



SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES: JOINT DISCUSSIONS ON FLOODS AND FLOOD MANAGEMENT

January 11, 2013

Venue: Guwahati, Assam, India

Emerging Issues with Flood Management in Bangladesh and India

The Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna river systems of South Asia support and influence some of the most agriculturally productive, industrially populated yet precariously vulnerable flood plains in the world. *Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative* is a joint initiative between India and Bangladesh that is founded on a shared vision model for sustainable development of water resources in the countries. The project is founded on a hydro-diplomacy approach that strives to achieve consensus and benefit for all parties. Recent investigations led by Ecosystems for Life have facilitated a comprehensive physical assessment of the water resources availability of the region under a changing climate. Initial physical assessment by the joint research team comprising institutions from both India and Bangladesh have revealed that flooding will likely undergo major changes in its frequency and distribution in the coming decades. In particular, mega flood events as well as yearly recurrent flooding events were identified as having little dependence on local hydrological conditions. Rather, such extreme flood events that take on catastrophic translational dimensions will be increasingly dominated by hydrological and climatic characteristics in the larger upstream basins. The extensive regulation of the rivers and its tributaries by upstream dams and barrages coupled with the uncertainties of climate change will progressively result in less skill in forecasting of such mega flood events.

In response to the above concerns, a set of multi-stakeholder meetings were held in Bangladesh and India in 2010 and initial part of 2011, initiating the consensus building process and defining the areas of research focus. During these consultations, stakeholders emphasized the need to include floods and flood management within the research agenda. This topic was also endorsed by the National Advisory Committees of the project. Given the importance of the rivers and its tributaries for ecosystem function and sustaining the livelihood of about 200 million, it is now timely to organize a meeting focused exclusively on understanding the future large-scale flooding pattern under a changing climate. Since such large-scale flooding impacts both India and Bangladesh, can also impact and enhance agricultural productivity, damage livelihood (poverty), and have serious implications of hydropower generation (dams), such a focused meeting on flood management will directly tie to the five thematic areas of Ecosystems for Life,

- a) food security, water productivity and poverty;
- b) impacts of climate change;
- c) convergence of inland navigation and integrated water resources management goals;
- d) environmental security; and
- e) biodiversity conservation



Ecosystems for Life is now planning to organize a regional multi-stakeholder consultation on trans-boundary cooperation on flood management. Such a consultation will create the scope to exchange community¹-scale knowledge on flood preparedness as well as proofing against large floods considering the climate change scenarios of this region.

Objectives of the Flood Meeting in Guwahati

Without a radically new approach, the United Nations warns that the long-standing global economic crisis can potentially reverse the steady progress made on development in the region. Large-scale extreme poverty is projected to co-exist with high vulnerability to natural disasters and disease in an urbanizing 21st century. For centuries, the inhabitants of these basins have developed an inherent resilience against flooding that allowed steady economic development to take place. However, changing patterns of large-scale flooding now stand to undermine this resilience. Accurate contextual understanding of the emerging issues on large-scale flooding pattern in a changing climate and fast growing population is therefore key to robust local-scale adaptation by stakeholders.

The key objective of the meeting will be to bring together multiple stakeholders from India and Bangladesh to the same platform for a negotiated exchange of ideas on floods and flood management. The meeting will disseminate recent findings by the joint research team on the impact of climate change and global warming on future water availability and flood behaviour. Eminent persons from Bangladesh and India, will steer a comprehensive dialogue as to the crucial next steps for translating the research towards policy development and adaptation protocols.

The day long multi-stakeholder consultations will discuss the following:

- A. dissemination of the research findings on flooding patterns in a changing climate for the Brahmaputra basin; this includes the dissemination of the modeling and a vulnerability assessment report on community-based flood preparedness prepared for Ecosystems for Life.
- B. facilitate a contextual and community-based understanding of the implications of future patterns/projections of flooding.
- C. devise a trans-boundary plan of action for India and Bangladesh to achieve a shared-vision based approach towards flood management.

This Joint Dialogue is scheduled to take place in Guwahati, India, on January 11, 2013. A range of stakeholders including policymakers, representatives of various local communities, researchers and private sector representatives from Bangladesh and India will be invited to participate.

¹ 'Community' is defined as the smallest flood-impacted unit, a cluster of villages or a locale whose economic resilience is sensitive to flooding.

Proposed agenda

Following is a preview of the structure of the policy dialogue on January 11, 2013.

Time	Proposed Agenda
9:00 AM – 9:30 AM	Registration
9:30 AM – 10:00 PM	Inauguration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Ecosystems for Life
10:00 PM – 10:30 PM	Tea break
10:30 PM – 01:00 PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation on implications of changing patterns on resilience of communities against flooding Plenary session: Exchange of ideas on community-based flood preparedness in a changing climate: Identifying best practices
01:00 PM – 02:00 PM	Lunch break
02:00 PM – 04:00 PM	Presentation on emerging issues of large-scale flooding in a changing climate Plenary session: Policy agreement on flood management under a changing climate and Guwahati declaration: Way forward
04:00 PM – 04:30 PM	Snacks