

# Science Communication for Water Diplomacy in the Brahmaputra

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Water diplomacy facilitates cooperation over water. This project has been initiated by IIT Guwahati and supported by the DGIS UNESCO–IHE Programmatic Cooperation (DUPC). It aims to generate a space wherein water journalists, scientists and policy makers (on some level) from the four Brahmaputra basin nations (India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and China) can engage in a process of common learning and co-production of knowledge, to contribute towards water diplomacy in the basin.



**The Origin**  
Yarlung Zangbo

## OBJECTIVES

- Enhanced trust and confidence among the journalists, water scientists and policy makers.
- Enhanced communication skills of water scientists to reach out to the public more effectively.
- Responsible reporting by the media based on scientifically authenticated information.
- To assess the various economic opportunities, challenges and research priorities in the basin
- Changing the narrative of the basin, through water diplomacy, and making it more inclusive through incorporating gender concerns and issues of the communities at stake.

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# Science Communication for Water Diplomacy in the Brahmaputra

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## BACKGROUND

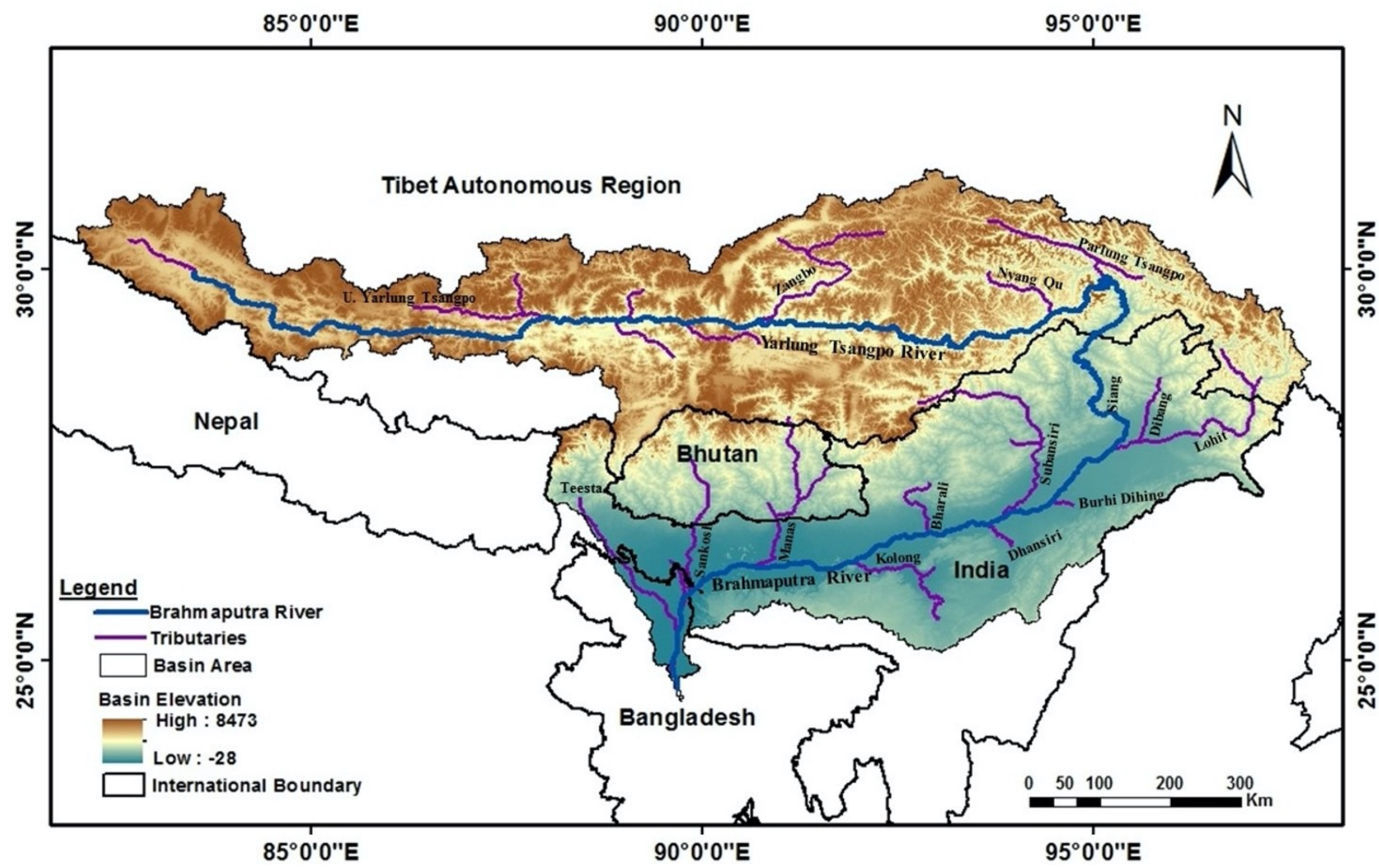


The Project Lead (Anamika Barua) and two other team members (Sumit Vij and Arundhati Deka) have been associated with the initiative “Transnational Policy Dialogue for Improved Water Governance of Brahmaputra River” (Brahmaputra Dialogue or BD initiative).

The last phase of the initiative was also hosted by IIT Guwahati under the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. The BD initiative has been ongoing since 2013, beginning as a bilateral dialogue between India and Bangladesh and then moving into a multi-track and multilateral dialogue with the inclusion of China and Bhutan as well.

While stakeholder involvement has been majorly from the academic community, civil society and policy makers, one of the crucial elements missing in the BD initiative is the involvement of the media, due to certain associated fears and distrust among the communities.

## The Bramhaputra basin



Map credits: Juna Probha Devi, Research Scholar, IIT Guwahati

The project aims to bridge this gap by bringing the water scientists (multiple disciplines) and media on one platform to facilitate water diplomacy in the Brahmaputra Basin. With lack of communication between media and water scientists, journalists are often not able to access scientific knowledge. This project will engage with key media personnel at local, national and regional levels to discuss various aspects of the basin.

The media-science dialogues will play a crucial role in building capacity and disseminating accurate information among the stakeholders for well informed and responsible reporting. This project will also seek to change the existing narrative through providing multiple sources of authentic information to journalists. It will reflect on the broader question towards the shared water issue of “Are media and science part of the problem or part of the solution?”

The project will also focus on understanding how the relation between media, science and politics unfolds in the basin, while trying to understand whether the current political situation encourages “going towards” or “going against” a culture of dialogue and cooperation, and the role that communication of techno-scientific issues plays in this regard.



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## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1: Scoping research:

To conduct an in-depth study on the role of the media in water conflicts and cooperation in the Brahmaputra. The scoping research will try to understand media and science's historical and current engagement: How do they work? Where do they find relevant experts? Where do they get their data and figures from? What are the implications of specific framing for water conflicts and cooperation? Does the current political situation influence the media's reporting?

It is usually not possible for them to attend workshops with continuation or at length. The inclusion and capacity building of the editors is significant as no matter how hard the journalist works for a report/story; unless it receives approval from the editors it is a futile exercise.

### Activity 2: Communication strategy for scientists & media:

It will focus on improving communication skills of the scientific community and media through:

#### Online course:

The aim of the online course will be to enable the scientists to communicate their work in a manner that is easily understood and disseminated by the media. The project will improve and retune an already existing course that at the moment is tailored for the Nile basin, to scale it up as a general course on communication skills for water diplomacy.

#### Webinar:

For the editors and journalists of the media outlets will be organized as it is usually not possible for them to attend workshops with continuation or at length. The inclusion and capacity building of the editors is significant as no matter how hard the journalist works for a report/story; unless it receives approval from the editors it is a futile exercise.

### Activity 3: Knowledge production:

Thematic workshop, focusing on aspects like disaster risk management, hydrogeology of the Brahmaputra River, socio-economic dependency on the river, gender and water diplomacy etc., will be conducted to build the capacity of media personnel. To sustain the process of science and media diplomacy for water, connecting the scientific community and media will be vital.

A roster of the scientific community, dividing them on the basis of their expertise will also be generated. While the multimedia stories/video grants would assist in bringing together researchers and media personnel with communities who live in the basin and are dependent on the natural resources of the basin for their livelihoods. A photography competition / exhibition will also be organized either online or during the thematic workshop.

### Activity 4: Outreach:

Social Media Campaign:In the 21st century, social media campaign is integral as an outreach mechanism for dissemination of information. On twitter, facebook and instagram, hashtags such as #EverydayBrahmaputra would be initiated for posting regular updates.

Podcasts will bring diverse stories from the basin, depicting the local communities' association with the river from different aspects like social, cultural, economic, spiritual, religious, etc.

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Dr. Anamika Barua is an Associate professor in the Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IITG), India. Trained in Ecological Economics, her research interest lies in understanding how political, social and economic factors shape environmental decisions and change, particularly related to water. For the last ten years, she has been involved in academic and consultancy project related to water issues in South Asia. Her research interest includes – climate change and water security, ecological footprints, virtual water flow through trade and water governance including transboundary water governance. She is at present facilitating a dialogue project called Brahmaputra Dialogue, which aims to create a platform for the Brahmaputra riparian countries to find avenues for co-management of the River.



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