FLOODING TO VISIONING: SHAPING TOGETHER A SUSTAINABLE MAJULI

LIVING LAB 2.0

WATER AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

IHE DELFT Institute for Water Education under the auspices of UNESCO

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

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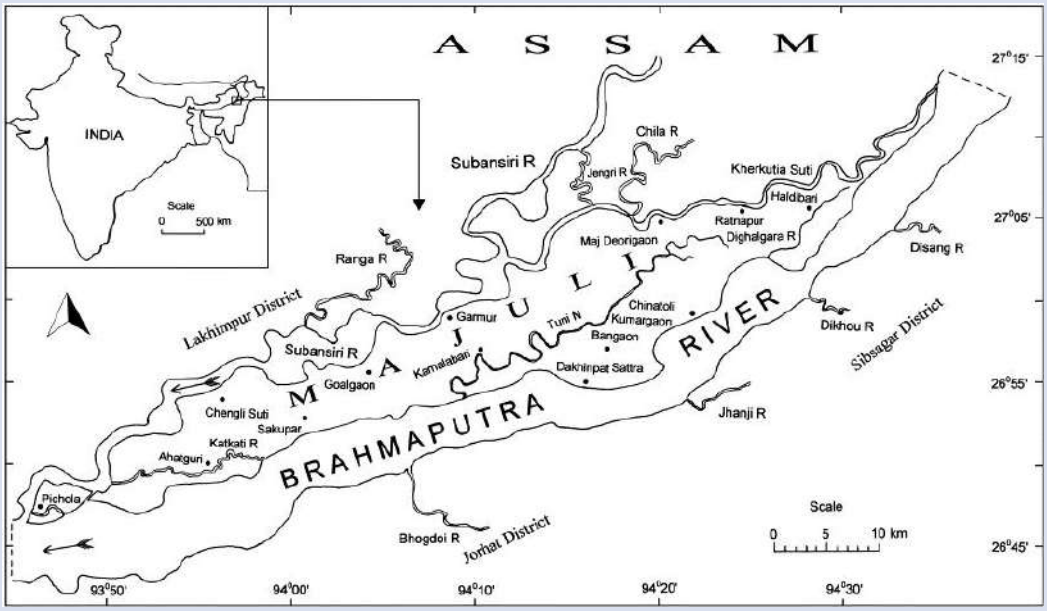
ABOUT MAJULI

Majuli is a large island in the Brahmaputra River in Assam, India. It was initially known as "Majoli" (a small stretch of land between two parallel rivers). The island was created as a result of the river splitting into two different channels, one flowed along the original river and the other started flowing along the Burhi Dihing channel (Borborah et al., 2016).



Picture 1 Majuli district of Assam (Sarma & Phukan, 2004)

According to Guinness World Records, it is the world's largest river island, with a total area of 352 square kilometres as of 2014. It is the first island district in India, created in 2016. Majuli is inhabited by various ethnic groups, mainly the Mising, Deori, Kaibarta, Sonowal Kachari, Koch, Ahom, Sutiya, Kalita, Brahmin, Sut, and Nath (yogi) communities.Majuli is one of the most backward districts of Assam in terms of socio-economic development. It faces several challenges, such as frequent floods and erosion, poor infrastructure and connectivity, lack of health and education facilities, and environmental degradation (Government of Assam, India). According to the 2011 census, Majuli had a population of 167,304, with a sex ration of 947 females per 1000 males and a literacy rate of 75.6%. The main languages spoken in Majuli are Assamese, Mising and Deori.

Majuli is the cultural capital of Assam and was nominated for the UNESCO World Heritage Site status in 2004 (UNESCO, 2004). Majuli is the birthplace and the seat of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, initiated by Srimanta Sankardeva and his disciples in the 15th and 16th centuries. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement was a socio-religious reform movement that

aimed to create a casteless and egalitarian society based on devotion to Lord Krishna. The movement also created a rich and diverse cultural legacy comprising literature, music, dance, drama, art, and architecture. Sankardeva and his followers composed various literary works in Assamese, Brajavali, and Sanskrit, such as Kirtan Ghosha, Gunamala, Bhakti Ratnakara, and Naam Ghosha.

Picture 2 The sanctum sanctorum of the Auniati Satra (one of the oldest and most important Satra of Majuli)

Picture 3 The big art forms of Samaguri Satra on display.

They also created various musical forms such as borgeet, ankiya gaan, and bhatima They also developed various dance forms such as satriya, ojapali, and jhumur. They are the creators of staged dramas or ankiya naat, such as Chihna Yatra, Rukmini Haran, and Parijat Haran. They created various art forms such as mask-making, painting, and wood carving. In March 2024, Majuli received the prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the government of India, acknowledging its traditional art of mask-making and manuscript paintings (Times of India, 2024).

Majuli's exceptional biodiversity stems directly from its unique geography. Situated at the confluence of the Brahmaputra and Subansiri rivers, these waterways have profoundly shaped the island's character. Beyond its status as a river island, Majuli boasts an abundance of wetlands called beels[1] and vast stretches of grasslands known as chaporis. The island has various types of forests, such as semi-evergreen, moist deciduous, bamboo, and grasslands. The

Picture 4 Natural beauty of Majuli

[1] wetland or large aquatic body in Assamese language

island is home to the Molai forest, a man-made forest created by Jadav Payeng, who single-handedly planted over 1400 acres of trees since 1979 (Pareek, 2014).

Picture 5 Lesser Adjutant Stork spotted in Majuli

Various factors, such as frequent floods and erosion, climate change, deforestation, pollution, overexploitation, and invasive species threaten the ecology of Majuli. Several conservation efforts have been undertaken by the government, NGOs, and local communities to protect and restore the island's ecology. Some of the initiatives include afforestation, bioengineering, community-based natural resource management, ecotourism, and environmental education (Das, 2016; Ramachandran, 2022).

PROJECT TEAM

The Force That Made This Happen!

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OBJECTIVE

Co-produce policy-relevant knowledge for sustainable livelihoods in Majuli

The Trans Path: Water Transformation Pathways Planning project is funded by DUPC (The Water and Development Partnership Programme) and supported by the IHE Delft Institute for Water Education. It spans eight countries—India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda, Vietnam, Mexico, and the Netherlands—and focuses on achieving sustainable and inclusive water management through transformative planning approaches. The project aims to develop tools, methods, and participatory processes to guide water- related transformations towards sustainable, equitable, and adaptive pathways. By integrating science, policy, and practice, it seeks to address global water challenges while fostering inclusive, participatory decision-making in water governance. Additionally, the project aims to establish a global network of researchers and practitioners to facilitate joint learning and policy innovations.

The Majuli island is prone to annual floods which causes river bank erosion and threats the geomorphology. Inland Water Transport (IWT) remains the primary mode of transportation for most of the people, albeit fraught with significant limitations. The dwindling scenario of recurring floods and poor connectivity poses enormous challenges to the traditional livelihoods. For example, the field insights suggest that the poor connectivity hinder the opportunities to enhance livelihoods around pottery and weaving. The communities residing in the *chaporis* have to shift places with the seasonal course of the river and river bank erosion besides their minimum livelihood opportunities.

At present, two key developments taking place are pivotal in shaping the island's future: the rise of cross-border tourism and the construction of the bridge connecting Majuli to Jorhat (nearest major town). At this critical juncture, it is crucial to reimagine Majuli’s identity as an island, examining how the local community perceives these developments. There are not yet any deliberation on what these development means to the future of Majuli and livelihood of local communities. The local communities were not involved in shaping these crucial initiatives and there are no existing platforms for them to voice their concerns or tailor the development according to the local needs.

In this context, "Living Lab" for Majuli is conceived as a safe space where local communities and government representatives can come together to openly discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with these transformative developments in Majuli. This initiative envisions to pave the way for a collaborative and inclusive approach to shaping development initiatives on the island. In this direction, the first Living Lab was conducted in the month of May involving local government officials and community representatives. There are several arguments both for and against the bridge.

However, the primary reason people support its construction is the poor waterway connectivity to Majuli. Does this enhanced connectivity have the potential to foster sustain the local livelihoods, ecology and culture of Majuli? The key questions emerged out of the discussions are a) What tangible benefits will the bridge bring? b) How can the environment, cultural identity, and local industries be safeguarded? c) How can development ensure benefits for local residents rather than outsiders?

Picture 6 Participants from Living Lab 1.0 engaging in discussion

Against this backdrop, the second follow up Living Lab focused on anticipating the changes the bridge might bring, and collectively discussing whether to accept, adapt to, or oppose such changes and seek the possibility of address these concerns through locally led initiatives. For example, framing protective measures for Majuli island and steps to address the mobility needs of the communities who will not directly benefit from the bridge.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Sl. No.	Name	Institution/Designation
	Facilitator	
	Sushanta Talukdar	Editor, NE Zine
	Stakeholder List	
1	Ratul Ch. Tamuli	Retd. Junior Engineer, Assam Inland Water Transport Department
2	Pallabi Devi Payeng	Self Help Group representative, Sitadar Chuk
3	Arun Pathok	Retd. Joint Director, Agriculture Dept., Kamalabari
4	Mukti Patir	Representative, Lower Majuli
5	Sumi Nath	Self Help Group member, Borguri
6	Rubi Kaman	Self Help Group member, Garmur
7	Subhas Kuli	Gaon Pradhan, Upper Majuli
8	Dipak Kotuwal	General Secretary of Gorkha Students Union, Majuli
9	Padmashree Jadhav Payeng	Forest Man of India, Conservationist, Jorhat
10	Kalpajit Payeng	Student, Kamalabari
11	Karuna Borah	Ex-Headmaster; Social Worker, Kamalabari
12	Karabi Payeng	Tour Guide, Content Creator, Kamalabari
13	Stiti Sikha Bharali	Entrepreneur, Niribili Homestay
14	Bharat	Gorkha Students Union, Majuli
15	Keshab Kakti	Representative, Auniati Satra
16	Anamika Barua	Professor, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
17	Mijo Luke	Post-Doctoral Fellow, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
18	Gitima Das	PhD Scholar, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
19	Chayashri Basumatary	Admin Staff, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
20	Sumanta Biswas	Assistant Director, CUTS International

STEP BY STEP PROCESS OF THE LIVING LAB

Date: 2nd November 2025, Sunday
Venue: Niribili Homestay, Kamalabari, Majuli
Time: 9:30-13:00 hrs.
Facilitator: Mr. Sushanta Talukdar (Editor, NE Zine)

Step 1: Introduction and refection of Living Lab 1.0

The session began with a welcome note from Anamika Barua of IIT Guwahati, who provided a brief overview of the Trans-Path Project and reflected on the process and takeaways of the Living Lab 1.0 for the participants. She then introduced the facilitator, who delivered the opening remarks.

Step 2: Expert remarks by Padmashree Jadav Payeng on "Ecology and Sustainable Future of Majuli

Step 3: Visioning Majuli

The facilitator explained 4 different scenarios of bridge connectivity in Majuli to 4 Groups. The visioning exercise intended to understand the local perspectives on what change they anticipate after Majuli is connected with bridge. the participants were divided into four groups based on their preference to discuss the themes. The groups were given four themes which emerged from Living Lab 1.0 as key themes perceptive of change with bridge connectivity. However, when the facilitator explained about ecology of Majuli as a theme both in English and vernacular language no body want to discuss the ecological changes that bridge connectivity will bring.

- *Cultural heritage of Majuli with bridge connectivity*
- *Ecology of Majuli with bridge connectivity*
- *Local livelihoods in Majuli with bridge connectivity*
- *Tourism in Majuli with bridge connectivity*

One representative from each group presented the important points emerged from the group discussions.

Step 4: Open Discussion

The open discussion amongst the participants. The open discussion was moderated by the facilitator. The event was concluded with the reflections from Prof. Anamika Barua and Mr. Sumanta Biswas.

Revisiting Living Lab 1.0

The first Living Lab was organised in the month of May. The questions for the Living Lab was formulated from the earlier field immersions which started from January 2024.We understood that local lives are dependent on the river and Inland Water Transport for the connectivity. Hence, we organised the Living Lab 1.0. with these questions in mind. In this context, "Living Lab" for Majuli is conceived as a safe space where local communities and government representatives can come together to openly discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with these transformative developments in Majuli. This initiative envisions to pave the way for a collaborative and inclusive approach to shaping development initiatives on the island. The Living included a visioning exercise to understand future of Majuli in terms of different situations of connectivity. Following are the important takeaways from the 4 Scenarios a)IWT + Bridge together – this is suggested as best balance for Majuli which supports tourism, trade, emergency access. However, it requires regulation (entry control) to protect culture & identity (crimes too) b) Only Bridge – the advantages include 24/7 access, faster mobility and economic boost; the bridge construction involves risk of culture dilution, livelihood loss for operators, increased crowding &ecological pressure on the island. c) Only IWT will help to preserves island-identity, aligns with Majuli's "island-ness", supports river livelihoods & low-cost logistics. However, IWT is unreliable during flood/monsoon & poor night/emergency service. d) No Connectivity for Majuli implies self-reliant, traditional living continues. It comes with negative implications such as extreme isolation, restricted education, health & livelihood opportunities.

Various anxieties were expressed about the bridge being built without adequate regulations in place. For example, younger generation, are tense that what lies in the future, how things will change. However, at the end of the discussion, the only point that was raised is that we want both bridge and IWT Participants emphasized the importance of protecting Majuli's unique character, noting concerns such as the potential for increased crime rates and the influx of industries that local businesses may be unable to compete with. It was suggested that these concerns should be addressed through locally led initiatives. Potential initiatives could include petitions from local communities to secure formal protection measures for Majuli, as well as exposure visits to similar regions worldwide where conservation has successfully coexisted with tourism—allowing Majuli to adopt models that balance preservation with development.

Picture 7a&b Anamika briefing participants on the reflections from Living Lab 1.0

Expert Talk by Jadav Payeng

Padmashree Jadav Payeng who is popularly known as Forest man gave a talk on the future of Majuli focusing on the following themes, he pointed the importance of IWT for life in Majuli. For example, if in case of earthquake even the bridge might not survive and a complete shift from IWT will bring big catastrophe to the island. He recollected memories of the 1988 major flood in Assam when boats were used to rescue people. Therefore, if the ghats were to disappear completely then how will the government will help the people in case of emergency. The locals in Majuli are living on the river itself surrounded by waters there has to be IWT always and it can't just disappear. Another point of concern is construction embankments by government which are not scientifically sound and we never know when they might ditch. So, I had requested Union Minister of Ports & Shipping, Mr. Sonowal, that never stop these IWT services because that is the essence of Majuli specially for the tourist as a form of attraction.

He has expressed concerns around bridge construction. For example, the bridge will bring connectivity to local people in Majuli. people will come and go unlike now where they are bound to stay for some time hence brining opportunities, environment won't stay silent with such sudden and big change. There are many reasons why the bridge coming is not ecologically safe, especially in dry season when there is generally high sedimentation that will increase even more. We can't stop the bridge as it is a necessity for the people of Majuli, however the river and biodiversity need to be protected. In addition to this, at Jorhat, sand mining is at places which is very harmful for the ecosystem but the forest department has to generate revenue so they have to do it. The bridge starting for Jorhat is not scientifically sound because of the sand mining and riverbank excavation the soil is not very stable and high chances of erosion, as a boy who grew up on the riverbank, I have that experience that I know the impacts and one day Brahmaputra will give take its revenge for sure because there are around 25 small islands here and they will be heavily impacted. Since bridge is coming now and can't avoid that, the question is how will we protect the people of Majuli, either through nature-based solution or engineering marvel, there needs to be researched.

It is impossible to leave environment aside; we are living because of the lively environment. Therefore, we cannot completely ignore these facts. Technology won't solve everything as nature is always fierce and furious ultimately the impacts will be on the living beings, including humans and non-humans alike, also applying marine technologies will not solve anything here because river has current unlike marine systems. The youth also must realize the positives and negatives of this situation. Additionally, tourist won't come to see a concrete jungle but only natural surroundings, so these must be protected. For instance, a scientist from JNU has said that the natural beauty of Majuli must be protected, Majuli does not need to be mechanical, right now its beauty is unmatched. He gave also a solution that just like COVID had lockdown protocols, it be possible to give protocols for the bridge once in a while or probably every alternate week of the month. The islands became greener during COVID lockdown, skies became bluer, water became pristine and birds came back to their

usual migratory habitats. It is also important to give 60% conservation to women because it has been observed that they are better at conserving nature than men based on experience. “In our Indian tradition, there is a saying that our parents are our property, our pride and our duty, but nowadays that has changes into money is our property, money is our pride and duty, even money is our parent, so everything revolves around money now.”- this inference that people who can’t differentiate between money and their parents now, will they respect nature? Will they respect fellow citizens and the country? Educated ones now don’t stay back in rural areas, they don’t even recognize the essence of rural life, if they can’t protect our rural areas which are the actual properties of any state, they can’t protect nature and the country.

If there is no IWT then it will be catastrophic for the people of Majuli as per my practical knowledge of working alongside the river for several years. It is wrong to assume that if bridge will come then all problems will be solved. At the same time, there needs to be project R&D trying to understand the impacts of IWT on the river and its biodiversity because activities like dredging and also related sedimentation/siltation. However, we need to learn from nature how to protect the river and us, one solution can be plantations such as bamboo (that is in abundance) that we will act like a buffer, preventing erosion, sedimentation and other things just like mangrove does for the costal ecosystem that will protect our highlands and also the river.

Picture 8a&b Padmashree Jadav Payeng sharing his experience on working on nurturing the ecology and sustainable futures of Majuli

Reflections on Group Discussions

1. Tourism and ecology

"Majuli is a place where dawn begin by the sounds to *doba* (traditional drum) and *khonkho* (a shell musical instrument) and the dusk falls with the musical sound of *Oi Nitom* (Mishing traditional folk songs)"- this quote emits the importance of cultural significance and diversity of Majuli, where many live in surreal, peaceful surroundings and unity.

Bridge connectivity is crucial for Majuli, which has long faced exclusion due to limited access. Inland water transport (IWT) remains unreliable and often unsafe, whereas a bridge would significantly improve mobility, boost tourism, and enhance access to medical and educational services. However, strong regulations will be needed — including alcohol licensing controls, plastic waste fines, and other safeguards. Ultimately, both IWT and bridge infrastructure are important for promoting sustainable tourism in Majuli.

It is essential that Majuli's cultural heritage is preserved and promoted alongside the new bridge. Proper spatial planning around supporting infrastructure — such as hotels, homestays, markets, and eateries — will be critical. With thoughtful planning that links livelihoods to cultural heritage, Majuli has the potential to emerge as an international tourism destination.

The bridge can also stimulate local economic development by improving market access for traditional handloom products, dairy, vegetables, and other local goods. It will diversify markets beyond Jorhat and Lakhimpur, generating broader economic benefits for local communities and strengthening Majuli's Vaishnavite cultural identity. Improved road access will allow visitors to explore remote areas that were previously difficult to reach.

At the same time, inland water transport (IWT) should continue to play a role. Although IWT use may decline once the bridge is operational, the development of two new ports provides an opportunity to upgrade ferry services — including options such as luxury ferries — to enhance the visitor experience and preserve the river's aesthetic value. This can sustain the livelihoods of boat operators rather than displacing them. After all, many visitors will still want to experience the Brahmaputra by boat: *"the journey is more beautiful than the destination."*

Ultimately, Majuli's development should not be tied to a single mode of connectivity. Whether by bridge or by boat, the focus must remain on sustainable development, safety, cultural preservation, and inclusive economic opportunities.

Picture 9 Group representative explaining their perspective on tourism and ecology with bridge connectivity in Majuli

2. Local livelihood and bridge

Majuli supports a wide range of traditional livelihoods that will inevitably be affected by improved bridge connectivity. To safeguard local economic activities, measures should be introduced to prevent unregulated in-migration and land leasing that could allow outsiders to dominate Majuli's trade and livelihood landscape. The government could consider protective mechanisms — similar to Inner Line Permit (ILP) arrangements — to support sustainability while building local capacity.

It is also crucial to protect Majuli's unique cultural enterprises, such as mask-making and pottery, through copyright, geographical indication (GI), or patenting initiatives. Skill development programmes should be designed to address capacity gaps in each sector, ensuring that local communities can sustain and advance their traditional livelihoods. These efforts should make it difficult for external actors to appropriate or commercialise indigenous skills without community consent.

Community-based forums can play an important role in maintaining Majuli's identity by discussing livelihood priorities, promoting innovation, and integrating technology in ways that enhance rather than erode tradition. Currently, many residents are not fully aware of the diversity of communities and livelihood groups within Majuli. Orientation and awareness programmes are needed to strengthen this understanding, identify safe development pathways, and enable participatory decision-making that turns change into opportunity.

Declaring Majuli a "no-plastic zone" would help protect its biodiversity and reinforce environmentally responsible tourism and development.

The field explorations carried out during the Living Lab shows local perspectives around these issues. The bridge will improve connectivity and aid the locals during emergency. However, local communities are concerned about the identity of Majuli due to the influx of outsiders—peace may decline. They feel that the local culture can be protected, for example, Deori cultural heritage will not be affected much because they are deeply attached to their traditions and will never abandon them. Bridge connectivity may improve village level communication. The road connectivity, communication, agriculture, industry, and official electricity access have developed compared to other districts over the years, however, local communities are never involved in decision-making processes or programs. IWT will vanish eventually, and people dependent on it will lose their livelihoods unless compensation is provided. Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Mishing people will be the most affected groups. People living on meagre incomes will suffer the most. Therefore, alternative livelihood options are needed for riverbank communities with a livelihood planning. They do not want to move out despite challenges. If given the opportunity, they prefer to stay because this is their land—they are *Majuliya* (people of Majuli) also the indigenous people of Majuli and will never move out. Many people who run small shops and booths near the ghat will be affected. Although connectivity will improve, local livelihoods dependent on ferry and river trade will decline. Their cultural heritage will not be affected much because they take efforts to conserve it. The natural beauty of the area will definitely be affected. Pollution will increase, and peace will be disrupted. Marginalised or needy people, like the weaving community may initially benefit economically due to the influx of outsiders, as they will find opportunities to profit. However, peace will be disturbed with outsiders coming in, criminal activity will increase.

Every community has expressed concerns around local livelihoods. For instance, fisherfolk worry that once the bridge is built, fishing-based livelihoods will decline because ferry-based transport and boat services will reduce. Their families depend mostly on fishing, with no alternative livelihood sources available. They believe that after the bridge is completed, outsiders will enter and dominate the fishing business and loss of traditional fishing practises and river knowledge. They have seen reduced fish production in recent years, mostly due to changing river depth and sediment load. Some younger fishers are considering migrating for wage labour once the bridge opens, as they expect fishing-related income to disappear. The main causes of decline are sedimentation, river depth changes, and sand deposition. Fishermen expressed uncertainty about their future — if they cannot fish, they will have to migrate or shift to other work. Shopkeepers near the ghat also worry that their customer base will drop after the bridge is built. The people feel Majuli's life and rhythm will change once the bridge becomes operational.

Picture 10 Group representative explaining their perspective on local livelihoods with bridge connectivity in Majuli

3. Ecology and Culture

A complete shift from IWT is not wise for the conservation of islands as the nature of natural calamities are unpredictable. We can't stop the influx of outsiders once bridge is completed. However, to control and cap the inflow of outsiders based on initiatives of every panchayat and SOPs to protect local culture. There should be preference for local and native for every aspect of the island. For example, we must ensure local artist, local beauty, local plants such as *Simalu, Hilikha* planted by Srimanta Sankardev/Madavdev are protected. These native things are our assets and keeps the uniqueness of Majuli. We should ensure no plastic and organic utensils and local products are used by tourists that in turn will uplift the local life of Majuli. The tourism development should focus to protect and promote a green Majuli.

Picture 11 Group representative explaining their perspective on ecology and cultural heritage with bridge connectivity in Majuli

Open Discussion

After the group discussions, the floor was opened for wider participation. Several additional concerns and forward-looking ideas emerged, reflecting broader community aspirations and apprehensions regarding Majuli's future.

There is currently no collective deliberation on what kind of development Majuli envisions for itself, or what the island should look like in 100 years. The conversation has largely been limited to choosing between bridge connectivity and inland water transport (IWT), instead of imagining long-term development pathways. Participants stressed the need to consider whether Majuli could house facilities such as a super-specialty hospital or a university, rather than focusing solely on physical connectivity.

Examples from Guwahati were cited, where bridge and flyover construction created multiple challenges because local communities were not consulted in advance. To avoid similar issues, participants suggested creating structured discussion platforms at the level of Mising communities, satras, and youth organisations. Such forums could enable community-led decision-making and locally driven initiatives. Social media could also be leveraged to generate a "Roadmap for Majuli," serving as a public space for sharing ideas, concerns, and solutions.

Local institutions, particularly satras, were identified as potential anchors for dialogue processes, capable of taking grounded community concerns — such as ferry infrastructure — to government authorities. It was noted that while the bridge may diminish some of the experiential beauty of Majuli that IWT currently captures, the bridge is likely to be constructed given longstanding public demand. Therefore, the priority should shift toward ensuring that socio-economic welfare, cultural integrity, and community aspirations remain central to Majuli's development after the bridge is built.

Participants emphasised that essential public services — particularly healthcare — should be considered more urgent priorities than bridge construction alone. A multimodal connectivity approach was also recommended to ensure reliable access during emergencies, balancing bridge use with safe and efficient IWT services.

Picture 12a&b Facilitator summarizing the group perspectives and facilitating an open discussion with the participants

Key Takeaways: Protecting Livelihoods, Culture, and Demographic Balance in Majuli

Majuli is home to a diverse population, including the Mishing, Deori, Nepalese, Sonowal Kachari communities, and non-tribal Assamese groups. These communities live together harmoniously and sustain a wide range of traditional livelihoods - agriculture, weaving, pottery, mask-making, boat building and operation, and fishing, among others. These practices are not merely economic activities; they are deeply rooted in Majuli's cultural identity and traditional knowledge systems.

1. Documenting and safeguarding existing livelihoods

It is essential to record, protect, and promote existing livelihood options so that upcoming external developments particularly the proposed bridge and tourism expansion do not disrupt Majuli's socio-economic and cultural fabric. The protection of indigenous skills such as mask-making and pottery should include legal measures, certifications, or heritage protection mechanisms.

2. Capacity building and youth engagement

A major priority is building skills among young people. Training should focus on:

- advanced and climate-resilient agriculture,
- appropriate technology adoption,
- sustainable homestay and ecotourism management, and
- responsible entrepreneurship.

These initiatives would strengthen local resilience and ensure long-term livelihood security in a changing economic environment.

3. Managing migration responsibly

Close monitoring of migration both in-migration and out-migration is necessary to protect local interests. A registration system for new entrants and visitors could help maintain demographic balance and safeguard community rights.

Some participants suggested exploring regulatory mechanisms similar to an Inner Line Permit (ILP). For example, an SOP could cap visitor numbers per day (in the model of Bhutan), especially during major cultural events. This would prevent overcrowding, ensure that festivals like Raas retain their spiritual and cultural essence, and protect community spaces.

4. Land and business regulation

Clear land-use rules are needed to prevent indiscriminate sale of land to outsiders. Where businesses are leased to external entities, local participation should be mandatory, ensuring community-led decision-making and benefit sharing. This approach would retain local control over emerging economic opportunities in hospitality, tourism, market infrastructure, and traditional crafts.

Picture 13 A concluding group photo with all participants of Living Lab 2.0 Majuli in the frame

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