

Mangrove resource dependence of the people in Pottuvil and Thirrukkovil Divisional Secretariats in Ampara in Eastern Province of Sri Lanka

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Mangroves are important ecosystems in coastal areas restricted to estuaries and lagoons. In Sri Lanka main mangrove patches are located in Cjempionpattu, Mullativu, Trincomalee, Batticaloa lagoon, Komari, Pottivil, Arugambay, Gintota, Negombo lagoon, Kirindi Oya, Rekawa, lagoon, Madu Ganga Estuary, Chilaw lagoon, Puttalam lagoon and Kala Oya Estuary. The present study was conducted to assess the mangrove resource dependency in Pottuvil and Thirukkovil Divisional Secretariats of the Ampara District where four lagoons contain significant amount of mangroves; Omari, Thandiadi, Pottuvil and Paladi. These lagoons come under 2 divisional

secretary areas; Pottuvil and Thirrukkovil in Ampara District. Two villages in the Pottuvil Divisional Secretariat area i.e Pottuvil and Komari and another two in Thirrukkovil Divisional Secretary area ie. Thirrukkovil and Tampaddai were selected for survey. 20% of the total households in each village were selected at random for the survey. Data were collected using questionnaires, observations, formal and informal discussions etc. In addition to this, focused group discussions were conducted with members of fishery societies, religious leaders, government officials, community leaders and NGOs working in the areas. Existing records on the settlements and other use of mangrove resources were taken. The duration of the survey was 9 months from July, 2002 to February, 2003.

According to the results, the majority of the people in the study area were dependent on mangrove resource for their daily living. About 70% of the people surveyed were indulged in lagoon fishing which draws heavily on the mangrove resource (brush piles). There was a seasonal pattern of resource dependence, where during the northeast monsoon period the exploitation of mangroves were very high as intensity of marine fishing was relatively less. Firewood is collected from the mangroves throughout the year although it was heavier in dry months. Timber collection is mainly recorded in two periods from January to March and July to September. Mangroves are also used as medicine. Therefore, the highest mangrove resource dependency is recorded from March to October. According to the responses of villagers surveyed in both DS divisions, mangrove resource accrue many economic benefits in terms of firewood, medicine, vegetable, timber and fish harvest while the perceptions for ecological benefits were rather low. The use of mangrove resource for fishing and firewood was higher in all villages. Collection of medicinal plants (8.9%) and collection of leaf vegetables (3.7%) were higher in Thirrukkovil. The study also compared the data on mean fish harvest, mean firewood collection, mean collection of brush piles and change of mangrove area and land use in general between 1980, 1997 and 2003.