

“Workshop on Water Conflicts in the Central Himalayan Regions”

Himmothan Society, Dehradun, and ‘The Forum for Policy Dialogues for Water Conflicts in India’ (the Forum), Pune, are jointly organising a one day workshop to be held on June 30, 2009, at the Central Soil and Water Conservation Research and Training Institute, 218, Kaulagarh Road, Dehradun, Uttarakhand - 248 195

Himmothan, backed by the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT), Mumbai, is working on various rural, water related issues in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. SRTT’s Himmothan Pariyojana has been working on drinking water and sanitation, watershed and livelihood programmes in Uttarakhand since 2001. During the on-ground workings of these various programmes, we often encountered disputes over water sources, flowing water, irrigation and drinking water. Other water conflicts in this region are related to water and land issues, big dams, destruction due to unregulated flows, polluted flows and the lack of adequate water. The conflicts are numerous, and increasing in intensity by the day, fueled by changing rainfall patterns, surface flows and an increasing population. It was against this background that Himmothan has requested the Forum to initiate a dialogue on issues of water conflict in the state of Uttarakhand.

The Forum began its work towards the end of 2004, as a collaborative initiative of eight organisations and a few independent researchers, and was supported by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Presently the Forum has more than fifty affiliated organisations and individuals, and is primarily supported by Arghyam, Bangalore. The Forum has also established resource centres in Kerala and Orissa (Please see <http://conflicts.indiawaterportal.org> for further details).

With this workshop, the Forum, in collaboration with Himmothan, seeks to begin work in the region on issues of water conflict mitigation. The workshop is therefore planned as a beginning into the exploration of different types of water related issues and conflicts in the central Himalayan region, to understand how they are presently addressed (or not addressed), and to understand how issues of water conflict can be tackled by collective action. It is important to understand the different kinds of water conflicts in all their complexity, before beginning to create a strategy.

The specific objectives of this workshop are:

1. To understand the different types of water related conflicts in the region.
2. To explore what could be done to avoid/ mitigate water conflicts in the long run.
3. To explore what the Forum can do in collaboration with the local NGOs and civil society groups and to agree upon a broad agenda for future action.

The workshop will bring together the participants and give each enough time to present and discuss water related conflicts in their region, and possibilities on what could be done to mitigate them. In the second part of the workshop the effort would focus on discussions and to agree on a broad agenda of action that could be taken up by the Forum and local organisations as a follow up of the workshop.

The workshop will focus on awareness building and knowledge sharing in the field of water conflicts, with specific emphasis on rural drinking water conflicts. Slots for interactive sessions will enable discussions on how to integrate outputs from this workshop into various programme activities. It is expected that these sessions will help in generating discussions related to water conflicts and later, a strategy to resolve conflicts.