BDT 1500. Even the *mouals* do not have permit fee. This money is also borrowed from the *Mohajan*. For every one thousand taka they have to give 2kg honey as interest. *Golpata* collectors also do not have money and boats of their own to collect *Golpata*. To make large country boat BDT 90,000 to BDT 100,000 is required which is impossible for them to afford. On the other hand many natural disaster and wild animals make their life more vulnerable. Different types of factors affecting forest resources dependency are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Factors affecting forest resources dependency

Factors	Instance
Economic	Poverty
Administrative	Payment of extra money at different level
	Hiring a boat at a high amount
	Borrowing money at high interest
Environmental	Natural disaster
Social	Affecting by wild animals
	Affecting from pirates
	Victim to many opportunist
Political	No national consent in occupation

Causes of the exploitation of the Sundarbans resources: It is a common belief that the forest dependent people are responsible for the over exploitation of the *Sundarbans* resources. But from the respondent point of view, as the forest dependent people are fully dependent on the *Sundarbans* resources and there is no support without the *Sundarbans* for their livelihood, so that they are not responsible for the exploitation of *Sundarbans* resources in any way. There is no particular policy for collecting the forest resources. Thus, the commercial collectors, mostly the *Mahajon*, *Sardar*, Businessmen etc., of the *Sundarbans* resources easily get permit from the Forest Department for collecting forest resources. For this reasons the forest resources are exploited day by day. In Fig. 3 we see that the respondent seem indiscriminate collection of resources, occupational dissent and the lack of transparency at different level are the main causes for the exploitation of the *Sundarbans* resources rather than the natural disaster and oppression of pirates.

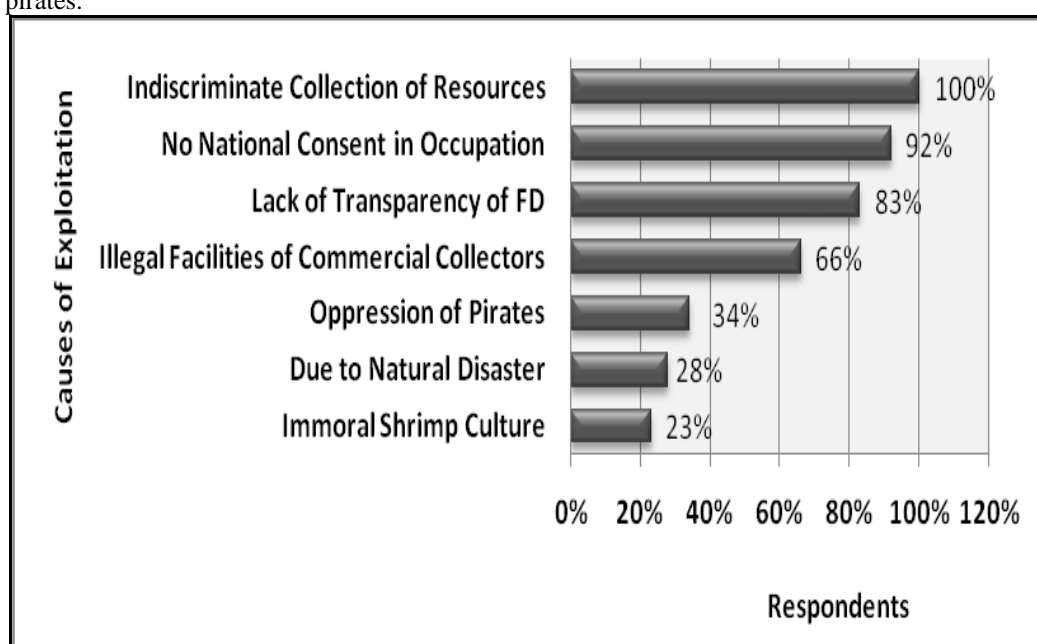


Fig 3. Perception of respondents regarding resource exploitation

Local Government (Union Parishad): Rural and urban local government bodies are entrusted with a large number of functions and responsibilities relating to civic and community welfare as well as local development. *Union Parishads* have been assigned with the adoption and implementation of poverty alleviation programs directly by themselves and through NGOs and co-operatives. The *Union Parishad* consists of 12 elected members and a directly elected Chairman. Of the 12 elected members, three women are elected against seats reserved for them.

Role of UP members in the livelihood of the Sundarban dependent people: The *Parishad* members have virtually no role to play legally in resource exploitation. The Chairman of the *Parishad* attest the incumbent before receiving pass/permit to enter the forest. Sometimes a personally request is needed for quick disposal of BLC to the FD. However, the members of the *Union Parishad* (UP) support the people in case of miseries during natural resource collection. The forest dependent people desire the participation of the UP members to get pass permit and BLC from the FD. About 80% respondent desire the cooperation of the LGRs in the resource extraction system and the UP member's role that can be played according to their formal work are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Cooperation of UP Member according to their formal work

Designation	Formal role	Formal role in accessing forest product	Informal role can be played
-Chaireman	-Make plans for natural resource management and development;	Nil	-Make plans for forest resource management and development;
-Male member	-Supervise management of primary educational institutes; motivate parents to send their children to school and create better awareness for adult and female literacy	Nil	-Can provide the teachers to build-up awareness among children about the forest resources management.
-Female member	-Encourage co-operatives and NGOs	Nil	-Encourage co-operatives and NGOs in management of forest
	- Maintain law and order and control terrorism, violence against women etc	Nil	-Maintain law and order against pirates
	- Ensure participation in local and central government development planning	Nil	- Ensure participation in local and central government development planning of forest
	-Door to door awareness build-up about health and sanitation among women and children	Nil	- Door to door awareness build-up about necessity of forest resources among women and children

Discussion

About 68% populations in *Koyra* Sadar Union are directly dependent on the *Sundarbans* among which the majority of them are fishermen. These people have very poor income to manage their family. To enter the SRF, they need permission from Forest Department. To extract the resources they have to pay extra money at different levels which raises their expenditure three to four times one has to pay officially for resources harvesting. Moreover they have no supporting assets of their own. They depend on *Mohajan* (money lender) for credit and *Mohajans* take this opportunity. For the same reason they do not get appropriate price for their collected materials. Sometimes they become victims of pirates, wildlife and natural disasters. The victim and victim's family do not get any compensation from anywhere. Users are not defined by any law. There are other people (known as commercial collectors), except forest dependent people, can get permission by giving extra money to some corrupt officials of FD which is the main causes of over exploitation. Local Government Representatives have no legal role in accessing *Sundarbans* for resources extraction. But as they are very close to the forest dependent people, they can identify the actual forest dependent people to entrance into the forest stop the activities of commercial collectors.

Conclusion

Local government, as a political institution to ensure public participation in development activities, is yet to take proper shape in Bangladesh. This includes major improvements in the

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existing facilities and management of the area, greater involvement by stakeholders and the community, together with direct involvement in wildlife and forestry enhancement programs. Currently, local people appear to have limited rights to forests. There is a pressing need to facilitate specific interventions that enable forest resources to play a greater role in livelihoods through improved local forest governance. It is reported that some people extract more resources from the Sundarbans beyond their need. Extreme resource extraction in terms of wood and non-wood product has made the *Sundarbans* vulnerable to resource depletion. It is properly believed that, illegal harvesting of resources of the *Sundarbans*, by some of the corrupt officials from concerned departments; it is losing its uniqueness. Forests can only contribute to poverty reduction when poor people have secured long term rights to their resources, coupled with the capability to defend them against more powerful actors. The potential contribution of forests to poverty reduction is subject to some debates. Overcoming these barriers is crucial in achieving progress towards sustainable forest management and making forest resources work optimally towards alleviating poverty, leveraging local and national socio-economic development and avoiding the long term degradation of important forest-based goods and services. So there is a pressing need in the cooperation of Local Government in this sector for dealing these activities.

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