

Press Release

From *Water Initiatives Odisha (WIO)*

Wake up to the 36 year old “Model Bill on Flood Plain Zoning”

- **Just issuing a letter to BDA and BMC will not help.**
- **We need to have an immediate assessment of all encroachments of flood plains and free them with adequate rehabilitation and compensation to the poor and marginalised sections.**
- **Pursue for a participatory discussion on the National River Regulation Zone and push for a proper notification that helps proper river basin planning and management.**

Sambalpur, September 13 – We have just heard from media reports that the Secretary, Water Resources of the Govt. of Odisha has issued a letter to Bhubaneswar Development Authority and Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation to take strong steps and see that no residential areas are built on flood plains. *While we welcome this move, we see this as too little and ‘lip service’ to the real problem of increasing flood menace in the state.*

We would like to remind that way back in 1975 the Central Water Commission (CWC) had circulated a “Model Bill on Flood Plain Zoning” for the state governments to take it up as a model for freeing flood plains from encroachments by empowering the authorities appropriately. *However, 36 years have passed and the state government has not brought that into action in the state.*

The CWC had circulated the model Bill to all the states to help the state governments enact legislation. This Bill, if enacted, will have provisions like replacing dwellings in low-lying areas by parks and playgrounds so that vulnerability in terms of loss of life and property could be reduced. As per information available with us, the Bill had grouped different types of buildings

and utility services under three priorities from the point of view of damage likely to occur. The model Bill provided clauses about flood zoning authorities, surveys and delineation of flood plain area, notification of limits of flood plains, prohibition of the use of the flood plains, compensation and most importantly removing obstructions to ensure free flow of water.

However, the state government has never responded to this it seems. ***We therefore urge upon the Govt. of Odisha to immediately enact a legislation following the Model Bill, after ensuring proper discussion with the people of the state. As an immediate measure, before this process takes place, we urge upon the Govt. to issue strict circulars to all urban bodies of the state to remove encroachments from flood plains by entering into 'free prior informed dialogue and consent' process with the would be affected communities and adhering to best rehabilitation packages.***

The Govt. of India, under its Minister of Environment and Forests, had recently proposed to issue a River Regulation Zone notification to protect riverbeds from any harmful constructions in future. ***We urge upon the Govt. of Odisha to take a proactive action to pursue the Govt. of India to put this plan in public and initiate discussion with each state and the people of the country and bring into force a strict River Regulation Zone which can help in proper river basin planning and management and hence help rivers from further dying and also in reducing flood furies.***

For further information, please contact:

Ranjan Panda

Convenor, Water Initiatives Odisha

Sambalpur

Cell: 9437050103

Email: ranjanpanda@gmail.com

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Water Initiatives Odisha (WIO) is a state level coalition of civil society organisations, farmers, academia, media and other concerned, which has been working on water, environment and climate change issues in the state for more than two decades now.