

Workshop on Environmental Flows: *'Towards maintaining natural flows in our rivers'*

8th June, 2012, Hotel Madhuban, Rajpur Road, Dehradun

Natural flow patterns are the heartbeat of a river. Each component of a flow regime – ranging from low flows to floods play an important role in shaping a river ecosystem and livelihoods of river-dependent communities. While many rivers in Northern India are still in a pristine free-flowing state in the upper reaches, ecosystems and communities dependent on natural flow regimes have already experienced the impacts of altered flow regimes due to engineering interventions such as dams in many parts of the region. Examples include the Tehri and Maneri Bhali projects. Work continues on and off on the Loharinag project and Maneri Bhali Phase II. Overall the state lists between 250 to 500 projects to be completed, which are estimated to impact the environment and livelihoods of roughly over 2 million people. Ongoing and proposed interventions will dramatically change the riverscape in the region in the future: whether it is the fragmentation of the Ganga river due to a series of projects being built with virtually no part of the river left to flow free, or the impacts of massive unnatural daily flow variations in Tehri dam due to the requirement of power-generation patterns of projects in region.

Rivers in the Himalayas and Peninsular India are in a very bad shape due to massive human interventions over the years. Many of the rivers have either stopped flowing to the seas or the outfall into the sea has dropped drastically over the years. Deforestation, dams and diversions, pollution and over abstraction can be cited as the main causes of such drastic reduction in flow of these rivers.

It is in this context that it becomes important to understand a major concept being used in current environmental decision-making on rivers in the country called 'Environmental Flows' or 'E-Flows'. While there are a range of definitions of E-Flows, the Brisbane Declaration 2007 defines them as: *'Environmental Flows describe the quantity, quality and timing of water flows required to sustain freshwater and estuarine ecosystems and the human livelihoods and well-being that depend on these ecosystems.'*

E-Flows assessment has now become a mandatory part of the Terms of Reference (ToR) for cumulative impact assessment of hydro electric projects across India. In order for us to make informed-choices about whether and how (on what terms) to engage with 'E-Flows' issues with respect to existing and proposed interventions on our rivers, it is important to understand the science and politics of 'e-Flows'. Some of the important issues include: the concept, need, objectives and modalities of environmental flows; understanding diverse methodologies; who all should be part of the assessment, implementation and monitoring; what are the negotiable and non-negotiables while assessing flows; and risks associated with current implementation in the country.

Against this backdrop, the Himmatthan Society, Dehradun and International Rivers, U.S.A., are organising a one day workshop on environmental flows in the Western Himalayas. A Primer on the What, Why and How of environmental flows is being published by the International River(IR), authored by Latha Anantha from the River Research Centre and Parineeta Dandekar from the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP). This will also be shared with participants during the workshop.

The workshop will be held on the 8th of June 2012 (Friday) at the Hotel Madhuban, Rajpur Road, Dehradun, from 9:30 am – 5 pm. The address of the venue is given below. Rooms have been blocked on twin sharing basis for those arriving from outside Dehradun.

A tentative agenda of the Workshop is given below.

Best wishes and regards,

Malavika Chauhan, Himmotthan Society

Samir Mehta, International Rivers

TENTATIVE AGENDA *(Subject to change)*

Registration: 9:30 am – 10:00 am

Session 1: 9:30 am – 11:30 am

Inaugural talk by Dr. Ravi Chopra *(Director, People's Science Institute, Dehradun)*

Introduction to the workshop and participants – *Dr. Malavika Chauhan*

Environmental flows – the concept, need, objectives and modalities - *Dr. Latha Anantha (River Research Centre, Kerala)* and *Parineeta Dandekar (SANDRP)*

Discussion

Tea break: 11:30 am – 11:45 am

Session 2 – 11:45 am – 1:00 pm

Understanding the 'Building Block Methodology' for e-flows - *Suresh Babu, WWF India*

Discussion

Lunch: 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Session 3 - 2.00 pm – 3.30 pm

Cumulative Impact of Dams in the Western Himalayan Rivers – *Himanshu Thakkar, SANDRP*

Tea 3.30 pm – 3:45 pm

Session 4 - 3:45 pm – 5:00 pm

Open session – Moderated by *Samir Mehta (International Rivers)*

Role of stake holders and way forward

Vote of thanks by (Vinod Kothari)