SIAS
Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies

# PANI CHAUTARI

## A Facilitation Guidebook for

## Evidence Informed Dialogue on Urban Water Issues

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## 1. Introduction

Impending water crisis is one of the most critical challenges facing the urbanizing global south. The crisis is driven by the combined effects of rapid rate urbanization, climate change, mis-management of water resources, poor governance of supply systems, and rapid rise in water demands.

In South Asia, water shortage in the urban region is compounded by increasing trend of water intensive urban lifestyle. A long-term water management planning approach has become indispensable for the sustenance of the newly emerging towns and cities. This cannot be achieved without evidence informed planning and participatory decision making for the equitable and sustainable water management.

Over a period of six years, SIAS and its partners have worked with a number of municipalities in Nepal to explore and develop strategies and methods for evidence informed urban water planning and management. We also worked closely with partners in India, with active cross-site sharing of lessons and insights.

As a direct consequence of our collaborative work, Municipalities like Dhulikhel, Dharan, Diktel and Bidur in Nepal have initiated an innovative approach called Pani Chautari for evidence informed policy making through the dialogue among concerned stakeholders in the city.

Pani Chautari is a process of policy articulation and implementation that fosters evidence informed dialogue on all aspects of water policy and practice to address city level water problems. It helps to identify water-related issues, generate and apply credible knowledge, facilitate the formulation of specific policy arrangements at city level, fosters

articulation of new policy ideas, and translate existing good policy arrangements to solve problems in water management and supply practices.

Pani Chautari follows a traditional institution in Nepal embracing the practice of open discussion in a communal place, usually under a large banyan tree. Such place is commonly known as Chautari - a public resting place, where people gather to discuss social issues. In course of our work with local communities in Nepal, we coined the term 'Pani Chautari' that builds on the rich local tradition of Chautari. The addition of 'Pani' word extends the idea to the water sector.

*Fig 1: Pani Chautari steps*

Semantically, Pani Chautari is a space for discussion on water issues. However, we have technically elaborated its definition and scope that include an interactive process of identifying issues of local concern, evidence generation through action research or diagnostic studies, deliberation among stakeholders including local authorities and researchers to identify solutions collectively, implement such solutions in practices. Pani Chautari is also used to harness second order reflections (or "double loop learning") to learn about the method of interaction and collaborative learning.

The Pani Chautari process has thus evolved as a methodological solution to contribute towards strengthening the capacity of city level water champions, enhance partnership/collaboration among diverse stakeholders, and foster innovations in urban water systems informed by locally engaged research.

**Five functions of Pani Chautari Methodology**

- To facilitate co-learning both as a culture and as a problem-solving tool among diverse stakeholders of the city water supply system
- To strengthen capacity of city governments to plan and implement adaptive water management
- To deepen deliberative process in water management and governance through harnessing local government powers, diverse knowledges, stakeholder commitments, and research based evidence
- To provide a conflict management platform in water governance and access, and
- To create a robust interactive process of action oriented and policy relevant research to generate highly relevant policy insights and practitioner oriented knowledge products

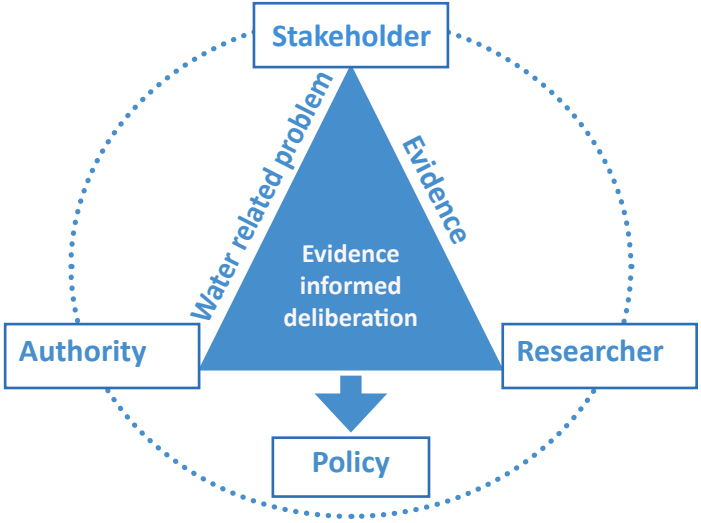


*Fig 2: Pani Chautari conceptual diagram*

## 2. About this guidebook

This guidebook provides a practical guide for facilitating Pani Chautari process or similar initiatives that aims to foster evidence informed dialogues with the aim of informing local level policy processes. It provides a step by step guide to facilitate Pani Chautari as a tool. Specifically, this guidebook helps local authorities and water managers to identify the key water management related problems, generate evidence for informed dialogue and facilitate stakeholder dialogue and take appropriate policy initiatives. In addition to the detail processes, this guidebook also provides background on how the tool of Pani Chautari evolved through long-term policy oriented work of SIAS and other partner organizations.

### *2.1. How is this guidebook developed ?*

Initially, the Pani Chautari was used as an informal multi-stakeholder gathering to discuss water related problems directed towards finding innovative solutions. The gathering was initially facilitated by Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS). Over the course of a year, the mere discussion events gradually evolved as a set of tools for evidence informed dialogue and engagement in local policy processes and practices.

This guidebook is a product of SIAS's long term engagement with a number of towns in Nepal such as Dhulikhel, Dharan, Bidur and Diktel through multiple participatory action research projects. The insights are drawn from 14 different Pani Chautari processes within aforementioned four municipalities. The process documentation of the Pani Chautari processes, followed by a critical reflection of the each process to identify practices that 'work' and 'do-not work' in multi-stakeholder platform helped to develop this guidebook. It also draws from SIAS's long term engagement in policy processes, continued discussions with the local stakeholders in the towns of Dhulikhel and Dharan. The tool was then tested in other towns such as Bidur and Diktel. The reflections from these series helped to refine the process of Pani Chautari which is captured in this guidebook.

*Fig 3: Steps for Pani Chautari guidebook*

## 2.2 Who can use this guidebook?

This guidebook is primarily designed for people involved in policy-oriented research, and those engaged in developing policies at different levels and facilitating local water management and planning practices. However, it is also useful for local government authorities and local level resource management committees, not strictly limited to water management committees. Policy communities can use this tool for facilitating participatory and inclusive policy making processes. Taken broadly, a community of practice can use it for facilitating dialogue towards solving their local resource management problems. This guidebook can also be used to facilitate dialogues on wider local planning and resource management issues. Further, the process outlined in this guidebook for evidence informed dialogues can be customized and used in different sectors of development and across different levels.

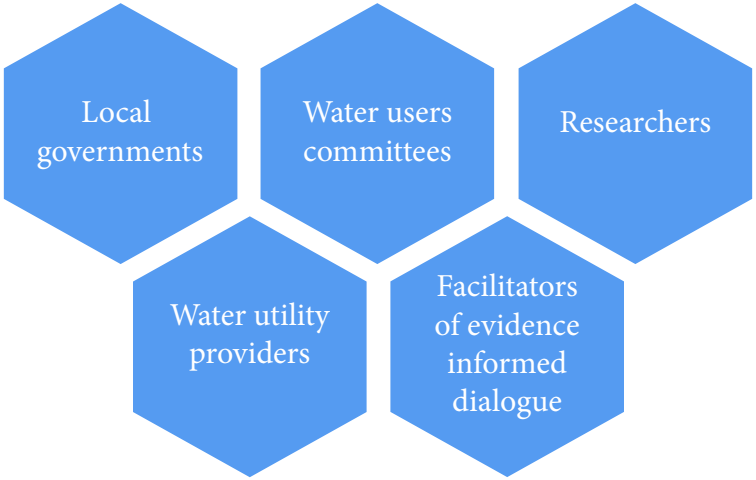


*Fig 4: Suggested users of this guidebook*

## 3. Pani Chautari Process: Detailed guide for users

Pani Chautari process broadly includes five major steps –

(i) Identification of issues

(ii) Generating evidence

(iii) Stakeholder dialogue

(iv) Policy uptake and

(v) Review and reflection

Following section elaborates the five major steps with relevant examples.

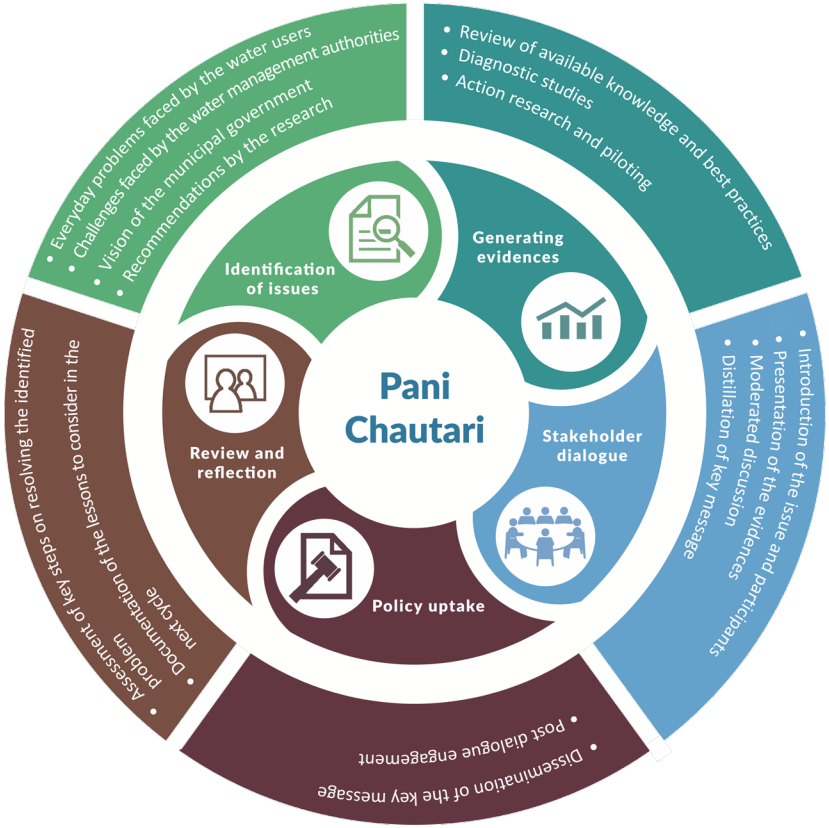


*Fig 5: Pani Chautari process*

## 3.1 Identification of issue

The Pani Chautari process starts with the identification and prioritization of water related problems that require policy or practical intervention. Issues are normally identified from:

i. everyday problems faced by the water users
ii. challenges faced by the water management bodies
iii. vision or the priority of the local government
iv. the issues identified from research.

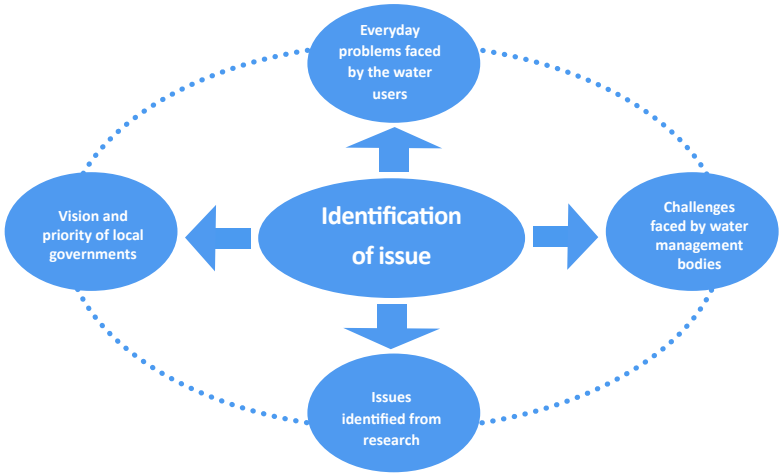


*Fig 6: Areas to identify issue*

***An example from Dhulikhel***

Of the issues raised in Dhulikhel, the decreasing volume of water in local springs was identified as the most pertinent issue that required immediate attention. The decreased volume of water in springs reduced the water supply, thereby affecting the local users and the water management committees, who had vowed to increase water flow to meet users' demand.

## *3.2 Generating evidence*

**Evidence are generated against the identified issues to**

i. identify the root causes of the problem
ii. document the experiences from other towns that helps identifying solutions
iii. identify possible technological solutions to be discussed in the stakeholder dialogue.

**Evidence can generally be generated through:**

i. review of available knowledge and best practices
ii. diagnostic studies of policy and practices
iii. action research or quick experimentations.

**Key considerations for generating evidence**

a. The causes of problem with some historical aspects,
b. Evidence on both biophysical and social aspects connected to the problem
c. Gather some factual evidence - graphs, charts, tables, photos, videos that are more persuasive in decision making
d. Gather narratives, best practices, lessons from other cities from within or outside of the country.

The generated evidence need to be summarized in the language that works best in the local context, preferably in both English and the local language. Prior to the stakeholders dialogue, a pre dialogue meeting among the key actors of the Pani Chautari process i.e. the facilitator, municipal government (mayor), issue specific key stakeholders and key beneficiaries is useful. This helps to identify the key participants, modality of the discussion, logistic preparation and post dialogue communication strategies.

*Fig 7: Piloting recharge pond in Dhulikhel*

***An example from Dhulikhel***

*In Dhulikhel, evidence on declining water flow from local sources were generated through*

*a. collection of experiences water users*

*b. Analysis of hydro-meteorological data from upstream areas*

*c. review of best practices in similar context, and*

*d. piloting of recharge ponds and their initial impacts on the drying spring.*

*Fig 8: Collecting experiences from neighboring village*

## *3.3 Stakeholder dialogues*

The dialogue event is the crucial step in Pani Chautari process. The dialogue brings together major stakeholders into a single platform to discuss on the identified problems and possible solutions. The event can be planned considering the following four steps.

*Fig 9: Facilitating Pani Chautari in Dharan*

**A. Introduction of the issue and actors:** The dialogue generally starts from a brief introduction to the issues and expected outcomes. A brief introduction of the participants can be helpful, with a focus on their stakes in water and motivation to participate in the forum. The moderator can ask the participants to introduce themselves while they speak in the discussion session.

**B. Presentation of the evidence:** Presentation of evidence is very important to inform the dialogue and such presentation can include facts, figures, charts, graphs, public opinions, best practices, innovative ideas and short videos connected to the identified problem. Additional expertise on the issue at hand can be sought by including expert's presentation. The presentation can include some carefully crafted questions for discussion.

**C. Moderated discussion:** The presentation is followed by a discussion among key stakeholders and it can take any form i.e. panel discussion, round table discussion. In both cases, careful moderation is required to make the discussion focused, lively, participatory and output oriented. The discussion should lead towards identifying some policy or practical solution but often, such solution cannot be found in a single discussion.

**D. Distillation of key message:** At the end of every discussion event, we should aim for identifying some important take-home messages. The concluding message can either lead to solution or identify questions for further research and dialogue. Often the discussion can end with clear action plan for step ahead.

***Key Considerations***

- *We need evidence related to the problems*
- *Insights from national and int'l experiences can be helpful*
- *Use local language in presentation and dialogue*
- *More audio- visual presentation to make the dialogue lively*

- *We need carefully crafted questions for discussion*
- *Need good facilitation skill to make the dialogue lively, inclusive and action oriented*
- *Commitments from the municipal authorities are important*

Apart from these, logistic preparation such as date/time and venue of the event, selection of a good moderator, physical setting of the meeting is very crucial in determining effective dialogue. Special attention should be paid to ensure participation of people from marginalized groups and weaker actors. We need to make sure that the municipal authorities participate actively in the dialogue and show their commitments towards resolving the problems.

It is important to note that the "stakeholder dialogue" is not a one time event and there may need a series of follow up meetings to identify and implement the solutions.

We shall carefully document the key points discussed in the dialogue and can record the discussion if needed.

***An example from Dhulikhel***

The Stakeholder dialogue in Dhulikhel on declining water flow in local springs was hosted among municipal authorities, members of water user committee, and officials from district forest and water management office. A comprehensive presentation was made including key findings of ongoing research conducted by SIAS which also covered the possible solution for water recharge. The dialogue agreed to pilot recharge ponds but the idea was materialized after a number of follow up meetings among key actors.

## *3.4 Policy uptake*

Key outputs of the whole Pani Chautari process are finally taken to the wider dissemination and policy uptake. Key messages and proposed solutions can be disseminated through the local media, press release, opinion writing etc. Detail proceeding, report and policy brief are other possible outlets to disseminate the insights, lessons and recommendations targeting different audiences.

Further, after the dialogue, it is equally important to continuously engage with stakeholders to translate the idea into action. We can hold a number of follow up meetings among key stakeholders towards internalizing the solutions and putting them into action. For example, in Dhulikhel and Dharan, such meetings helped the municipal authorities to implement solutions such as water recharge ponds and recharge pits respectively.

***An example from Dhulikhel***

*With continuous engagement over 3 years following the first Pani Chautari discussion on water recharge, Dhulikhel municipality incorporated the idea of water recharge ponds and watershed conservation into its policy and program and started to allocate the budget accordingly. Further, the municipality also adopted the policy of revitalizing the traditional ponds in different locations. Municipality and SIAS jointly piloted recharge ponds and water flow monitoring is carried out jointly.*

## *3.5 Review and reflection*

Review and reflection is an important process of the Pani Chautari. However, there are two critical junctures where it is of most significant. The first one is after the multi-stakeholder dialogue. With review and reflection, the Pani Chautari process iterates until the key outputs are taken forward through policy uptake stage. Second, the entire cycle is reviewed to assess how the different steps contributed to resolve the identified problem. While this is also an iterative process, it also marks the completion of one complete cycle and opens up opportunity for identifying strengths and weakness to be considered in the next cycle.

*Fig 10: Review and reflection meeting in Dhulikhel*

***An example from Dhulikhel***

*Review and reflection meeting in Dhulikhel brought together mayors and municipal officers, local planners and water and forest user committees along with private sector and researchers. The discussion highly appreciated the process of evidence informed policy making through informed dialogue. This facilitation guide drew insights from the reflection in the review meeting.*

## 4 How can you use and adopt this guidebook

Pani Chautari, a joint experiment of SIAS along with some municipalities, has now become an innovative tool for linking research, policy and practices to resolve water related problems in the urbanizing cities. The process was a part of action research, and the authors have been actively involved in conceptualizing, facilitating and also documenting the process. This guidebook is one of the by-products, which summarizes the process in the form of step by step action points that can be helpful to municipalities and policy makers to conduct evidence informed dialogues on identified policy problems. The strength of this process lies in bringing together diverse stakeholders, convening an informed dialogue, and collectively exploring solutions for water related problems. The process has also contributed towards strengthening the capacity of city level water champions, broker partnership and foster innovations for sustainable and equitable water management.

However, the tool of Pani Chautari can be used beyond the water sector. The Pani Chautari constitute a set of tools reflecting more than 5 years of experimentation and proven results. We encourage researchers, experts and practitioners (municipalities) to customize the tool and use it according to their need for evidence based policy making.

## *Annex: List of Pani Chautari held in different municipalities*

| SN | Date | Issue for Pani Chautari | Municipality |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 23 Nov 2016 | Climate adaptive water management strategies in Dhulikhel | Dhulikhel |
| 2 | 11 Feb 2017 | Pani Chautari: modality and management in Dhulikhel | Dhulikhel |
| 3 | 19 Jun 2017 | Possibilities of water recharge ponds in Dhulikhel | Dhulikhel |
| 4 | 8 Feb 2018 | Private sector engagement for sustainable water management in Dhulikhel | Dhulikhel |
| 5 | 30 Apr 2019 | Women's issues in managing water in Dhulikhel | Dhulikhel |
| 6 | 27 Feb 2020 | Institutional mechanism for up and downstream collaboration for water management in Dhulikhel | Dhulikhel |
| 7 | 22 Dec 2016 | Pani Chautari: modality and management in Dharan | Dharan |
| 8 | 31 Mar 2017 | Future scenario of drinking water in the face of urban expansion and climate change in Dharan | Dharan |
| 9 | 15 Sep 2017 | Potentials and options for groundwater recharge in Dharan | Dharan |
| 10 | 13 Jan 2018 | Climate adaptive water management practices in Dharan: policy into practice | Dharan |
| 11 | 11 Jun 2018 | Building capacity on climate adaptive recharge pit for groundwater recharge in Dharan | Dharan |
| 12 | 12 Oct 2018 | Gender and social inclusion for climate adaptive water management in Dharan | Dharan |
| 13 | 17 Oct 2019 | Challenges, opportunities and possibilities of water security in Bidur | Bidur |
| 14 | 18 Jan 2020 | Sharing findings, identifying key challenges and sharing national and international practices | Diktel |

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