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ASSESSING VULNERABILITY AND PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY: A STUDY OF HILSA FISHERIES IN WEST BENGAL

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This study investigates the ecological, social, institutional, and technological vulnerabilities affecting Hilsa fisheries in the lower stretch of the Ganga, from Farakka to Gangasagar. Several factors, including sedimentation, overfishing, pollution, habitat loss, unregulated fishing practices, climate change, barrage constructions and ineffective governance, have led to a drastic decline in the Hilsa population, and people depend on the Hilsa fishery. The study revealed that 91% of fishermen agreed that not only there is a significant decline in fish catch but harvested fish are quite smaller (generally <250 g) compared to the average weight of 800 g two to three decades ago and 78.4% of fishermen in Farakka, 85.8% in Godakhali, and 92.2% in Tribeni believe that the use of monofilament small meshed gill nets is the major cause behind this. The study highlights the urgent need for transboundary cooperation, sustainable management practices, strict enforcement, habitat restoration, alternative livelihoods and community-based approaches.

Keywords: *Challenges, Lower Gangetic Stretch, Viability, Transition*