

Proceedings of the Synthesis Workshop on Basin Level Dialogues

Dialogue on Water for Food,
People and Environment (DWFE)

9th July 2004
Hotel Galadari – Colombo, Sri Lanka



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Basin Level Dialogues

Outcome of Synthesis Workshop

Based on an innovative concept introduced by the GWP-SASTAC, Lanka Jalani since the year 2001 has taken the initiative to establish Area Water Partnerships in Sri Lanka which serve as the platform for cross-sectoral and local level dialogues for a whole range of stakeholders who have an interest in water at basin/ sub-basin level. The stakeholders forums which represent a wide range of interests including those having negative impacts on the river, have met regularly to understand the dynamics of the river system and its effects on society-irrigation, drinking water, water quality, health, natural resources and the environment.

The AWP Forum has provided the opportunity for stakeholders to take a holistic view of the river in a medium to long term perspective (*a vision*) as well as to observe the cross-sectoral and upstream-downstream linkages.

The Forums have decided to proceed with community led local action as an '*entre*' to mitigate the negative effects that affect their "here and now" problems through a Dialogue – Action- Dialogue mode. This has given them a much better understanding of the river, the linkages, its behaviour, impacts on ground water, health and general well being of society through awareness raising. The stage is now set for action which will potentially have long term beneficial effects on the river and on society on one hand and on policy makers on the other.

Political Roundtables

Although in a rather rudimentary and ad-hoc manner, AWP's have been able to engage both local level as well as national level policy makers (political leaders and senior officials) to take note of the local problems which need policy level attention

Poverty and Livelihoods

The stakeholder forums have brought out in high relief the linkages between water and other natural resource management issues, like deforestation, soil erosion, drying up of springs, sand mining and solid waste management which impact on the quality and adequacy of water. Thus water is emerging as an entry point both for natural resource management and for livelihood issues since the poorest sections of society are affected most.

This indeed is the down payment that Lanka Jalani has made towards the Dialogue process and towards River Basin Management.

Basin Level Dialogues

Thus when the Basin Level Dialogues under DWFE commenced in 2002 the stage was already set to move to a more in depth interaction i.e to address upstream- down stream linkages, their technical underpinnings and underlying causes. Identifying sub and mini basins within the basin, admission of already active water related CBO into the Partnership and building strategic alliances with NGOs and govt: agencies followed soon thereafter. These processes enabled the Partnership to develop a basin vision and strategy, identifying local action and investments and to surface issues at the Provincial and National Levels. The admission of the Maha Oya Mithuro representative to the Cabinet appointed Task Force on Maha Oya is a good illustration of these developments.

Impact of indiscriminate solid waste disposal into water ways and sand mining which were surfaced at basin dialogues have now been identified as deserving national level policy attention. The most salutary outcome of the dialogues has been the realisation especially at local level that water related problems which had been condemned as being insoluble have been found to be infact soluble, if the right policies and management decisions are taken.

Having said this, the synthesis workshop raised a critical question;

- (i) Where do we go from here, **up** to the national level for policy solutions or **down** to the local level for 'action'.

The foregoing Basin Level reports and the conclusions at the end of this report reflect the collective view, not only of those who participated at the workshop, but of a whole community of Stakeholders interested in water as a critical natural resource.

Lanka Jalani is pleased to present the thoughts expressed therein as a spring board for further dialogues and actions for policy interventions at national level and for meaningful action at the local level.

Nanda Abeywickrama
Chair – Lanka Jalani