

## Conclusion of a JVS Forum: Refute the World Bank's Ganges Strategic Basin Assessment Report Upendra Gautam

**O**n 21 July 2012, Jalsrot Vikas Sanstha (JVS), Nepal organized a Discussion Forum on the 'Ganges Strategic Basin Assessment Report (GSBAR)' prepared by the World Bank in March 2012. The Bank which has sent the report to the Government of Nepal (GON) for "dissemination," is centered on the hydropower benefits of high dam projects in Nepal. The Bank report has concluded that the benefit of Nepal's water resources exclusively depends on the sale of hydro-electricity. It strategically ignores any irrigation, flood, various other use benefits including conservation benefits from high dam projects.

JVS established in 1999 AD is reputed for critically supporting the policy initiative and the community's efforts to harness Nepal's water resources.

Mr. Karna Dhoj Adhikari, former Ambassador of Nepal to India, was the Chief Guest in the Discussion Forum. The program was presided over by Mr. Iswer Raj Onta, Chairman, JVS.

Dr. Narendra Man Shakya, Professor, Institute of Engineering, Pulchowk and Er. Lila Nath Bhattarai, Director, Nepal Electricity Authority, presented their comments in the Forum. Fifty experts and professionals involved in water resources development and management participated in the Forum. The commentators, who reviewed the said report, agreed that that the report prepared by the World Bank was against the interest of Nepal; and it was designed exclusively to promote and fulfill the Indian interests. It was further stated that the report was prepared to please India. The objective of the report, as concluded by the two commentators and the participants, was to influence policy makers and the political leadership in Nepal to serve the Indian official interest. It was pointed out that this was precisely the major reason why the language of the report was politically so lucid lacking in technical data adequacy, reliability and associated analysis, and rigors of a serious research work.

The participants of the Forum suggested to the GON to refute the Report and not to fall in the trap laid out by such a premediated report. The GON and the National Planning Commission (NPC) had constituted an 11 member committee under the Irrigation Ministry Secretary Ms. Binda Hada's coordination. This committee also seems to have concluded that the World Bank Report is bias and deliberately ignores principles of water science, characteristics of the river basins, advances in water technology, integrity of research work and discipline and objectivity in a model application.

The commentators/reviewers Dr. Narendra Man Shakya and Er. Lila Nath Bhattarai, pointed out with evidences that the technical analysis made in the Report were wrong and it has not accounted for the benefits of regulated water in irrigation, flood control, and improving the environment in India.

Former Ambassador Mr. Adhikari, who has also been a seasoned senior bureaucrat of the country, stressed that as the World Bank's report is incorrect, the Government

of Nepal should outright reject this and in future be vigilant on such Reports which are against the interest of the country. He further emphasized that in these very transitional times, all the stakeholders of Nepal's water resources should be vigilant as undue pressure may be made on the Nepal Government to serve external interest.

Most of the participants suggested not to disseminate Bank's this wrong and pre-mediated report.

"The report finding no benefits from regulated flows from Dams on irrigation and flood control is illogical. The Report is designed to please India, which questions the very integrity of the World Bank like institution" remarked former Minister of Water Resources Mr. Dipak Gyawali in the Forum.

"The Report is published to serve Indian interest and goes against the popular belief in Nepal that the institution of the World Bank is neutral. Word by word reading of it creates confusion and misleads one towards wrongly formulated recommendations" said Ex-secretary of Water Resources Mr. Surya Nath Upadhaya.

Dr. Upendra Gautam feared about the looming risk. He said the incumbent Nepal Government may go for an umbrella water agreement with the Republic of India by approving the World Bank report at a time when the Nepal Government's holds the lowest level of legitimacy. He saw a nexus between the abolition of Ministry of Water Resources and objective of the World Bank Report. Mr. Sant B. Pun, former Managing Director of Nepal Electricity Authority opined that the report did not raise any issue regarding the India's River Linking Project, which was an evidence of the fact that the Report is made public without any in-depth study of the major issues

Representatives of Nepal Government agencies participating in the JVS Forum voiced their considered opinions against the Report. "Opportunistically using the energy crisis in the country, it has tried to influence the policy makers and politicians", said Mr. Sishir Koirala, General Secretary, of the Task Force constituted by the NPC on the Ganges. He further stated that the Task Force's comment on the report will be submitted to the Government in a few days. In his opinion, the Report is not suitable for the development of Nepal's water resources, and as it is not even worthy of dissemination, the Report should be remonstrated. In the view of Joint Secretary of Water and Energy Commission Secretariat (WECS), Mr. Shriranjan Lacoul, the Report was not acceptable to Nepal, because the Report was based on untenable data, very incomplete and weak analysis lacking in rigors of research and model use.

JVS plans to summarize the viewpoints of the experts and their recommendations into a report. This JVS report on the Forum will be presented to the related Government agencies and the Government of Nepal.

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