

**Public hearing on problems of water management & displacement in eastern
up**

SAHYOG & World Commission on Dams (WCD), India

2000

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Keywords: development, natural resource management, water resources,
community based approach, public hearing, India.

The programme started as scheduled at 11.00 A.M. with the arrival of the Chief Guest Ms. Medha Patkar member of World Commission on Dams (WCD).

Dr.B.C. Srivastava, Secretary of SAHYOG*, formally welcomed her and all the participants. A Dalit woman from one of the flood affected village community and facing the problem of displacement presented Ms. Patkar with a bouquet of flower on behalf of all present.

**SAHYOG is s network of grass-root NGOs working on the issues of Floods and Water logging in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, India, strives to work on the issue of flood & water logging in Eastern UP. It aims to critic the water management from the perspectives of poverty, powerlessness of the communities affected, and their livelihood. It offers an alternative vision for people centered water management in flood prone and waterlogged areas.*

Background

Dr. Shiraz A Wajih, President SAHYOG presented the background and reasons for conducting the programme of *Jansunvai* (Public Hearing).

The regions of North Eastern U.P. and Bihar situated in the Terai region of Himalayas have a nearly homogeneous situation. Though the area of Northeast U.P. and Bihar do not have dams but they have other similar structures for water management such as embankments built along river coasts. Having a network of rivers, with dams and embankments, resulting in the situation of water logging, water locking floods in an area with very high population density result in a complex problem which people face in this area and which apart from other economic factors make the fruits of development inaccessible in many ways. The increased structural solutions to the above problems such as construction of embankments to check floods and canals for irrigation and other such mechanisms have also served to increase the disaster level and widen the impact of the problems.

Introduction

The areas in *Saryupar Plain* affected by floods were shown and the rivers covering this area were depicted on the map. It was seen that though the majority of rivers were small rivers, yet they have a major role to play in the flood impact. Some major problems that were emerged from 1998 floods are:

- The problem was intensified due to ridden break in the embankments at midnight
- Lack of proper water management in the area
- The untimely letting off of huge quantities of water from barrages in the hills upstream
- Lack of appropriate treaty on water management/floods control between Nepal and India

In this context it seems important for the Non governmental organizations and Government organizations working in the area to see it in a joint perspective for development. Little more on NGO's role in awareness building, surveying to bring out facts, pressurizing the state, facilitating link between the Govt. and the NGOs... Mobilizing people for different actions, including self - reliance. The role of media is also very significant in highlighting the actual situations and bringing the problems to the fore to help form a link between the people and service departments. The proactive role of media in 1998 floods can be seen as an example in this context.

So it seemed important for all of us to assemble here to discuss the problems faced by floods and how to manage it along with the villagers, thinkers and policy makers.

World Dam Commission and Public Hearing

Ms. Medha Patkar, member of World Commission on Dams (WCD) welcomed all present and emphasized on the importance of such public hearings as democratic, participatory mechanism which will help in bringing up the facts and solutions for the problems faced due to lack of sustainable water management measures. She gave a brief introduction to the WCD, its mandate, scope and work plan.

'Floods and Dams', she stated, is very much a theme studied by WCD. She informed the participants about Public Consultation held by WCD all over the world at different places such as in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cairo, Brazil and Europe with the support independent experts, NGOs, lending agencies, dam

builders and governments of different countries in search of an assessment of dams in the past and equitable and sustainable solution for the world wide problems of improper water management. A Global Meeting of People's Movements organized in 1997 from where an appeal for an impartial enquiry into dams' policy was issued to the World Bank resulted in formation of 12-member commission for taking forward this issue of dams and alternatives in a global context.

A study of 7 dams in river valley projects and another sample of 150 dams already constructed and their analysis is also being conducted to contribute towards a better understanding for effective water management and effective development. A report will be published in November 2000, which will incorporate the issues raised and findings on dams in the past and recommendations for the future.

SESSION I

Agenda: Causes and Problems of Floods

Chairperson: Mr. Lalji Singh, Ex. General Manager, NE Railway, Gorakhpur.

A panel was invited for discussion on the problem from of floods. The panel consisted of members from different sections of the society.

Prof. Jagdish Singh, Ex. Head of Geography Department, Gorakhpur University.

- It is important to discuss the problems of floods and its resulting problems.
- The displaced people of 1998 floods are still living in polythene tents after two years. It is important that relief and rehabilitation to them is ensured at the earliest.
- Problems of agricultural land turned to wasteland due to salinisation are serious.
- It is important to see what role the local people can play in flood management
- The excess and lack of water in the same areas at different times is a point to consider. The cycle of drought and flood is the problem to be analysed.
- It is important to conduct discussions on the distribution of water and its area between India and Nepal as the catchments are inter-state
- The three P's:
 - Prevention
 - Precaution and
 - Protection is important for solutions on these issues.
- Watershed management should be encouraged in Nepal and the upstream in India for reducing siltation in the rivers.

- The warning system through use of satellites can also help as a preventive measure for people living in en catchments areas.
- Long term planning keeping in mind the proper selection of crops and land use will also help.
- Making of appropriate drainage schemes is absolutely essential.
- Construction of a network of institutions such as schools, hospitals etc. in higher up places, which can be used as shelter places in case of floods.
- Some of the causes of floods were natural and some artificial:
 - The increasing siltation from hills in rivers and deforestation
 - The wrong land use pattern followed in the catchments by people

Mr. Lalji Singh- Resident of village Piprauli affected by the floods

He highlighted the following problems:

- Natural water drainage routes blocked due to embankments
- Water locking resulting in salinisation of agricultural land, the only source of livelihood
- Those affected by water locking are also affected by GIDA (Gorakhpur Industrial Development Authority) due to its land acquisition.

Dr. S.P. Tripathi, Journalist, Times of India

Causes of floods:

- Taming of rivers is the main cause of flood
- The building of embankments is an imported idea, without taking into consideration the local geographic situations of lesser slope etc. It is causing havoc
- Lower water holding capacity of mud embankments not properly assessed

Problems

- 70% population of villages of Eastern Uttar Pradesh is surrounded by water due to flash floods from the catchments as they are living very close to embankments.
- Apathy of government and callousness of service departments lead into people living as refugees for years after floods recede.
- The problem of storage of crops/grains and drinking water arises.
- Increased migration from the affected areas.

Solutions

- Raise height of embankments.

- Make 'Pucca' embankments only as a last option and where there is no other means to solve problem.
- De siltation of river beds from time to time.
- Plan new embankments only after proper situational analysis.
- Farmers need training in utilization of wasteland and new seed varieties appropriate for this new barren land.

Mr. Prem Sagar Patel- A social activist from Maharajganj district highlighted the problems of canals in 1952 - The Gandak Canal project in Maharajganj area

- Diseases due to water logging situation such as encephalitis, which claim hundreds of lives each year.
- Diseases such as leucorrhoea in women.
- Indigenous crop varieties) Kala Namak (aromatic rice variety) is on the brink of extinctive due to salination.
- Mahua, Mango & Sheeshum are also diminishing due to continuous waterlogged situations.
- Non availability of Safe drinking water is a problem getting worsened.
- Village 'Sohgibarwa' is like an island affected by both, flood & water logging also faces the terror of dacoits. The situation in such areas is serious.
- Mr. Chirkut Yadav- from village Turtipaar one of the worst affected villages at the confluence of Saryu & Rapti.
- The fertile land (top soil) is being washed away due to land erosion which is a very critical situation.
- Erosion needs to be checked at river banks through boulders.
- Flood is natural ands we should learn how to face floods.

Mr. Harsh Vardhan Shahi, Journalist, Bureau Chief, Hindustan (Hindi daily)

Started his discussion with historical perspective:

- Floods are a natural phenomenon and embankments are not a long-term solution. This was felt by the British and the previous rulers
- But in the post independence era, embankments were made and villages such as Distauliya, Kewataliya and Patwaniya have been inundated by floods time and again and completely destroyed by floods many times being situated close to river embankments
- The problems of ring dams in the area having inadequate system of siphons due to which problem of water logging and seepage have persisted in the area. This has also resulted in a decrease in paddy production.
- Inadequate government aids/promised services to the flood victims, as a result of which since 1998 only 10% of the victims have received Indira Awas (Indira Houses) under Indira Awas Yojna (IAY) allotments as yet.

Prof. Lalji Singh, the chairperson for the session summed up the proceedings as follows:

The reckless felling of trees and deforestation have caused unprecedented soil erosion which is indeed the root cause of frequent floods.

- Water reservoirs in villages were filled thus reducing the area of buffer zones.
- Financial management is very crucial for which at present has no system due to unclear policy and lack of commitments.
- Population pressure is also the basic cause which must be considered while discussing such problems
- A proper management of natural resources like soil, water and vegetation is required.
- Checking corruption is necessary for any relief, rehabilitation and other.
- Increased political will and commitment is also needed to take up the challenges and address the problems with human approach.

Mr. Ashok Chowdhary, Social Activist

His association with the movement of Ramgarh Tal Project in which 2500 acres of land was acquired had taken inspiration for launching own movement in 1985 from Medha Patkar's Narmada Bachao Andolan. This was considered as it was seen that the price of development was very heavily burdened on the common person.

Suggestion

- It is important to have the voluntary organisations to share a common platform to help combat the problems and raise their issues and launch a mass movement.

Mr. Kalpanath Singh, Ex MLA (elected representative of the area)

He elaborated the context of 1938 floods and its causes and tried to compare it with the floods in 1998. He said the flood of 1998 was more devastating than that of 1938 but it is unfair to attribute it with the development activities taking place in the state.

Problems

- The changing course of river Ghaghra had forced the authorities to add several villages to Azamgarh district.
- A village Sikanderpur in Chullupar Pargana has been lost in floods of Ghaghra and several villages like Distauliya have been drowned elsewhere.

Suggestions

- It is important to visit the interior parts affected by floods for finding situation specific solutions to their problems.
- It would also be important to know if siltation in rivers caused the floods in 1998 then why it not recurred in 1999.

Prof. R.M.Mishra, Vice Chancellor DDU Gorakhpur University

Prof. Mishra as a special guest, attended part of the hearing and expressing his deep concern over the issue as also appreciation of the programme concluded the session with the following message:

"Unless we identify our own needs and priorities and involve local people in the planning process and implementation, the projects will never succeed. Hence, bottom up approach is very much required. Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) is an example to be followed in this respect of building up a mass movement."

SESSION II

Agenda: Livelihood, Effects and Agonies

Chairpersons: Mr. Krishna Mohan (Swamiji) & Dr. Surahita Kareem

Mr. Lavkush VishwAkarma welcomed the participants on behalf of SAHYOG

Mr Tariq Rehman, Coordinator of SAHYOG facilitated the session.

- **Mr. Jata Shankar**, SEVA, Gorakhpur highlighted the problems related to livelihood of the displaced families. He invited Mr. Rama Shankar from the flood-affected village of Campierganj Block to share his experience and opinions. Mr. Rama Shankar narrated his agonizing experiences during and post flood situations. He pointed that water reservoirs like Surha Tal and other water bodies in his area have become heavily silted and have lost their water retention capacity further aggravating flood situation.
- **Mr. P.N. Singh**, Yuva Chetna Kendra, Deoria, narrated the incidence of A.P. embankment breach and grime situation of the displaced population from 25-30 villages. He also pointed that embankment in this region have been catalytic in creating social conflicts and divisions. There were several incidents when groups irritated by breach of embankments clashed which subsequently led armed violence between the people living inside and outside of that embankment. It is a situation like Pro breach people Versus Anti breach people. Sometimes it has created an unbridgeable rift between those who are rich, influential and also involved in obtaining contracts for development activities and poor and powerless people of the area.
- **Mrs. Srimati Mani**, Nari Kalyan Seva Sansthan, Kushinagar, raised the perennial problems of displaced people of Kushinagar district due to

Bikha- Retart embankment situated in Bihar because of lack of coordination between the governments of UP and Bihar. She prominently highlighted the sufferings of women and children in displaced families.

- 1998 flood victims **Mr. Sampati and Mr. Kaulesh** from Jaitpur and Rampur villages described their pathetic conditions. Since last two years their families along with several other families are still living on Terhia embankment as their villages have been washed away. "Although government officials do visit our places, they do not even bother to ask how we are living."
- Journalist **Mr. Raghavendra Dubey**, journalist sharing his experiences during coverage of flood-affected areas criticized media for being selective and commercially motivated. He narrated how professional compulsions some times prevent journalist to hide the truth and said deaths and people's sufferings are not sellable items for media. Does our government have any charter, agenda or action plan to combat the flood menace and address the problems of the displaced in longer perspective? He asked.
- **Mr. Kolahal** from Bhitwalia village said that his entire field is covered with neck deep sand and his cattle have died during floods. Earlier we used to harvest at least Rabi crop and leave our homes for four months along with family and cattle. Presently we have no option but to starve and drag our lives.
- **Dr. T.R. Sati** a representative of Poorvanchal Gramin Sewa Samiti (PGSS), Gorakhpur said that floods are bound to come we have to accept this fact and prepare our selves to Live with Floods. He narrated the results of flood preparedness in Savota and Mainpur villages situated near small Gandak River in Deoria district. He suggested that local remedies and water purification methods should be promoted to make people self-reliant and save money. Besides, government and non-government organizations should adopt specific flood affected areas for long-term intervention instead of relief work during floods.
- **Dr. D.K. Srivastava**, B.R.D. Medical College spoke about health aspect of displaced people. He said that displaced population is quite vulnerable to several serious diseases. Besides displaced people who migrate to cities and mega cities are almost free from social obligations and pressure and hence become victims of contagious diseases like HIV and Hepatitis B.
- **Dr. Ajendra Srivastava**, Lecturer, Law Faculty, DDU Gorakhpur University pointed that there is no scarcity of water on our planet earth as such. It is only the matter of management and equitable distribution. He suggested that sustainable use of water should be promoted and water should be considered as community asset. He observed that people have right to water and this should be made juridical enforceable right. Still there is no recognition of environmental damage per se. We have to promote Earth ethics, which demand responsible human

behaviour. As we have right to nature, nature has also claims against us, he added.

- **Shri Dargahi Sharma** from Rudrapur Doaba region suggested that proper drainage system should be worked out before construction of embankments and roads. Profits and loss of any project and plan should be assessed at micro level, he opined.
- **Dr. Ashfaque**, a social activist from Barhaj, Deoria narrated the pathetic conditions of small and marginal farmers who are forced to change their cropping pattern for their fields are covered with tones of sand. He along with Mr. Lavkush presented Muskmelons, which are now being cultivated instead of cereal crops in his region. This has threatened food security of the entire village, he added.
- **Mr. Nagendra Pandey**, Shashwat, Maharajganj described the flood situations in the region due to Rapti and its tributaries. He suggested that Majhuka, Chakkar, Panghaliya Nallahs should be cleared for drainage, Gerui regulation at Campierganj should be strengthened and another bridge is required at River Rapti towards the east of Nausarh Crossing which will be helpful in minimizing flood affects.
- Chairpersons **Mr. Krishna Mohanji** and **Dr. Surheeta Kareem** summarized the session adding that the issue is quite sensitive and must be addressed promptly. And it is possible only when community is aware. We have to raise the consciousness of the masses to initiate the movement they observed.
- In her concluding address **Ms. Medha Patkar**, member WCD expressed that people need development but not at the cost of displacement. Neither rehabilitation is complete with relief work. She said that a mass movement should be planned to raise the issue and highlight the problems. For this, she added-efforts should be made to raise awareness and consciousness of the people, organize the community towards decentralised, water and management and simultaneously initiating dialogue with the government while also preparing to struggle for the state playing its role efficiently and promptly other stakeholders. Concerns and suggestions reflected in this Public Hearing will place and discussed in WCD meeting, she informed.

Dr. B.C. Srivastava, Secretary, SAHYOG, Gorakhpur gave vote of thanks

Notes to readers

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