



Research Paper

## Mapping Majuli's Potential: a Road to Economic and Infrastructural Advancement

Dr. Rounak Mahtab<sup>1</sup> and Jashnamoyee Boruah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, Gauhati University, Assam, India)

<sup>2</sup>(Research Assistant, Department of Foreign Languages, Gauhati University, Assam, India)

**ABSTRACT:** Nestled in the majestic river Brahmaputra in Assam, Majuli Island is globally recognised for its distinctive blend of ecological richness and vibrant cultural heritage. As the spiritual centre of the Sattras (Vaishnavite Monastery), home to various indigenous tribal communities, and a fragile yet stunning ecosystem, Majuli has preserved the essence of Vaishnavism, particularly its Neo-Vaishnavite form, in isolation, making it a socio-cultural capital. However, despite its exceptional cultural and ecological significance, Majuli remains marginalized in the national and international tourism circuits due to limited infrastructure, inadequate policy implementation, and ongoing environmental degradation, including severe riverbank erosion and seasonal flooding. By investigating current infrastructural gaps, policy frameworks, and cultural-economic assets, this study aims to explore the developmental challenges and opportunities that shape Majuli's potential as a sustainable tourism destination and set before mind for consideration of a carefully designed, community-sensitive development strategy that can foster tourism growth without compromising the island's ecological integrity or cultural authenticity. This study attempts to explore how targeted, sustainable development can transform Majuli into a thriving destination for domestic and international tourism and also assist in generating income for the locals. It positions Majuli not merely as a site of touristic interest, but as a model for how culturally significant, ecologically vulnerable spaces can be developed through participatory, responsible and place-sensitive approaches. In doing so, this study seeks to offer both theoretical insights and practical solutions for leveraging tourism as a tool for inclusive and resilient development in Majuli.

**KEYWORDS:** Vaishnavite Sattras, Tourism, Developmental Challenges, Environmental Degradation, Ecological Integrity, Cultural Authenticity

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### I. INTRODUCTION

"India is like a necklace made of lots of different coloured beads. Each bead is a different region with its own language and ethnicity" (Stoyanova, n.d., para. 1). As Stoyanova retraces the experience of her visit to India, she celebrates the nation's diversity but also reminds us of the fragility and uniqueness of each of its cultural components. This vivid metaphor beautifully captures the essence of India, a land not unified by uniformity, but by its extraordinary diversity. With over 1.4 billion people, more than 1,600 spoken languages, and countless ethnic, religious, and cultural identities, India functions as a complex mosaic of civilizations. Among the string of vibrant beads lies Majuli, the world's largest inhabited river island, nestled in the mighty Brahmaputra River in Assam. Majuli is not merely a geographical entity; it is a cultural cartography, a repository of tradition, ecological resilience, and communal spiritualism.

The Island is home to the monastic Vaishnavite Sattras, founded by Srimanta Sankardev in the 15th century. For centuries, the island has preserved traditional Assamese art forms, like the *Ankiya Naat*, *Gayan-Bayan*, *Sattriya Nritya*, mask making, manuscript painting, pottery etc. In addition to the great historical and religious symbolism, the Island is a sanctuary for diverse tribal communities such as the Mishng, Deori, and Sonowal Kachari. Although the island of Majuli is rich in culture and nature, it is under persistent threat, eroded not only by the literal collapse of its riverbanks but also by infrastructural neglect and policy inertia. The island serves as a paradox for its visibility as a heritage site and invisibility in developmental planning. Despite being

the epicentre of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, a home for indigenous tribal cultures, and a sanctuary of biodiversity, Majuli sadly remains absent from the mainstream developmental imagination of India.

This marginalization is very perplexing given Majuli's unique historical and cultural significance. Even at present, the island remains marginalized in infrastructural, economic, and policy developments, constantly facing challenges such as severe riverbank erosion, seasonal flooding, poor connectivity, and tourism underdevelopment. Even after being declared India's first river island district in 2016 and being shortlisted for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List, Majuli's touristic and infrastructural potential remains largely unrealized and underexplored. This raises a very important question: How can we envision development for a region that is so rich in cultural heritage and ecologically sensitive, without endangering its authenticity and integrity?

This study is thus, an attempt to propose that mapping Majuli's developmental potential necessitates a multi-disciplinary inquiry, one that acknowledges the socio-cultural synergy of its communities, the spiritual and historical significance of its monastic institutions, and the ecological vulnerabilities inherent to the island's geography. As Escobar states, "development must be culturally and ecologically grounded if it is to be genuinely transformative" (2008, p. 12). Therefore, any developmental intervention or potential projects in Majuli must align with the lived experiences, belief systems, and ecological practices of its people, rather than forceful imposition from external models that prioritize economic gain over cultural sustainability.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent decades, Majuli has garnered increasing academic and policy attention due to its rapid environmental degradation, especially riverbank erosion, which now threatens its very existence. Thus, there has been a few significant research concerning development in the island district.

On the matter of Majuli being nominated for UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS), Borkakoti (2017) asserts, "The overwhelming presence of the Sankari culture in its socio-cultural life is the uniqueness of Majuli." He critiques upon the previous attempts to secure World Heritage Site (WHS) status for the island, noting inaccuracies in the dossiers submitted and emphasizing that "the dossier has to shift emphasis from geography to culture if the nomination has to be successful."

In *The Majuli Island: Society, Economy and Culture*, D. Nath (2009) presents a comprehensive sociological and historical analysis of Majuli, addressing its evolution, demographic constitution, and rich cultural life. Nath describes Majuli as "a living heritage island" whose cultural resilience is inseparable from its geography and religious history (2009, p. 12). His interdisciplinary approach combines archival sources, field studies, and interviews, making this work an essential resource for understanding the interplay of tradition, ecology, and development in Majuli.

Roy et al. (2020) details the involvement of the Brahmaputra Board in deploying erosion control measures since the 1980s, which include embankments, dykes, RCC porcupines, and sandbags. Additionally, they have also focused on the Water Resources Department (WRD) of Assam, which has employed advanced geo-engineering materials in Matmora, such as Geo-Bags, Geo-Tubes, and Geo-Mattresses, to alleviate further soil degradation.

Bordoloi and Das (2023) highlight efforts such as the introduction of River Ambulance Services and RoRo (Roll-on/Roll-off) Boats by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (2018). These innovations are designed to address the connectivity issues caused by seasonal ferry service suspensions.

According to Mago et al. (2022), Majuli features bio-organic techniques such as mask-making using biodegradable materials and the construction of stilt houses (*chang ghars*) adapted to annual floods. They warn, however, that "in the era of social, geographical and climate change, a lot of traditional knowledge is on the verge of extinction. Proper efforts are not being made to save these traditions in which the secret of sustainable development is hidden." (Mago et.al., 2022, p. 14)

In *Tourism in River Island Majuli: Prospects and Problems*, Dibya Jyoti Kalita investigates Majuli's potential as a river tourism destination. He identifies patterns in tourist behaviour, particularly the cultural and ecological factors that attract domestic and international visitors. He also notes persistent challenges, such as inadequate tourism infrastructure, limited connectivity, lack of organized tour services, and the annual

disruption caused by floods, while incorporating tourist perspectives on Majuli's appeal, accommodation, and transportation facilities.

The literature underscores that while the island's sedimentological formation and spiritual heritage render it unique, its fragility due to riverine erosion demands immediate and sustained attention. On one hand, traditional knowledge systems and community-based sustainable practices provide living models of ecological balance; on the other, infrastructural inadequacies and erosion continue to jeopardize these heritage assets.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The development in Majuli must be understood within three key theoretical lenses:

**A. Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF):** Originally developed by Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway in 1992, and later refined by the Department for International Development (DFID) in 1999, this framework emphasises on long-term ecological balance, cultural continuity, and equitable economic growth. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) is a development model that helps explain how people make a living, especially in vulnerable or rural environments. It looks at the resources people have, the challenges they face, and the systems that influence their wellbeing.

In *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: practical concepts for the 21st century*, Chambers and Conway provide a definition to SLF.

Livelihood is defined as adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs. Security refers to secure ownership of, or access to, resources and income-earning activities, including reserves and assets to offset risk, ease shocks and meet contingencies. Sustainable refers to the maintenance or enhancement of resource productivity on a long-term basis. A household may be enabled to gain sustainable livelihood security in many ways - through ownership of land, livestock or trees; rights to grazing, fishing, hunting or gathering; through stable employment with adequate remuneration; or through varied repertoires of activities. (Chambers & Conway, 1991, p.p. 5)

### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis for this study followed a mixed-methods framework, suitable for interpreting data collected through a Google Form comprising both open-ended and closed-ended questions. This framework enabled the systematic examination of quantitative trends and qualitative insights.

#### (a) Data Sources

The Google Form generated two types of data:

1. **Quantitative data**
  - Yes/No response
  - Multiple-choice items
  - Likert-scale ratings
2. **Qualitative data**
  - Open-ended responses describing personal experiences, expectations, and concerns

This dual-format dataset made it possible to analyse not only the prevalence of issues but also the lived realities that explain those patterns.

#### (b) Sampling Logic within the Analytical Framework

The sample was collected through random sharing of the form. Therefore, the analytical framework treats it as a non-probability random-exposure sample, which is common in geographically constrained, community-based studies.

This framework acknowledges:

- Random distribution of the form (open link was shared among community networks)
- Voluntary participation of locals
- Diverse respondent category was reached through digital snowballing

Since the Google Form was randomly circulated online, the survey was not restricted to any specific geographical area of Majuli.

### **(c) Frequency Distribution**

Frequency distribution was used to:

- Identify the most common concerns (e.g., healthcare, connectivity)
- Rank infrastructural issues
- Assess levels of satisfaction with development initiatives

### **(d) Percentage Analysis**

Applied to show the proportion of:

- Respondents affected by erosion and flooding
- Residents willing to participate in tourism
- Locals dissatisfied with healthcare or transportation

These percentages were used to visualise patterns in survey figures (e.g., Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3).

### **(e) Qualitative Analysis (Open-Ended Questions)**

Open-ended responses underwent systematic qualitative coding, following three steps:

- Initial Coding: Short phrases or keywords were extracted from each response to identify core ideas such as "lack of healthcare", "transportation during monsoon", "bridge needed" etc.
- Thematic Coding: Codes were sorted into broader themes, such as:-
  - Healthcare dissatisfaction
  - Connectivity challenges
  - Environmental vulnerability
  - Tourism potential
  - Administrative transparency issues
- Ethical Considerations within the Analytical Process
  - No identifying information was collected from participants.
  - Only voluntarily submitted data were used.
  - Responses were analysed anonymously.

## **V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This paper seeks to answer two interrelated questions:

1. What are the existing infrastructural impediments to Majuli's development?
2. And how can a sustainable, community-sensitive model be cultivated to enhance both preservation and progress?

By addressing these, the study contributes to broader conversations about sustainable tourism, heritage conservation, and the politics of rural development in ecologically fragile zones.

## VI. ECONOMIC PROFILE

Majuli's economy is predominantly agrarian, supplemented by artisanal weaving, fishing, pottery, bamboo craft, and tourism. The following are a few examples of government initiatives for the development of the primary sources of income:

- **Agriculture:** As per the District Agricultural Office, the Economy of Majuli District agrarian agriculture along with its allied activities is the principal occupation of the people of Majuli. As high as around 90 percent of the total population of the District is dependent on agriculture and its allied activities for their livelihood from. As per records of 2011 census. 80.63 percent of the total working population of the District is cultivators and agriculture workers. (District Agricultural Office, Government of Assam, Majuli District, 2022)
- **Textile/Handloom:** The Department of Handloom and textile calls Majuli a Handloom weaving potential area. Visitors may hear the sound of looms in almost every household in Majuli and this phenomenon is more prominent in Tribal dominated areas. The administration of Majuli developed a semi commercial approach after rigorous efforts by the Department through various State level, Central Sector and Centrally sponsored Schemes. There are different ongoing/proposed schemes of Handloom & Textile under Majuli District like the Economic Upliftment of weavers through Handloom Weaving, Yarn Bank Scheme, Assam Agribusiness Rural Transformation Project (APART) etc. (Department of Handloom and Textile, Government of Assam, Majuli District, 2022)
- **Fishing:** The wetlands of Majuli serve as a perfect source of income generation through fishing. According to the Department of Fisher, Government of Assam, Majuku District, the island's large numbers of wetlands, rivers and rivulets, constitute important fisheries resources for the people. There are with enormous potentiality in the form of flood prone wet lands, low lying area, derelict water bodies, large number of community tanks and other small homestead ponds in the district which provides scope for nutritional security, fish production as well as employment generation. (Department of Fishery, Government of Assam, Majuli District, 2022)
- **Tourism:** Tourism has been one of the most important fast revenue generating assets. To promote and assist the tourists visiting Majuli, the Department of Tourism, Govt. of Assam has set up a Tourist Information Centre at Kamalabari, Majuli. Over the years, both the Central and State Govt. of Assam had identified and executed several large, medium and minor tourism projects for infrastructure building as well as schemes have been implemented in Majuli, these included infrastructure projects under Swadesh Darshan Scheme, Amar Alohi Rural Homestay Schemes etc. (Tourist Information Center, Government of Assam, Majuli District, 2022)

## VII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Majuli being a river island in the heart of the mighty Brahmaputra, which is considered one of the most dangerous and turbulent rivers in India, have been inaccessible during older times. However, although late, development in water transportation has made it comparatively easier. Although the current mode of transport is still not the safest and most convenient, throughout the year the island does observe a significant footfall. This only hints towards an already existing popularity, attracting travellers, both domestic and international, to the island. Over time, this gradual rise in popularity of the island has sought government attention, which has led to the introduction of more conventional modes of travel and infrastructure. A few of the introductions that have been influential for the development of the island can be assessed below.

### 7.1 Education

1. **Majuli University of Culture:** Majuli University of Culture, established in 2019 in Majuli, Assam, is dedicated to preserving, researching, and promoting the region's rich cultural heritage. The university focuses on indigenous art, literature, music, and traditions, serving as a hub for academic research and cultural preservation in one of the world's largest river islands.

### 7.2 Agriculture

1. **Aamar Majuli (Our Majuli):** It is a flagship program and an initiative of the Deputy Commissioner (now District Commissioner), Majuli, where a platform is provided for the farmers to interact directly with the officials of various departments of the district to resolve their issues and concerns. This interaction is held every Friday of the week to meet 50 progressive farmers. Moreover, once a month it

is organized in a community hall to ensure participation of a large number of farmers. This scheme has brought significant progress in the agricultural scene of Majuli. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> KMS 2021-22, the district achieved 105% paddy procurement.

### 7.3 Communication and Public access

1. **ROPAX:** Introduced in 2021, the ROPAX ferry service connects Majuli with Jorhat, enhancing transportation efficiency by allowing both passengers and vehicles to travel together, significantly reducing travel time and improving accessibility to the island
2. **River Ambulance:** Launched to address Majuli's healthcare accessibility challenges, the river ambulance provides emergency medical transport across the Brahmaputra, ensuring timely treatment for residents in remote areas.

### 7.4 Tourism

1. **Swadesh Darshan Scheme (SDS):** Implemented in Majuli to promote eco-tourism and cultural tourism, SDS focuses on infrastructure development while preserving the island's unique heritage and natural environment.
2. **Amar Alohi Rural Homestay Scheme:** Designed to boost rural livelihoods, this scheme supports homestay facilities in Majuli, enabling tourists to experience authentic Assamese culture and local hospitality.
3. **Weaving and Bamboo Craft Centre at Borganya:** Established to preserve traditional skills, this centre trains artisans in weaving and bamboo craftsmanship, fostering economic opportunities and cultural continuity in Majuli.

Apart from this, the district awaits further completion/introduction of developmental prospects:

1. **Government Model Degree College, Majuli**
2. **Majuli Polytechnique**
3. **Jorhat-Majuli Bridge**
4. **Lakhimpur-Majuli Bridge**

Whenever there is development, a gradual rise in the number of disappointed citizens is expected. Therefore, to understand the current development scenario, a survey was conducted with a diverse group of 50 locals to assess their satisfaction, concerns, expectations and unresolved issues. It is merely an attempt as a follow up on what was promised to the locals and how much of their expectations were able to be met. The following table highlights the demographic characteristics of respondents of the survey:

Demographic characteristics of respondents	Numerical value	Percentage value
Total respondents	50	100%
Male	29	58%
Female	21	42%
Occupation		
Student	43	86%

Self-employed	2	4%
Service	3	6%
Unemployed	2	4%
Age group		
18-25	38	76%
26-45	12	24%
Educational qualification		
Secondary	1	2%
Higher secondary	5	10%
Graduate and above	44	88%

Table 1: Demographic representation of respondents

The diverse number of participants allowed us to look into the matter of developmental issues in Majuli through a dynamic point of view. The participation of locals enabled a thorough investigation of day-to-day difficulties faced by them. The following graph is a mere effort to highlight the issues that affect the locals the most.

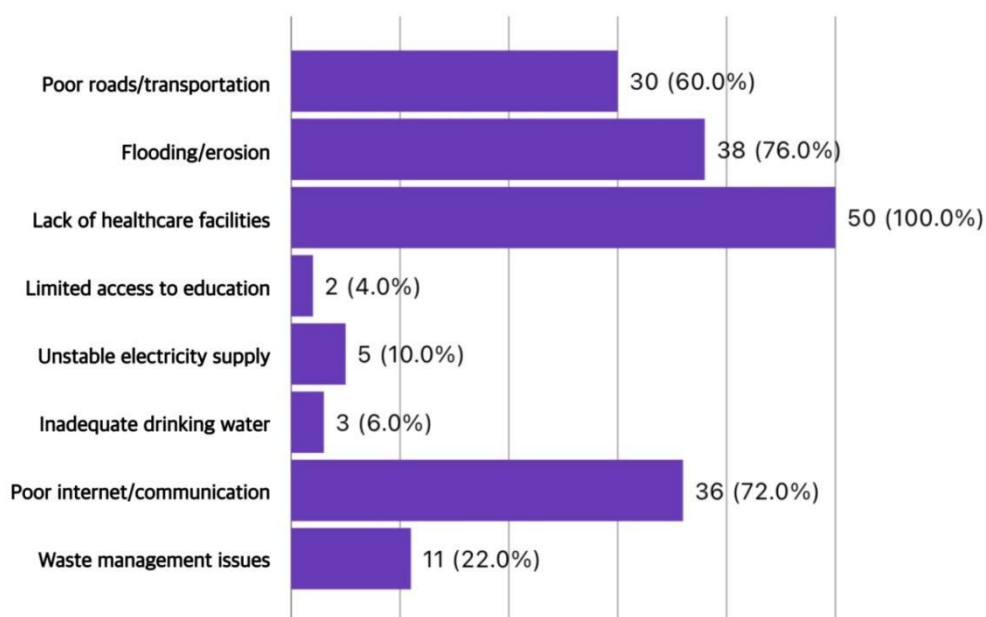


Fig 1: Infrastructural issues affecting Majuli in daily life

As the graph clearly shows, lack of healthcare facilities emerged as the most alarming concern, with 100% of respondents marking it as a key issue. This indicates a deeply rooted problem, both in infrastructure

and governance. While Majuli did introduce a fleet of 108 boat ambulances to support emergency health services, especially given the island's isolation, recent reports show a complete breakdown of this system. As per a report by The Assam Tribune (30<sup>th</sup> May 2025), all three emergency boat ambulance services in Majuli have been defunct for a course of over three months. Furthermore, The Assam Tribune was able to connect with an official who acknowledged the crisis, confirming that the operation of all three boat ambulances had been suspended. He revealed that one boat has completely deteriorated and is beyond repair. Lack of healthcare facilities thus emerged as the most alarming concern, with 100% of respondents marking it as a key issue. This points towards deep-rooted problems in both infrastructure and administration. While Majuli did introduce a fleet of 108 boat ambulances to support emergency health services, especially given the island's isolation, recent reports show a complete breakdown of this system.

While the healthcare crisis is the most urgent, the survey also sheds light on other significant issues that plague daily life in Majuli:

- Flooding and erosion were marked by 76% of respondents. This is a perennial issue in Majuli, but locals have observed that erosion-prevention efforts remain inconsistent. Some areas still await the completion of embankment reinforcements, and flood-relief services remain disorganized.
- Poor internet and communication facilities (72%) have also hindered education, banking, and access to online services, especially critical in a post-pandemic economy increasingly reliant on digital access.
- Roads and transportation continue to be a concern for 60% of respondents. In many regions, roads are either unpaved or damaged during monsoons, making access to schools, markets, and hospitals difficult.

Other issues identified include waste management (22%), unstable electricity supply (10%), inadequate drinking water (6%) and limited access to education (4%). While these may not have the same scale of urgency as health or flooding, their consistent mention highlights the multifaceted nature of civic neglect.

A recurring pattern noted during this inquiry is the absence of detailed public updates regarding certain ongoing issues. For example, while concerns such as ambulance service disruptions and healthcare safety have been covered in local media, there has been limited publicly available information on the timelines or processes for resolution. Community members, as reflected in survey responses, expressed uncertainty about the current status of some facilities and services. This uncertainty is often linked to how some initiatives appear highly visible during their launch but receive less public attention in the following years. For instance, the introduction of the boat ambulance service was a widely covered event, with many residents recalling its initial utility. At present, however, several of these services remain unavailable for regular use, and residents are seeking clarity on their future operation.

Over the years, the geographical area of the island has undergone a significant yet alarmingly large change. Mostly due to the ongoing issue of soil erosion and degradation, the surface area of the riverine island has decreased from 1255 sq. km as recorded in 1901 to 584 sq. km as recorded in the District Census Handbook of Jorhat (2011), and still continues to decrease till today. Around the year, the island faces the issue of soil erosion mainly during monsoons when a large number of locals are affected. According to the Census Handbook of Jorhat, 58 villages and 48,000 locals were affected during the monsoon floods in Majuli till 2011. The monsoon season not only brings physical and environmental hardships but also affects the island's accessibility.



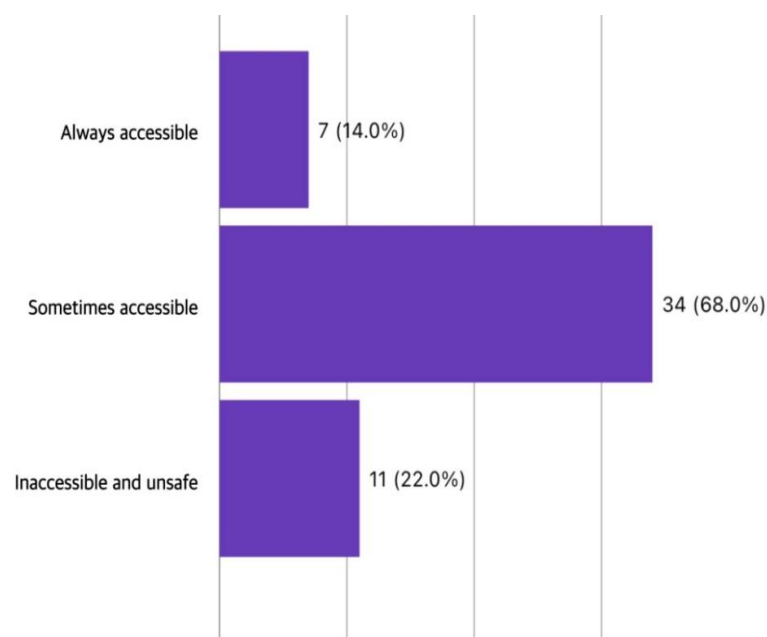


Fig 2: Accessibility of Majuli Island during flood/monsoon season

As observed in the survey conducted, although 68% of the dedicated participants have implied that the island is “sometimes accessible” during the monsoon season, many have shared their opinions regarding the abruptness in inaccessibility. A local shared, “Communication and transportation within the island is efficient however, reaching other districts or towns during monsoon becomes a hassle because the ferry services are shut down by the authorities when the water level rises.” The ferries are the primary source of transportation for the island. It is a daily practice for hundreds of people who travel to and from the island for business, service, job, studies etc. When the ferry services shut down, it poses a threat to all kinds of day-to-day activities, be it economic or social. Upon enquiring about the most urgent priorities for Majuli’s development, along with urgency for proper healthcare, a local shared, “Bridge connectivity which connects Majuli and Jorhat is the most urgent requirement for the development of Majuli.” The need for better connectivity is felt highly during emergencies due to heavy rain and flood. The bridge in question is the Jorhat-Majuli Bridge, that’s construction was put in motion in November 2021, under the building supervision of UP State Bridge Construction Corporation Limited, Lucknow. The targeted date for completion of the project is November 2025. However, retendering has caused a significant delay in reaching the target. Locals have expressed their concern over the half-finished bridge that remains a hope for the people of Majuli.



Image 1: Jorhat-Majuli Bridge under construction

The construction of the bridge which was supposed to open doors to opportunities for the younger generation in the guise of access to better education, jobs and businesses now remains a stagnant project waiting for authorities' intervention. Unsurprisingly, the Jengaramukh Tribal Theme Village in Majuli, a project under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme of the Government of India, remains shut even after completion of construction. The construction of the tourist attraction was presumably started in 2022 (as updated in the Tourism Information Centre Majuli) but has been inaccessible for public and tourists till today. There were discussions regarding the retendering status of the development of the theme village during the District Development Committee (DDC) meeting held in April 2023 at the Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Majuli. However, there is no significant update at present regarding the same. Locals say that even after completion of the project, the property remains non-operational. Although the Tribal Theme Village has a potential for creating job opportunities and help generating income, expecting this project to be fully operational and accessible soon is still improbable.

These developmental projects sent to Majuli further solidify the island's potential. Yet, these prospects fail to be put into action. The findings of this survey do not suggest that no progress has been made in Majuli; rather, they highlight a reality: progress without maintenance leads to regression. Development must be understood as a continuous process, not a destination marked by ribbon-cutting ceremonies. Development, when neglected, becomes a source for peoples' disappointment and discontent and this discontent is further exacerbated by the sense that many initiatives have become one-time events, implemented with fanfare and forgotten thereafter.

The findings from the survey and secondary research indicate that while Majuli has witnessed several developmental initiatives in recent years, there remains significant scope for enhancing their long-term effectiveness. One of the most notable areas of growth has been tourism, which is increasingly emerging as a key sector for the island's economic future. In recent years, many tourism-related businesses such as private resorts, homestays, and boutique lodges have been established, most often by individual entrepreneurs or local businessmen rather than by public or government-led projects. These establishments cater to both domestic and international visitors, offering ethnically rich experiences in Majuli's cultural heritage, nature and wildlife. The survey conducted for this study further indicates strong local interest in participating in tourism-based livelihoods.

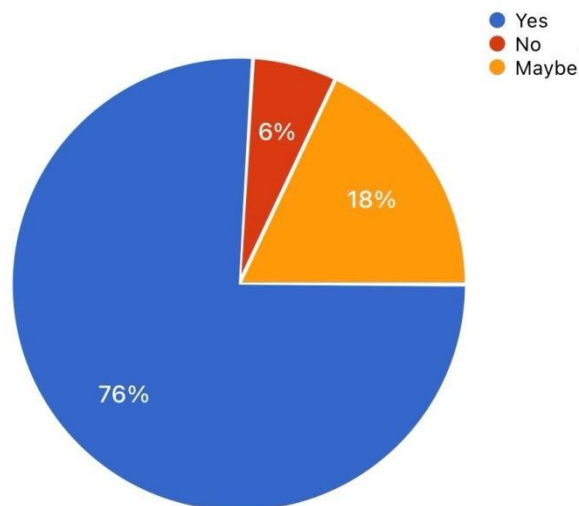


Fig 3: Willingness of locals to participate in Tourism activities

When asked if they would be willing to engage in activities such as operating homestays, working as guides, or offering cultural experiences, 76% of respondents said "yes," 18% responded "maybe," and only 6% said "no". These numbers indicate a strong foundation for community-led tourism in Majuli. The overwhelming majority willing to participate reflects not only openness to new livelihood opportunities but also recognition among residents that tourism can be a sustainable source of income if developed responsibly. This sentiment was echoed by a local resident, who remarked, "It helps boost the local economy. Majuli is rich in culture and natural beauty, attracting tourists who come to explore its heritage and surroundings. This, in turn, improves the hospitality sector's economy and benefits those involved in tourism." The 18% who responded "maybe" suggest

that while there is interest, certain barriers such as lack of training, market linkages, or initial investment, may prevent immediate involvement. Addressing these barriers through skill development workshops, microfinance options, and promotional partnerships could help convert much of this “maybe” group into active participants.

Given Majuli's rich cultural heritage, vibrant traditional arts, and growing visibility as a unique travel destination, this readiness from the local community presents a significant prospect for shaping tourism into a sector that is both economically beneficial and culturally preservative. Integrating community participation into tourism development, particularly in homestays, eco-tourism projects, and heritage-based activities, could ensure that economic gains are retained within the island, fostering a model of tourism that benefits residents directly while enhancing the visitor experience with authentic, locally guided engagement.

While tourism holds considerable promise for Majuli, it is important to recognise that focusing exclusively on this sector does not equate to comprehensive development. True development must be multi-dimensional, addressing the island's diverse needs across healthcare, infrastructure, education, connectivity, environmental protection, and livelihoods. A thriving tourism industry can generate income and employment; however, without any progress in basic services such as healthcare, transportation, and flood management, the benefits will remain limited and unevenly distributed. To achieve long-term resilience and prosperity for Majuli, developmental strategies must integrate tourism into a broader framework that uplifts all sectors and ensures that improvements are sustainable, inclusive, and unprejudiced.

## **VIII. SUGGESTIONS**

Although the findings of the survey and secondary research indicate that Majuli has witnessed several developmental initiatives in recent years, there is still scope for enhancing their long-term effectiveness. Thus, the following suggestions are derived from survey responses and stakeholder discussions. In the context of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), the following suggestions aim to strengthen its five main pillars: human capital, social capital, physical capital, natural capital, and financial capital.

### **(a) Strengthen Healthcare Services**

Majuli's healthcare system is often criticised for not being accessible by the residents, mostly during emergencies. Majuli's geographical location poses an obstacle to travel to and access healthcare facilities in the neighbouring districts. Therefore, at present, developing reliable healthcare infrastructure is a necessity for the island district. Although the introduction of river ambulances and improved health facilities marked important milestones, the survey shows that healthcare remains the most pressing concern for the residents. Given that ferry schedules and seasonal floods can limit physical access to mainland hospitals, it is very important that local facilities operate at full capacity year-round. From the SLF perspective, strengthening healthcare directly enhances Human Capital. It reduces vulnerability to seasonal shocks (floods, transport breakdowns), and supports more resilient livelihood outcomes. Following suggestions can be put into action for initiating development in healthcare.

- Regular servicing and operational checks for critical services like the boat ambulance can ensure availability, especially during emergencies. This can prevent prolonged delays that can have serious consequences for an emergency patient.
- Upgrading hygiene standards and food safety protocols in district hospitals and health centres will not only improve the quality of services provided, but also rebuild public confidence in the government medical institutions.
- Mobile medical units with sufficient medical supplies and equipment can serve remote villages when road and ferry access becomes unpredictable, ensuring continuity of care throughout the year.

### **(b) Establish Communication Regarding Project Timelines**

Before becoming an independent district, Majuli's infrastructure and developmental projects were managed under Jorhat district administration, which meant that priorities had to be shared with other regions. Now, with its own district administration, Majuli has the opportunity to accelerate projects concerning its development. Timely completion of construction of infrastructures like the Jorhat-Majuli Bridge is a key to boosting connectivity and economic activity. Within the SLF, transparent communication and responsiveness to

local concerns strengthens Social Capital by improving trust, cooperation, and interaction between institutions and the community (transforming structures & processes). To develop better public relations, concerned authorities can adapt the following:

- Regular public updates on the progress of major development projects can help manage expectations and build community trust. To keep the residents updated, the administration can also install public notice boards, expand local media announcements, and rely on online updates.
- The concerned authorities must also prioritise incorporating community feedback into implementation stages which can help ensure that completed projects serve actual needs, making infrastructure more user-focused and effective.

### **(c) Improve Connectivity**

Proper and reliable transportation is the backbone for Majuli's socio-economic life and functioning. Right now, the ferry service is the primary link to the mainland, yet they are often suspended during monsoons, disrupting trade, education, and healthcare access. Under the SLF, improving transport and digital systems strengthens Physical Capital and reduces vulnerability associated with Majuli's geographic isolation and seasonal monsoon patterns. Reliable connectivity also expands livelihood strategies and improves access to financial and educational services.

- The concerned authority should explore other transport solutions such as private boat services in case of ferry shutdowns during the monsoon season, which can help reduce isolation during monsoon season.
- There is also a need to improve digital connectivity. Better digital and internet connectivity can enable remote access to education, banking, and government services.

### **(d) Develop Tourism Opportunities**

Tourism has been one of Majuli's most beneficial sectors. The unique culture and lifestyle of the island is able to attract both international and domestic tourists. Over time, the island has also witnessed the development of private resorts and homestays which has helped the residents of the island to generate income and employment. From the SLF viewpoint, tourism strengthens Financial Capital, supports diversification of livelihood strategies beyond agriculture, and leverages Majuli's cultural and natural assets (Natural & Social Capital). However, for more improved functionality of the tourism sector of the island, the concerned authorities should focus on achieving the following:

- The local authorities should focus on expediting the launch of all the completed tourism projects, for example the Tribal Theme Village of Jengraimukh, which will ultimately assist in generating job opportunities and creating a possible boost for local income generation.
- To enhance the hospitality sector of the island, concerned authorities should focus on expanding business opportunities by engaging enthusiastic locals in homestay programs and cultural art and craft workshops. This nudges the locals to explore tourism related business opportunities.

### **(e) Continuous Monitoring and Feedback**

When Majuli was under the jurisdiction of Jorhat district, it was not possible to elaborately focus on the development of only the island. However, after being declared a district, Majuli has great potential and freedom to focus on its development and implement necessary targets to create a better and sustainable version of the island amidst all kinds of ecological and developmental threats. In the SLF model, regular monitoring and feedback is part of 'Transforming Structures and Processes,' ensuring that institutions effectively support livelihood resilience, reduce vulnerability, and enhance long-term livelihood outcomes. Following measures can be adapted for a potentially better functioning island district:

- A monitoring committee with government representatives, local representatives and society members can work together to provide oversight of projects and policies which will help aid faster resolution of issues.

- A consistent annual evaluation of the already established or ongoing development initiatives must be conducted to analyse public satisfaction or discrepancies. This will help guide future planning and strengthen thrust between locals and administrators.

Majuli has been subjected to neglect and poor response when it comes to public concerns, be it regarding healthcare, transport, threat of erosion, yearly flood etc. Although it is true that public administrations have worked towards development to cater to these concerns, if the persisting problems seem severe, only providing services that are the bare necessities is not a long term solution. Consistent delay in delivering projects, overlooking public concerns and lack of active community engagement in decision making has not only made Majuli's development slower but also has hampered public trust on responsible authority. It is therefore about time that the largest inhabited river island of the world receives the care and attention it is entitled to before this remarkable centre of culture, tradition, religion and art erodes into being a history.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Majuli's development reflects a land rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty however, geographically and infrastructurally challenged. The island's uniqueness is both an asset and a challenge, offering rich cultural values but also simultaneously exposing it to persistent threat in the form of flooding, erosion and underdevelopment. In recent years, many initiatives focusing on the lacking healthcare system, transportation and tourism have been implemented which explains the potential this island district holds. However, the survey findings state that although residents acknowledge and value the initiatives, many express their aspiration towards greater consistency, transparency and responsiveness. Healthcare, flood management and better road connectivity have emerged as a pressing concern, which reflects that there is a need for a more balanced development strategy that does not only limit its focus on completing the projects rather aim for sustainability, ensuring that development is not only initiated but also maintained over time. Wherever there are geographical vulnerability and infrastructural constraints, there is a need for a multi-dimensional approach when it comes to planning for development. On the other hand, tourism cannot be the sole driver of development, it is definitely the most influential sector that displays great potential for a long term opportunity. Government initiatives like "Awesome Assam" are a state focused project which may come with limitations and restraints. However, community-led initiatives have the potential to offer a stronger foundation for the development of tourism in Majuli. This calls for a holistic approach, where economic opportunities are reinforced by strong infrastructure, environmental conservation and cultural preservation. Development in Majuli cannot be measured by the number of projects or policies launched but by the quality, accessibility and durability of the benefits provided. Therefore, when it comes to development in Majuli, it is very crucial to adopt a participatory model like SLF, where planning, execution and monitoring actively involve local stakeholders. The challenge here is to balance modernisation with preservation. If guided by a long term vision and commitment to sustainable growth, Majuli will be able to embrace progress without losing the very qualities that make it exceptional and the island can become a model not only for Assam, but for other rural regions across the world.

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