

Is the Future of Mangroves in Vidattaltivu Nature Reserve Secured? A Community Based Study

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Vidattaltivu is a coastal region and composed of four adjacent grama-niladhari divisions with a close knit community of about 600 families. It is located in Manthai West divisional secretariat division of Mannar District, Northern Province, Sri Lanka. Vidattaltivu has been declared as Vidattaltivu nature reserve since 2016, because of its luxurious but highly vulnerable mangrove ecosystem. Regardless, the mangrove vegetation in Vidattaltivu is still at a great risk mainly due to destruction and illegal felling of mangroves, pollution and inadequacy of management and conservation interventions. This study was aimed at understanding the community's awareness, knowledge and perception on mangroves in Vidattaltivu and emphasizing the importance of the community involvement and participation in order to protect this valuable ecosystem for future. Questionnaire survey method was employed and a pre-tested questionnaire was distributed among 100 respondents in Vidattaltivu. The findings suggest that majority of respondents (77.86%) are having a higher degree of knowledge and awareness on mangroves but are not willing (89.00%) to take the prime responsibility to protect the ecosystem. This type of negative behavior of locals is typically encouraged by neglecting of sociological & socioeconomic factors and ignoring of suggestions & needs of local communities in planning and implementation stages of protected area management. Apart from that, the exclusion of ownership of the mangroves from local communities might have lessened their commitment towards conservation of this ecosystem. Nevertheless, the respondents showed a higher level of readiness and capacity (86.25%) towards community participation in mangrove management, which can be utilized productively in future if they are encouraged and empowered properly.

Keywords: Mangroves, Vidattaltivu, Conservation, Community participation