

## **Chotiari Dam waterlogging ruins over 50,000 acres of land**

*\* Local people now turned landless and poor, facing starvation*

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KARACHI: Due to failure of many tube wells and a pumping station, water logging caused by Chotiari Dam has destroyed over 50,000 acres of fertile agriculture land, some of it partially, in Sanghar district, according to a survey conducted by PPI during an environmental awareness visit to the area organised by WWF Pakistan, Karachi.

The local people, who were once prosperous in the recent past, have now turned landless and poor, facing starvation-like situation, while many of them have migrated to other regions to seek livelihood for their survival, the survey said.

Senior environmental education officer of Chotiari Dam site, WWF Pakistan, Naveed Soomro said that in view of recent flood, sufficient water has been released into Chotiari Dam from Nara

Canal which has added to the water logging and salinity in the region. So far over 50,000 acres of agriculture land is under waterlogging, some of it partially.

He said that at present the water level is normal but if it is raised then there would be more destruction of lands. However, this destruction of land could be controlled if tube wells are run and water logging is drained out to LBOD by establishing the drainage system.

He said that local communities living in the dam area suffer when water level rises so it is the need of hour to release normal water in the dam so that grazing of animals, which is the main source of income of local community people, could be sustained.

He said that the dam is spread over 13-kilometer wide and 16-km long and occupies an area of about 64,000 acres at pool level, with water storage capacity of about 0.71 million acre feet. The water stored in the reservoir mainly contributes to meet Rabi crops need of Sanghar, Mirpurkhas and Umerkot districts, he informed.

Naveed said the dam consisted of thousands acres of lush green forest which is known as 'Makhi Forest', famous for the rich reserves of quality honey, commercial valued wood and plants with rich medicinal value from the areas.

Naveed underscored the need to safeguard livelihood of local people and conserve the natural flora and fauna. He said that the WWF in collaboration with the government is raising awareness among people about sustainability of wildlife, agriculture and other sources of economy.

“The local economy of the area relies largely on fishing, agriculture and livestock. Most of the people are living below the poverty line due to erratic climate, persistent drought, lack of basic amenities, illiteracy and exorbitant population growth rate. The fishing contract/lease government system is adding to the miseries of local fishermen community,” Naveed said.

He said that there is need to establish drainage system so as to drain out water logging to LBOD. He said that Chotiari produces fish weighing more than 550 tones per year, which is also one of the income and food source of the area people.

Due to excessive storage of water in the reservoir, the existing rangelands have ruined and disappeared that caused a great biodiversity loss and fodder insecurity for livestock which was once of the major livelihood sources of the areas population, while the sand dunes in the reservoir have also destabilised, diffused or submerged thin water which were the abode of fauna and fishermen population.

He said that this disaster increased human population pressure on some safe and high-elevated sand dunes that consequently increased permanent migration of fauna life from the areas. The water seepage towards western and southern areas occurs due to loose soil structure that is being caused by water logging.

The issues that needs to be resolved are habitat degradation, unprotected wetland, increased dependency on machine boats, hunting pressure, increased water logging, use of pesticides; lack of health, education, communication and other basic facility of life, Naveed added.

Community development officer Chotiari Moula Bux Mallah said that waterlogging is a big problem in the area, which is caused by Chotiari Dam. He stressed the need to run tube wells and drain out waterlogging from the area so as to make the lands useful for agriculture.

He said that Chotiari Dam and its surrounding Makhi Forest needs to be saved from water logging and salinity through swift actions. WWF Pakistan is raising awareness about saving biodiversity among people. He said that with the efforts of WWF, the hunting of partridges and other rare birds in the region has been stopped to a significant level. He said that his organisation has provided solar systems, drip and pitcher irrigation systems in villages so as to develop community.

Moula Bux said that a reasonable water quantity should be released into the dam region so that grazing field for livestock could be saved from submerging which is the major source of livelihood for the local people.

Mir Junejo, a resident of Village Owadh, said that their agriculture economy has completely been destroyed due to waterlogging and salinity in the area caused by Chotiari Dam. He said that the completion of a tube-well system installation project along the embankment of dam could not be ensured despite lapse of a much time. He said that Dam would be profitable when tube wells are

installed and waterlogging is drained out from submerged lands.

“Social leaders of the area said Chotiari Dam has caused multiple environmental degradation in the area including water logging and salinity, disturbing habitat of the unique wildlife species. It has badly affected the livelihood of the local people, while unsustainable fishing practices have become common and an uneven supply of water into the reservoir in the past has not been instrumental in increasing the production of fish,” he said.

He said that WWF is helping us to save the biodiversity in the region but the government role in this regard is condemnable. He said that many people have still not been provided compensation due to dam losses. He asked the government to provide compensation for the losses with immediate effect.

Villagers Khalid and Ghulam Hussain said they are in great trouble due to waterlogging, which has ruined their precious lands. They hailed WWF efforts for developing community by raising awareness about nature conservation. They said that WWF Pakistan has provided us a fish farm for community development, which has provided a greater financial help to them. - **PPI**

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