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Contribution of NTFPs in the Livelihood of Mangrove Forest Dwellers of Sundarban

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ABSTRACT Sundarbans are the world's largest mangrove biomes having highest mangrove biodiversity, which are used for subsistence and commercial purpose by the local inhabitants. It is one of the essential components of the livelihood of the forest dependant population of the area. The paper tries to explore the spectrum of NTFPs being collected from Sundarbans and its contribution in the livelihood of the people. It also attempts to assess the livelihood assets of the people and how much of it is attributed to NTFPs. It explores the livelihood vulnerability and stress coping mechanisms of the local population and how NTFPs help as a "safety net". For the purpose of the study 4 EDCs from 2 ranges of Sundarbans were sampled, viz: Bally II and Bijohnagar, from Bidya Range; and Dulki and Hamiltanabad (Anpur) from Sajnakhali Wildlife Sanctuary Range. The parameters of the study included: (i) range of NTFPs being collected; (ii) seasonality and duration of collection; (iii) method of collection; (iv) extent of dependence; (v) total household income and contribution of NTFPs. The respondents were selected from different occupation class and income groups. The study shows that the contribution of NTFPs is quite high as it contributes almost 79% (Rs. 80,000) on an average to the annual income of the collector's family. Of course not every family of the village goes for NTFP collection but nonetheless their number is significant. The major NTFP that are being collected includes firewood, prawn, fishes, crab, honey and bee wax. The collection of NTFPs is a daunting task, which involves risk from man-eater tigers. High livelihood vulnerability was also observed with little help from government. If, these biomes are to be conserved it is necessary that Sundarban Development Authority must consider the role of NTFPs in the livelihood and develop the Sustainable Livelihood Framework accordingly so that the biomes as well as people's need could be sustained.