



Operationalising IWRM through multi-level cooperation and benefit-sharing in the Meghna River Basin (Bangladesh and India)

Tourism in Dawki River
Dawki (India) – Tamabil (Bangladesh) border @IUCN

Meghna river basin

The Meghna river basin is a transboundary river basin shared by Bangladesh and India, covering a total area of 82,000 km². Approximately 57% of the total area (47,000 km²) is located in India and 43% (35,000 km²) is in Bangladesh. The basin includes several transboundary rivers that originate from India and flow into Bangladesh, such as, Simsang (Someshwari), Umngot (Piyain) and Myntdu (Shari-goyain) rivers originating from the Meghalaya plateau; and Barak (Surma) river originating from Manipur.

The river basin provides ecosystem services through the provision of forestry, fisheries, agriculture, navigation and ecotourism, supporting an estimated 50 million people. The basin is also home to many different indigenous forest and fisheries-dependent communities, such as the Chakpa, Garo, Jaintia, and Khasi.

However, the productivity of the economic sectors are heavily impacted by the increasing population pressure, forest and wetland degradation, as well as impacts of climate change such as irregular rainfall and flash floods¹.

Joint solutions and integrated basin management approaches are required to tackle and minimize water governance challenges in the Meghna river basin.

IUCN Meghna basin initiative

Since 2018, IUCN is leading joint research and multi-stakeholder benefit-sharing dialogues to support the implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and climate-

¹ [MKF 2021 Key Messages and Recommendations](#)

resilient development of the Meghna river basin. The activities are facilitated through the Building River Dialogue and Governance for civil society organisations in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna river basins (BRIDGE GBM) project, funded by Oxfam's TROSA programme.

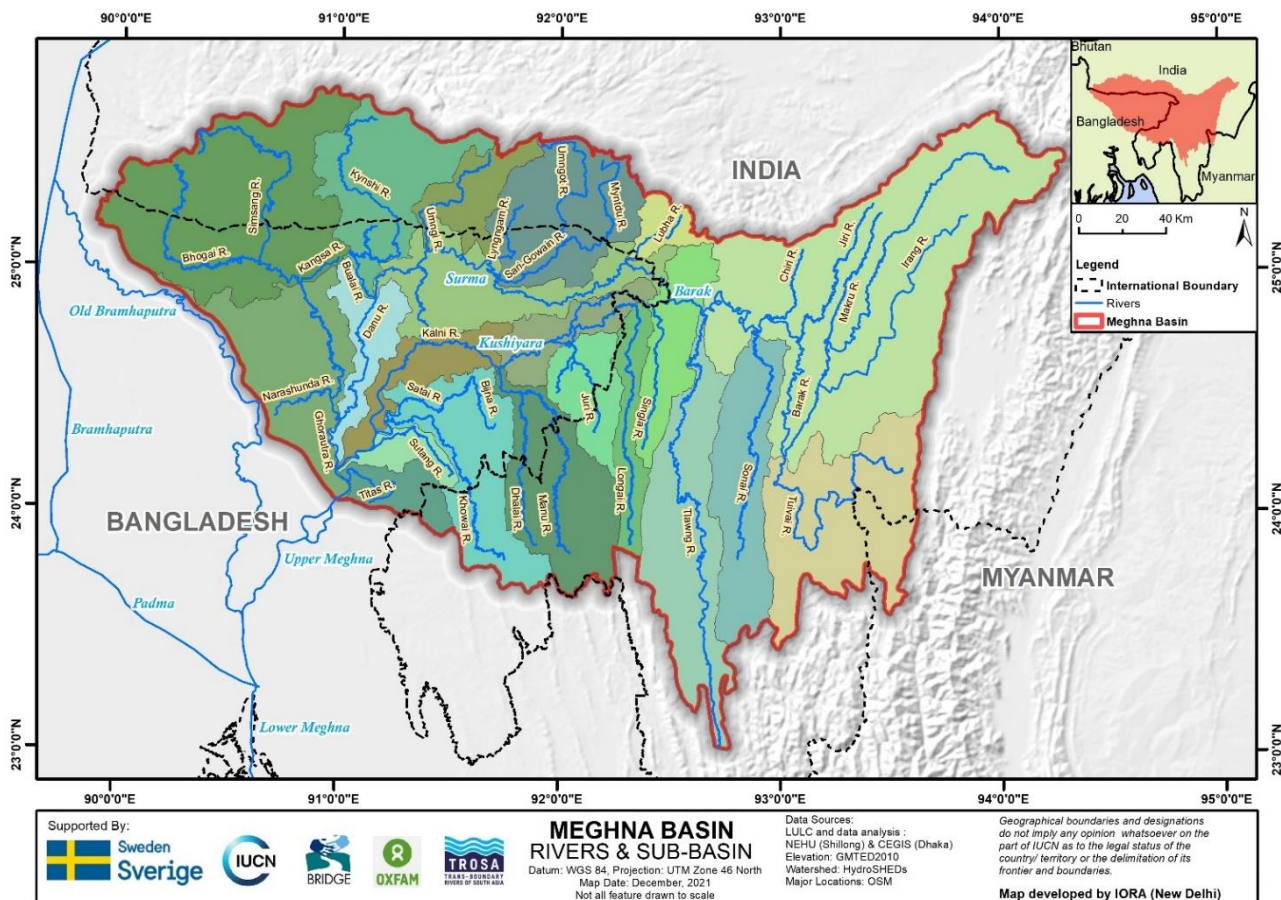
The Meghna benefit-sharing dialogues identified the importance of the river basin in providing ecosystem benefits, and highlighted opportunities for both countries to work together. This included joint management of forests to support flood and erosion control, and the development of transboundary navigation and ecotourism circuits.

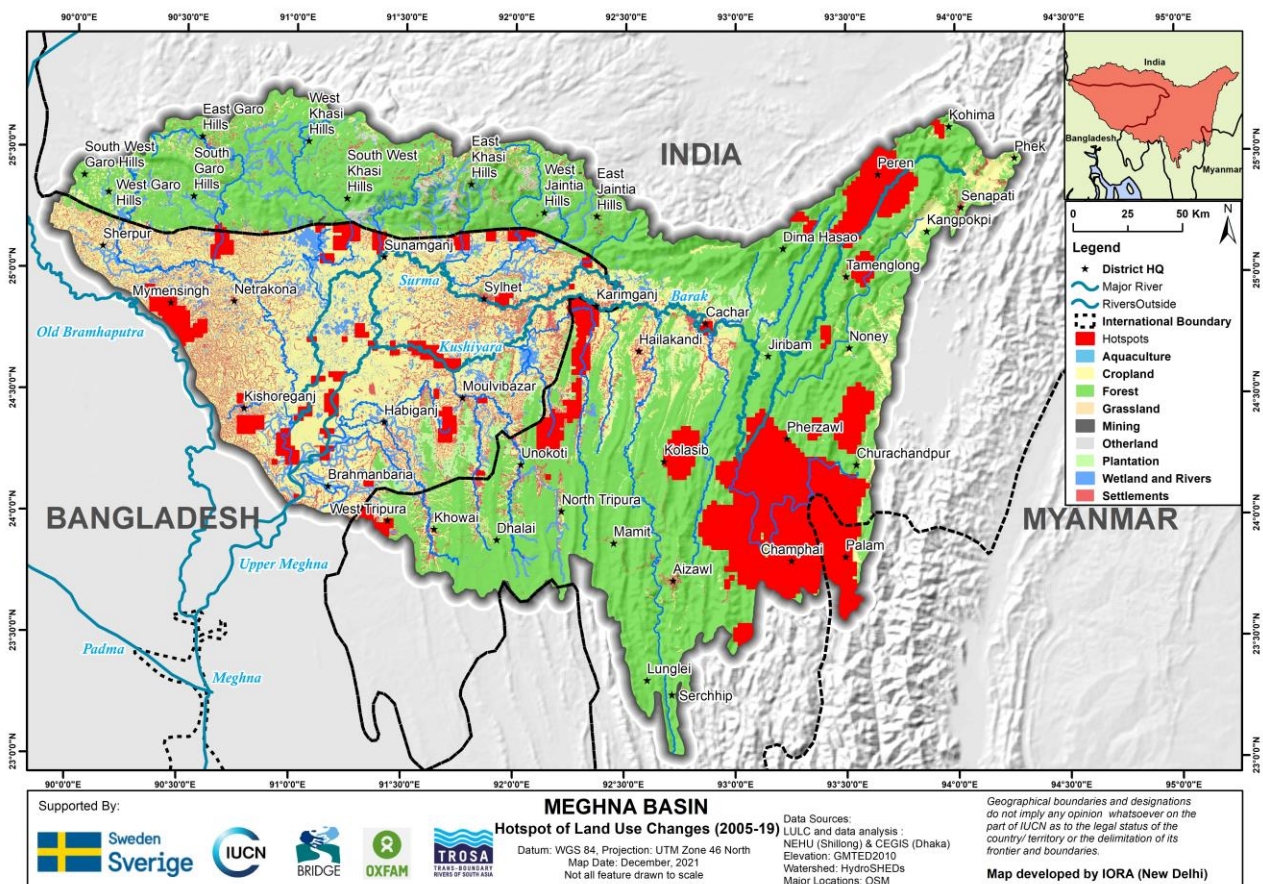
IUCN also initiated the Meghna Advisory Group (MAG) in 2019, which is an informal multi-disciplinary team of experts comprising of representatives from governments, academia, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from Bangladesh and India, to guide the Meghna dialogue process.

The Meghna basin land-use data was compiled for the years 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2019 (dry period, November-February) to identify hotspots of land-use change in the basin. The data also supported the development of maps of the Meghna basin and sub-basins to facilitate future dialogue on transboundary benefit-sharing opportunities in the basin.

In June 2021, IUCN convened the first-ever knowledge-sharing forum on the Meghna river basin, with over 100 participants each day. The forum consisted of 17 co-conveners and 40 speakers from high-level governments, CSOs, academia, private sector, and youth leaders.

The Forum highlighted the need for data on the Meghna river basin ecosystem status, water quality, and the impacts of climate change. The key messages from the forum emphasised the need to shift from solving issues to more effective cooperation for enhancing joint benefits. The key messages will serve as the basis for a series of dialogues at the sub-basin and national levels in 2022.





Meghna sub-basin dialogues 2022

Building on the results of benefit-sharing dialogues, IUCN activities in the Meghna basin in 2022, will focus on the sub-basin level, targeting the Indian state of Meghalaya and Haor region of Bangladesh. The activities will be supported by the IUCN's 'Shared Waters Cooperation Facility', funded by the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES), US State Department.

The state of Meghalaya acts as a catchment for the unique Haor wetland ecology of Bangladesh, contributing to more than 30 billion cubic meters of water flow through major tributaries, like Simsang, Umngot and Myntdu rivers.

The Meghna benefit-sharing dialogues have identified priority themes for transboundary cooperation between Meghalaya and Haor region. The themes include joint forestry and

fisheries management, as well as cross-border trade and navigation.

To support multi-level cooperation and benefit-sharing for operationalising transboundary operation opportunities, IUCN will work with the local governments, academia, CSOs and the private sector at the sub-basin level.

The activities will be designed to support the development of a business case, which will highlight cooperation mechanisms and the economic rationale for the development and implementation of benefit-sharing agreements amongst different sectors and stakeholders. The business case will also aim to promote cooperation for the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and to strengthen climate change resilience of the local communities at the sub-basin level.

Following activities will be implemented to support the development of business case:

1. Interviews with the local governments, the academia, CSOs, and the private sector to gather data and knowledge on the opportunities for sub-basin benefit-sharing.
2. Formation of a sub-basin working group with stakeholders from the local governments in Meghalaya (India) and the Haor region (Bangladesh), as well as quarterly meetings to support the drafting of the business case.
3. Partnership with academic institutions to facilitate the collection of data and analysis for building economic arguments to draft a business case for transboundary cooperation.
4. Meetings with Joint River Commission (JRC) for Bangladesh and India, as well as relevant central ministries in Bangladesh and India to get buy-in and inputs to finalize the business case.
5. A regional workshop with relevant government departments to disseminate the final business case and to identify the next steps for implementation.

As a cross-cutting objective, IUCN will promote women's leadership development and youth engagement during regional dialogues and capacity-building workshops.

References:

- [Opportunities for benefit sharing in the Meghna Basin, Bangladesh, and India. Scoping study](#)
- [Is Sharing More than Water the Key to Transboundary Governance in the Meghna River Basin?](#)
- [Integrated policy approach needed for the management of the Barak-Meghna River Basin](#)
- [Use of land for aquaculture, mining increased threefold since 2005 in Bangladesh](#)
- [Key messages and recommendations from the Meghna Knowledge Forum 2021](#)

About IUCN

Created in 1948, IUCN is a membership Union composed of both government and civil society organisations. It is the only environmental organisation with an observer status in the UN General Assembly. More than 14,000 organisations spread across 80 countries are Members of IUCN.

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