

Nadi Baithak
Khowai River, Tripura, India
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The River Khowai is the third longest river of Tripura which is flowing through the Khowai District of Tripura. It emerges from the Longtarai hill range and then enters into Bangladesh. The river experiences massive bank erosion at an alarming rate which contributes to a dominant irreparable loss of farm lands of a very high quality each year. The bank of the Khowai River has created an acute socio-economic problem in the study area affecting thousands of people. The socio-economic dimension of the bank-erosion problem, therefore, needs a fairly thorough treatment. The Khowai River has water all year round, though the water level rises during the monsoon season. Fishing is one of the prominent sources of income for the riparian communities dwelling in the downstream of the river.

Key Issues and Challenges:

- ✚ **Severe bank erosion** - Bank erosion tremendously affects cultivable lands and settlements near to the river Khowai. Over the years, the change in the course of the river has changed the socio-economic conditions of the neighbouring settlements across the river, creating a pathetic condition to some by eroding away their living places and agricultural lands. Villages like Moharcharra have already lost 164 acres of land whereas Krishnapur, Laxminarayanpur, Purba Kalyanpur and Laxmipur have lost about 50 – 90 acres. One of the main reasons for bank erosion, as reported by the families, is practice of illegal sand mining.
- ✚ **Displacement of Human Settlements** - The severe impact of flood and erosion is the loss of homestead, which makes people around of the banks of Khowai more vulnerable to live a decent life. Out of the total sufferers of bank erosion of Laxmipur, Krishnapur, Moharchara, Purba Kalyanpur and Laxminarayanpur sites, the total number of migrated families varied from 30 – 70 percent with most of the migrated families reported to have shifted their houses and acquaintances for more than once. Under such circumstances, rebuilding of houses become difficult. Khowai River becomes hazardous in respect of impact of bank erosion on socio-economic condition as the local people have been losing their houses every year.
- ✚ **Impact on Livelihood** - River erosion severely affects livelihood of riparian population with many residents becoming homeless overnight. Many of the erosion-affected people are still living near their already eroded places with a hope of re-emergence of new land. With loss of cultivable lands due to river erosion and no proper assurance from the Government about a possible resettlement, farmers are compelled to change their occupation from farming to daily labor works, which are often less rewarding.
- ✚ **Effect on Society** - Due to the effect of bank erosion, economic problem had started and

the societal environment has been disrupted as the local people become engaged with anti-social works. A good number of respondents informed that social services and social network have been depleted as a consequence of erosion. The people living on char lands are deprived of medical services in emergency situation. It is also difficult for them to arrange transport like boat or other vehicles as the road networks are not conducive.

✚ **Lack of prior information regarding release of water-** The local communities face the problem of artificial floods when the lock gates are suddenly opened as they do not receive any prior information regarding releasing of water from the local administration.

✚ **Use of disinfectants in water-** People residing in the upstream of Khowai river, use disinfectants in the water which leads to death of fishes and also lack of fish supply in the downstream.

✚ **No strict restrictions on illegal activities-** Excessive sand mining and stone lifting activities have reduced the depth and capacity of these rivers. Local people expressed that government should impose more strict restrictions on such illegal activities.

Key Entry Points towards Sustainability:

✚ **Embankments across the banks of river Khowai** – Local communities stated that flood has been duly controlled after completion of concrete and mud embankments in most of the river banks of Khowai. Although banks were made around 4 – 5 years from now, better maintenance of these structures would further reduce chances of devastation caused by the monsoon floods.

✚ **Practicing Community-based ecological restoration strategies** like restoration of fish and replant eroding river banks with native trees to stabilise the soil and improve the quality of river as a whole. Also, appropriate measures and actions need to be taken against some of the local communities, who fishes in the river water through unusual and unfair techniques by diffusing poisons, thereby polluting the environment and ecology.

✚ **Renovation of pumping stations meant for drawing river water to agriculture fields** – Pump sets, which are installed in parts of the river banks for the purpose of winter crop irrigation are not in usable states, everywhere. Out of 60 irrigational centres or units between Teliamura and Khowai region, almost 40 are non-functional. The primary reason is lack of regular running of these pump sets along the year. The primary reason is lack of regular running of these pump sets along the year. Efforts should be made from the local administration level to maintain these equipments on a regular basis and look after the wear and tears. Although, a person is deputed for running each of these pump sets with a monthly wage of around INR 7,000, complaints regarding non-utilisation of these equipments needs to be addressed.

- ✚ **Proposals of using river water for drinking purposes** - There have been serious concerns of drinking water in this region of Tripura, as the generally used ground water has high iron content, and is hazardous to health. Most of the water treatment plants of the region are prone to higher rates of wear and tears and depreciation owing to this issue. Given this, local communities have been lauding to use the river water for drinking purposes through proper means of treatment, as, for them, the quality of river water is better as compared to the former.

- ✚ **Promotion of Cage fish farming-** Other than farming, women can be engaged in cage fish farming. This is more sustainable and can be done all round the year. The women of this region have no knowledge and skills to be engaged in factories or industries. Since, fish is one of the most prominent source of income for the families dwelling here, cage fish farming can be promoted in this region successfully.