

GBM REGION: WATER MANAGEMENT- THE REGIONAL DIMENSION

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- The water issue is becoming increasingly complex and difficult with increasing population and accelerating economic growth, in South Asia as well as worldwide
- This is being further compounded by the intensifying climate change

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- Proper and efficient water governance is therefore crucial:
 - Nationally and
 - Regionally, given the geophysical reality

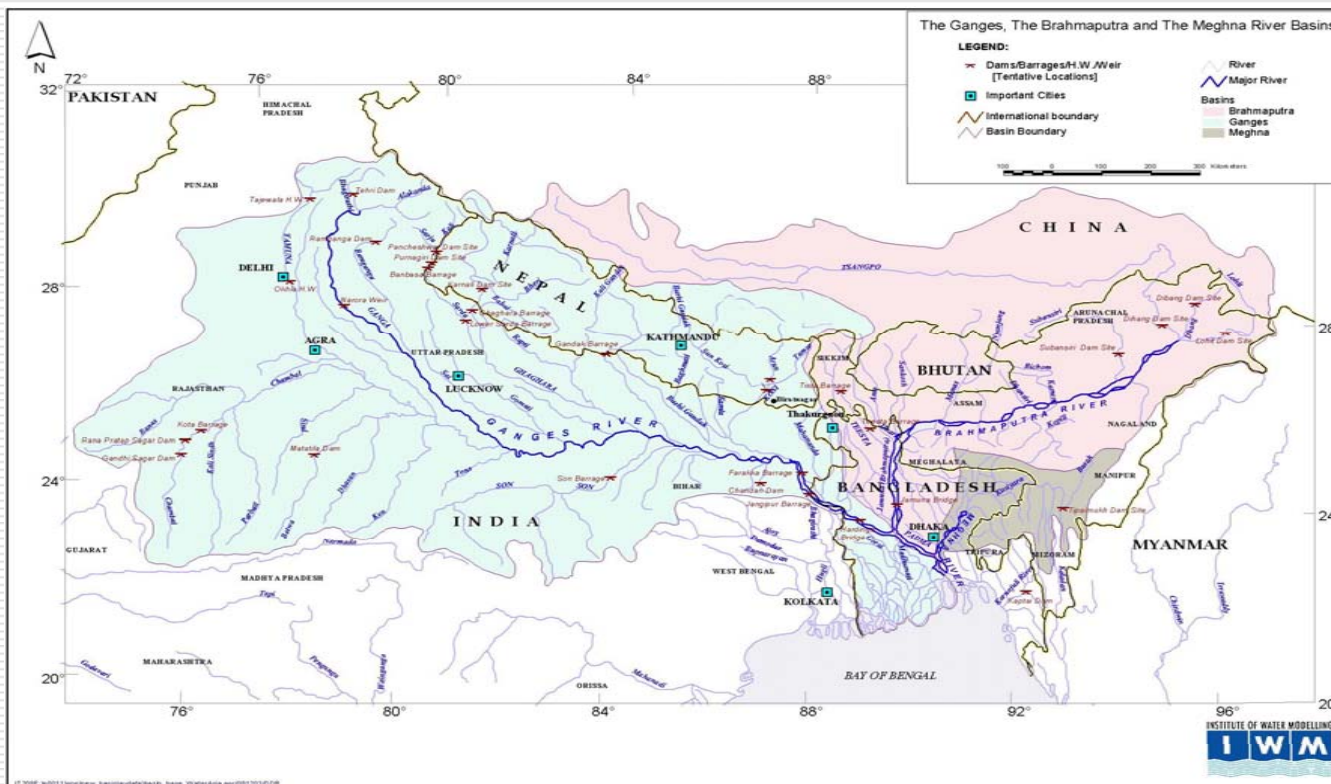
- I focus on the regional dimension

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- GBM river systems constitute the second largest hydrologic region in the world
- The total drainage area of the GBM region is about 1.75 million sq km, stretching across five countries: Bangladesh (7%), Bhutan (3%) China (18%), India (64%) and Nepal (8%)

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Map of the Catchment Areas of the GBM River Systems



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- While Bangladesh and India share all the three rivers, China shares the Brahmaputra and the Ganges, Nepal only the Ganges, and Bhutan the Brahmaputra

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- The three basins constitute only about 0.12% of the world's total landmass but are home to about 10% of the world's population and over 40% of the poor of the developing world

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- The GBM region is characterized by
 - Too much water during the rainy season (June-October)—causing floods
 - Scarcity of water during dry season (January-May), particularly March-April

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- Bangladesh being the lowest riparian of all three mighty GBM river systems suffers the most

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- The seasonal patterns are changing due to climate change (changing pattern of rainfall, sea-level rise and salinity ingress, snow-melt in the Himalayas, intensifying river bank erosion and so on)

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- The region is, however, rich in natural endowments, which, if cooperatively developed by the regional countries, can make a huge positive impact on poverty reduction and sustainable development in the region

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- Total basin management in respect of any transboundary river is now recognized to be the best approach for the best possible development of water resources for equitable benefit of all riparians, each gaining more than is possible under narrow national approaches

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- Many research studies have pointed out that the abundance of water in the GBM region can, as a shared resource, serve as the principle agent of development for the people living in the region

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- The development and utilization of the region's natural resources have never been sought in an integrated manner by the regional countries due to past differences, legacies of mistrust, and lack of goodwill
- The cost of non-cooperation is huge

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- If properly appreciated, the prospective net benefits of cooperation being greater than benefits under the ongoing non-cooperation mode should be a powerful incentive for the regional countries to opt for cooperative management of transboundary rivers

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- The benefits derivable from cooperative management of transboundary rivers include those:
 - ✓ *from the river* (e.g., increased food and energy production),
 - ✓ *because of the river* (e.g., reduced geo-political tensions, enhanced flood management),
 - ✓ *beyond the river* (e.g., catalyzing wider cooperation and economic integration), and
 - ✓ *to the river* (e.g., improved water quality, conserved biodiversity)

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- It is internationally (Helsinki rules, UN resolutions) recognized that in the case of a transboundary river, each riparian has the right to an equitable share of its waters. This is also recognized in the 1996 30-year Ganges Treaty between India and Bangladesh (Article IX: Guided by the principles of equity, fairness and no harm to either party, both the Governments agree to conclude water sharing Treaties/Agreements with regard to other common rivers)

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- But, despite internationally recognized rules-based equity requirements as well as the knowledge that regional cooperation and regional joint basin-wide management will bring more benefits to each of the co-riparians, upstream over-extraction and upstream unilateral interventions in many regional transboundary rivers are taking place

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- In the interest of the peoples of the region, the regional countries must therefore abandon the old and persisting mindset and join hands to come to terms with the geophysical realities and embark upon a cooperative, integrated, holistic approach to the development of the region, beginning with water resources

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□ The Way Forward includes

- Decision to embark upon a path of flourishing cooperation in water sector and beyond
- To work together to find most appropriate basin-wide management to seek, e.g., improved management of floods and optimal solutions to water scarcity and water quality problems as well as to find the best regional approaches to augmentation of water flows in the dry season, improved irrigation opportunities for the riparians, and hydroelectricity generation and sharing

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- To properly manage the forward move, a GBM Regional River Basins Authority may be created to act as the water management steward for the country

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- But, a major thrust in regional water-based cooperation is unlikely to happen if bureaucrats and experts are left to their own devices
- It calls for strong political will and a forward looking decision at the highest political levels in the co-riparians, on the basis of full appreciation of the above mentioned reasons in favour of cooperation, including mutual benefits to be derived

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- For continuing good and friendly relationship among co-riparians:
 - In the case of any planned intervention in a common river by a particular co-riparian, the key to preventing confusions from arising and avoiding adverse impacts on the relationships between co-riparian is transparency and adherence to the principles of equity, fairness and no harm to any co-riparian (as enshrined in the 1996 Ganges Treaty between Bangladesh and India)

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- In all potential cases, projects are best undertaken jointly by the concerned co-riparians, as this should benefit each country more than otherwise

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□ Thank you