

Critical Engagement with Floods in India

Introduction

The Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India (Water Conflict Forum) in November 2013, published 'Agony of Floods: Flood Induced Water Conflicts in India', a compendium of case studies from different parts of the country, cutting across geographies and settlements. The rationale behind this publication was to showcase conflicts of varying character and intensity during the times of plenty (floods). The floods of 2020 in India across rural, peri-urban or urban landscapes have prompted Water Conflict Forum to once again critically engage with floods.

The months of July and August this year have again revealed the domination of human induced floods over the naturally occurring floods in India. Rural and urban landscapes in north-eastern, eastern, northern, western and southern India have been ravaged by varied floods resulting in unconventional standard as well as unconventional ramifications. As on August 24, 2020 in Assam, 5.69 million people have been affected during the 2020 monsoon. Flooding in 5,378 villages in 30 of the state's 33 districts have been reported. According to government reports 113 flood-related fatalities were reported from 23 flood affected districts. By the third week of August, flooding in Bihar impacted over 8.36 million people across 16 districts, according to the Disaster Management Department (DMD), Government of Bihar. The DMD reported 27 fatalities as a result of flooding. There are approximately 21 known rivers that have flooded North Bihar. In Uttar Pradesh, recent heavy rains have resulted in the second phase of floods affecting 1090 villages in 16 districts. Earlier, as many as 1,04,562 families and 38,248 hectare of agricultural land have been affected in the 19 flood-hit districts. Floods, landslides, and landslips following torrential rains have affected Kerala for the third consecutive year. On August 6, a landslide at Pettimudi settlement in Rajamala near Munnar in Idukki district claimed the lives of 52 people. On August 5, many areas in south Mumbai, which usually do not see waterlogging, were flooded for hours. On the other hand, three hours of incessant rainfall, recently created havoc in the city of Gurgaon (Gurugram). Vast stretches of the city including seven out of the 11 underpasses in the city were underwater. Various factors like indiscriminate concretization, disappearing water bodies, encroachment on natural drainage systems, unregulated dumping of waste and sewage are some of the reasons being cited for the largescale inundation. However, urban flooding remains an unresolved mystery, requiring comprehension and clarity.

In the eastern, north-eastern and northern parts of the country, the monsoon period is largely referred to as the flood season. However, since past few years, both the urban and rural spaces in western and southern India also have started experiencing floods on a regular basis, which is a departure from the usual monsoon disposition. Despite the variance, for majority in India, floods get defined by a common definition or are

observed as a common occurrence, largely triggered by either the dominant narrative, or because of the dearth of factual explanations. Therefore, realizing the need to propel the nuanced realities that surround floods across the country, and to share the legitimate reasons behind floods in diverse landscapes in India, the Water Conflict Forum will be facilitating the sharing of flood based experiences and knowledge with the intent of understanding rivers and floods through their diverse attributes, deep rooted integrity, duties, influences, and transformations (natural and human induced). Thereby, demystifying floods in general and contextualizing them as well. The interaction will largely highlight floods from a natural phenomenon across history and contemporary perspectives, transformation within river basins and their impact on different landscapes and settlements, gendered experiences of repeated preparation, coping and rehabilitation measures for survival, innovations for minimizing flood triggered challenges, and possible way forward.

It is with this intention, the Water Conflict Forum will be organizing five webinars with the flood series between September 10 and October 8 on regular intervals facilitating an interaction between individuals who are intrinsically linked with floods (have experienced floods, undertaken flood related research and advocacy, have raised voices, concerns and mobilised public opinion for better flood management) and an audience that are inquisitive to know about floods in India.

	Topic	Speakers	Date
Webinar 1	Understanding Rivers, demystifying floods	Dinesh Mishra, Uma Maheshwari, Ravi Chopra, Manoj Mishra	10 th September 2020
Webinar 2	Living with floods: Grassroots voices	Speakers from Assam, Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh/ Telangana, Mumbai, Odisha	17 th September 2020
Webinar 3	Are all floods the same?	Partha Jyoti Das, Shailaja Deshpande, S. P. Ravi, Eklavya Prasad	24 th September 2020
Webinar 4	Is climate change the only villain?	Jagdish Krishnaswamy, Nidhi Jamwal, Mahendra Yadav, Himanshu Thakkar	1 st October 2020
Webinar 5	Living with rivers and floods: Way forward	Nirmal Sengupta, Nirmalya Choudhary, Janki Andharia, Kamal Kishore	8 th October 2020

Time: 1600 to 1730 hours (Indian Standard Time/ GMT + 05:30)

To register, please visit:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeKL5xdpwgif7lqMOtNr0z0Mh0z1dbPg9jUS03k34q0l74bYA/viewform>

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