Sustainable Energy Transition in the Ganges River Basin

Breakdown group discussion on 'Narrative Drivers for Regional Cooperation in the Ganges River Basin'

Development Alternatives participated in the 3-day long 'CSO-Media Regional Networking, Write-Shop & Study Tour' conducted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) from 21 to 23 February 2023 in Nepal. The programme was attended by more than 30 representatives from civil society organisation (CSOs) and media agencies from Nepal, India, and Bangladesh who are working to resolve the water-energy-ecosystem nexus issues.

Energy is one of the main drivers of social, economic, and ecological change in the Ganges River Basin, with a number of hydropower and coal projects operational and planned in the region. In India and Nepal, energy policies promote hydropower development as one of the main strategies to achieve energy security. In low-lying Bangladesh, energy security strategies rely on imported power from neighbouring Nepal and India, as well as the development of advanced coal-fired power plants.

Participants during a panel discussion on 'Sustainable Energy Transition in the Ganges River Basin'

While such development of energy resources is crucial for maintaining economic growth, these must be designed with a clear understanding of their impact on water resources, ecosystem services, community livelihoods, and transboundary impacts. Involvement of CSOs as entities working closely on the field, can bring about transparency to this process. This can further be aided with media agencies donning the role of knowledge disseminators for the common masses.

Taking a cue from it, the networking, write-shop, and study tour aimed at cross-learning between the two actors to promote inclusive energy investments and sustainable transition. The proceedings were divided into 3 days:

Day 1 of the Programme

Group picture of the participants at the end of Day 1

The first day of the programme commenced with the launch of the IUCN's baseline report on the scenarios for sustainable energy transition in the Ganges River Basin. It was followed by a breakout session wherein the participants were divided into mixed country groups to discuss the narrative drivers for regional cooperation among Nepal, India, and Bangladesh on the matter. The end of the day witnessed development of a plan for communication outputs (articles, reports, audio-visual resources, etc.) and a study tour on Day 2.

Day 2 of the Programme

A study tour and exposure visit to Trishuli River in Nuwakot, Nepal was conducted on the second day of the programme. The river sustains the following two run-of-the-river hydropower plants: Trishuli Hydropower Plant and Devighat Hydropower Plant. The water released from the first plant feeds into the second one. Run of the river is when the water from the river is diverted through canals and fed into energy generators (turbines). There is no electricity storage mechanism in this setup. While both the hydropower plants are a few decades old, a solar power plant was set up on the bank of the river in less than half a decade.

Clockwise: Banks of Trishuli River in Nuwakot, Nepal; the source of diversion of Trishuli Hydropower Plant and; the Solar Power Plant being set up on the banks of Trishuli

Near these plants is the Charghare village. Interactions with the villagers revealed lack of proper information among them about the hydropower and solar projects. In fact, there exists a misconception that the temperature in the village has risen after setting up of the solar power plant.

Day 3 of the Programme

The final day of the programme witnessed the participants working in groups for drafting communication products linked to sustainable energy transition, as well as identifying opportunities (supported with the exposure visit) where the CSOs and media can work together to strengthen the discourse on sustainable energy mix and regional cooperation.