

**Bilateral Dialogue on the Management of Brahmaputra River
Basin**
**Transnational Policy Dialogue for Improved Water Governance of the
Brahmaputra Basin: Phase II**



**The Transnational Policy Dialogue for
Improved Water Governance of
the Brahmaputra Basin: Phase II**

06 August 2015

North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Limited,
"NEDFi House" G. S. Road, Dispur, Guwahati

PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

Time	Agenda	Panelists
10:00am–10:30 am	Registration & Tea	Dr. Anamika Barua
10:30am–10:45 am	Welcome address & Introduction	Dr. Poulomi Banerjee
10:45 am – 11:15 am	Keynote <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Shri. Likar Angu, Chief Engineer, WRD, Arunachal Pradesh2. Shri. Rishi Srivastava, Director (Reservoir Operations), Central Water Commission (CWC), New Delhi.3. Shri. Fazlur Rashid, Directorate of Planning-1, Bangladesh Water Development Board(BWDB) Dhaka	
11:15 am – 12:15 pm	Open session: Moderated by Dr. Aditya Bastola & Dr. Anamika Barua	
01:00 pm– 1:25 pm	Way Forward & Vote of thanks	Dr. Anamika Barua/ Dr. Poulomi Banerjee
01:30 pm onwards	Lunch	



Participants List

Sl.No	Name	Designation	Organization/Department
1	Mirza Zulfiqar Rahman	PhD Scholar	HSS, IIT Guwahati
2	Biren Basty	GIS Expert	ASDMA
3	All Gupta	Sr JT.Coman	MOWR,RD & GR
4	A K Mitra	Sr JT.Coman	TAC/WR/Assam
5	Rachna Yadav	HSS	IIT Guwahati
6	R K Chaudhary	Chief Engineer	NHPC
7	Sanchita Baruah	Assistant Professor	DHSK Guwahati
8	Rishi Shrivastava	DIR, CWC	Central Water Commission
9	Dr Rabindra Kumar	ENVS Forest	PCC, Arunachal Pradesh
10	PP Changkakah	CEWR Assam	WRD Assam
11	Ravi Shankar	SE HUE, CWE	Central Water Commission
12	Dr.Monowar Hussain	Executive Director	IWM, Dhaka
13	En.Pura Tupe	Chief Engineer Hydro Power	Hydro Power Development Arunachal Pradesh
14	Fazlur Rashid	Director Planning-1	Bangladesh (Water Development Board)
15	Partha Jyothi Das	Program Head	Aaranyak
16	AK Baruah	Secretary	Water Resource Department
17	Likar Angu	CE WRD	WRD Arunachal Pradesh
18	Dr. Anamika Barua	Executive Director	SaciWATERS
19	DrPoulomi Banerjee	Senior Fellow	SaciWATERS
20	Dr. Aditya Bastola	Senior Fellow	SaciWATERS

Agenda

This workshop was the third dissemination-cum-dialogue meeting, of the three-year initiative on Brahmaputra Dialogues. This workshop then focused on the common grounds of cooperation and roles of different stakeholders in informing institutional transformation at regional, national and local levels along with the dissemination of our findings.

Welcome address & Introduction

Dr. Anamika Barua, Executive Director of SaciWATERS, welcomed the delegates and thanked them for accepting the invitation to participate in the dissemination workshop of the Brahmaputra Dialogue project. She extended her gratitude to the participants from government departments of India and Bangladesh (WRD of Assam and AP, CWC, New Delhi and Water Board, Bangladesh) for attending the workshop. She then briefed the participants about SaciWATERS, the thematic areas where SaciWATERS work and the type of projects that SaciWATERS is presently involved. She informed the participant that among all the projects BD is a project, which is very close to her heart, as she belongs to Assam and she has grown seeing the river. She also mentioned of the huge potential that social and economic development has for the region but that is only possible if the river is co-managed by the riparian countries.

“Unlike negotiation, in a dialogue forum there is no winner or loser and hence it provides an opportunity to all the stakeholders to raise issues, concerns and also to find common grounds for corporation”

She then highlighted that BD is a project that realizes this potential and believes that a dialogue is the first step towards cooperation. Unlike negotiation, in a dialogue forum there is no winner and loser hence it provides an opportunity for all stakeholders to raise issues,

concerns and also to find common grounds for corporation. With this understanding SaciWATERS initiated the project in 2013 with support from The Asia Foundation (TAF) through two phases, between 2013 to 2015. She mentioned that while much research, particularly joint research has been conducted to understand the river they have been mostly academic in nature and are hardly shared with the policy makers. Hence, there is a need to start a dialogue to facilitate discussion among multiple stakeholders before any negotiation happens.



Dr. Barua explained that a Dialogue is an inclusive process, which provides a platform to different stakeholders to be a part of the process and identify new approaches to address a common problem. It is different from negotiation as it provides an opportunity to identify and consult as well as understand the constraints and opportunities in managing the issues in hand. It was emphasized that dialogue is also not about just sitting around a table, but it is about changing the way people talk, think and communicate with one another. It is with this objective in mind, SaciWATERS initiated the BD project, which initially started with mostly track 3 stakeholder but today she is happy to see a very good participation from track 2 diplomats along with track 3 participants. To be able to bring track 2 participants from India and Bangladesh, she said, itself is a big achievement to SaciWATERS.

Dr. Barua mentioned that the purpose of this workshop is to inform all the participants in detail how this initiative started two years back, what we have achieved so far and where we would like to go from here. She emphasized that SaciWATERS would like to take this initiative to the third phase, which would not be possible without the support of the stakeholders including government who have been part of this process since its inception.

Dr. Barua concluded by thanking all the participants again for attending the workshop and then requested Dr. Poulomi Banerjee, who is a senior fellow at SaciWATERS and also the principle investigator of the project to provide the background of the project and disseminate the findings of the project.

Dr. Poulomi Banerjee gave a brief description of the project and shared SaciWATERS experience in moving from track 3 to track 2 level, and also about the vertical (bringing Assam and Arunachal together) and the horizontal integration (India and Bangladesh), and the challenges faced in the last two years. She mentioned that different stakeholders across India and Bangladesh have pointed out that lack of dialogue has led to raising tension, speculation and apprehension among the riparian countries and hence SaciWATERS effort to facilitate a dialogue between the riparian countries have been appreciated by all.



She highlighted that, while discussing with different stakeholders about the River, most felt that there are robust engineering solutions to the river but what is missing is the social-economic underpinning. There is therefore a strong need for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) before any intervention takes place and these should be of trans-boundary nature. It was also emphasized during the dialogue process by different

stakeholders that there is a need for a basin level approach while conducting EIA too as the River needs to be viewed as a whole. While joint research like the one conducted by IUCN are good initiatives, but there is need to have more such studies and the research findings should be translated into the language of the community and policy maker. This gap needs to be bridged and dialogue could be one medium.

Similarly stakeholders pointed out that while data sharing through different agreements between the riparian countries is happening but these are bilateral in nature and data is shared only for the during monsoon period but not during lean season. Although it is possible to generate scenarios using satellite data, but satellite data cannot substitute the ground level, such data also helps in building trust with the community as well as between riparian countries.

Dr. Banerjee mentioned that stakeholders expressed their concern related to erosion, as erosion seems to be larger issue than flood management. She cited an example from Majuli, where during discussion most of them said that they are happy with flood as it makes their land fertile, but the concern is more about erosion and sedimentation. The stakeholders also mentioned that management of erosion and sedimentation has to be understood in the context of the trans-boundary nature of the river.

“There has to be a political will too which can lead to cooperation at the trans-boundary level and that is what this Dialogue aims to achieve”

Dr. Banerjee also emphasized the need of constituting an apex body or a trans-boundary institutional structure, which can be created through dialogue. Stakeholders suggested this during the Dhaka Dialogue in Bangladesh. She

emphasized that continuing the dialogue is important to push the agenda as far as possible. There has to be a political will too which can lead to cooperation at the trans-boundary level and that is what this Dialogue aims to achieve.

Unfortunately in the Brahmaputra basin nothing much has happened and whatever treaties have been signed they are all at the bilateral level. Hence it is important to push for multilateral agreements between the riparian countries. It may take time, as it took 37 years for Mekong to come up with a treaty, which is an outcome of successful dialogue process. Hence with this aim SaciWATERs is initiating this Dialogue with multiple stakeholders in the Brahmaputra Basin.

Dr. Banerjee gave a quick background of how the project initially started with Assam (India) and Bangladesh, and at track III level and now we have been able to bring in Bhutan and China as well. India, Bhutan and Bangladesh have involved representation from track II, however representation from China has been mostly from academicians. However initiating discussion with academicians from China for SaciWATERs is one major achievement. Moreover, this may be the first time all the four riparian countries have come together in an informal setting to discuss about the Brahmaputra Basin.

Key Session

The main objective of this workshop is to get everyone's suggestion on what we have achieved so far, to understand if we are on the right track and how to move ahead from here. She then invited Mr. Likar Angu, additional Chief Secretary, WRD, Arunachal Pradesh (AP) to give his opening remarks.

Mr. Angu, began by stating that he would like to share his personal views on the subject and not the views of Govt. of Arunachal. He appreciated SaciWATERs initiative of facilitating a dialogue between the riparian countries. He started by emphasizing that water is a complex issue. The share of AP is about 14.5 % and China's contribution is about 25% and the total flow is about 35% which is a significant volume of water between China and AP contributing together to the Brahmaputra River which flows from China to India and Bangladesh. Because AP shares a huge basin area, it has to play a significant role in basin management. Any good work AP does in basin management will also be beneficial to lower riparian countries (India and Bangladesh). He further emphasized that with the challenge of climate change which will have an impact on the water resources, it is very important on each State to promote basin and forest management. He therefore, fully endorses the initiative taken by SaciWATERs to continue this dialogue. He stated that there is a need for generating international consensus about the River, among different countries irrespective of the country being a part of the basin or outside the basin. He mentioned that it is important to generate awareness about the river through the support of Media. SaciWATERs can definitely play an important role here.

He reminded all the participants that the agenda of this workshop and the dialogue process is to bring in international cooperation in the sound management of the river. He added that "I as a representative of Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh fully endorse the agenda and that the dialogue should be taken forward". He also recommend that along

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with the dialogue, joint research should be conducted at the basin level by bringing in all the riparian countries on issues related to the river basin.

Dr. Aditya Bastola thanked Mr. Angu for his encouraging words and also for endorsing the dialogue process on behalf of the Govt of AP. He also thanked him for setting the questions for the participants of the workshop to discuss which includes international cooperation, climate change impacts and joint research. He mentioned that in the last two years SaciWATERs also realized that the project is not devoid of challenges, there are different views from different stakeholders and therefore this workshop aims to bring in these different perspectives & experiences into one platform so that SaciWATERs can raise the concerns at international level. With that he requested everyone to share their views and invited Mr. AK Mitra and Mr. Changkakoti from WRD Assam, to share Govt. of Assam's perspective

Mr. A. K Mitra stated that Brahmputra river system is now in his blood as he has been working on issues and challenges related to the river in the last 40+ years. His experience



tells him that it is not correct to look at the river system in isolation, apart from the river, there are various social, economic and environmental challenges which needs to be looked at too when we talk about the sustainability of the River.

As far as Assam is concerned, he mentioned that the most dangerous part of the river flows through Assam. Brahmaputra starts from Kobo where the 3 rivers join; it has as many as 126 sub tributaries. Apart from that there is also the problem of sedimentation, which is a huge challenge for the river. For the last 60 years, since 1954 Govt. of Assam has come up with various short & long term measures to control natural disasters caused by the river, which are implemented with the help of Center. One of the natural disasters, which occurs every year and is the sorrow of Assam, is flood. In spite of so many efforts every year flood occurs and there is loss of life and livelihoods. Although the state government has made its best efforts to reduce the flood related disasters but both in Assam and Arunachal in the recent years the intensity of water related disasters have increased manifold. Hence, there is a need for a comprehensive solution to this problem. Various suggestions have come like – holistic and basin level approach, integrated water resource management, regional cooperation etc. but according to him, all these will not succeed without dialogues and consultations between riparian countries.

Mr. Mitra mentioned that he has been attending all the dialogues that SaciWATERS have organized since 2013 and that for the first time he has seen some positive direction where riparian countries are coming together to share their views. He therefore endorse this initiative that SaciWATERS has taken, and if such an initiative is not taken by someone then the system of no discussion and no dialogue between riparian countries will continue forever, will not lead anywhere. Hence a platform is definitely needed for dialogue and consultation, in order to arrive to some consensus and as it is not possible to address all problems at one time so it is also important to prioritize some of the issues.

“Various suggestions have come like – holistic and basin level approach, integrated water resource management, regional cooperation etc., all these will not succeed without dialogues and consultations between riparian countries”

He emphasized that this is definitely not going to be smooth and easy. It took 36 years of rigorous dialogue to come up with Mekong River Commission

(MRC). The dialogue for MRC started in 1959 and eventually it was setup in 1995. They have a conflict solving mechanism in place because they are also no devoid of conflicts. But their attitude towards conflicts is different, they hold the view that brothers sharing the same house will have conflicts but the conflicts needs to be sorted before it grows out of proportion. The way with trust, confidence, dialogue and consultation a major trans-boundary river like Mekong has come up with a commission, similarly it is wrong to believe that it is impossible for Brahmaputra to come up with some kind of consensus with its riparian countries, it may take 10 -15 years but it is definitely possible through such dialogues. So, SaciWATERS has a long journey ahead to get this dialogue accomplished.

He reminded the participants that in the Dhaka Workshop there was a daylong deliberation with all the stakeholders representing India, Bhutan, Bangladesh and China.

He mentioned that it was interesting to see that Chinese delegates very opening expressed their views and have also invited SaciWATERS to organize a workshop in China just for the percolation of ideas.

He then requested all the delegates coming from different background with varied experience such as Shri. Ravi Shankar from CWC to share their ideas so that SaciWATERS could come up with a vision and a mission for the next 2 - 5 years. He stated that we all together should be able to come up with some policy level achievement by the end of 2 years and then we should plan further for the next 3 years. During these 5 years we should move from track 3 to track 2 to track 1.5. He also reminded everyone that although in the Dhaka workshop participants had different views and opinion related to the River, but one thing to which everyone agreed is that the dialogue should continue. He emphasized that we all need to keep in mind the bigger issues of water related hazards and disasters which brings sufferings to all. Let this mutual suffering led to common solution so that all the riparian countries sharing the basin suffer less, which will eventually benefit the people.

He then requested Mr. Changkakoti to express his views and opinion on the subject.

Mr. Changkakoti started by narrating his experience in the flood control department where he joined as an assistant engineer in 1970. He shared his personnel experience of working in Brahmaputra Board – Flood Control Division and that he was in charge of Dihan/Siang and Subansri River. During his term in 1980 the act of parliament was passed to constitute the apex body as Brahmaputra Board and in 1982 the Brahmaputra Board was functional. Based on his experience he feels that there is enormous potential in the region due to its vast water resources. If the potential of the river could have been explored in a manner, which is beneficial to all, today Assam could have been economically in the similar position like UAE. Nevertheless, he mentioned that, he can

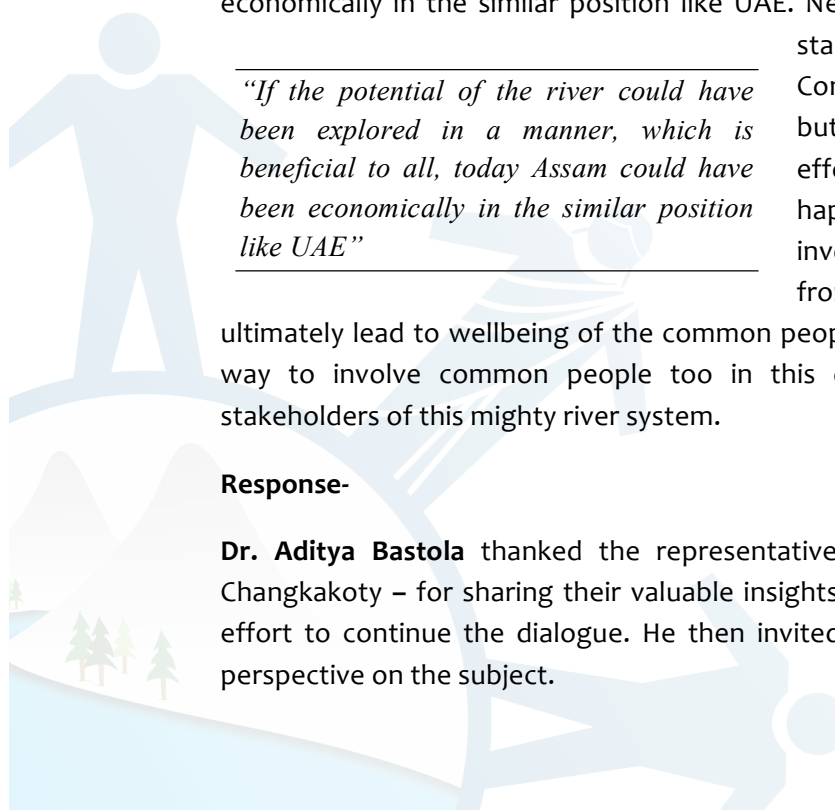
“If the potential of the river could have been explored in a manner, which is beneficial to all, today Assam could have been economically in the similar position like UAE”

start dreaming again of a Brahmaputra Commission, which may take 40-50 years but he definitely I appreciates SaciWATERS efforts. He also mentioned that he is very happy that this dialogue process will involve multi-stakeholders at multiple level from all the basin countries, which will

ultimately lead to wellbeing of the common people. He requested SaciWATERS to find a way to involve common people too in this dialogue process, who are the main stakeholders of this mighty river system.

Response-

Dr. Aditya Bastola thanked the representative of Govt of Assam – Mr. Mitra and Changkakoty – for sharing their valuable insights and also for appreciating SaciWATERS effort to continue the dialogue. He then invited Mr. Ravi Shankar to get the centre’s perspective on the subject.



Mr. Ravi Shankar began with a critical insight that usually when we talk about Brahmaputra Basin we forget about the other basin Yarlung Tsangpo, which is in China. So if we talk about Brahmaputra Basin then we will have to confine our dialogue between India and Bangladesh only, else we need to bring Yarlung Tsangpo basin if we want to include China into the dialogue. But at the same time we have to also remember that most of the water for Brahmaputra is generated in Arunachal Pradesh.

He emphasized that although for Assam due to water related disasters, Brahmaputra becomes the river of sorrow, but the river is also a very important resource of the state. Flood is a natural process, which is needed to keep the land fertile. So it not possible to stop flood but it definitely needs to be managed. We can talk about horizontal and vertical integration for dialogue, which is good and is required too but there is also a bigger need to sort out the problems between Arunachal Pradesh and Assam as there is a lot of water issues between these two states. He also mentioned that water is unidirectional it moves from upstream to down steam so any intervention made by the upper riparian will have to keep in mind about the impacts that may lead to in the lower riparian states/countries. He added that if Assam objects to any intervention AP makes which is beneficial to AP, Assam also has to understand that AP has been asked to make that sacrifice for the benefit of the lower riparian states without getting anything in return.

He also emphasized that China being the upper riparian usually is reluctant to come for a discussion. But if SaciWATERs is able to bring them onboard he said that he appreciates that effort. He added that it is also important that SaciWATERs involve other States of India including West Bengal. He feels that it is important that the issues need to be sorted first within India before taken it to the international/trans-boundary level. While Basin wise approach is good, there is a lot of things that needs to be worked out first within the country before talking about basin.

Regarding Data sharing, he mentioned that CWC has all the relevant data related to Brahmaputra, but this is a policy decision that data is not available in public domain. He also added that while data is shared but it is not shared for all the seasons, it is only shared for the monsoon season. He then poised the question that why do we need data for the lean season? He also added, such questions come from China to India and similarly India also questions Bangladesh.



He said that in Assam the main problem is erosion than flood. Erosion is caused by both natural and man-made factors. Various engineering solutions have been provided but many a times they have also failed. Another problem he added is the sedimentation of the river that is caused by the developmental activities in upper riparian states such as AP (e.g. roads construction, building houses) this leads to the sedimentation in the river. But the problem is, it does not mean that we can ask AP not to develop. He emphasized that even within Assam due to unplanned development the flood has started to occur very frequently. Due to construction of houses in the hills, it has led to sedimentation within Assam itself. Therefore the issues needs to be perceived from a holistic manner, piece-meal solutions are not enough. When disasters happen short terms measures are taken to reduce the loss or to cope with the disaster but no permanent solution is devised because after a few months everyone forget about it.

Mutual dialogue as initiated by SaciWATERs is happening and is a good initiative, but there has to be a strategy in place and it has to be well designed. It has to move step-by step, as bringing all the stakeholders together at one go in one platform may not help too much. Mekong is a good example, but Brahmaputra and Mekong are two different rivers that cannot be compared. He acknowledged Brahmaputra has high potential but the question is how to harness it. It has to be resolved with mutual understanding between the states. Central govt. is trying to find ways, to come up with North-East Water Authorities, but it is not devoid of challenges.

“Mutual dialogue as initiated by SaciWATERs is happening and is a good initiative, but there has to be a strategy in place and it has to be well designed”

He then emphasized that while SaciWATERs is trying to initiate the dialogue between the riparian countries, there is a need to

ensure that upper riparian also get a chance to put their points on table. It is not right to always question upper riparian when due to any development activities the lower riparian lose water. Both upper & lower riparian has the equal right to use the water.

He concluded by stating that for such negotiations to be successful, there has to be a political will, engineers and bureaucrats, all needs to come together and only then useful conclusion can be drawn. This is needed because most of the issues that are discussed in such platforms are policy level issues. He cited the example of data sharing. He mentioned that “data at the moment is confidential because of a policy decision and only a signature is needed to put in public domain”.

Response-

Responding to the points raised by Mr. Ravi Shankar, **Dr. Anamika Barua** mentioned that SaciWATERs is not looking at this platform as a platform for negotiation. It is a platform where representatives from riparian countries come to talk, share their views and there is no winner or loser as it is platform only for dialogue. SaciWATERs experience shows that if it is termed as negotiation, representatives are not willing to participate, as they feel there is nothing to negotiate but participants do feel that there is lot to share and talk.



SaciWATERS looks at it as a very positive move because many issues, which are otherwise not discussed and shared, are discussed in this platform. She quoted Mr. Ravi Shankar's remark on data sharing that to bring the data to the public domain is a matter of one signature and that SaciWATERS looks at it as a positive sign because it may be challenging but not impossible.

She emphasized that as Mr. Ravi Shankar mentioned, SaciWATERS also understand Mekong and Brahmaputra are completely different rivers, and has different usage too. But she mentioned that it is important to understand that SaciWATERS is not trying to compare these rivers, but SaciWATERS is trying to understand through international treaties like Mekong and other treaties, the process that they went through, 37 years what they discussed, what were the challenges, how did overcome the challenges, who were the stakeholders etc.

She appreciated the idea that first issues needs to be resolved within the country and she mentioned that SaciWATERS is providing that platform too, as dialogues have moved to the international level from the country and regional level. She also informed the participants that, SaciWATERS was very happy to have representation from China, although it was a challenging task but SaciWATERS could bring academicians from China who are working closely with the Chinese government. To understand more on China's behavior, SaciWATERS is also going through international treaties where China is a party to understand Chinese way of getting into a formal agreement. SaciWATERS feels that such understanding will help to bring China on board.

She then invited Mr. Fazlur Rashid from Bangladesh Water Board to share his thoughts on the subject.

Mr. Rashid first thanked SaciWATERS for inviting him for the workshop. He then mentioned that feelings of common people whether it is Bangladeshis Indians or even Chinese are the same, they can hear the heart beat of the common people. Such forums provide an opportunity to express our feelings. Many issues, which are usually not discussed in the political forum, can be discussed in these informal forums. For example, data sharing is one such issue which now know why it is not in the public domain and that it is a matter of signature. Also there are different layers of diplomacy but it is also

“It may take 72 years for Brahmaputra River Commission to come up but process has to start, and I am very optimistic that it will definitely happen”

important that we invite politicians to such platforms as observers; they will then understand the language and the feelings of the common people. River is not only about sharing of water, it is also about

sharing our joy and sorrow; it is also about sharing every problem like erosion or any other ecological problem. But to do so we need more such dialogue platforms and so he appreciated SaciWATERS initiative of providing such a platform. Agreeing with Mr. Mitra he mentioned that this dialogue needs to have a vision as there are two many compartments, we can discuss about one compartment and after we resolve that we move to the next, otherwise it will be an endless process.

He added that even though we are not able to bring in bureaucrats from Chinese, it is fine we can have Chinese academicians or common people on board as they can disseminate the discussion in their country, what is need is involvement does not matter who is involved. He also mentioned that the dialogue needs to be strengthened through research work and a regional knowledge base network can be created under the onus of SaciWATERS. He added that SaciWATERS should become the permanent office, who will ensure the continuity of the dialogue and the outcome of such dialogue meetings should be developed as published reports and it should be distributed in the relevant government departments of all the riparian countries

Responses

Mr Ravishankar responded by emphasizing that we have to keep in mind the river, the ecology, the politics around the Brahmaputra River system is a very dynamic one and this dialogue is a long drawn process. During this time the needs of the community, the thoughts on the river may itself change, so we have to keep space for such dynamism in the dialogue process. Ravishankar also suggested that one way of involving center could be by SaciWATERS approaching the center with the affected party. It is also a good idea to ask JRC to include both India and Bangladesh.

Mr Rashid, from Bangladesh, then suggested that all these will follow eventually but this dialogue is a good way to break the ice, even if it takes 72 years as he stated earlier.

Prof Monowar Hossain, from IWM, Bangladesh, reacted to this by saying that this dialogue can also reduce the time scale to 18 years too as through this dialogue we all are learning and also getting educated on issues which were not very clear earlier. He appreciated SaciWATERS initiative in facilitating this dialogue and also taking this initiative.

Mr. Mitra mentioned that this dialogue has been able to increase the level of understanding between the riparian countries. He has been a part of IUCN project too and he can see the trust building is taking place and this process therefore needs to be continued.



Dr. Ravindra Kumar emphasized the need to have a knowledge and research aspect into the project. He also suggested that it would be a good idea to invite opinion papers from stakeholders, which could be useful for common people, will also sensitize policy makers on the issue. There has to be some mechanism to disseminate the knowledge generated through this dialogue to multiple stakeholders

Dr. Aditya Bastola informed the participants that for the next phase we have proposed a dedicated interactive website and blog where everyone can share and express their views.



Mr. Angu mentioned that a discussion is going on to come up with a regional level Brahmaputra Basin authority (NEBRRA). Arunachal Pradesh has shown some opposition is accepting the terms and conditions laid in the document. He would like to clarify the reason for this opposition in this forum. He stated that any regulatory authority in some or other way try to restrict the wider access to water. So AP fears that it may have an impact on its access to water resource. While Mr. Angu appreciated the effort made and also commended the initiative taken by the center to have such regional authority but he felt that they would like to seek some clarification from the central government on certain clause that has been laid down in the document. He emphasized that it is not true that AP is vehemently protesting it, as they are very much in favor of having dialogues with Assam as well as Centre on this so that this initiative can be taken forward carefully and with a positive approach. Hence he expects that MoWR will take the lead in drafting it in a manner that it is doable and will not take away the water rights of the citizens of AP. He also mentioned that in national forums where such decision is taken, AP's representation is usually very low, as such their voice is not heard. He there suggested that center must ensure that the representation from all the NE states should be there and in equal proportion.

The participants from both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh deliberated on NEBRA and the challenges associate with it. There was also a discussion on how to elect the co chair and the vice chair for NEBRA and if it is possible for states where the water resource lies to have veto power.

Dr. Ravinder Kumar reacted to this by bringing in the challenges related to Environmental Impact Assessment. He mentioned that it is important that we study the cumulative effect of dams, usually EIA is confined to a state and downstream states and upstream states do it within their political boundary. But it is important that for issues like dams we should not confine to political boundaries and this needs to be coordinated by the centre. If it is not possible to have an international body immediately but at least national level body under JRC can be created to conduct such assessment to understand the impact at the basin level.

“EIA should be conducted at basin level and is not confined to political and administrative boundary of the state”

Dr. Bastola then asked Mr. R.K Choudhury, from NHPC to let us know his view on the subject.

Mr. Choudhury started by stating that the most important issue in front of Assam is how to use the water in the most beneficial way. Water management is the major challenge, hence a decision was taken that there should be a storage in Arunachal Pradesh for Assam. The problem was that the monsoon discharge is high and it is low during the lean season. So the only way to manage this is through construction of big reservoirs in AP as it is in the upstream. He emphasized that with such reservoirs we will be able to

“While flood is considered important to enhance the fertility of the agricultural field, but when impact of flood become devastating, it does not do good to anyone, and we then need to think strategies to get rid of it”- Mr. R.K Choudhury



manage the water flow as well as it will bring economic benefit to the region as a whole. We all need to together think how best we can utilize the water so that we can be make most of it. This will not only resolve the problem of flood but also erosion problem will be taken care of.

He mentioned that while flood is considered important to enhance the fertility of the agricultural field but when impact of flood become devastating that it does not do good to anyone, and we then need to think strategies to get rid of it. It calls for planning and implementation of flood management projects. To address all these issues, CWC and Brahmaputra Board together came up with the implementation plan for hydro-power projects in Arunachal Pradesh. CWC is one of the pioneering institutions of India. Mr. Choudhury mentioned that when he joined NHPC he saw Chinese engineers coming to CWC to take training, around 20 people used to come for 3-4 months for the training programs.

He emphasized that CWC has so much knowledge we need to use this knowledge to find local solutions to manage water resources. Using CWC and BB's knowledge it was decided that the reservoirs should be constructed in AP to control excess floodwater and the place of construction was also identified.

Before Subhansiri project started, a lot of studies were done to understand the impact of the project; these studies were done for years before it was actually implemented. Mr. Choudhury said AP raised the objection that because of the height of dam, some areas of AP will be submerged. He mentioned that we engineers studied the dam further to find a solution to this problem. Hence it was decided that in order to save the submergence of the area as highlighted by AP, it will be better to go for cascading development i.e. three (3) dams will be developed – Subhansiri lower, middle and upper. This was done with CWC's approval. Such construction will lead to flood moderation and will reduce erosion and siltation too.

Construction of Subhansiri Dam started in 2005, it continued till 2011 Dec, 8000 crore which is the tax payer's money has been invested already. But in 2011 work stopped, the problem of downstream and benefit sharing came up. So many experts committee has given their views on the safety of the Dam, CWC which is the supreme authority has also approved it, geological survey of India which is the constitutional arm of the government has also given go ahead but the work is still under hold.

Dr. Ravindra Kumar intervened and mentioned that more than technology; the issue is more of benefit sharing and employment.

However **Mr Mitra** did not agree to this and mentioned that the major issue is of downstream impact

Mr. Choudhury reacted to this and said that experts did a basin wise study, if downstream impact is a concern then we must look for a solution too – “*if there is an impact there must be a solution*”. He also mentioned that he endorses that sharing of benefit between the riparian states is an issue, and then both the states should be



brought together by CWC, SaciWATERS so that the states can sit together and find a way out. He mentioned that if this is not done we will lose out and no one will benefit or gain anything, neither Indians nor Bangladesh and the water will just flow into the sea. On the other hand China will reap all the benefits of the river.

Aditya invited Dr. Partha Jyoti Saikia to express the view of the civil society on the subject.

Dr. Partha Jyoti Das started by appreciating the concerns raised by Mr. Choudhury and that everyone including civil society also wants a resolution to the problem. However, there are some issues, which are of concern, particularly the downstream impact, benefits distribution and mainly dam safety. Although CWC is an expert and had ensured the safety of the dam, but still people from diverse discipline are expressing concerns in different ways related to the safety of the dam and we cannot ignore their concerns, as they are well known personalities in their fields. After going through these concerns there are quite a few experts who have changed their minds on the dam safety. Hence dam safety is definitely the major concern and debate is still going on and the 8 member expert committee who is looking into it has yet not come to any conclusion.

“People from diverse discipline are expressing concerns in different ways related to the safety of the dam and we cannot ignore their concerns”

Anamika Barua intervened and emphasized that the purpose of such dialogue is to provide a platform to make people aware of these issues related to dam and remove these kind of apprehension.

Mr. Das mentioned that he has been a part of the SaciWATERS dialogue process and this is the third workshop he is attending. He appreciated SaciWATERS effort in continuing the dialogue. He also emphasized that such dialogue can remove many misunderstanding and is a very good experience for all. He asked SaciWATERS to take the dialogue to the next level by bringing different stakeholders on board so that knowledge sharing can take place. He also emphasized the need for the states to strengthen their data management, as there are many tributaries of Brahmaputra for which no data is collected. This is something the states can take initiative to collect data of numerous tributaries of Brahmaputra.

Emphasizing the need of data, **Mr. Ravishankar** mentioned that CWC has data on Brahmaputra but since it is classified so it is not available online. But there is a request they provide the data but they do need to know the purpose for which the data will be used. But such questions are usually not answered and data sharing between state and center has also become a sensitive issue.

“Ecological needs to be taken into account when we talk about development and therefore a multi-dimensional approach is needed”

Dr. Sanchita Barua brought in the need to understand the ecosystem as a whole and the services they provide. She mentioned that river species are getting extinct and fish like Hilsa are getting reduced in number as there is no way for



them to breed as the natural channels have been cut off. There are no alternative provisions made for them to breed or to relocate them. The minimum river flow, which is required to sustain these species, is not maintained. Hence she emphasized that these are additional issues, which needs to be taken into consideration when we talk about development and a multi-dimensional approach is needed.

Everyone unanimously agreed that such studied needs to be discussed in the dialogue forum as it would be enlightening for all.

Anamika informed all that SaciWATERS in the next phase has proposed to organize workshops, which will provide a platform to all to share knowledge through presentations and deliberations. She then asked Mr. Pura Tupe from Arunachal Pradesh to share his thoughts on the subject.

Mr Pura Tupe started by emphasizing that Brahmaputra is a big river with a huge volume of water flowing, which flows through different states and country, hence a holistic approach is needed as it is also a life line for many people. He mentioned that there could be a lot of economic benefits coming from the river and India's position is very crucial in the international platform. Hence, such dialogue helps to discuss many things and to ease the tension between the states. But he emphasized that this forum should move beyond internal issues and bring Bhutan China Myanmar too, and more so for China as it is very difficult to understand what they have in their mind and such informal dialogues provides an opportunity to discuss many things openly. Hence we should focus at the river as a whole and not focus only from a state perspective.

“Such dialogue helps to discuss many things and to ease the tension between the states”

Conclusion

Dr. Anamika Barua thanked all the participants for their active participation and for the thought provoking discussion. She requested all of them to ensure the continuity of the dialogue by participating in all the upcoming dialogues. She informed that the next dialogue meeting would be scheduled in the early next year and SaciWATERS will send invite to all the participants requesting their participation.