

ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN BENGAL COASTAL DELTA

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1. PROBLEMS OF A LARGE RIVER DELTA

The Bengal delta facing the Bay of Bengal partly in India and partly in Bangladesh is the largest in the world. Bengal delta is complex due to various reasons—a megacity of 14 million population in upper part of delta, Sunderbans biosphere with wild life and mangrove forests at lower delta and in between small towns, agriculture land etc. The delta which has many canals, creeks, rivers and estuaries receives sedimentation from upstream, and pollutants with decreasing water quality, unsustainable fishery like prawn culture, there is intrusion of salt water and flooding over larger area, landslides and soil erosion are evident. There is loss of bio-diversity and with climatic change often sea level change occurs with flooding. There is unsustainable agriculture also and the coast is vulnerable to cyclone and other disasters. Though there is government authority but lack of coordination and absence of environmental planning in sectoral programmes are evident.

2. GOVERNMENT MEASURES

During the last few years some positive measures :

The entire tidal zone of Sundarbans (lower delta) of 9636 sq km has been declared biosphere reserve including Tiger Reserve area. It is part of UNESCO biosphere reserve.

(b) Metereological warning system via satellites his improved for disaster mitigation.

(c) A Development Board has been setup. Local government elections in towns and

rural areas (one third members are women) have been conducted.

3. PLANNING

The hydrology of deltaic coastal region is to be studied in the context of broader ecological environmental perspectives.

The components may include physical, biological, human and environmental parameters, assessment of impact of large dams, construction and urbanisation, development control regulations, preservation of natural resources, biodiversity, flora and fauna, Pollution control, disaster mitigation—flood, cyclone, tidal waves etc, new economic opportunity, structure of governance and people's participation, environmental audit and monitoring etc.