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# Country Level Workshop Bangladesh

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Transnational Policy Dialogue for Improved Water Governance of the Brahmaputra  
River- Phase 3



JUNE 4, 2016

Dhaka, Bangladesh



## Background of the workshop

On June 4<sup>th</sup> 2016, South Asia Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies (SaciWATERs), India and Institute of Water Modelling (IWM), Bangladesh jointly organised the Consultation Workshop on Policy Dialogue for Improved Water Governance of Brahmaputra Basin: Phase –III in Dhaka. The workshop was the first country level dialogue meeting of the third phase of the project “Transboundary Policy Dialogue for Improved Water Governance in Brahmaputra River”. The project was started by a group of researchers from India and Bangladesh in 2013 as a bilateral dialogue initiative between India and Bangladesh, which later became a multilateral dialogue with the involvement of China and Bhutan.

The discussion during the workshop was based on three broad themes:

1. **Knowledge sharing** – The review of Mekong river treaty helped in sharing the experiences and the process of going into a treaty. The review of such treaties (Mekong, Nile, Mississippi) would eventually help in the dissemination of knowledge and good practices across the region which would eventually help in better decision making.
2. **Economic opportunities** – This session helped in the identification of basin wide economic opportunities that would aid in addressing the issues of poverty, food and energy security in the basin.
3. **Disaster management** – The ideas and the suggestions coming out of this session helped in recognizing the opportunities to co-manage the river for effective disaster management

The workshop attended by track 3 and 2<sup>1</sup> diplomats and a few track 1.5 diplomats. Apart from the participants from SaciWATERs, there were 28 workshop participants<sup>2</sup> from Bangladesh representing over 12 organisations, including academic institutions, NGOs and government departments. **Dr. Zafar Ahmed Khan**, Senior Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources (Government of Bangladesh) was also present during the inaugural session.

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<sup>1</sup> Track 1: High-level politician

Track 2: Influential academicians, bureaucrats

Track 3: Non-Governmental Organisations, academicians, civil society, and grass root level community

<sup>2</sup> Annexure 1 gives the list of the participants

## Inaugural Session

The Inaugural session began with Dr. Monowar Hossain, Executive Director, Institute of Water Modelling welcoming the participants of the workshop. Dr. Anamika Barua, Executive Director, SaciWATERS presented a brief introduction about the project in which she



emphasized the importance of multi-stakeholder dialogues like this. She reinstated the achievements of phase 1 and 2 of the project and how the suggestions and outcomes of these two phases are being taken into account in the third phase. The participants from India and Bangladesh wanted the dialogue to be continued at multi-track level across all the four riparian countries which is being executed in this phase. The ultimate aim is to come up with a basin level institutional framework could provide the means, mandate, and resources necessary to employ formal and informal agreements, reflecting the needs and interests of stakeholders. To achieve this aim there are certain objectives, like the review of the international transboundary treaty/ protocols, mapping of the institutions involved giving an insight into the management practices of the Brahmaputra basin. Also an Advisory Committee with equal representation from each riparian country has been organized which will provide support in drafting the structure of the basin level institutional framework. Along with the issues and challenges, it is very important to identify the avenues of cooperation in the basin.

“Dialogue between riparian countries helps in identifying the points of common interest related to water and avenues of cooperation.”

-Dr. Anamika Barua

*The keynote speakers in the inaugural session were:*

- Dr. Zafar Ahmed Khan, Senior Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Bangladesh
- Mr. Md. Sarafat Hossain Khan, Director General, Water Resources and Planning Organisation (WARPO), presented a paper titled “Brahmaputra River Basin: Need for Cooperation and role of dialogue.
- Md. Jahangir Kabir, Director General, Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB)

*Outcome of the Inaugural Session: Key issues and suggestions*



- With only 8% of the total catchment area in Bangladesh, 82 million people are dependent on the river. This makes it very important for Bangladesh, the lower most riparian country to get any kind of cooperation from the upper riparian countries.
- The Brahmaputra River is prone to flooding every year which results in heavy silting of the river beds with sediment. Annually, Bangladesh receives approximately 1.2 billion tons of sediment load per year. The floodplain topography of Bangladesh changes because of this continuous process of erosion and deposition and has severe socio-economic impacts (loss of land- housing and agriculture, migration etc.).
- Out of the total land under irrigation in Bangladesh, only 18% of the land is irrigated by surface water, rest 82% is irrigated by groundwater. This over extraction of groundwater is causing serious ecological balance.
- Apart from that Climate Change is putting additional stress on the Brahmaputra basin- increasing temperature, evapotranspiration, increasing intensity and variability of rainfall, sea level rise etc.

“Unilateral interventions within riparian countries will undermine the integrated development process of the basin. Bangladesh is always at the mercy of the water management strategies of the upper riparian countries.”

**-Mr. Md. Sarafat Hossain Khan**

- Each riparian country has its own perspective regarding the management of the river system. For example, Bangladesh is of the view that no inter-basin water transfer should take place between the Ganges and the Brahmaputra river basin. On the other hand, India is of the view that diverting water from the Brahmaputra to the Ganges river basin would resolve the problem in both the basins.



- Similarly China, the upper most riparian country aims to utilize the untapped hydropower potential of the Brahmaputra and at the same time intends to divert water from the Brahmaputra basin to the other basins within China.
- The water diversion by the upper riparian countries will reduce the amount of water available downstream (Bangladesh). This would disturb the socio-economic stability of the region.
- No multilateral treaty has been signed among any of the four riparian countries. Few bilateral

“Through several workshops like this, we can come up with some solution to reach a consensus to manage the river”  
-Mr. Md. Jahangir Kabir

agreements focusing on hydropower generation have been signed between India and Bhutan. Regional cooperation dialogues at the track 2 level are very important to bring all the four riparian countries together on one platform for integrated and

sustainable management of the Brahmaputra basin.

- **Opportunity for cooperation:** There is 200 GW hydropower potential in the Brahmaputra basin, but it has not been tapped fully. With coordinated river basin management, there is a lot of potential to develop hydropower and energy security within the basin. For example in Mississippi River Basin, along with the utilization of the hydropower potential (43 dams), a very good river corridor (low flow and high flow) has also been maintained within the

“If we don’t grow together, don’t have inclusive development it will be impossible for anyone to survive.”

-Dr. Zafar Ahmed Khan

river system. Hence a lot of opportunities are available if the riparian countries opt for coordinated river basin management.

- Through multi-lateral and multi-track dialogues, the riparian countries can come up with ways for integrated river basin management and thereby improve the quality of life of the people.
- The world cannot survive with the kind of development that is happening. Apart from developing ourselves, we need to protect the right and privilege of the future generation also.



- The main role of a bureaucrat from any nation is to link the political will of the government with the common people and to find out ways through which we can survive in a better way.
- A holistic approach should be followed where Track 3 people can easily approach Track 2 and Track 1.

## First Session: Knowledge Sharing

Started with the presentation by Ms. A.C.S. Perera (SaciWATERs) on Mekong river treaty. In her presentation she talked about the initiation and the approach adopted for the Mekong River Treaty. She further compared the similarities and the differences between the Mekong river basin and the Brahmaputra basin. She presented the process the Mekong river commission underwent and how it took them approximately more than 37 years to get into a treaty.



*Major discussions and suggestions during the session:*

- To deal with any transboundary issue, it is important to have both political and bureaucratic will.

“We have to share knowledge to deal with the transboundary issues in a holistic way”

- Dr. Khondaker Azharul Haq

Bangladesh have started sharing the flood forecasting data which is not helping in the better management of the disaster but is also helping in building cordial relationship between the two countries.

- Apart from flood forecasting, data sharing should be expanded to other socio economic and environmental aspects of transboundary river management

- One of the neutral areas where the data can be generated is navigation. Transporting the goods via water is still the cheapest route of transporting the goods. To maintain the navigable route, a minimum flow of water has to be maintained in the river throughout and it would indirectly put pressure on the riparian countries.

It is important for dialogues like these to continue to get more filtered and refined ideas.

-Dr. Monowar Hossain



Silt management is another area where knowledge sharing can play an important role. Each country is putting its individual effort for silt management. The riparian countries can collectively generate and share data for effective silt management.

- In South Asia, India has signed many bilateral treaties (with Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh). It would be good to review these treaties also apart from Mekong, Nile etc. and analyse what kind of role India is playing in each of these treaties.



- Good practices should be adopted from other river basins like Nile and Mississippi where the countries are utilizing the river efficiently and sustainably.
- A website about the Brahmaputra basin can be initiated which can provide a platform to all the riparian countries for knowledge sharing.

## Second Session: Disaster Management

The session started with Ms. Vishaka Gulati (SaciWATERs) on the process of Institutional Mapping. The presentation explained the process of Institutional Mapping and the Delphi process and how it would ultimately aid in the formation of an Institutional Framework. The institutional mapping will also help in understanding role of the existing institution in managing disaster, and what kind of capacity building is required to develop a basin level institution for disaster management.

### *Major discussions and suggestions during the session:*

- The participants raised the concern regarding the strengthening of the existing institutions within the basin for effective disaster management in the basin.
- Moreover since India is a federal state, both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have different stands because of which the participants recommended separate representation of the institutions of the two states.
- If the four riparian countries have to be brought together on one platform for effective disaster management, it is imperative that the dynamics between the two state governments (Assam and Arunachal Pradesh) and how they are influencing the national policies is well understood.
- Regarding disaster management, both structural and non-structural aspects should be considered.





- When talking about flood management, India and Bangladesh can collectively co-manage the river by dealing with the issues like inadequate channel capacity, drainage congestion, river bank erosion etc.

- The armed forces play a very important role at the time of a disaster, hence their role and capacity should also be taken

into account for effective disaster management.

- For effective disaster management it is important the knowledge is disseminated through the media to local communities who are the affected the most at the time of the disaster.
- The capacity and the preparedness for dealing with any disaster doesn't matter if the local communities are not informed about the timing of the disaster, which is usually the case. Hence it is very important that the local communities are informed timely.
- The Brahmaputra region in China is in the Tibet Autonomous Region, so when talking about China, it should be taken into account.

“We have to make people aware of this region that this is the river of the people and not of any individual country. River is not an individual property of any nation but it is a common resource for everyone”

- One of the participants

### Third Session: Economic Opportunities

The session helped in the identification of the economic opportunities in the region. The participants identified the economic benefits that they think the country gets or has the potential to get from the river system.

#### *Major discussions and suggestions during the session:*

- Both Bangladesh and India (Assam and Arunachal Pradesh) are primarily dependent on the



river for Agriculture. Irrigation efficiency in both the countries is very low and this is a luxury we cannot afford anymore. Investment should be made for towards the development of efficient and sustainable agriculture.

- Assam and Arunachal Pradesh can improve their economy by developing inter-state avenues for electricity supply and navigation routes.
- Existing livelihood activities should be strengthened further with more investment.
- Among the various opportunities available, investment should be made for the development of the navigation routes. Transportation of goods through water is still a lot cheaper than the transportation of goods via land and this would ultimately aid in the development of the economy of the region.
- Investment in Hydropower can give a boost in the overall economy, especially in the rural areas. Rural areas are generally deprived of water and power supply, investment in hydropower can help in the mechanization of various livelihood activities like agriculture and fishery.
- Economy of the region can be built by tapping the untapped hydropower potential of the region. But before that a good research on water-food-energy nexus should be carried out. This would help in harnessing the economic opportunities sustainably.
- Also different countries have different perspectives regarding the harnessing of the economic opportunities from the river. Countries should think of ways through which they can create a win-win situation for all the riparian countries.

- For sustainable economic opportunities, investment should be made towards effective disaster management. There are certain knowledge gaps and lack of expertise that needs to be addressed.
- According to a research, by investing in flood forecasting system, the lower income group can save up to 70-80% of their assets and properties.



- Moreover when talking about economic opportunities, the focus is always on the quantum of water. Quality of water is something which is never talked about. The sustainability of the

“We always think about how we can get benefit from the river but never think about how we can give benefit to the river. You can make the power grid but you cannot make the water breed”

-Mr. Md. Sarafat Hossain Khan

ecosystem should be kept in mind before harnessing and economic opportunity.

- If we can move away from focusing on consumptive use of water then a lot of opportunities for collaboration would come up among the riparian countries.
- For Bangladesh it is not about opportunity, but it is about the survival of the people in the country.

## Summary:

Transboundary water issues are complex issues and therefore the issues which are common to all the riparian countries should be dealt with first. This would create a common platform for the riparian countries to share their concerns and issues. Multi-lateral and multi-stakeholder dialogues can help in achieving this aim. Such dialogues help in bringing the views of the different stakeholders (civil society organizations, government, funding agencies, academia, scientific community and media) at one level and promotes integrated and coordinated river basin management. A lot of individual efforts are being carried out in the region for basin management because of which there is a huge gap in the knowledge system. Jointly producing and sharing knowledge among the riparian countries can help in bringing regional cooperation in the region. Also while thinking about harnessing the benefits from the river, it is equally important to think about the health and the ecology of the river. This process of going through a dialogue for the establishment of a treaty is a slow process but this is an intricate issue which needs to be managed carefully and slowly. It has been speculated that the third world war will be fought over water. It might or might not happen. Irrespective of that, we should find ways of inclusive development for a sustainable growth of the river basin.

## Annexure-1

<b>SNo.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation, Organisation</b>
1.	Dr. Azharul Haq	President, Bangladesh Water Partnership
2	Mr. S.M. Shah Newaz	Director, IRM division, Institute of Water Modelling (IWM)
3	Md. Mahfuzur Rahman	ADG (planning), Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB)
4	Dr. AFM Afzal Hossain	Deputy Executive Director, Institute of Water Modelling (IWM)
5	Dr. Monowar Hossain	Executive Director, Institute of Water Modelling (IWM)
6	Mr. Mantu Kumar	Joint Chief, Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Bangladesh
7	Dr. Mohammad Ali Khan	Additional Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Bangladesh
8	Mr. Fazlur Rashid	Director, Planning-1, Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB)
9	Mr. Malik Fida A. Khan	Deputy Executive Director, Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information System (CEGIS)
10	Md. Jahid Hossain Jahangir	Member, Joint River Commission (JRC), Bangladesh
11	Md. Humayun Kabir	Additional Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Bangladesh
12	Dr. Aminul Haq	PSO, Water Resources and Planning Organisation (WARPO)
13	Md. Sohel Masud	Director, Flood Management Division, Institute of Water Modelling (IWM)

14	Mr. Amirul Hossain	Director, Planning-3, Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB)
15	Mahmud Hasan Salim	Director (Planning), Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA)
16	Dr. Zafar Ahmed Khan	Senior Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Bangladesh
17	Md. Jahangir Kabir	Director General, Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB)
18	Md. Sarafat Hossain Khan	Director General, Water Resources and Planning Organisation (WARPO)
19	Saiful Alam	Director, Water Resources and Planning Organisation (WARPO)
20	Ershad Shaik	Scientific Officer, Water Resources and Planning Organisation (WARPO)
21	Rafid M Khan	Development Officer, Uttaran
22	Md. Sazzad Hossain	Executive Engineer, Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB)
23	Zahirul Haque Khan	Director, Institute of Water Modelling (IWM)
24	Dr. Umme Kulsum Navera	Professor, DWRE, BUET
25	Netai Dey Sarker	AD (GIS), Department of Disaster Management
26	Kati Saidur	Water Resources and Planning Organisation (WARPO)
27	Md Rahman	DG, Haor and Wetlands Department
28	Dr. Anamika Barua	Executive Director, SaciWATERS
29	Vishaka Gulati	Research Associate, SaciWATERS
30.	Ms. A.C.S. Perera	SaciWATERS

