

Lessons Learnt in 2nd NARBO Training Workshop on River Basin Management and Organizations in Ways to Implement those in Bangladesh Situations

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Introduction

The 2nd Network of Asian River Basin Organization (NARBO) Workshop training workshop was held in Sri Lanka from 24-29th April 2005. The objective of this workshop was to share the experiences and information among the nations of South Asia in respect of River Basin Management providing an environment for discussion the issues, constraints and objectives of RBM. As the river basin management is a fairly new development strategy in most South Asian countries, it was a need of time.

27 Participants from 6 South Asian countries attended the workshop. The workshop was jointly sponsored by Asian Development Bank (ADB), International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Sri Lanka, Japan Water Agency, Global Water Partnership, and Lanka Jalani, Sri Lanka. A Core training team, with assistance from local Subject Matter Specialists, Professionals and Experts, conducted the training programme.

Topics Discussed

The training programme was very compact. It consisted of class lectures on different aspects, presentation of country papers by participants of each country, presentations on case studies of 5 river basins of Asian countries, presentation of Experiences of River Basin Management in Japan and Indonesia, group work, field visit to a River Basin of Sri Lanka, group presentation of findings of field visits, presentations of situations of the visited river basin by the concerned Officials, Researcher and NGO Executive, panel discussions, group work on development of effective River Basin Organization, etc.

The class lectures, the presentations, the field visit supported by presentations and panel discussions and the Group Work gave an ample scope for the participants to share experiences and have a detailed insight of existing Organizational Set-up, status of participation of stakeholders, degradation of environment, water pollutions, etc. It revealed that co-ordinations among the agencies involved in the development and use of water for different stakeholder of the river basin are not strong. Existing institutional arrangement are at adhoc level are not able to address the problems and enforce the laws and regulations. Laws and regulations are not also adequate in some cases.

The beneficiary participation is at the minimal. To be very honest, it is absent in the sense of effective role of the beneficiaries in resources management, project planning,

project implementation and O&M. Water sharing is also an important aspect where no stakeholders' participation was found, even consultation of different authorities/Govt of different part of the basin were also found absent.

Water pollution and degradation of environment were found to be major concern in the management of River Basin. Soil erosion by natural forces as well as by human interference are very common. Illegal deforestation accelerates soil erosion. Unplanned sand mining from rivers also found degrading environment. Unplanned and illegal settlement on the river bank, encroachment of water ways, disposal of untreated urban, domestic and industrial waste are the main cause of water pollution of the river basins. These result breakout of epidemics, water borne diseases and shortage of drinking water.

Sharing of water by different class of users is also a great concern in RBM. Water is becoming scarce and costly commodity day by day. Normally the users of upstream are enjoying the positional advantage in this regard. They are in the position to withdraw water depriving the users of lower region though there are country and international laws that water of the basin is the properties of the people of the whole basin and they should use the resources amicably. But by nature human being does not like to abide by rules. This gives in fight among the users. Even users of each group some times involve in fighting for sufficient water when there is a shortage. This signals requirement of efficient water management.

Strong data base not in respect of river hydraulics, but also other social parameters are considered absolutely necessary for any co-ordinated basin development.

Experience to be collected for Implementation in Bangladesh Context

Bangladesh is land of rivers and is one of the most densely populated flat delta of the world. She has excess water during rainy season and shortage of water in the dry season. Even, during dry spell of rainy season some areas face water shortage. Flood and drought are common events in Bangladesh as it is situated in the lower region of three mighty rivers – the Ganges, the Bramaputra and the Meghna. But only 7% catchment area lies in Bangladesh. Run off of upper catchment passes through Bangladesh over a short period of time. When water of more than one basin comes together, the extent of flood becomes so grave that the suffering of Bangladesh people becomes un-describable. Again in the dry season, the substantial withdrawal of river water in the upstream puts Bangladesh in shortage of water. The rivers are loosing navigability, irrigation projects are not functioning. Even drinking water crisis is acute. The ground water resources are also decreasing. The ground water table is gradually lowering down. It is also getting contaminated. This is mainly because of reduction in recharge. Previously, ground water was the main source of drinking water. But because of arsenic contamination in the recent days, alternative source of surface water has become essential.

How use the knowledge gained in NARBO workshop in Bangladesh Context

Presently there is no River Basin Management Authority in Bangladesh. There is no Provincial system also. Water problems and development are managed by state owned organizations under respective Ministries. Local Govt. is also active to some

extent. Administrative boundaries in Bangladesh do not follow the watershed boundaries. So, separate River Basin Organizations may be set up. But instead of creation of new organization, the existing organizations may be redefined. Co-ordination among the Ministries and department under them may be strengthened. The Apex body that to some extent exist may be made more functional with, more authority not only for co-ordination but also to enforce decisions taken in the co-ordination process. The Apex body should have representation from all relevant Ministries like Water Resources, Environment & Forest, Fishery, Local Govt. etc. Stakeholders should also be inducted in such co-ordination body to share their views in all sphere of project management. Co-ordination is also important at field level. Community Based Organizations (CBOs) should also be developed to build public awareness regarding the activities of the river basins, needs of other communities. But all these need strong commitment of political leaderships and attitude of co-operation among official and political Govt. of the basin depended countries. Joint River Commission of the Basin dependent countries should be made active and work together for evolving strategies for development of water resources for the benefit of the people of the region. NARBO secretariat may assist the countries in this regard.

Data base is reasonably exist in Bangladesh. She has several institutions for collection and preservation of Data. However for hydrological and meteorological data she needs support from countries of upper region as the major part of the River basin lies in the countries of the upstream.