

Promotion of Customary Sustainable Use of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the Sundarbans

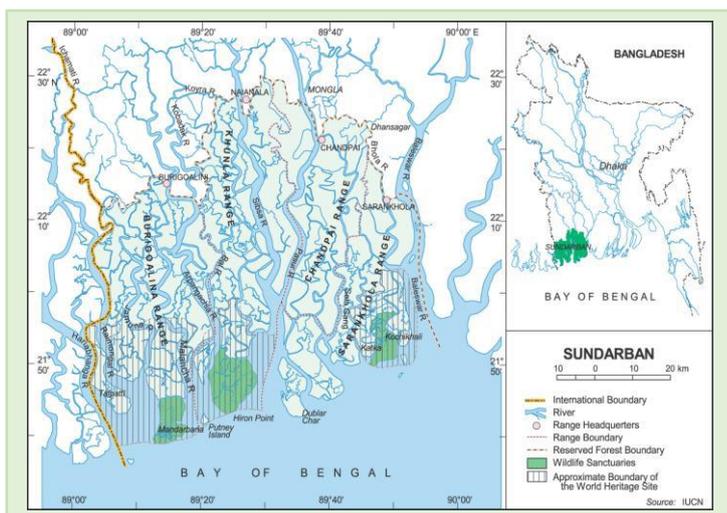
Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir

Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka and Chairperson, the *Unnayan Onneshan*, Dhaka, Bangladesh,

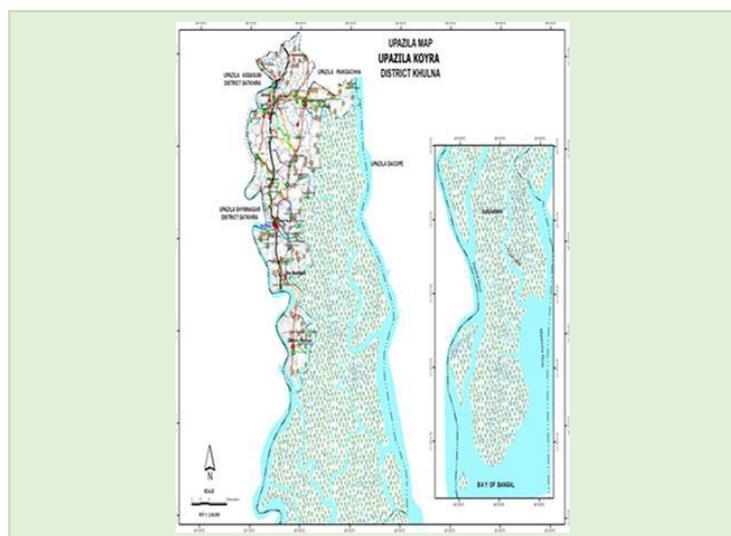
Prof. Titumir holds Ph.D. in Economics from the University of London, M.Sc in Development and Financial Economics from the University of London, Certificate in Trade Policy and Commercial Diplomacy from the Universities of Carleton and Ottawa, BSS (Hons.) in Economics from the University of Dhaka, and HSC and SSC from Jhenidah Cadet College. He has worked in diverse constituencies, namely, academia, governments, think-tanks, international organisations and media. He has published widely.
rtitumir@unnayan.org



Geographic and demographic information



Country	Bangladesh
Province	
District	Khulna, Satkhira and Bagerhat
Size of geographical area	6,071 km ²
Number of indirect beneficiaries	3.5 Millions
Dominant ethnicity	Bangladeshis



Size of project area	km ²
Number of direct beneficiaries	350 persons
Geographic coordinates (longitude and latitude)	21°30' and 22°30' North 89°00' and 89°55' East
Dominant ethnicity	Bangladeshis

Ecosystem Types

X	Forest	X	Grassland	X	Agricultural	X	In-land water
X	Coastal		Dryland		Mountain		Urban/peri-urban

Important species in the site

English common name (Local name)	Scientific name	Description
Sundari	<i>Heritiera fomes</i>	The tree species upon which the Sundarbans is named.
Royal Bengal Tiger	<i>Panthera tigris</i>	The most magnificent animal.
Chingri (Shrimps/prawns)	<i>Penaeus monodon</i>	24 shrimps, 7 crabs, 8 lobsters
golpata	<i>Nypa fruticans</i>	high value non-timber forest products
estuarine crocodile	<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>	The population has declined further due to rapid destruction of their breeding grounds and unchecked poaching



General introduction

The Customary Sustainable Use project for promoting diverse values of biodiversity and ecosystem services is implemented by three traditional forest resource users' communities with the overall goal of establishing a just, sustainable resource management regime in the Sundarbans that ensures livelihood security of the traditional resource users. The project is located in the Sundarbans in Bangladesh, which is the world's largest mangrove forest.

The Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Mangrove Biosphere Reserve and Ramsar Site, is situated at the coastal region of Bangladesh. The various ecosystems (forest, coastal and wetland) make the Sundarbans home to several uniquely adapted aquatic and terrestrial flora and fauna. Yet, this globally important ecosystem is now vulnerable due to anthropogenic pressures (e.g. over-harvesting, pollution, coastal development, destructive fishing and habitat degradation, climate change, intense and frequent natural disasters) amidst fragile institutions and ineffective command-driven governance system.

The Unnayan Onneshan (UO) researches¹ imply that there is a significant number of anthropogenic pressures that not only cause degradation of biodiversity resources but also negatively hamper the balanced relationship between the biotic and the abiotic components of this mangrove ecosystem. The continuous encroachment into the forest region, conversion of mangrove forest land into commercial shrimp cultivation farms and the marginalization of IPLCs signify that institutional fragility exists in management of the Sundarbans. Specifically, the unstable nature of property rights, harboured by politically and administratively powerful groups, restricts access to resources by the traditional resource users of the Sundarbans and squeezes their tenurial security.

In response to problems and deprivations, the Unnayan Onneshan (UO) advocated them to establish cooperatives. Accordingly, three forest people cooperatives came into existence in three unions of Koyra Upazila, namely the *Koyra Bonojibi Bohumikhi Unnayan Samity* (Koyra Forest Dependent Peoples' Cooperative), the *Horinagar Bonojibi Bohumukhi Unnayan Samity* (Horinagar Forest Dependent Peoples' Cooperative), and the *Adibasi Munda Unnayan Samity* (Indigenous Munda Cooperative). The UO provides logistic and technical support to the cooperatives. The Cooperatives serve as a common ground for sharing information, experience and enhancing cooperation among the members. The establishment of cooperatives has helped the traditional forest peoples to walk to the avenues of claiming their rights and a journey towards self-sufficiency.

¹ Kabir & Hossain, 2008; Baten & Kumar, 2010; UO 2010; Baten, 2011; Titumir, 2014; Titumir, 2015; Titumir, Afrin & Islam, 2017

On the positive side, the UO researches demonstrate that customary sustainable practices and traditional knowledge of traditional resource users (TRUs) such as wood collectors (*Bawalis*), fisherman (*Jele*), honey collectors (*Mouals*), shell collectors (*Chunary*) and crab collectors can play a major role in reversing destructive trends. They contribute to conservation, restoration and sustainable uses efforts, both within the protected areas system and potentially as other effective area-based conservation measures, if they are given a chance and are supported by government and non-government agencies.

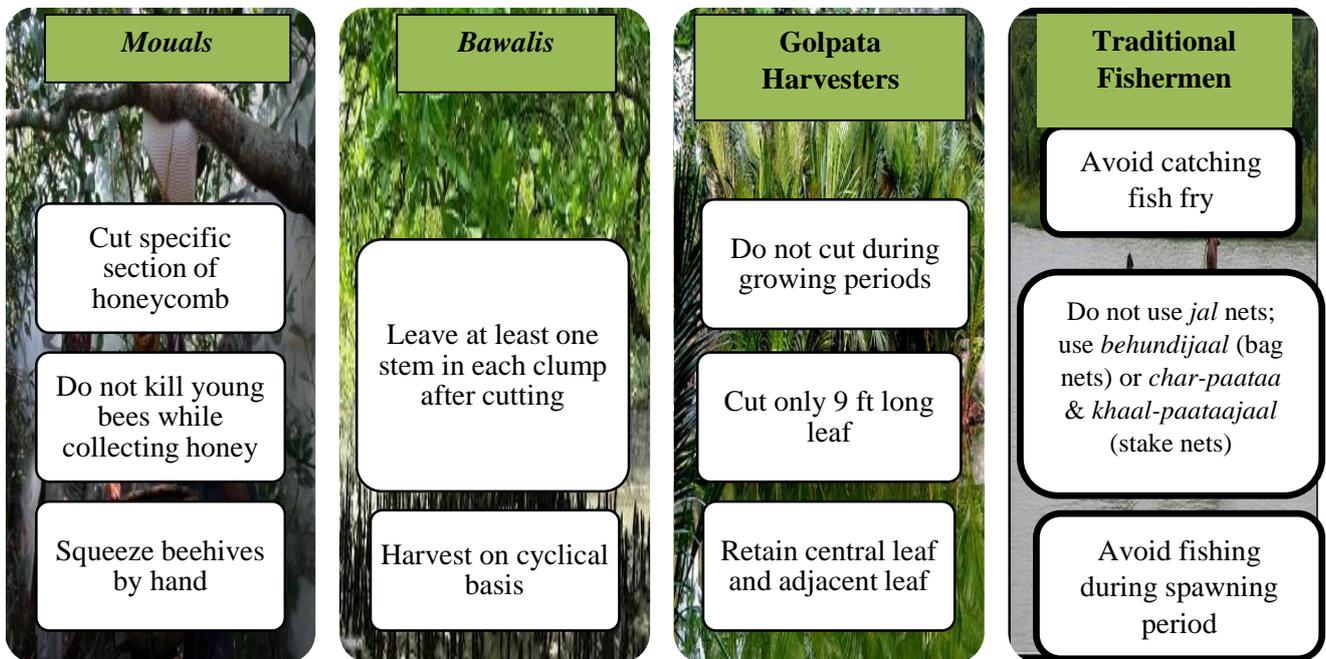


Figure -1. Traditional rules and practices followed by IPLC occupational groups at a glance (Source: authors)



The Pioneer of Community-based Mangrove Agro-Aqua Silvi (CMAAS) culture -Khaibar Sardar in his farm



Sustainable use of traditional knowledge



Climatic variabilities leading to disasters, including chronic river bank erosions



Sustainable fishing using traditional knowledge

Contribution to Aichi Biodiversity Targets' Strategic Goal D

		Breakdown Target	How did you measure the outcome?	Result
Strategic Goal D	TARGET 14	Ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded ...	Formation of three cooperatives Regular activities of the Cooperatives Inter-generational transfer of knowledge	Formation of three cooperatives. The community is participating and the membership of the cooperatives increasing
		... taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable	The Cooperative Members have gathered formally at least once in a month and informally in regular intervals throughout the whole year. In these group meetings, a session was devoted to share their experiences to promote their traditional knowledge and to keep records of their practices through written formats. They also discussed different aspects of sustainable livelihoods in relation to the management of Sundarbans' resources	Inter-generational transmission of traditional knowledge promoted and ensured
	TARGET 15	Ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks have been enhanced through conservation and restoration		
		At least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems are restored, contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and to combating desertification	Restoration activities by the three cooperatives Support to groups of practitioners of traditional occupations, for enhanced bio-diverse adaptation to climate change in the Sundarbans	Models for sustainable livelihood activities developed and implemented
	TARGET 16	The Nagoya Protocol is in force		
		The Nagoya Protocol is operational, consistent with national legislation		

Relations to other Aichi Biodiversity Target & SDGs

Please indicate the Aichi Biodiversity Targets other than the targets your working group focuses and SDGs that your activities contribute to if any. Use “●” and “■” to indicate the “direct” or “indirect” contributions to the targets.

CBD Aichi Biodiversity Targets (<https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>)

Strategic Goal A				Strategic Goal B					
●		■	■	●		●	●		■
Strategic Goal C			Strategic Goal D			Strategic Goal E			
		●	●	●			●	■	

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>)

●	●	●	■	●	●	■	■	
■	■	●	●	●	●	■	●	

Any difficulties you found during your assessment

The Cooperatives have mobilized the traditional forest users or *Banajibis*, and provided a space for discussion, consultation, planning, and claiming their rights. These have also become platforms for inspiration for innovations amidst the difficulties and distress they face in leading their day to day livelihoods. They have come up with **innovative options** such as locally available climate adaptive economic activities and cultivating honey in boxes. Yet these have not been piloted and upscaled due to financial constraints.

Key messages for the CBD in planning for the post-2020 Targets

Progress is being made through direct efforts by Indigenous People and Local Communities (IPLCs) on protection and restoration of vulnerable ecosystems, particularly mangrove forests. Increased attention to the impacts on IPLCs who are depending on vulnerable ecosystems with declining integrity and functioning as a result of anthropogenic pressures is needed in post 2020 framework. The contributions of IPLCs towards vulnerable ecosystems and knowledge regarding adaptation to changing ecosystems have to be promoted.