

Save estuaries and inshore coasts: an environmental concern

Editorial

Estuaries and inshore coasts are vulnerable all over the globe. These sites are frequently subjected to storms, sea-level rise, flush floods, waste disposal, etc. Unsustainable resource exploitation of fin fish, shell fish, salt production is an added constraint towards marine life and marine production. Livelihood issues of the local communities devastated from time to time need to be adequately addressed for conflict resolution. It is necessary to understand community conflicts and documentation of all environment related risks for information dissemination, research necessities and adoption of appropriate management modalities at the local, regional and country level. Indian Sundarban coast is highlighted hereunder to understand this title 'Save estuaries and inshore coast'. This coast includes Sundarban Biosphere Reserve (SBR) of 9630 sq. km. in the state of West Bengal. About a half of the SBR is forested with mangrove which includes Sundarban Reserve Forest (SRF) and three Wildlife Sanctuaries (WLS), while the other half is human inhabited. SBR is designated as the World Heritage Site in 1987 and includes the Royal Bengal Tiger habitat, the Sundarban Tiger Reserve (STR). Actually, Sundarban mangrove forest (12,000 sq. km.) is the largest single natural mangrove of the world of which one-third lies in India and two-third under Bangladesh.

The Indian Sundarban mangrove area is also presently declared as Ramsar Site. It is mentioned that the natural wonder status of World Heritage Site for the Sundarban did not improve the economic condition and ecosystem health of SBR. The question arises now -will the Sundarban survive for next 20 years? With the rising sea water level, islands like Lohachara and Ghoramara are going under water. Out of 102 islands in SBR, 54 islands are inhabited and the rest 48 forested islands, apparently constitute the critical habitat for wild animals. Super cyclone like Tsunami, Aila, Bulbul, Amphan, etc., have added to the misery of man and wild animals including Royal Bengal tigers inhabiting this famous Sundarban wonderland. Presently, the people of Sundarban are increasingly leaving this mangrove tigerland, not for tiger attacks but more for earnings elsewhere.

It is worth adding that estuarine and marine ecosystem health is increasingly impacted by climate change and global warming. Fishery production in the inshore coast of Bay of Bengal as well as estuarine rivers of Sundarban delta is increasingly affected assumingly due to such unavoidable global climate change and global warming

issues which need urgent global and national actions since millions maritime fishermen all over the world as well as in India are affected. It is also important to note that magnificent mangrove forest cover of Sundarban delta is disappearing with the reduction in diversity and density distribution of both true mangrove species as well as mangrove associates. The green cover of mangroves in Sundarban, perhaps may not remain green, even though there is ongoing mangrove plantation programme. It will be worthwhile to develop useful joint management action plan including India and Bangladesh to save this largest mangrove delta and help save livelihoods in the estuaries and inshore coasts.

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Conflicts of interest

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