



Kuakata Declaration

16 March 2016 | Water Museum, Kalapara, Bangladesh

Free flow of rivers and precipitation are the main source of fresh water in Bangladesh and ninety percent of fresh water comes from rivers. In recent times people of our country are affected by the interruption in free flow of fresh water from upstream during dry season. As a result, some of the districts in North Bengal region are showing signs of desertification. Natural resources including the Sundarbans are damaged because of salinity intrusion.

The Human Rights Convention gives special emphasis on taking development plan while ensuring the political, social and cultural rights of the people. Apart from that Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International River were issued in the UN Watercourse Convention in 1966, which was later approved as Helsinki Rules by the General Assembly (United Nation's convention, 1997). As per the convention, there are specific provisions to ensure protection, preservation and management related to the uses of those water-courses and their waters. For any construction in a trans-boundary river, all related countries, nations, societies and stakeholders must be included in planning & implementation. Bangladesh, India and Myanmar are yet to ratify the convention.

Water is a natural resource; its rightful use & conservation are our own responsibility.

There are 800 rivers and tributaries in our country of which 150 are trans-boundary. However, bilateral negotiations with the neighbouring countries helped recognise only 57 rivers as trans-boundary. Some of these recognised trans-boundary rivers are facing obstruction due to construction of dams in several places. Some rivers from upstream have already dried up. It has an adverse effect on the people living around the places. They are suffering from both flood and drought.

Underground water level is going down due to decreasing flow of water in water-body and too much extraction of ground water. It has a negative impact on our agro-based economy, cultural heritage, psychology and social infrastructures. River is a precious asset for mankind. It is our duty and responsibility to ensure conservation and maintenance of this resource properly.

We do not want to confine our water-centric cultural heritage and traditions within the scope of water museum. Rather we hope to preserve and uphold this heritage. Under these circumstances, we have following demands and proposals to the concerned authority:

Internal Water Management

- 1 To secure equitable flow of water in rivers, strong legislation should be made to remove all kind of obstructions and prevent future disruption.
- 2 Prioritising our local knowledge and cultural heritage for the greater interest of people, we should refrain ourselves from taking any harmful projects instigated by international donor organisations.
- 3 As per international practice, before initiating any project, we have to make sure that all related parties and stakeholders are included in the decision making process, hence adequate measures and remedies are taken for the affected people from the implementation of such projects.
- 4 In any bilateral and regional discussion on water issues, public should be informed. Planned discussion session with the community people should be organised to create consensus.
- 5 All harmful sluice gates, dams and other establishments around the rivers and other water bodies should be removed to ensure environmental sustainability.
- 6 By amending the Water Law-2013, the conservation of rivers, environmental and ecological sustainability and people's right over water should be secured followed by the prohibition of any commercialisation of water.
- 7 We should stop repleting the wetlands and create new wetlands to reduce our dependency on ground water and increase the use of open water bodies.
- 8 Water resource is being affected and free flow of water is being interrupted because of water governance in the name of water management program, unlawful possession of river banks in the name of development and excessive pollution. Authority should immediately take appropriate measures against such harmful and (to some extent) illegal activities.
- 9 We should consider issues relating to free flow of water, rightful use of water, prevention of any kind of pollution, food security, disaster management and climate change while building any massive and permanent establishments.

Regional Water Management

- 1 The government should ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses 1997 as soon as possible and encourage neighbouring countries to do the same.
- 2 Joint River Commission requires to be converted into the South Asian River Commission, so that the relationship based on mutual trust can be put together on water issues among the SAARC countries.