

**On the occasion of World Water Day 2014**

**A SYMPOSIUM ON**

**SOUTH ASIAN WATER COMMONS:  
PEOPLE'S VISIONS ON TRANSBOUNDARY RIVER SHARING**

**22 MARCH 2014**

**9.00am-5:30pm**

**Constitution Club  
New Delhi**

**Organised by**

**People's SAARC-India  
South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People &  
ActionAid India**

The South Asia region is characterised by numerous river basins, that do not coincide with national boundaries. Many of these basins are shared between countries of unequal size and power. Sharing waters of transboundary river systems has been a source of ongoing tensions and conflicts in the region for more than half a century. Further, China's growing use of the eastern Himalayan waters is a source of concern.

Nearly all the water in Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan comes from a river shared with at least one other South Asian state. India's trans-boundary riparian policies affect four countries - Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh - on four river systems – the Kosi, the Indus, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. China's riparian policies affect nine countries to the south - Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam - on five river systems - the Indus, the Ganga, the Brahmaputra, the Salween and the Mekong.

Bhutan, India and China are planning inter-basin water transfers to feed their rapid economic expansion through hydropower dam constructions. Hydropower and dam projects impact local communities in upstream and downstream, livelihoods, cultures, lands, rivers, forests, biodiversity and disaster potential of the river basins. There are no credible - project specific or basin level - impact assessments, mitigation plans or compliance systems in place with free, prior and informed involvement of the basin communities. These impacts are accentuating the climate change impacts and adaptation capacity of the communities. Whatever benefits are generated from these projects, they are largely going to outside the affected region.

The ongoing inter-state conflicts over water have not necessarily addressed issues that impact ordinary people of South Asia – their access to water and impact on livelihoods for example. The Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna Basin covering North Eastern and Eastern India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, in addition to upstream China, Nepal, and Bangladesh has been dubbed South Asia's "poverty square", with substantially more people below the dollar-per-day poverty line than in all the countries of sub-Saharan Africa combined.

There is an urgent need to evolve a regional policy and mechanism on water commons that

work transparently, with accountability, and with participation of local people and impacted people, (especially the more vulnerable such as dalits, women, minorities, farmers and peasants) along with ensuring sustainability of the water commons, ecology and biodiversity.

The SAARC's energy policy is also pushing for harnessing hydropower on these rivers, sometimes with UN funding of hydropower and other projects under the UNFCCC's Clean Development Mechanism and funding from other bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, so there is need to evaluate and propose an alternative approach, maybe a 'South Asian Water Commons Convention' that takes into account equity, justice, sustainability and livelihood concerns.

It is in this context that People's SAARC-India, South Asia Network of Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) and Action Aid (Natural Resource and South-South Knowledge Hubs) are organizing a symposium on 22 March 2014 at the Constitution Club, New Delhi from 9 am to 5:30 pm.

### **TENTATIVE AGENDA**

9:00 – 9:30 am Registration & Tea

9:30 – 10:30 am **Opening Plenary:** Ramaswamy Iyer (India), Ajaya Dixit (Nepal)

10:30 – 11:45 pm **Session 1:** Kosi River Basin

Chair: Dr Onkar Mittal (India)

Speakers:

- Deo Narayan Yadav (Nepal)
- Dr D K Mishra (India)
- Gopal Krishna (India)
- Kameshwar Kamati (India)
- Vijay Kumar (India)
- Ranjiv (India)
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- Action Aid Study Team members

11:45 – 1:15 pm **Session 2:** Barak & Brahmaputra

Speakers:

- Dr. Mohd Abdul Matin (Bangladesh)
- Ravindranath (India)
- Action Aid Study team members

1:15 – 2:00 pm Lunch

2:00 – 3:15 pm **Session 3: Ganga & Teesta River Basins**

Speakers:

- Dr Kalyan Rudra (India)
- Tseten Lepcha (India)
- Arnab Bhattacharya (India)
- 
- Action Aid Study team members

3:15 – 3:30 pm Tea

3:30 – 4:45 pm **Session 4: Indus River Basin**

Chair: Dr Uttam Sinha (IDSA)

Speakers:

- Mr Mostafa Kamal Majumder (Bangladesh)
- Dr Sudhirendra Sharma (India)
- Basharat Ali, (India)
- Prof. Shakil Romshoo (India)
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- Action Aid Study team members

4:45 - 5:30 pm **Concluding Plenary**

- Anu Chenoy (India)
- Himanshu Thakkar (India)
- Ashim Roy (India)

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