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Farmers’ and academia’s views”

## Exploring the wellbeing of communities adjacent to coastal forests: a case study from Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

The well-being of communities living adjacent to coastal forests plays an important role in their conservation and management. The positive outlook of communities towards these forests helps to plan sustainable conservation trajectories. This study outlines different dimensions of the well-being of coastal communities living closer to Mandaitivu on the Northern coasts of Sri Lanka. A well-being questionnaire survey was carried out among 30 households from July to September 2021. The well-being approach conducted focused on the human, social, and material concerns and how these are related to coastal forest services, disservices, ecosystem processes and functions. The results for human concerns showed that 90 % of the respondents relate that the mangrove ecosystem contributes to their happiness while 100 % think that mangroves are not dangerous. About 80 % do not fear the coastal forest ecosystems and encourage conservation. Considering the social concerns none of the respondents think that forest ecosystems help them in enhancing their relationships with others and 90 % of respondents believe these ecosystems are culturally important. Even though coastal ecosystems were destroyed by the 30-year civil war which ended up in 2009 none of the respondents believes that these ecosystems remind them of violence, conflict, and insecurity. Only 20 % of the respondents have a clear understanding of mangrove-related laws, regulations, and local bylaws and are satisfied with the current legal enforcement related to coastal forests. When considering the material concerns only about 20 % of the respondents are getting environmental resources goods and services. Around 50 % of the respondents think that the coastal forest spread/enhancement makes them happier now than before. Coastal communities are marginalised in the decision-making processes related to coastal management in Sri Lanka. In order to develop sustainable cost conservation initiatives, we recommend the consideration of the well-being of coastal communities so that they can act as guardians for sustainable coastal forest management in Sri Lanka and beyond.

**Keywords:** Co-management , environmental governance, participatory approach, social-ecological systems