

Training Workshop

UNDERSTANDING AND RESOLVING WATER CONFLICTS IN THE NORTH EAST, INDIA

23-26 January 2012, Guwahati, Assam

Call for applications

Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India (Forum to be brief), in collaboration with Aaranyak (Guwahati); Centre for the Environment, IIT (Guwahati); Arghyam (Bangalore); SaciWATERS-CapNet Network (SCaN) and Cap-Net, is organizing a Training Programme on **Understanding and Resolving Water Conflicts** at Guwahati from 23-26 January 2012. This is to invite applications from interested person from the eight states of North East India (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura) to participate in this training programme.

The Forum is an effort to bring together people who have an interest to work on water and water conflict related issues. The Forum began its work towards the end of 2004 as a collaborative effort of eight organizations and a few independent researchers and was supported by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). In the first phase of Forum's work the emphasis was on understanding conflicts and hence the Forum took up extensive documentation of different types of conflicts in the country. The documented case studies have been published as a book – *Water Conflicts in India: A Million Revolts in the Making* – by Routledge. The present phase of Forum's work, primarily supported by Arghyam, Bangalore, covers four broad areas of:

- Conflict Documentation
- Conflict Resolution
- Conflict Prevention
- Network and Outreach

The secretariat of the Forum is housed in the office of Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM), Pune. The Forum has also set up two state resource centers – one in Kerala (housed and managed by the Chalakudi Puzha Samrakshan Samiti) and the other one in Odisha (housed and managed by Shrishti on behalf of the Odisha Water



Forum). The Forum, in collaboration with Megh Pyne Abhiyan, is also planning to document flood induced conflicts in the country.

The Forum has always been keen on exploring the multidimensional water related issues in northeast India. It is fully aware of the eco-hydrological importance as well as environmental and socio-cultural sensitivities of the region. It is in recognition of the need to understand the nature of water related conflicts of the NE region that the Forum has embarked on an initiative to document selected conflict areas in the water front.

For further details on the forum, log on to <http://conflicts.indiawaterportal.org>

Rationale

Understanding conflicts and developing approaches and practical strategies to deal with conflicts is an important aspect of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). One of the critical issues in IWRM is contending and competing water uses and users and many of the conflicts are also embedded in this. Of course there are also other types of conflicts like conflicts due to dams, submergence and displacement, pollution induced conflicts, conflicts due to privatization and so on. If IWRM has to move forward then we also need to develop capacities of various stakeholders in the water and allied sectors: 1) to understand water in an integrated manner (from an IWRM perspective in terms of crossing disciplinary boundaries of bio-physical sciences as well as various social science boundaries as well as sectoral and institutional boundaries, 2) understand the present institutional and legal set up and see the type of reforms to be initiated at this level, and 3) to bring together various, especially conflicting stakeholders, into a process of knowledge driven dialogue process within the deliberative democratic framework.

Though water conflicts are not necessarily bad or negative, with every conflict the society (and the ecosystems) pays a price. If water conflicts are unresolved there is a strong possibility that all our development efforts might get hampered and further the food security in the country could be seriously compromised. Also, the ecological issues related to the water conflicts are a major concern that needs immediate attention.

One of the pre-conditions for conflict resolution is the ability of the stakeholders to analyse the conflicts in all their complexities and come to a scientific understanding of the issues underpinning the conflicts. It also requires a good understanding of water as a resource and its legal, policy and institutional context. The different stakeholders also should have the necessary skills for a negotiated settlement. It is in this context the present training programme is being organized.



Water Conflicts in Northeast India: The focus of this training programme

The proposed training programme would be focused more on the water conflicts in the North East. The Northeast, geo-ecologically a part of the eastern Himalayas is known for its richness in water resources, biodiversity and ethnic and cultural diversity as well. The region is drained by two large river systems of the World, mainly the Brahmaputra and the Barak (Meghna), both being trans-national rivers cutting across bordering countries. It is one of the rainiest regions of India. As a result the region is endowed with the highest water resources and hydropower potential in the country. With ownership of natural resources lying mainly with communities in most of the states in the region, state control over the resources has remained a source of disgruntlement for many communities. Moreover the dominant approach to developing and utilizing natural resources without much regard to participation of communities or traditional institutions in the decision making process has been a source of dissatisfaction of indigenous communities. The present development paradigm coupled with disregard of traditional institutions and community opinion has prepared the ground on which seeds of conflicts have germinated. The nature of water related conflicts in the region is typical of its socio-cultural complexity and political sensitivity. The hydropower potential of the region has attracted national and international attention with the result that more than 168 hydropower projects with large river dams are being planned for the region. A number of these projects are in different stages of execution by public and private sector companies. There is widespread concern over the observed and probable social and environmental impacts in the region. Protests against the detrimental downstream impacts of the large dams have assumed the proportions of a mass movement in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Flood, river bank erosion and sand casting are three serious water induced hazards that have significantly affected people's lives, livelihoods and agriculture and economy of states like Assam. Floods are also disasters for Tripura and Manipur. The state's approach to flood management has left a lot to be desired. Right from adopting short- term measures like embankments as the main method of flood containment, to lack of proper and culturally acceptable R&R package to not doing enough for saving riparian areas from collapsing in to the rivers, it has been a story of poor governance and management of flood mitigation. People are not only unhappy with inadequate rehabilitation and relief, they have started protesting against inappropriate structural interventions and the financial corruption of vested interest groups in the Government.

Quality of drinking water is another area of growing concern where conflicts are building up slowly. In the face of increasing contamination of groundwater with fluoride and arsenic and resulting health hazards, Government actions has proved to be too ineffective. Transboundary issues like building of dams by China and alleged attempts of China to divert the Brahmaputra

River within China are now topics of hot debate in the region. The upstream-downstream linkages within the region and the contiguous Himalayan areas are also contributing to conflict scenario. Landslide dams getting breached or diffused in Bhutan or Tibet have caused catastrophic floods in downstream areas in Arunachal and Assam. Unwarranted release of water to rivers from dams both in Bhutan and within the region has caused devastating flash floods in downstream plains. Lack of coordination between countries sharing the river basins is a major obstacle in resolving these problems.

The conflicts over water are not limited to the issues and examples cited above. These are rather indicative of many other observed or potential conflicts situations cantering around water. The proposed training programme is part of the 'North-East initiative' started by the Forum in 2010.

Objectives, modules, methods and team of resource persons

This training programme is aimed at introducing participants to the basic concepts, debates, theoretical and analytical approaches and emerging issues related to water, water conflicts and their resolution especially in the specific context of the North East.

The training programme will have modules on the following components:

- Understanding water
- Normative concerns around water
- Legal and institutional issues related to water
- Understanding water conflicts
- Conflict resolution: approaches, methods with special emphasis on negotiations, mediation and stakeholder dialogue

The training programme will involve lectures, group discussions, assignments, case studies and interactive sessions with resource persons. A good set of reading material would be made available to the participants prior to the training programme.

The programme will be coordinated by a team of resource persons having considerable experience on theoretical and practical aspects of dealing with water and water conflicts in different geographies of India. Key members of the team are Dr. Chandan Mahanta (Centre for the Environment, IIT, Guwahati); Dr. Partha J Das (Aaranyak, Guwahati), Prof. S. Janakarajan (Madras Institute of Development Studies, MIDS, Chennai); K J Joy & Suhas Paranjape (SOPPECOM, Pune.) We would also get a few more reputed resource persons from the NE region.



Target Participants

The programme is designed for middle level / senior level functionaries of NGO / civil society groups and movements, government officials in water resource departments, researchers/teachers from academia, lawyers, media professionals and activists working on water related issues. The seats are limited to about 20 participants. This course is exclusively for participants from North East India.

Programme dates, Logistics and Costs

The programme is scheduled during **23 to 26 January 2012**. This is a residential training programme and will be held at Guwahati.

The training programme would be held in English.

Lodging and boarding arrangements for the participants will be made at the venue. Local hospitality will be provided by the Forum. Travel support would be provided to participants up to 3 tier AC train or bus.

About SOPPECOM

Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM), the secretariat of the Forum, is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation working in the area of Natural Resource Management (NRM) primarily in the rural areas. It is committed to the principles of sustainable and rational use of natural resources, equity and social justice in the distribution of benefits especially to the disadvantaged sections like dalits, landless, women, democratic and decentralized governance of these resources. As an organization committed to these principles, SOPPECOM extends its support to grassroots groups working on NRM issues through training, resource literacy, and participatory planning, research and policy advocacy. (www.soppecom.org)

About Aaranyak

Aaranyak is a registered society working in the field of nature conservation in North East India since 1989. Its strength lies in applied research in biological, environmental and social field and its thrust area of work is the North Eastern India and Eastern Himalayas. From a small beginning in the year 1989, it has been slowly, but steadily growing as a premier research and advocacy organisation in North East India to cater to the complex needs of biodiversity conservation, natural resources management and livelihood improvement in this culturally diverse region of India. It is one of the most active NGO in the region and has influenced the policy making at national and state levels through its presence in the committees like 'Steering



Committee for Formulation of New Assam Forest Policy', Rhino Task Force and State Wildlife Advisory Board' of the Government of Assam as well as National Board of Wildlife.

About Centre for the Environment

Since the Earth Summit in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, a global consensus has been reached in addressing the pressing environmental problems facing us and preparing the world for the challenges waiting ahead. Great emphasis has been placed on the need for all sections of society to participate in working towards sustainable development - development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, every action at local level is equally vital for the continued economical and social development of the world without detriment to the environment and natural resources. The Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati has visualized an active role for itself in dealing with new directions and concerns emerging from the mitigatory efforts of environmental problems of the day. In order to give a concrete shape to this visualization, IIT Guwahati established this full-fledged Centre for the Environment, in May 2004. The main objectives of the Centre for the Environment are to promote interdisciplinary research and development, to impart postgraduate education, to create public awareness, to provide consultancy in challenging area and to train manpower for mitigating emerging environmental problems.

About SCaN

SaciWATERs-CapNet Network (SCaN) provides a platform for working in partnership towards strengthening the human and institutional capacity in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) across the South Asia region. It aims to integrate the available skills and knowledge, which are otherwise scattered throughout various institutions and disciplines.

Last Date for Application

The last date for receiving the application along with endorsement of employer/institution is **30 December 2011**. Applicants will be informed of the selection by **2 January 2012**.

Kindly send your application in the prescribed format accompanying this announcement via e-mail (as a .doc file) to waterconflictforum@gmail.com or post or fax to:

Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India

C/O Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM)
16, Kale Park, Someshwarwadi Road, Pashan, Pune 411 008. Maharashtra, INDIA

Tel: +91-20-2588 0786/ 2588 6542; Fax: +91-020-2588 6542

Email: waterconflictforum@gmail.com . URL: <http://conflicts.indiawaterportal.org>

