

# **DIALOGUE ON MAINSTREAMING RIVER BASIN PLANNING**

WWF- India Conference Hall  
Lodhi Road, New Delhi  
9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> August 2011

**Organised**

**BY**

River Research Centre, Kerala  
Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment, New Delhi  
Gomukh Environmental Trust for Sustainable Development, Pune,  
Maharashtra  
Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, Badwani, Madhya Pradesh  
International Rivers, South Asia office, Mumbai, Maharashtra

## **BACKGROUND**

The National Water Policy (Sec.3.3) mentions that 'water resources development and management will have to be planned for a hydrological unit such as drainage basin as a whole or for a sub-basin, multi- sectorally, taking into account surface and ground water for sustainable use incorporating quantity and quality aspects as well as environmental considerations'. Despite acknowledging the significance of planning for the drainage basin as a whole, planning processes at the state as well as national level have ignored the same.

It is a fact that most rivers are facing human induced crisis: rivers have reduced outflows in summer, high fluctuations in the daily hydrograph as sediments, nutrients and sand get trapped behind dams, biodiversity and forest ecosystems degrading beyond repair, water extraction is more than recharge, to name a few. Livelihoods of river dependent communities, inland fisher folk, downstream water users and ecosystem dependent communities has been put at risk as a consequence of river degradation. Added to this is Climate change which is emerging as a major threat to water resources development and management in the context of altering hydrological cycles all over the world. Study reports as early as 2007 indicate that along with the dramatic changes in natural flows of rivers and the ability to adjust to and absorb disturbances, unexpected changes in global climate could lead to serious problems for ecosystems and people.

The current market driven agenda of the governments at centre and state and increasing private investments in all sectors has its impacts on rivers and water resources planning. The entry of private companies into hydro - power

projects, water allocation for irrigation and drinking water to villages getting diverted to feed industries and cities, water privatization taking control over rural water resources, mining and thermal power companies abstracting and polluting rivers and water bodies are some of the major sectors where impacts are already felt. In most of these cases, tribal, farming and fishing communities who are the most directly dependent on rivers and water bodies for their day to day existence are the directly impacted, displaced and marginalized. Striking examples are visible in the tiny state of Goa where mining is eating up the fertile lands and polluting the rivers for export of iron ore, the recent decision on the Jaitapur Nuclear Plant in Maharashtra, the hundreds of dams planned in the North East converting rivers into tunnels and leading to social and ethnic tensions amongst indigenous communities. Such trajectories of development driven by external interests rather than the country's real basic developmental needs are also linked to the lack of a proper natural resources planning with futuristic perspective. Can river basin approach to water resources and natural resources planning address some of these larger issues?

Over years, some critical questions have been raised with respect to the decision making process with respect to rivers and river basins. Some of them are:

- The need for *cumulative impact assessments* in river valley projects, including proper emphasis on *Carrying Capacity studies* for river systems;
- Consideration of downstream impacts and environmental / ecological flows while planning new dam projects to name a few. A move from minimum flows to ensuring optimal ecological flows of rivers.
- The problems due to large scale inter state or intra state diversions of rivers are creating problems of no-flows being allowed below dams that are raising major issues related to violations of treaties and their prolonged redressal.
- The National River Conservation Directorate has been supporting River Action Plans for 38 rivers. However, river conservation has been narrowed down to pollution control and related measures. The recently constituted National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) is silent on the nature of involvement of river basin communities in planning of resources and development projects.
- Placing large development projects like dams, thermal and nuclear and mining projects within hydrological and ecological limitations of river basins and irreversible socio - economic impacts

## **THE NEED FOR A DIALOGUE**

While it is evident that River Basin Planning, if designed in a decentralized scaling up manner with critical roles envisioned for the River Basin Authorities / Organisations, can solve many of the present problems mentioned above, there is a need for an effective dialogue on the issue. The need arises in view of the following:

- There have been limited discussion on this at the national level either at the Governmental level or by civil Society Groups on the issue of River Basin Planning;
- The dialogue could initiate a process of mainstreaming river basin planning into other national and sectoral plans;
- Provide a platform to express various views on the issue including likely problems so that a realistic approach could be adopted.
- Discuss on issue of importance especially on Cumulative Impacts, carrying capacity and ecological flows, protection of catchments and issues related to river basin planning.
- Ways and means to incorporate River Basin Planning into Local, Regional, State and National Level plans.

## **THE DIALOGUE**

The three day dialogue workshop on River Basin Planning proposed to be held from 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> August 2011 in New Delhi intends to bring together activists involved in dam movements and other social and environmental movements, civil society groups, experts in water resources management, environment, river basin planning, officials from all the relevant ministries and departments and others concerned. There will also be selected invitees from South Asian countries, including for sharing on transboundary issues.

## **INTENDED OUTCOME**

The intended outcomes of the dialogue are:

- To have a comprehensive understanding of River basin planning and its critical importance.
- Evolving or initiating a process to draft blueprint for mainstreaming River basin Planning at the national level.
- Developing an advocacy strategy to mainstream River Basin Planning issues.
- Sharing experiences, ideas and concerns with respect to River Basin issues.
- Build a platform of individuals, civil society groups and concerned government agencies to deliberate on the issue.
- Involving multiple stakeholders in the process of developing a blue print on River basin planning.

## **THE ORGANISERS**

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## **Tentative Structure and Agenda**

### **Day 1 (9 August 2011)**

*9.00 am - 9.30 am - Registration*

*9.30 am - 11.00 am*

**CHAIR: Sri Ravi Singh** - Secretary General and CEO, WWF India

Setting the background to Mainstreaming River Basin Planning  
- Prof Vijay Paranjpye

Keynote Speakers

- Prof Ramaswamy Iyer ( Former Secretary, MoWR)
- Dr. Mihir Shah ( Member, Planning Commission , Gol)

Brief Introduction to the workshop, its flow and expected outcomes  
- Dr.Latha Anantha

*Tea break – 11.00 – 11.30 am*

### **River Basin Planning -Viewpoints**

*11.30 am - 1.30 pm*

Presenters from the government will be invited for giving their views / perspectives / challenges / raising questions on the framework of river basin planning. They are Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Power and Godavari Marathwada Irrigation Development Corporation. This session is for opening the different viewpoints before the participants in order to focus on the discussion points and identify the missing links in river basin planning which will be brainstormed in the following sessions for the three days.

*Lunch – 1.30 pm – 2.30 pm*

## **Nuts and Bolts of Bottom up River Basin Planning Approach**

### ***Brainstorming sessions 1-9***

The brainstorming sessions will consist of placing a few questions on the specific aspect on river basin planning to be discussed before the participants and evolving strategies for the same towards the end of the session. The strategies will later fit into the overall framework for river basin planning. Perspective briefs will be prepared with respect to each session outlined below and circulated to the invitees before the workshop. Each session will be led by the resource person who has prepared the brief and assisted by a facilitator.

*2.30 pm – 4.00 pm*

#### **1. Broad Principles / Criteria**

*Tea break – 4.00 pm – 4.30 pm*

*4.30 pm – 6.00 pm*

#### **2. From Micro watershed to Basin**

*Levels of Up-scaling, Participation and Decentralisation*

### **DAY 2 (10 August 2011)**

*9.00 am – 10.30 am*

#### **3. Case studies**

*From Government led to community led initiatives*

*Tea break – 10.30 am – 11.00 am*

*11.00 am – 12.30 pm*

#### **4. Cumulative Impact Assessments in River Basin Planning**

*Lunch – 12.30 pm – 1.30 pm*

*1.30 pm – 3.00 pm*

#### **5. Across boundaries**

*Transboundary and Interstate water sharing and management*

*Tea break – 3.00 pm – 3.30 pm*

*3.30 pm – 5.00 pm*

#### **6. Accounting for Pollution in Basin Planning**

*Industries, agriculture and sewage*

## DAY 3 (11 August 2011)

*9.00 am – 10.30 am*

### **7. Do large dams hold water?**

The future of large Dams ( Irrigation and Hydro Power ) and Options Assessment

*Tea break – 10.30 am – 11.00 am*

*11.00 am – 12.30 pm*

### **8. Are river flows to the sea 'a waste'?**

Accounting for downstream impacts and environmental flows

*Lunch – 12.30 pm – 1.30 pm*

*1.30 pm – 3.00 pm*

### **9. Legal and Institutional framework including conflict resolution, equity, access, benefit and cost sharing aspects**

*Tea break – 3.00 pm – 3.30 pm*

*3.30 pm – 6.00 pm*

### **Summing up, Filling gaps and Consolidation of the Dialogue and Way forward to Mainstreaming River Basin Planning**

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