

## Coastal erosion in cities like Mumbai needs immediate action

A much-needed study on Mumbai, commissioned by the Maharashtra Maritime Board (MMB), has found that the continuous erosion of the 2.5km-long Dadar beach, along Prabhadevi and Shivaji Park, poses “high risk” to infrastructure in those areas. Mumbai, as one of the most densely populated urban areas in the world, must take this threat seriously as the erosion of the coast can fast become an irreversible problem for not just Mumbai, but also for other coastal cities in the country. The study, titled The Maharashtra Shoreline Management Plan 2017, has gone as far as to suggest that with the additional issue of the rise of the sea level complicating matters, the fallout could turn catastrophic by 2050.

In 2015, a study conducted by the Space Application Centre, Ahmedabad, and the Central Water Commission of the ministry of water resources had found that 45% of India’s more than 8,000 kilometre-long coastline was facing erosion. While some amount of such erosion can be blamed on the 2004 tsunami and other natural occurrences, the contribution of humans to the problem can no longer be ignored. Experts agree that the construction of structures along the coast that tend to protrude into the sea contribute to the erosion of the coastline by reducing natural sedimentation that allows the beach to become rejuvenated. Dumping of garbage, indiscriminate construction, and mere lip service towards protecting the environment are all causes of this problem.

But there are ways to stem the tide. Mangroves have been known to be very effective in protecting coastal spaces from even disasters like tsunamis; and can be cultivated as natural barriers to erosion. The other obvious way to ensure that our coastal cities are not destroyed by erosion and the rise of the sea level is to ensure that environmental impact assessments are conducted before the construction of any structures on the coast in cities; and sustainability as a paradigm is built into the development one. Sea level rise is already occurring around the world, and if we want our coastal cities to survive and grow in the future, the time to act is now.

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