



Ecosystems for Life

A Bangladesh-India Initiative

Media dialogue on Trans-boundary Resources Management:
Bangladesh and India Perspective

Bangkok, Thailand, 7 Decemeber 2011



INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE



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BACKGROUND

Media dialogue on trans-boundary resources management: Bangladesh and India Perspective was organized by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) on 7 December 2011 at the Hotel Windsor Suites, Bangkok, Thailand.

Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative is a civil society led multi-stakeholder dialogue process to promote better understanding of the management of natural resources in Bangladesh and India. Ecosystems for Life works to develop a shared vision and understanding of food, livelihood and water security issues through collaborative research and studies, creation of a knowledge hub, developing research-based policy options and enhancing the capacity of civil society stakeholders to participate in the management of natural resources.

The media have an important role to play in awareness raising, consensus building and internalising integrated water resources management in decision making. While in the initial phase, media activities have been limited, it is foreseen that involvement with journalists and media professionals will become more proactive as the project progresses. The engagement of media in the dialogue processes is an important strategy but due to sensitivities surrounding the project, clear protocols and guidelines need to be established for interacting with the media.



In this light, the project planned to organize a dialogue on news reporting about trans-boundary resource management from a regional perspective. This workshop allowed media representatives from Bangladesh and India to work together to facilitate greater interest among journalists in reporting on trans-boundary issues, bringing positive changes. The media dialogue was attended by some 20 media professionals comprising journalists, editors, and academia from Bangladesh and India and also representatives from IUCN. Participants agreed that the meeting should proceed under the Chatham House Rule. According to this rule : when a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the

identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed". <http://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chathamhouserule>.

The agenda of the workshop included three panel discussions preceded by the inaugural session. The first panel discussion was on "**A Media Strategy for Trans-boundary Resources Management**" was chaired by C.M Shafi Sami, former High Commissioner to India. Second one was on "**Environmental Journalism in South Asia in the Context of Bangladesh-India Trans-boundary Issues,**" chaired by Michael Dougherty, Head of IUCN Asia Communications and the last one was on "**Media and Regional Cooperation on Trans-boundary Issues,**" chaired by Frank van der Valk, Project Director, Ecosystems for Life, IUCN.

Objectives of the Dialogue

- To create a neutral platform for media representatives from Bangladesh and India to work together to facilitate greater interest among journalists in reporting on trans-boundary issues
- To provide sources of information and share knowledge with particular emphasis on scientific aspects of water resources management
- To increase awareness about the three major river systems between Bangladesh and India, Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna
- To focus on issues that directly affect the lives and livelihoods of people; e.g. food security, climate change, inland navigation, environmental security and biodiversity conservation
- To highlight positive aspect of cooperation and avoiding stereotypes about other countries in order to promote trans-boundary resource sharing and management
- To keep the public and media informed about the progress of the trans-boundary water dialogue project "Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative"

INAUGURAL SESSION

Chair: Mr. Ganesh Pangare, IUCN Asia Regional Office

- 09:15 AM – 09:25 AM Opening Remarks by Mr. Ganesh Pangare, Head, Regional Water and Wetland Programme, IUCN Asia Regional Office
- 09:25 AM – 09:40 AM Introduction of “Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative” by Ms. Bushra Nishat, Project Manager (Bangladesh Part), Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative, IUCN Bangladesh; and Mr. Kazimuddin Ahmed, Project Manager (India Part), Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative”, IUCN India
- 09:40 AM – 09:55 AM Objectives of the Media Dialogue by Frank van der Valk, Project Director, Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative, IUCN Bangladesh
- 09:55 AM – 10:15 AM Media Monitoring

Opening Remarks by Mr Ganesh Pangare, Head of Water and Wetlands Programme, IUCN Asia

Mr Ganesh opened his address by welcoming all to the media dialogue organised by Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative, an IUCN led initiative, as the local host. He noted the visa issue was one of the reasons the meeting had to be held in Thailand. However, he stated the waters of the rivers and also the fish living in these rivers, for example the Hilsha does not recognise boundaries. He emphasized on trust building across the borders when dealing with trans-boundary issues and how the Track III approach which the project is complying with, can facilitate the development of a shared vision and understanding of trans-boundary issues. He then placed the significance of trans-boundary water resources in global context and how IUCN is playing the facilitating role to increase understanding of the values of ecosystems in the Bangladesh–India sub region using various dialogue processes at the Track III level. This Initiative also wants to connect at the policy level and contribute to hydro-diplomacy. Mr Pangare appealed to the journalists to use their influence, on how people think and act to promote trans-boundary water resources management and sustainable development for 620 million people. Scientific facts will help to create win-win situation in terms of reporting on trans-boundary issues, he added.



Mr Ganesh Pangare concluded his remarks by emphasising that this dialogue between media in both countries needs to continue and invited the participants to share their viewpoints on media reporting on trans-boundary water and their recommendations and comments on how the Initiative should engage with media in the future.

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

Presentation 1

Theme: Overview of Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative

Presenter: Ms Bushra Nishat, Project Manager, Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative



Basic facts including duration, project partners, vision, objective and approach of the project were introduced to the audience in this presentation. Ms. Nishat discussed the aim of the project which is to develop a multi-stakeholder forum for dialogue for managing trans-boundary water regimes, a comprehensive knowledge base on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and develop capacity to foster mutual learning and actions as a bridge between similar processes in the region.

She highlighted that the project is being implemented as a Track III approach for the dialogue, involving multi-stakeholders and civil society channels which includes

research, dialogue and advocacy efforts. Actors in this process remain outside the government apparatus but government agencies are informed about the process and the dialogue. The objective of such a dialogue is to build a platform for generating knowledge and mutual trust for settling issues or resolving disputes.

Covering the five themes, the project will try to achieve the change in policy through policy networks and civil society platforms. These will be facilitated through the Project Advisory Committee (PAC). The project will also try to achieve a multi-stakeholder knowledge hub on food, livelihood and water security issues and enhanced capacity of stakeholders to address food, livelihood and water. She also updated the audience about the progress of activities of the project.

Presentation 2

Theme: Objectives of the Media Dialogue

Presenter: Frank van der Valk, Project Director, Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative

In his presentation, Mr. Frank van der Valk focused on the importance of this media dialogue and how this event will connect and feed into the greater goal and expected outcome of the Initiative. Following on Mr. Pangare and Ms. Nishat's introduction to the project, Mr. van der Valk further stressed that the key focus of this project is the better management of the rivers and water resources systems in the region through stimulation of dialogue across borders and better communication between the civil society and researchers of both countries. Communication being an essential element, the engagement of media in this dialogue process is also important. The media has a greater outreach and will help in connecting with policymakers, government agencies, private sector stakeholders as well as communities living in this region. This will help develop a shared vision of trans-boundary water resources management amongst the constituency of the project.

Mr. van der Valk went on to introduce the communications strategy of the project highlighting the objectives and salient points in this strategy. He mentioned the website was one of the key elements of this strategy and being interactive he hoped key stakeholders will give their feedback and viewpoints. Touching on the need for translating the technical and scientific reports and articles into easy to understand jargon free language is crucial for wider dissemination to reach a larger audience. He emphasised that this is the first of series of media dialogues and collaborative events.



He introduced the three sessions of the media dialogue, highlighting the expected outcome of the dialogue. Considering the contentiousness and sensitivity of the issue in the public domain, in conclusion, he assured the participants can be straightforward and open in their discussions and hoped the sessions will bring out some strategic directions for the project.

Presentation 3

Theme: Media Monitoring: A Review of Reportage on Trans-boundary Issues in Bangladesh and India

Presenter: Kazimuddin Ahmed, Project Manager, Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative

Mr. Kazimuddin Ahmed presented the preliminary results of the media monitoring exercise initiated by the project. He emphasised the report is in its draft preliminary stages and the presentation was to set the stage for a more comprehensive discussion.

Mr. Ahmed stressed the importance of engagement of media to raise awareness, cultivate perceptions and disseminate scientific findings to a larger audience. Monitoring of media reportage has been one of the key activities as far as media is concerned. This activity started in July 2011 with the aim to understand how journalists report on trans-boundary issues especially related to water, to provide comparative analysis of focus of the two countries in this regard, to monitor interaction of the Initiative with media and also identify ways to increase science based reporting. One of outputs of this activity, the archiving of related articles will be an important resource of information. He mentioned the project had decided on using the anticipated Teesta talks as a case study for the media monitoring report and the focus was given on the articulation of technical information in the reports, the use of experts and reports to increase the credibility of an article and how the larger picture including poverty, health were brought into the picture.



While discussing the process the participants gave recommendations especially on seeing the statistical analysis, which contained some errors. The participants expressed that media monitoring firms often do not have the right perspective and collect news clippings based on word search. To

add value to the exercise, a proper analysis with inclusion of all types of media, print, audio and video needs to be taken up. Selection and analysis of information needs to be dealt very carefully during media monitoring. One of the participants, opined that the choice of reports in the presentation were mainly national, regional papers especially North East Indian papers and West Bengali papers should be included in the search list. Another participant recommended that importance be given to the title of the news, coverage, position within the newspaper rather than limiting the basis for analysis to a word search. Acknowledging the inaccuracy in the monitoring report, Mr. Ahmed assured the participants that their recommendations will be the basis of media monitoring of the initiative in 2012 and onwards.

ROUND OF INTRODUCTION

At this point, participants introduced themselves to the gathering by giving names and affiliation.

SESSION ONE

A Media Strategy for Trans-boundary Resources Management

Chair: C.M. Shafi Sami, Member of Project Advisory Committee, IUCN and Former Foreign Secretary, Government of Bangladesh



Panellists:

- Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury, Editor Advisor, Financial Express, Dhaka
- Aynpuram S. Panneerselvan, Executive Director, PANOS South Asia, Chennai
- Kalyan Paul, Grassroots Development Foundation, Ranikhet, India
- Abed Khan, Chief Editor, Daily Jagoron, Dhaka

Highlights of the Panel Discussion:

The first panellist of the workshop drew attention to the significance of holding the media dialogue in Thailand, as the country recently witnessed severe and devastating floods. The selection of this venue highlights the importance of effective water resources management and giving room for the river. Additionally, Thailand is also a part of the Mekong River Commission and sets an example of co-operation for trans-boundary water management.

The panelist quoted poetic lines from the late Tagore and Nazrul and also recently deceased Bhupen Hazarika to emphasize value of water and rivers in the everyday life and livelihoods of people living in this region. He emphasized on the need to bring in wider regional aspects rather than confining the issues between the two countries Bangladesh and India. Disputes and discontent is part of all regional and trans-boundary resources and is very much common all over the world, however with positive attitude disputes can be resolved, and Ecosystems for Life project can play an important role in creating bridges within the region. He highly commended the strategy of the project to focus and involve the media in trans-boundary water dialogue. In order to achieve this goal, the project needs to understand how media is responding to water issues and can then catalyse media response and reaction to events and issues related to trans-boundary water management. Additionally, the project should organise capacity building and training workshops for media to involve, motivate and inform journalists and media professionals on environment and water. Journalists in turn can play a greater role in influencing policy and decision makers to take decisions for sound management of water resources.

Another panellist emphasized on the role of media on policy advocacy. He opined that the governments in both countries need to be influenced and motivated to take decisions for better management of our trans-boundary rivers based on scientific facts. Journalists can influence this process by reporting more on trans-boundary water management issues and also by ensuring the reports are fact based. He went on to cite an example on how arbitration can be used to define advantageous water sharing mechanisms between countries sharing rivers. He pointed out the Indus Treaty between India and Pakistan, which was a result of arbitration talks between the two countries. But however, the press could have played a more important part. He also highlighted that unless and otherwise there is a distress sharing process than every water sharing treaty will go to havoc; and distress management and genuine water shortage aspects should be considered during drafting of document. During the Ganges Treaty, the Chief Minister of West Bengal was on board and played an important role, the Central Government of India needs support from regional government for water sharing talks between the two countries.

It was cautioned that water and water management should not be treated as a political issue, but addressed from an environmental perspective. **The discussant** emphasized the need to focus on the origin of the rivers, it is not the politicians but the forests and wetlands from which rivers evolve. It is important to connect the water issue to deforestation. Citing the example of Danube river, and the agreement between Jordan and Israel, he highlighted the need to focus on ecosystems and the people-water relationship rather than narrow political objectives. He lauded IUCN's initiative and acknowledged the importance of engaging at track III level using multi-stakeholder platforms. He also stressed the need to consider farmers and the general people as primary stakeholders, underlining that politicians and policy makers to respond to their constituents more easily. Educating media is very important in this regard as media has a larger outreach and can raise awareness amongst general people as well as motivate policymakers towards trans-boundary cooperation essential to develop sustainable and durable water sharing mechanisms within the region.

Citing examples of recent issues regarding rivers like Teesta/ Tista and Feni **the last panellist** of this session, agreed that both the countries should try to solve water disputes logically through consensus and co-operation. Decisions regarding trans-boundary rivers should not be taken unilaterally, the solutions will become one sided. Decision making process in the region needs to be transparent and generated solutions should focus on integrated water resources management and progress of the people living in the river basins.

Open Discussion

During the open discussion, one of the participants pointed out that the Indus treaty between India and Pakistan is an example of a Treaty that was established successfully between the two countries. It talks about river systems not just one river. The reason this treaty works is because of involvement of a third party as an arbitrator. But again, involvement of a third party is not always a desired option. He recommended working together and even joint construction and management of water resources infrastructure as a way towards working together. In answer one of the discussants, again highlighted the need for considering water shortage aspects during drafting of documents. Additionally, third party involvement has a way of smoothening rough edges, and can often lead to cooperation more easily.

Another participant inquired, "How can journalists play a role in regional disputes where no treaties exist? Or in this case where treaties are not useful." In response to his query, the Chair, disagreed with the term 'not useful'. He believes both countries need to take responsibility, while Bangladesh can work on conserving water in the dry season India is similarly responsible for ensuring that water sharing is done as per treaty. Both countries should ensure that benefit is given not only to the water users but also to water users as well river itself.

A query was made about a media strategy for the project. The participant hoped that the discussion during the media dialogue can contribute towards this goal. On the water resources management aspect he further stressed that raising the vision of the media and scientific community to a new dimension (benefit sharing) not only from the river but also benefit to the river (improvement if water quality, flood control) should be ensured.

Conclusion of the Session

The Chair thanked the distinguished panellists for their valuable comments. He appreciated that in both countries there is a healthy practice where journalists focus on criticizing their own governments rather than the government of their in their own countries. He commended Ecosystems for Life for organizing this meeting and noted the importance of involving journalists and media professionals especially in the South Asian context in a dialogue related to trans-boundary water management. Referring to Mr. Pangare's speech he also emphasized trust building is important. Time was when media reports were only read, not seen, or heard, but even then the outreach of media was much larger than scientists. He agreed on Mr. Pangare's comment that Hilsha is not supposed to respect borders, unfortunately the Hilsha has come to respect boundaries as it travels along Ganges. He noted that the visa regimes have to be liberalised to facilitate scientists and civil society movement within the countries. He further thanked the speakers for advocating building bridges and pulling down walls for better co-operation. He quoted different politicians and international personalities that the next war will be fought over water. But he also noted in the last century there were 37 conflicts against 200 treaties signed for water co-operation, so water too can be a medium for peace. He hoped that this Initiative will work towards raising our vision to include our responsibility and obligation to nature and to the river.

SESSION TWO

Environmental Journalism in South Asia in the Context of Bangladesh-India Trans-boundary Issues

Chair: Michael Dougherty, Head, Asia Communications, IUCN Asia Regional Office

Panellists:

- Golam Rahman, PhD, Professor, Mass Communication and Journalism, Dhaka University
- Kalpana Sharma, Independent Journalist, Columnist and Media Consultant, India
- Shashwati Goswami, Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Mass Communications, New Delhi
- Jamil Ahmed, Chief of JATRI-BRAC University, Dhaka



Highlights of Panel Discussion

A panellist of this session stressed on the need for accessibility to data and information, especially to the media, to maintain transparency between the countries. There are a lot of commonalities in approach and topics on environmental and water related issues in the South Asian region. He emphasised the need for collaborative efforts in reporting in this region to reduce the mistrust. A holistic approach in resolving disputes between the countries, which involves professionals from all spheres and sectors including scientists, researchers, policymakers, civil society, general people and the media needs to be taken. The problems and issues in both countries need to be highlighted and understood and only then can journalists work towards solutions and wellbeing of the people of the region. Without participation from all in a transparent process it will not be possible to build consensus within the countries and region for more co-operation.

He acknowledged that as the lower riparian country reporting on water issues in Bangladesh is more vibrant and pro-active. He emphasised the need for focussing on environment journalism in South Asia Region for media professionals and urged Ecosystems for Life to become a platform for journalists to share data, information, news and views within the region and across sectors.

The next panellist continued the conversation where the first panelist left off. She agreed that being lower riparian country, water is often more focussed upon Bangladesh than in India. But she cautioned that water is a national issue for both India and Bangladesh and being a national issue for both countries, sometimes it is hard for the journalists to write from neutral perspective, without being nationalistic. While putting one's country first is important, it is important that reports should be balanced and based on concrete scientific information and reflect on the ground situation. She also showed concern about the commercialisation of the media which leads to conflict of interest of the journalists. Journalists are confined to report within certain interests. To encourage the media reporting on environmental and water related issues she emphasised the need for field visits and recommended that Ecosystems for Life should take the journalists to case studies so that can see for themselves what is happening. Journalists and media professionals should be facilitated regularly by the project and communication with the media should continue.

Another panellist opined the project should focus on ways to encourage media to overcome national issues for more objective and neutral reporting through scientific knowledge dissemination and raising awareness. She acknowledged that regional and local papers are more likely to cover trans-boundary issues than their counterparts in central India. Therefore the project should give importance to regional journalists and media professionals. She stressed the interest in political issues rather than water and environment stems from commercial aspects of the media. While journalists often are interested to focus on environmental issues, editors and media houses have a different policy. Many times the media pieces are trimmed down, losing the focus and message of the original article. So she highlighted the importance in working with all sections of the media including journalists, editors and media houses.

One of the panellists focused on practical problems faced by the media in reporting on environmental issues and recommended feasible steps to work with the media to overcome these difficulties. He too emphasized the need for training and capacity building on water issues for the media professionals. But again the focus should not be only on journalists but sensitization and awareness raising programmes need to include management level personal as well. Additionally a handbook on water and environmental issues focusing on trans-boundary water management specifically for journalists and media will be very useful. He pointed out that there remains a gap between science and journalism as researchers and scientists use a lot of technical language in their reports and papers. A summary of scientific findings using a more popular non-technical language and words will bridge this gap. Ecosystems for Life, is such a platform that can work with scientists and media for better collaboration within the country and region. Another important recommendation by the discussant is taking into consideration the more contemporary forms of media. The project should take advantage of social media including mediums like e-group, facebook for knowledge sharing and taking the message across to a wider audience. Making note that journalists often do not know who to contact in case they need information and data, he recommended the development of a database containing names of experts, scientists and researchers in both countries and the region. Additionally, the media should be taken to the field in each of the countries, to see the issues directly so that they can experience firsthand the environmental concerns and also best practices in both the countries and the region. Media activities such as seminars, tours, field visits can be planned to coincide with environmental events such as Rio+20, CBD CoP, which will encourage coverage of these event and raise awareness within the public realm.

Open Discussion

The open discussion started with a recommendation that IUCN should initiate a joint platform for news sharing or media lounge for media professional. At this point one of the panellists suggested that, such a platform can facilitate sharing of stories, articles, news items across the border. A few other participants supported this idea mentioning that IUCN can take the initiative.

It was suggested that, newspapers can dedicate sections to environmental news rather than printing the issues on separate pages. This will help focussed reading and the issues can be given due importance. While talking on environmental reporting, another participant recommended that environmental issues should include socio-economic aspects, combining economy issues and how the environment touches people's lives. Adding to this, another comment was made on environmental issues. It was observed that be linked with known public issues and in line with public interest; this will ensure more prominence in mainstream news and newspapers. Additionally, writing patterns and style need to be brought up to date to suit the target readers.

Conclusion of the Session

The Chair thanked the discussants for their viewpoints and recommendations and noted that these will help the project to chart a map towards a stronger communication strategy. The project is developing a large amount of information which needs to be disseminated properly and made accessible to all. It is important to clearly identify the hindrances and bottlenecks to come up with effective ideas and strategies for dissemination.

SESSION THREE

Media and Regional Cooperation on Trans-boundary Issues

Chair: Frank van der Valk, Project Director, Ecosystems for Life, IUCN

Panelists:

- Prasanta Rajguru, Editor, Amar Asom, Assam, India
- Abed Khan, Chief Editor, Daily Jagoron, Dhaka
- Bharat Bhushan Editor, Mail Today, New Delhi
- Jamil Ahmed, Chief of JATRI-BRAC University, Dhaka

The final session started off with two video documentaries from NTV of Bangladesh. The documentaries were in Bangla and for the benefit of the audience the director and presenter, Pipul Ahmed, Senior Correspondent, NTV, explained that these demonstrate the impact of upstream water diversion and encroachment of rivers on the environment and common people living in the south west region of Bangladesh. The documentaries highlight the need of working together to save our rivers and while upstream diversions from outside the country is a major reason for dying of the rivers, many unsustainable practices within Bangladesh are also creating devastation in these areas.



Highlights of the Panel Discussion

The panel discussion started with an observation by **one of the panellists** that significant and crucial issues in neighbouring countries are not always covered appropriately by most newspapers. Journalists and media personal need to be motivated to give due importance to trans-boundary

issues especially related to water which in turn will raise awareness and influence public opinion towards co-operation. He also voiced his concern in the involvement of the private sector in the media and how they try to influence reporting and journalism. Journalists and editors are often pressurised in featuring commercially viable stories and reports. This in turn creates a hindrance in environmental journalism.

Drawing everyone's attention to the two video documentaries **another panellist** appreciated how the videos raised voice against unacceptable natural resources management and encroachment practices which are killing our rivers. While the videos focus on the south west region of the country, he said, unfortunately, similar instances can be found all over the country. Therefore journalists and media need to give due importance to these issues and play a role in environment conservation. However reporting should not give a partial or politically biased viewpoint but rather show the real picture through probing and investigation. He also showed concern over the fact that newspaper editors are now obliged to the owner of the media houses. In most cases the owners are influential businessmen driven only by commercial interests, so even if editors or journalists are committed to the environment they have to oblige the management. This shows that it is equally important to sensitize newspaper management, media houses, editors and journalists about environment issues.

One of the panellists focused on five issues related to journalism and media in his discussion. He started with the point that opaqueness leads to distortion, because lack of information and transparency always leads to distorted reporting, speculation, sensationalism and inaccurate reportage. The government and policymakers in both countries need to share information with media and the public, he stressed this is even more important in the context of trans-boundary water sharing which is a complex issue. But he was concerned that IUCN being an international NGO, despite its best efforts cannot fill this gap. In his advice to Ecosystem's for life, he opined that the project should focus on preparing briefing documents on trans-boundary resources as a ready reference with focus on controversial and non-controversial issues, on trans-boundary resource sharing treaties and to provide a list of experts both from India and Bangladesh who would be available for quick comments and analysis. The list should include co-operation minded diplomats, environmental experts, lawyers and water experts, etc. But he appreciated the track III initiative stressing that broad-basing the relationship is better than a government-to-government relationship to ensure a sustainable relationship. An agreement of two countries can be turned into a partnership for mutual benefit, when all sections of society, media, academia, government as well as the opposition is involved.

Third in his list of issues came the effect of nationalism on journalism. He pointed out neutral perspective cannot be maintained always, as nationalism has an effect on journalists. He expressed concern that nationalism combined with the compulsions of a competitive market, gives a distorted understanding of the relationship between India and Bangladesh. One way of overcoming this, is through a greater interaction between the media of the two countries, through regular exchanges, seminars, discussions, etc with inclusion of regional and local level journalists. He also highlighted the need to take the journalists to the vulnerable areas and communities to give them first hand experience. He also discussed the possibilities of co-operation emphasizing on inland water transport between the two countries. With many navigable common rivers between India and Bangladesh, there is an excellent opportunity for both neighbours to connect with each other through inland navigation for a win-win situation. Finally he focused on the potential of sub-regional co-operation acknowledging that Bangladesh could be the hub to connect India with South-east Asia and with India's own states in the north-east. His comments have been elaborated in Annex III.

The **final discussant** in this panel stressed the need for site visits and field events. Even in the case of sensitive issues like dams and diversion structures, the media can be taken to the communities

living along the river to witness the opportunities and problems. Media dialogues organized by Ecosystems for Life can facilitate these joint visits. Another way to educate media is to organise study circles and workshops on trans-boundary water issues in media houses. These study circles should bring together scientists, editors and reporters for a better collaboration of science and media. Additionally he recommended the introduction of fellowships for environmental journalists to encourage work in this area. But again the events should not be one-sided where media is invited as observers but rather as participants and discussants to voice their opinions also. Again he added the need to broaden the media base to radio, television as well as print media to increase outreach.

Open Discussion

One of the participants asked the panel to note that according to the Ganges Treaty, parties of the treaty cannot take up any activity that is harmful to other party. Recent reporting indicates that in this case the upstream party is planning to build dams and structures that are harmful for a downstream country like Bangladesh. In response a panellist stated that the governments need to be very open with the information about any developments in the shared rivers, and communication between the parties is essential to understand the real facts. At this stage, a participant requested media of both countries in a region of paradoxes, to play on positive aspects of the neighbouring countries to encourage co-operation. He also added that in most international conventions or treaties we see the inclusion of 'harm done clause', it is really a challenge to find a no harm solution, therefore regional co-operation to generate a win-win situation is needed. A discussant added that joint reporting towards the solution on sensitive issues should also be encouraged. One of the Bangladeshi participants further added that Bangladeshi television channels are not allowed access to Indian viewers; this is also an impediment towards smooth communications and trust building of media in both countries.

It was said that journalists should also be able to understand the distinction between dams and barrages. This type of knowledge deficiency shows a gap between media and science. It was also discussed that the real facts about the issue should be investigated before coming to conclusions.

Drawing attention to the Teesta talks, a participant opined that there was miscommunication between the central government of India and state government of West Bengal. He added that the Bangladesh government should also have clarified issues with the West Bengal leadership.

Closing by Chair

The Chair, thanked all panellists and participants for a rich and lively discussion. He assured the audience that this meeting is the initial step towards sustained work to maintain this media network (e.g. electronically/Google groups) and soon the project will take up the idea to arrange media tours as a tool for dialogue. He further appreciated the recommendation of working with the private sector in all spheres including media engagement and also linking with the primary stakeholders: the communities living along the rivers. Lastly he highlighted that Ecosystems for Life will focus on translating scientific information into products and messages that are clear and understandable for journalists and the public.

VOTE OF THANKS

Mr. Frank van der Valk, while giving the closing remarks and offering a brief vote of thanks, mentioned about the importance of this dialogue participated by the media professionals of Bangladesh and India. All the comments should be considered with importance.

He again thanked everyone and drew the conclusion of the event.

ANNEX I

List of participants

Name	Job Title	Organization
Mr CM Shafi Sami	Former Foreign Secretary	Government of Bangladesh
Mr Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury	Advisory Editor	Financial Express, Bangladesh
Dr Golam Rahman	Professor, Mass Communication and Journalism	Dhaka University
Mr Abed Khan	Chief Editor	Daily Jagoron, Bangladesh
Mr Jamil Ahmed	Chief Executive	JATRI, Bangladesh
Mr Ahmed Pipul	Senior Correspondent	NTV, Bangladesh
Mr Bayezid Ahmed	Senior Reporter	RTV, Bangladesh
Mr Amin Al Rasheed	Senior Reporter	ABC Radio, Bangladesh
Mr AKM Zakaria	Senior Assistant Editor	Daily Prothom Alo, Bangladesh
Mr Sheikh Rokonzaman	Assistant Editor	Daily Samakal, Bangladesh
Ms Anita Rao Kashi	Journalist	Bangaluru, India
Ms Rajashri Khanna	Journalist	Kolkata, India
Mr Ranit Mukherji	Senior Editor	Doordarshan, Kolkata, India
Mr Samudra Gupta Kashyap	Bureau Chief	Indian Express, Guwahati, Assam, India
Mr Jayanta Kumar Bhattacharya	Bureau Chief	Press Trust of India, Agartala, Tripura, India
Mr Prasanta Rajguru	Editor	Amar Axom, Guwahati, Assam, India
Mr Bharat Bhushan	Editor	Daily Mail, New Delhi, India
Mr Kalyan Kumar Paul	Journalist	Grassroots Development Foundation, Ranikhet, Uttarakhand, India
Ms Shashwati Goswami	Journalist	Indian Institute of Mass Communications, New Delhi, India
Mr Aynpuram Sundaramurthy Panneerselvan	Executive Director	PANOS South Asia, Chennai India
Ms Kalpana Subramania Sharma	Environmental Journalist and Writer	Mumbai, India
Ms Asha Ramachandran	Correspondent	Statesman, New Delhi, India
Mr Frank van der Valk	Project Director E4L	IUCN
Mr Ganesh Pangare	Head of Water Programme, Asia	IUCN
Michael Dougherty	Head of Communications, Asia	IUCN
Ms Bushra Nishat	Project Manager, E4L, Bangladesh	IUCN
Mr Kazimuddin Ahmed	Project Manager, E4L, India	IUCN
Ms Upasana Joshi		IUCN
Mr Shahad Mahabub Chowdhury	Programme Officer	IUCN
Mr Md Abdul Quayyum	Communications Officer	IUCN

ANNEX II

Agenda

**Media Dialogue on Trans-boundary Water Management:
A Bangladesh-India Perspective**

Date: 07 December 2011

Venue: Hotel Windsor Suites Bangkok, 8-10 Sukhumvit Road, Soi 20, Bangkok

Inaugural session

Chair: Mr. Ganesh Pangare, IUCN Asia Regional Office

- 09:00 AM – 09:15 AM Registration
- 09:15 AM – 09:25 AM Opening Remarks by Mr. Ganesh Pangare, Head, Regional Water and Wetland Programme, IUCN Asia Regional Office
- 09:25 AM – 09:40 AM Introduction of “Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative” by Ms. Bushra Nishat, Project Manager (Bangladesh Part), Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative, IUCN Bangladesh; and Mr. Kazimuddin Ahmed, Project Manager (India Part), Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative”, IUCN India
- 09:40 AM – 09:55 AM Objectives of the Media Dialogue by Frank van der Valk, Project Director, Ecosystems for Life: A Bangladesh-India Initiative, IUCN Bangladesh
- 09:55 AM – 10:15 AM Media Monitoring
- 10:15 AM – 10:45 AM Tea Break
- 10:45 AM – 12:15 PM **Panel Discussion I - A Media Strategy for Trans-boundary Resources Management**
Chair: C.M. Shafi Sami, Member of Project Advisory Committee, IUCN and Former Foreign Secretary, Government of Bangladesh
- 12:15 PM – 01:15 PM Lunch
- 01:15 PM – 02:45 PM **Panel Discussion II - Environmental Journalism in South Asia in the Context of Bangladesh-India Trans-boundary Issues**
Chair: Michael Dougherty, Head of Communications, IUCN Asia
- 02:45 PM – 03:15 PM Tea
- 03:15 PM – 04:45 PM **Panel Discussion III - Media and Regional Cooperation on Trans-boundary Issues**
Chair: Frank van der Valk
- 04:45 PM – 05:15 PM Concluding Remarks

ANNEX III

Panel Discussions Topics

Panels will consist of four members. It is foreseen that each during the first half hour of each session the panelists will share their points of view on the topic, after which there will be an open discussion with all workshop participants.

Session 1:

A Media Strategy for Trans-boundary Water Management

This is a follow-up and reflection on the presentations that were made in the inaugural session. In the light of the mandate of Ecosystems for Life and its communication strategy, the session is going to talk about communicating research in both the countries as well as the larger region. The panellists are invited to give their comments and advice on the project and its communication strategy, followed by a moderated discussion. The session is also going to look at packaging information for both policy and for the public domain, as well as engaging various sections/beats in the media from an interdisciplinary perspective.

- Reflections from a media perspective on the objectives and approach of the project
- What advice can media experts give to the project for its best way of interacting with the media to achieve the project's objectives?
- What would be the pitfalls on the way and how to avoid these?

Session 2:

Environmental Journalism in South Asia in the Context of Bangladesh-India Trans-boundary Issues

This session is going to reflect on the larger scene of (environmental) journalism in South Asia and discuss reporting on trans-boundary issues in this context. It will also deliberate on the kind of issues that the media treat as a priority. This too will help in the research and communication agenda of the project.

- What are salient features of (environmental) journalism in South Asia that the project should take into account?
- How can the relation between journalism and policy making in South Asia be characterized?
- To what extent would these features hinder the project to get its message across? How to overcome?
- Could and should the project reach beyond environmental journalism into other areas in journalism?
- Is there a need and possibility for the project to try and influence features of South Asian journalism?

Session 3:

Media and Regional Cooperation on Trans-boundary Issues

This project is about dialogue. This final session will focus on how the E4L project can further collaborate with the media to stimulate the trans-boundary dialogue on trans-boundary water regimes in South Asia. This session will look at the possible role of the media in these dialogues. While selected media houses and peers from both countries have been in touch, there has not been a concerted effort in bringing people together on issues that are critical to the trans-boundary region of both the countries and the people living therein. Both possibilities for further media dialogues and for the role of media in the wider trans-boundary dialogue will be discussed. This can include ways in which the media can come together on common issues, how research based reportage from Bangladesh can be published in India and vice versa and how IUCN can facilitate this. An important aspect of this discussion will be the media's role relation to policy making related to trans-boundary issues in both the countries.

- How can the media play a positive role to contribute to more dialogue and better policy making on trans-boundary water regimes in South Asia?
- How can the E4L project contribute to the media to enhance reporting on trans-boundary water regimes?
- What advice can media experts give to the E4L project for its best way of interacting with the media to achieve the project's objectives?
- What could pitfalls on the way and how to avoid these?

ANNEX IV

Discussion by one of our esteemed Panellists

Our panellist has kindly provided his comments during the discussion.

The only difference between the Indian and the Bangladesh media, a diplomat friend quipped, is that in India the media focus is on issues that are controversial and in Bangladesh the focus is on the sensational. The net result, he feels is that India often becomes the source of all phobias and hysteria in Bangladesh. I am sure this is not entirely correct and journalist friends from Bangladesh will dispel this in the course of our discussion today. I would like to raise four or five issues on the subject of media and trans-boundary sharing of resources:

I- Opaqueness leads to distortion:

Any journalist would tell you that a lack of information and transparency always leads to distorted reporting. In a vacuum of information, you will only get speculation, sensationalism and inaccurate reportage. Therefore, it is necessary that states – in this case, India and Bangladesh -- are candid in their approach to each other, that journalists are taken into confidence, all adverse questions answered and all fears and apprehensions of the public laid to rest.

In this day and age of media explosion, trans-boundary resource sharing initiatives cannot be sold to the public without the media underwriting them. Therefore, Indian and Bangladeshi political leaders and diplomats need to explain their actions not only to journalists of their own country but also those of the other. The IUCN, despite its best efforts cannot fill this gap. On national and bilateral issues, diplomats and political leaders are taken much more seriously than international organisation, civil society or NGOs. Indian diplomacy has learnt this the hard way when it comes to dealing with Pakistan, China, America and, of late, even Bangladesh. If there is no attempt to reach out to the media, the media will project whatever it presumes is happening. If the media is hostile or ill-informed, then even the best of diplomatic developments are likely to be shown up in an adverse light. Take the case of a complex issue like water sharing. What complicates sharing of trans-boundary resources like water is that it is an entirely political matter as international law is not very clear on this. Therefore, water sharing depends on two things:

- One, the level of political relations between the upper and lower riparian states – that is, how close and mutually satisfactory is the relationship in respecting each other's core interests; and
- Two, the needs of Upper Riparian's own people and the determination and sharing of the surplus after meeting their basic needs.

Now, as far as political relationships go, you cannot have a trans-boundary resource sharing agreements on the assumption that the political relations will continue to remain at a deep level of understanding. Democratic changes and other kinds of regime changes – especially in South Asia -- can alter the situation so dramatically that bilateral arrangements can be jeopardised. Also, assessing your present needs is very subjective and making future projections is a very complicated exercise -- especially given climate change and the uncertainties about the rate of glacier melt, rise in the level of the sea, impact on agriculture and, therefore, the impact on livelihood and economic migration.)

The only way these issues can be addressed in somewhat coherent way is if there is information sharing with the media and the people at large by telling them what the difficulties involved are. Think tanks in the two countries or even organisations like yours could prepare briefing documents on boundary resources for journalists as a ready reference.

(Example of Stimson Centre Briefs for journalists).

- The knowledge base that this project seeks to create not only contain briefing documents for journalists, it should have detailed briefs on contentious trans-boundary resource sharing issues. If you write only about Hilsa and not about Tipaimukh and Teesta, then you are not going to create any shared understanding.
- Secondly, there should also be briefing documents on trans-boundary resource sharing treaties which have worked in South Asia – like the Indus treaty – and which haven't worked –like the Mahakali Treaty – and he reasons why this has happened.
- Third, I think it would also be a good idea to provide a list of experts both from India and Bangladesh who would be available for quick comments and analysis whenever a trans-boundary issue is being written about in the media. These could be co-operation minded diplomats, environmental experts, lawyers and water experts, etc.

II- Broad-basing the relationship is better than a government-to-government relationship:

Not only resource sharing arrangements but any relationship between nations has to be broad-based for it to be sustained and to be insured against political turmoil. I think this is what the IUCN project is trying to do – to get large sections of society to come to a shared vision.

To convert any agreement or arrangement into a partnership for mutual benefit, the message cannot be limited at the government -to-government level but has to go to everyone – the ruling party, the Opposition, the civil society, the media and other opinion making sections of society. That is why you will find that high level visit between India and Bangladesh are of late being accompanied by addresses to universities, think tanks, breakfast with editors and prominent journalists. (Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a former professor, spoke passionately from the podium of Dhaka University during his two-day visit in September where he publicly acknowledged the contribution of the Bangladesh's current government in addressing India's concerns on terrorism and insurgency.) (When Indian External Affairs Minister S M Krishna came to Dhaka, he made it a point to have breakfast meeting with about 20 prominent editors to brief them and answer their questions.) These are good developments.

III- The distorting mirror of nationalism

As media markets – especially in print and TV news – are broadly domestic and therefore confined by national boundaries, media in any country is influenced by nationalism or what one might call national interest. The extent of nationalism on news media may vary from country to country or even within a country between newspapers and between TV news channels. The media market is extremely competitive, and some media houses find that an ultra- nationalist niche gets them better branding and, therefore, better readership or viewer response.

(Example of BSF soldiers shot by Bangladeshi forces and being carried tied on poles as animals and the furore it created in India)

(A key corrective here could be allowing the telecast of Bangladeshi news channels from Indian DTH platforms or in the Indian cable space. While most Indian news and entertainment channels are available in Bangladesh, none of the Bangladeshi channels can be viewed in India. There is a need for allowing TV channels from Bangladesh in West Bengal, Assam and Tripura – in fact all over India --for better trans-boundary people-to-people understanding and getting an alternative point of view. Film festivals focusing on trans-boundary environmental and bio-diversity issues should also be encouraged.)

In India, in the India-Bangladesh context, hyper-nationalism is reflected in the play given by some sections of the media to extradition of Bangladeshi immigrants, handing over of Indian insurgents by Dhaka, Teesta and Tipaimukh, etc. These are not the real issues which can sustain the relationship between Delhi and Dhaka or make it more constructive.

The point I want to make is that nationalism combined with the compulsions of a competitive market, gives us only a distorted understanding of the relationship between India and Bangladesh. This certainly happens on the Indian side and I wonder if Bangladesh is any different.

One way of overcoming this, is what we are doing here today – a greater interaction between the media of the two countries. However, what needs to be done is an institutionalized exchange of media delegations. I know that two Bangladeshi media delegations have come to India this year in May and in August. There should be more regular interaction between the journalists from the two sides through regular exchanges, seminars, discussions, etc. This, however, will be of limited use unless the regional media from the areas and regions abutting the border on both sides are also included. This means that journalists from West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura from the Indian side must have representation in these seminars and other exchanges. Similarly, from the Bangladesh side, journalists not only from Dhaka but from Sylhet and Chittagong must also be included.

Visits – not touristic but reporting visits -- by journalists at the vulnerable trans-border biodiversity spots must also be encouraged so that the co-operative arrangements reached by the two countries in these areas are also publicised rather than only those issues which divide us. For example, two key pacts that were signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit that deserve attention but did not get space in the media following row over Teesta are the MOU on Conservation of the Sunderbans and the protocol on saving the Royal Bengal Tiger.

The Sunderbans MOU seeks to facilitate cooperation in the areas of conservation of biodiversity, joint management of resources, livelihood generation for poverty alleviation and development, cataloging of local flora and fauna and studying the impacts of climate change.

- The Protocol on Conservation of the Royal Bengal Tiger of the Sunderbans provides for bilateral cooperation in undertaking scientific research, knowledge sharing and patrolling of the Sunderbans waterways on their respective sides to prevent poaching or smuggling of derivatives from wildlife and bilateral initiatives to ensure survival and conservation of the Royal Bengal Tiger in the unique ecosystem of the Sunderbans.

The media in both countries can be encouraged through site visits to take note of such trans-boundary co-operation which is non-political in nature but important in terms of confidence building and co-operative action.

IV- The possibilities of co-operation – looking both at the past and the future:

The media and the public have to be reminded of the history of trans-border co-operation between India and Bangladesh before 1965. There was extensive co-operation by way of transit and inland water transport between the two countries both in the Brahmaputra and the Ganga basins. Today, this has become extremely limited even though everyone knows that trans-boundary trade through inland waterways would be much cheaper than the other options.

Before 1965, there were extensive railway linkages between the two countries. Today, the railway links are only to the extent of the Maitree Express that connects Kolkata and Dhaka twice a week. The Akhaura-Agartala rail link when completed could connect West Bengal with Northeast via

Bangladesh. We are, therefore, not only talking of what is possible but also what was already there in terms of sharing and benefitting from trans-border resources in the past and has been lost because of unnecessarily strident approaches on both sides. With many navigable common rivers between India and Bangladesh, there is an excellent opportunity for both neighbours to connect with each other through inland navigation. Yet this potential has not been fully utilised. It is a win-win situation for both. India will soon conduct a survey for new waterways with Bangladesh, a move that would facilitate the movement of goods between the two countries. The state-owned RITES (Rail India Technical and Economic Services) will conduct the survey for the new waterways between Tripura state and Bangladesh. Inland water transport could boost industry and commerce and help uplift the lives of those who live on the banks. Assam's tea and oil from the Nulmaligarh refinery could go to Bangladesh and elsewhere through river routes. India's north east could be linked to the ports of Kolkata and Chittagong. One can well imagine the employment creation potential of these measures. So, the media needs to remind their audiences of what was already there in terms of co-operation on trans-boundary resources in the past and what is possible in the future.

V- *Beyond India and Bangladesh – Sub-regional co-operation:*

I think there is a growing realization that Bangladesh could be the hub to connect India with South-east Asia and with India's own states in the north-east. If a sub-regional economic integration can work then the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) would come alive and so would India's "Look East" policy.

The Indian and the Bangladesh media have to first convince themselves that this would be a win-win situation for both countries. Then only can they get their respective audiences to appreciate the benefits of this co-operation. Bangladesh stands to gain from transit directly as well as from trade with India's north-east and the rest of India. Trade and transit do not only benefit India as some in Bangladesh seem to think. Take just the case of electricity which can be used as a trans-border resource to generate employment and growth. Today, we can envisage a situation where power is shared not only between India and Bangladesh but where it can be transmitted through Bangladesh to India's North-East. You can take a transmission line through Bangladesh, evacuate the power that is needed in Bangladesh, and then wheel the rest to the north-eastern states of India.

Today, Bangladesh is very keen on co-operation in sharing of hydro-power with Bhutan and Nepal. India has shown considerable openness to this idea of not bilateral but sub-regional co-operation. Such sub-regional co-operation can promote economic growth and economic security – the economic potential of the entire region will go up and there will be creation of more employment.

A situation has come about because of fortuitous circumstances where major irritants in the India-Bangladesh relationship have been removed or are on the verge of being removed. The Boundary issue has been resolved both in terms of the areas under adverse possession and the enclaves; since the prime minister's visit there have been no border killings and Bangladesh has been given market access for its textile products. Earlier Bangladesh has reciprocated in full measure by handing over Indian insurgents hiding on its territory and giving India access to Ashuganj port.

These are extraordinary steps being taken by the leadership in the two countries to forge a partnership. Only Teesta remains and that too will be resolved in due course. The question then is: Does the media recognize the fundamental change taking place on the ground in the relationship or does it want to stay trapped in the stereotypes of ultra-nationalist sentiment where any co-operation is seen as dilution of sovereignty? How long can we continue to appeal to the basest and the most-inward looking instinct in each country? And to what end? Who does it benefit? It doesn't certainly

benefit the impoverished masses in the two countries. Perhaps it helps those who want to carry on with their exploitative stranglehold over them.

You know what happened in the Bangladesh media when the BBC reported that a promoters' agreement was being signed on the Tipaimukh dam by the National Hydro Power Corporation (NTPC), the Manipur government and the Sulej Jal Vidyut Nigam. Although no work has begun and the area where the dam is located is inaccessible and in a state rife with insurgency, there were reports of imminent flooding, drying up of Bangladeshi rivers, etc. It was prime example of what the lethal combination of a lack of information, lack of the state taking a clear stand and media going overboard can do. This is precisely what we need to watch out for if we want to see trans-boundary resources in a co-operative framework, rather than in the framework of conflict.