

Community Dialogue on Sustainable Water Resource Management and Freshwater Biodiversity Conservation

ISET-Nepal and Samudayik Sarathi organized a community dialogue in Haripur 7 ward office in Sunsari. The objective of the dialogue was to discuss emerging issues and challenges in Koshi Basin mostly related to river management and freshwater biodiversity. About 32 participants attended this dialogue. The dialogue started with general discussion on significance and challenges related to river water. It then progressed to group work followed by larger discussions related to group work topics.

Opening session

The facilitator Mr. Tara Bahadur Bhandari from Samudayik Sarathi briefed on the objectives of the community dialogue and set the ground rules for the participants. Then he posed questions to participants related to their understanding of water and its importance. The participants shared that water is vital part of their lives that helps to fulfill their basic needs and support wide ranges of living beings. Conversely, it is also a major source of diseases and disasters. When the discussion shifted to freshwater biodiversity, the participants pointed that unlike forest with stronger policies and regulations, fresh water and its biodiversity are misused, overharvested and polluted due to lack to regulations. Likewise, the facilitator asked participants to ponder upon issues such as disaster preparedness and decreasing ground water level.

To help participants brainstorm and share opinions in next sessions, the facilitator asked series of questions such as:

- How to ensure Integrated Water Resource Management especially when water is taken as political agenda?
- How do you envision Haripur after 50 years in terms of water use, disaster and safety?
- What are the opportunities for better life?
- What is the status of freshwater biodiversity in Koshi region and their linkages with human society?

Group Session

In the second part of the dialogue, the facilitator asked participants to divide in four groups to discuss on following topics:

- Group 1: Approaches for sustainable water management
- Group 2: Key problems and challenges
- Group 3: Approaches for freshwater biodiversity conservation
- Group 4: Viable solutions

Outcomes of group work

<p>Group 1: Approaches for sustainable water management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase tree plantation and prevent deforestation • Discuss on sustainable water use and implement good practices • Promoting irrigation practices that minimizes the water use yet improve productions • Ensuring that development practices do not harm water bodies • Prevent water wastages • Introduce and implement appropriate policies and regulations that support sustainable practices • Improve level of awareness among individual, community and society for sustainable management 	<p>Group 2: Key problems and challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flooding problem in monsoon • Lack of appropriate irrigation facilities for fertile agricultural land • Problem related to safe drinking water • Flood early warning communication problem • Spread of diseases at time of flooding • Dry and barren land further exacerbating flood • Pollution due to unplanned development • Agricultural damage by flood • Snakebite during flood • Wild animals from Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve enter villages, destroy crops and attack people. Such intrusion more pronounce during flooding season since animals enter villages seeking safer locations
<p>Group 3: Approaches for freshwater biodiversity conservation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent misuse of water • Prevent water pollution • Conserve plantation and water sources • Control overharvesting of aquatic species • Ban use of poison during fishing • Promote organic farming • Haphazard road construction to be stopped • Raise awareness on importance of freshwater biodiversity • Formulate policies and regulation at national, province and local level to conserve freshwater biodiversity 	<p>Group 4: Viable solutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish safe drinking water • Strengthen embankment to prevent flooding • Construct a well planned canal system for irrigation facilities • Plant trees at the side of the road • Protect water sources • Manage boating facilities • Arrange safe shelter at the time of flooding • Timely arrangement and safe storage of food supply (as a part of flood preparedness)

Outcomes of open discussion

- Quality drinking water has become a problem especially at time of flooding
- Water demand is greater than supply so necessity of sustainable water management. Upstream users are to be conscious while using water as their actions directly impact downstream users
- River encroachment is common. Areas where river used to flow earlier are now being converted to agricultural land
- Fish population has decline in terms of population and diversity as well. People use poison for fishing.
- Wild water buffaloes and elephants are destroying the crops and attacking residents. Barrier against wild animals not effective
- Koshi hold greater value during festivals such as Maghe Sankranti and Kushe Poornima. However, locals have to take permission from Koshi Tappu authority to carry out cultural activities
- Flooding at the time of monsoon destroying property, lives and agricultural land. Lack of flood preparedness and more concern with relief.
- Flood alarm system is weak. Need of siren. Yet, Nepal police regularly communicate with Indian authority to receive information on water level.
- Fake flood news often circulates in area and sales of packet food increases. Participants perceive such news are spread by corrupt business group
- Farmers facing multiple problems. They face problem of seepage and crop destruction at time of monsoon, suffer from water scarcity during dry season and are now facing crop damage problems by wild animals. They lack suitable irrigation facilities too. Crop insurance in almost nonexistent.
- Armies do not allow people to collect firewood and logs floating in Koshi River. Indians collect those logs and earn benefit. People are dissatisfied with the fact that they have to take permission from armies for every activities related to Koshi.
- Government information is not evenly circulated. Elite locals take advantage of such information.
- Patriarchal societal structure is preventing women to express opening and their opinion are often disregarded. Women and other marginalized groups representations in various organizations are only practiced to fulfill the representation quotas.

Concluding session

After open discussion, the facilitator thanked all the participants and formally ended the program.