

Regional Consultation on Cooperation in Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in the Brahmaputra River Basin

Organised by: Aaranyak (Guwahati)

With support from The Asia Foundation, New Delhi

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Venue: Grand Bhabendra Alay, Survey, Beltola, Guwahati-781028, Assam

Concept Note

People living in the Lower Brahmaputra River Basin (LBRB) that covers India and Bangladesh are highly vulnerable to water and climate induced disasters such as flooding, river bank erosion, land degradation due to sand deposition, droughts as well as erratic and changed nature of these disasters. The changing nature of these disasters due to impact of climate change in recent years has led to unpredictability and uncertainty in their occurrence with their impact on people's lives and livelihoods becoming more pronounced.

In the wet season, the basin is prone to major flooding and rapid geomorphological changes that threaten property and life. In the dry season, low water availability and an uneven spatial distribution of water causes water stress and competition amongst users. Climate change is expected to increase evapotranspiration (thus increasing water demand), alter the spatial and temporal distribution of precipitation, increase the frequency and intensity of floods and droughts, and accelerate glacier melting. This compounds the existing water management challenges in the basin. Millions of people are affected in various ways and these two countries suffer from colossal economic loss and damage every year from these natural calamities that have now become more intense, frequent and difficult to predict.

While national policies and programmes to mitigate these disasters have met with limited success over the six decades, communities affected by these disasters have survived on the strength of their traditional knowledge and innovative practices. But the overall adverse impact of these disasters is on the rise since the traditional coping and adaptation strategies are no longer adequate to deal with the changed nature of these catastrophes and formal disaster management measures have failed to provide desirable results on many occasions. As a result vulnerability and risk of communities living in riparian areas to water induced disasters have increased substantially.

Therefore there is an urgent need to help communities build-up their capacity to strengthen their coping skill and adaptive capacity and gain resilience to these hazards. At the same time the policies and programmes in both countries must improve to make communities more resilient.

Bilateral collaboration between the two countries is a must for any long-term mitigation strategy of such disasters to be successful in the lower part of the basin. On the other hand both India and Bangladesh are affected by interventions on rivers in upper riparian countries viz. Bhutan and China (Tibet). In fact Bhutan is also prone to downstream effects from parts of China (Tibet) and part of India. Therefore when we discuss about mitigation of water and climate induced disasters the whole Brahmaputra River basin needs to be considered from a

holistic and systemic perspective. Therefore, regional cooperation becomes the key to the success of disaster and climate risk mitigation.

Aaranyak is now executing a project titled **‘Developing capacity of community to improve resilience to disaster risk by promoting best practices, appropriate policies and regional cooperation in the Lower Brahmaputra River Basin in India and Bangladesh’** with four main objectives (i) help communities vulnerable to water and climate induced disasters in building up their capacity so that they can share knowledge, experience and opinion with experts and other practitioners and learn about best practices and innovative strategies of mitigating disaster risk and coping with impacts of climate change on their own(ii) facilitate exposure visits of CSO workers and community representatives along with government officials between India and Bangladesh so that they can learn about best practices of Disaster Risk Reduction(DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation(CCA) from each other and replicate them with necessary modification where possible in their respective countries and (iii) carry out an advocacy campaign for policy reforms at local, state and national levels in the two countries so that there is more support to local communities for attaining resilience to disaster and climate risk and (iv) contribute to enhancing cooperation between communities, civil societies and Governments of India and Bangladesh on DRR and CCA.

The project is being carried out by Aaranyak in collaboration with the Environment and Population Research Centre (EPRC), Dhaka. The project is funded by the Asia Foundation, New Delhi under its CSF (Civil Society Fund) Programme.

As part of the project’s mandate 35 individuals from CSOs and communities coming from 12 districts of the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam have been trained in increasing resilience based on their local knowledge and practices as well as with support from existing programmes and policies of Government and non-government organizations. A group of 12 people was taken from Assam to Bangladesh for an exposure visit. The group consisted of CSO workers, communities, Government officials, journalists and researchers who have been engaged in addressing DRR and CCA issues.

The group visited various flood and erosion affected areas of the Jamuna River Basin in the Sirajganj district of Bangladesh and interacted with local communities, government officials, NGO workers and river activists. The interaction in field and workshops provided opportunities for exchanging information, experience and knowledge among the visitors and local stakeholders of Bangladesh on aspects of river management, DRR and CCA in the two countries. It is expected that the knowledge gained by the visitors will be useful in introducing new ideas for increasing resilience of communities back in Assam.

Similarly a group of 12 people led by EPRC will visit a few flood and erosion affected places in the western part of the Brahmaputra valley in the second week of November. They will also take part in a knowledge-sharing workshop in the JN College, Boko, Kamrup District and interact with local flood affected people.

It is as part of this project that the Water, Climate and Hazard (WATCH) Division of Aaranyak is organizing the **‘Regional Consultation on Cooperation in Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in the Brahmaputra River Basin’** at Guwahati on November 10-11, 2017 at the the Grand Bhabendra Alay, 60 Basistha Road, Survey, Beltola, Guwahati-781028.

The purpose of the Consultation is to (i) deliberate on the changing scenario of water induced disasters (flood, flash flood, river bank erosion, excessive sedimentation of river beds and banks etc.), and climate change impact (erratic rainfall, extreme events, drought like situations, effect on agriculture etc.) in the Brahmaputra River Basin as a whole; (ii) discuss new and emerging issues like *development of waterways in the Brahmaputra River basin both in India and Bangladesh in relation to hazard mitigation and overall sustainable management of the water resources of the Brahmaputra River* (iii) recommend specific strategies for mitigation of water induced hazards exacerbated by climate change through sub-national collaboration as well as regional cooperation in water governance in the Brahmaputra River Basin and (iv). Produce a **'Regional Outlook on cooperation for disaster and climate risk mitigation in the Brahmaputra River Basin'**.

We are inviting experts, practitioners and policy makers from all the constituent states sharing the Brahmaputra River Basin in India as well as representatives from Bangladesh and Bhutan. We expect to have about 40 people for this consultation who will engage in intense brainstorming and free flowing discussions during the two days to prepare a roadmap towards transboundary collaboration at the sub-national and basin-wide level for reducing disaster and climate risk and improving community resilience to water induced disasters. We will further utilize this opportunity of a congregation of competent experts and practitioners to discuss new and emerging issues and concerns related to the management of the Brahmaputra River System.

For more information please contact:

Dr. Partha J Das, Head, 'Water, Climate & Hazard Division', Email: partha@aaranyak.org, parthajdas@gmail.com, M: 9435116558, 9957189404

Nayan Das, Project Coordinator, Email: nayan@aaranyak.org, M: 8638067341

Juri Baruah, Research Associate, Email: juri@aaranyak.org, M: 7086780838

Aaranyak (A Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation of India)
Administrative Office, House Number # 13, Tayab Ali Byelane
Bishnu Rabha Path, Beltola Tiniali, Bhetapara Link Road
P.O Beltola, Guwahati- 781028, Assam, India
Telephone: +91-361-2230250, Telefax: +91-361-2228418
www.aaranyak.org