

People's Perspective on Water Commons in Trans-Boundary Water Governance: A Case Study from Nepal

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Abstract : South Asian rivers support ecosystems and sustain well-being of thousands of riparian communities. Rivers however are also sources of conflict between countries and one of the contested issues between governments of the region. Governments have signed treaties to harness some of the rivers but their provisions have not been successful in improving the quality of life of those who depend on water as common property resources. This paper will present a case of the study of the status of the water commons along the lower command areas of Koshi, Gandka and Mahakali rivers. Nepal and India have signed treaties for development and management of these rivers in 1928, 1954 and 1966. The study investigated perceptions of the local community on climate-induced disasters, provision of the treaties such as water for irrigation, participation in decision-making and specific impact of women. It looked at how the local community coped with adversities. The study showed that the common pool resources are gradually getting degraded, flood events increasing while community blame 'other state' and state administration for exacerbating these ills. The level of awareness about provisions of existing treatise is poor. Ongoing approach to trans-boundary water management has taken inadequate cognizance of these realities as the dominant narrative perpetuates cooperation between the governments. The paper argues that on-going discourses on trans-boundary water development and management need to use a new metrics of taking cognizance of the condition of the commons and that of the people depended on them for sustenance. In absence of such narratives, the scale of degradation would increase making those already marginalized more vulnerable to impacts of global climate change.

Keywords : climate change vulnerability, conflict, cooperation, water commons

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