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Steps to check sea intrusion urged

By Mohammad Iqbal Khwaja

THATTA, Feb 24: The authorities concerned should ensure release of 10 million acre feet (MAF) water downstream Kotri every year for checking sea intrusion in Indus Delta, demanded Convener, Sub-Committee, National Assembly's Standing Committee on Environment, Marvi Memon.

She made the plea during a visit to WWF's Indus for All Programmes site office in Keti Bunder wherein a member of the sub-committee MNA Tayyab Hussain was also present.

Sea intrusion had affected the socio-economic conditions of the people of Indus Delta by affecting its ecology and depriving people of their livelihood.

"Our fragile ecosystem is being degraded because of fast depleting mangroves," she said and called for banning illegal nets which were depriving poor fishermen of their only livelihood.

She announced an allocation of Rs5 million from the MNA fund for Keti Bunder and Manchhar Lake development schemes.

The Sindh Revenue Department had confirmed in 1992 that some 1.2 million acres of fertile land was damaged by sea intrusion while the present damage can only be documented after making fresh studies, she said.

Coordinator, WWF's Indus for All Programme Nasir Ali Panhwar in his presentation highlighted that Indus Delta being at Ramsar site was abode to variety of fish, agriculture, livestock, mangroves and more than two million people.

He added that low water in Indus and sea intrusion had caused resource depletion leaving little opportunity for area people.

He said that all districts of Sindh, particularly of coastal belt should have a proper land utilisation plan supported by legislation. Development work should be allowed under this plan to avoid depletion of precious land resources.

He suggested initiation of Indus rehabilitation programme through an independent body with the focus on revival of lost species, protection of environment, resettlement of people with livelihood opportunities and coastal zone management.

He asked the committee to recommend release of water downstream immediately along with fast-track social services which includes water supply and sanitation, micro credit health, disaster management and essential infrastructure.

Site Manager Zahid Jalbani informed of the different initiatives being taken by the programme including socioeconomic and ecological assessment, development of livelihood and natural resource management plans for the area.

He said that a vocational centre for women had been established in Keti Bunder along with the provision of both wind and solar energies and rehabilitation of mangroves.

The committee was briefed about the rehabilitation activities such as construction of thatched huts, provision of water tanker boat, fixed fibre water tanks and repair of fully damaged boats.

Earlier, committee members visited the village Tippan in Hajamaro creek, where they studied the level of delta degradation.

Abdul Munaf Qaimkhani from Federal Ministry of Environment, Riaz Wagan and Agha Tahir from Sindh Forest Department and Irfan Abbasi from the Sindh Environment Protection Agency also accompanied Ms Memon during the visit.