"Environmental Degradation and Displacement of Forests Dependent Communities: A Sociological Study in Sundarbans Area, Bangladesh"

Abstract:

The Sundarbans—the largest mangrove forest in the world, located in southwestern Bangladesh—plays a vital role in protecting coastal areas from cyclones and rising sea levels. However, this ecosystem faces escalating threats from climate change and human interventions, including industrial development and deforestation. For example, the construction of a coal-fired power plant has raised serious concerns about biodiversity loss and the disruption of traditional livelihoods for forest-dependent communities (EQMS, 2023; Chowdhury, 2019). While prior research has examined the broader impacts of climate change on coastal communities, limited attention has been given to how environmental degradation specifically affects forest-dependent groups in terms of livelihood vulnerability, health risks, and displacement dynamics. This study seeks to address that gap by investigating patterns of environmental degradation in the Sundarbans, the livelihood and health challenges of affected populations, trends and drivers of displacement, coping strategies, and the accessibility and effectiveness of social protection services. A mixed-methods approach will be employed, combining quantitative surveys (N = 390) with qualitative interviews (N = 32), including in-depth interviews (N = 22(12 individuals from 3 different communities & 10 migrated individuals from these 3 communities to nearby City) and key informant interviews (N = 10). The study will focus on three forest-dependent communities: the Munda, fishing, and beekeeping (Maowali) communities. 10 recently migrated individuals from these communities in nearby cities will be interviewed to explore whether their movement reflects displacement or an intentional coping strategy. Framed within political ecology theory, this research will analyze the power dynamics shaping resource access among these communities. The findings aim to deepen understanding of their challenges and inform policies that strengthen resilience and social protection mechanisms.