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4s2a: Food system transitions in deltas under pressure

Sustainable Management of Deltaic Forest Ecosystems for Resilient Rural Livelihoods

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Deltaic forest ecosystems are adversely affected by climatic stressors and agricultural intensification for food. Efficient enhancement and sustainable uses of forest ecosystem services play a crucial role in income generation and improving local livelihoods, while mitigating damages caused by nature- and human-induced impacts. The present study investigates the relationships between the value of forest ecosystem services and local livelihoods, and identifies solutions of enhanced ecosystem service value and improved livelihoods in the mountainous area in An Giang province in the Mekong delta, Vietnam. Building on ecosystem services, livelihoods and multivariate approaches, we find strong inter-relationships between the market value of ecosystem services and livelihood assets of local households relying on the ecosystems. Better-off households with better human and natural assets better access to and better use forest ecosystem services, benefiting more from food (i.e. rice, vegetables and fruits) and natural forest products (i.e. firewood, medicinal herbs, vegetables and water). The findings raise the equity of sharing benefits and responsibility of local communities in forest resource management. Besides, the benefits of ecosystem services are identified by the tangible value of ecosystem goods for local individuals and cultural services through which regulation services are promoted. To further efficiently promote available ecosystem services for improved livelihoods and sustained forest resources, it is necessary to pay attention to the whole ecosystem to promote its value. We suggest that priorities for sustainable management of the forest ecosystems are to increase the market value of ecosystem goods for local individual and communal livelihoods, and to build capacity of local communities for further enhancing cultural services and accessing opportunities for livelihoods.

Keywords: ecosystem services, food production, forest ecosystems, Mekong delta, rural livelihoods