

Civil Society and Media: Partnership for the sustainable energy transition in the Ganges River Basin



Energy development and the Ganges River Basin

Energy is one of the main drivers of social, economic and ecological change in the Ganges River Basin, with a number of hydropower and coal projects operational and planned.

In India and Nepal, energy policies promote hydropower development as one of the main strategies to achieve energy security. In low-lying Bangladesh, the energy security strategy relies on imported power from neighbouring Nepal and India, as well the development of advanced coal-fired power plants.

There is increasing regional cooperation on energy among the countries sharing the Ganges River Basin, particularly Bangladesh, India and Nepal. In 2018, Bangladesh and Nepal signed a MoU on energy generation and trade. India and

Nepal have several bilateral agreements for joint hydropower development, for example, the Arun-III project in Nepal, jointly inaugurated by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Nepali Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli in May 2018.

The development of energy resources is crucial for maintaining economic growth. However, there are also concerns that decisions on energy infrastructure are taken with limited consultation and understanding of their impact on water resources, ecosystem services and community livelihoods, and with a limited attention to transboundary impacts.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) can strengthen transparency and inclusion in the investments on energy, through broadcasting community voices and sharing

data and local knowledge. By working closely with the media, CSOs can be an agent of transformational change. However, there are limitations to the involvement of CSOs, including shrinking spaces for CSO-led advocacy, platforms to reach a larger audience, and insufficient understanding of complex energy data and scenarios to translate them into impactful messages.

About the project

Funded by The Asia Foundation (TAF), and facilitated by IUCN, the *Civil Society and Media: Partnership for the Sustainability of the Ganges River Basin*, is a 15 months project, which began in December 2021.

Project activities will be implemented in Bangladesh and Nepal, with experts from India engaged via virtual dialogues.

Project objectives

The project will strengthen civil society organisations' understanding of options and scenarios for energy and water resource development in the Ganges basin, and build partnerships between civil society and media outlets to promote sustainable and inclusive governance.

The project activities are organised around two main components:

- Enhance CSOs' understanding of the costs and benefits of various energy development scenarios in the Ganges River Basin, through an analysis of the baseline situation and the development of key messages to promote sustainable energy development pathways.
- Strengthen the discourse on sustainable and inclusive power sector development

in South Asia through the implementation of a communication strategy jointly developed by CSOs and media representatives.

The activities under the two project components are designed to lead to the following outputs:

1. Baseline report on energy-water linkages
2. Scenarios for transformation to a more sustainable energy mix;
3. Regional capacity building workshops and the exchange of perspectives between CSOs and the media;
4. Development of a CSO-media advocacy strategy to promote a sustainable energy transition in the Ganger River Basin;
5. Implementation of the communication strategy through media engagement training for local communities, development of op-eds and regional dissemination workshops and webinars.

IUCN is partnering with the Energy, Water, and Sustainability (EWS) program of the Stimson Center, USA for the development of the baseline situation analysis and sustainable energy mix scenarios. The project will also foster partnership with the BRIDGE GBM CSOs Network, relevant local and national media, as well as the government agencies responsible for water, energy and environment from Nepal and Bangladesh.

For more information on the project, contact:

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