

# EVENT REPORT

of a webinar on

## Knowledge Politics in Natural Resource Management in South Asia: Sharing Experience and Learning

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17th November, 2021

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### Organized By:



## Event Details

Name of the event:	Knowledge Politics in Natural Resource Management in South Asia: Sharing Experience and Learning
Date:	17th November, 2021
Venue:	Online- Zoom
Time:	2:00 to 4:30 PM IST
Organizers:	Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS) ForestAction Nepal University of Edinburgh (UoE) Centre for Ecology Development and Research (CEDAR) Indian School of Business in India (ISB) Institute for Study and Development Worldwide (IFSD)
Speakers:	Presenters: Sudeep Jana Thing, Neema Pathak Broome, Anushiya Shrestha and Vishal Narain Commentator: Hemant Ojha Moderator: Naya Sharma Poudel
Number of Participants:	66

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# 1. Context

A productive, sustainable and equitable natural resource management (NRM) is crucial to reduce poverty, achieve human wellbeing and climate change resilience. However, policies, institutions and practices in NRM are largely shaped by the ways in which knowledge is produced, distributed and used. This is because knowledge and power interact in such a way that the poor, and disadvantaged communities are often left behind or are excluded from governing and managing the resources in which their livelihoods rely on. Accordingly, there is an increased interest in understanding the dynamics of knowledge production, circulation and (mis)use and their impacts on resources and resource dependent people.

In this context, Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS) and ForestAction Nepal, in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh (UoE), Centre for Ecology Development and Research (CEDAR), Indian School of Business in India, and Institute for Study and Development Worldwide (IFSD) in Australia organized a webinar on **'Knowledge Politics in Natural Resource Management: Reimagining Resource Governance in South Asia'** on November 17, 2021.

The webinar was a part of the project 'Learning to leave no one behind: Equitable and sustainable livelihoods in natural resource governance (Nepal and India) – developing an international research cluster' funded by UoE under GCRF-SFC. The purpose of the workshop was to develop cross-country understanding on knowledge politics surrounding governance and management of natural resources in diverse contexts such as biodiversity conservation and urban water management drawing cases from Nepal and India. The workshop also intended to expand informal network on these agenda. Sixty-six participants from research and academia, civil society organizations and government officials joined the webinar.

The webinar primarily focused on three pertinent questions:

- a) Which/whose knowledge are influencing natural resource management policies and institutions and in which ways, and which/whose knowledge are being excluded?
- b) What efforts are being made to bridge knowledge traditions and with what effects?
- c) How might we better share experience and learning in knowledge politics across countries and sectors?

# 2. Presentations

The webinar commenced with key highlights about the LLNOB project by Dr Clare Barnes and Dr Sam Staddon from UoE. They elaborated on the project's interest in developing research links and sharing learning, leading to the development of a cluster between academics, researchers, practitioners and policy makers. The cluster aims to develop insights on how interventions in natural resource governance can best learn, reflect, adapt and exchange insights to support achievement of SDGs and ensure they 'leave no one behind'. Following that, there were four presentations:

1. A case specific presentation on the theme Protected Areas by Dr. Sudeep Jana Thing, ForestAction Nepal and Curtin University
2. A broader presentation on knowledge politics of Protected Areas by Ms. Neema Pathak Broome, member of Kalpavriksh and ICCA, India.

3. A case specific presentation was delivered on the theme Urban Water Management by Dr. Anushiya Shrestha, SIAS
4. A broader presentation on knowledge politics of Urban Water Management by Dr. Vishal Narain, Management Development Institute (MDI) India.

Please refer to the detailed presentations in annex section (Annex 3).

## 2.1 Sudeep Jana, ForestAction and University of Perth

Dr. Jana reflected on the changing discourses and practices of protected areas in Nepal. Following are the key highlights from his presentation entitled '**Protected area and dynamics of scientific-indigenous knowledge systems**':

- There is dominance of expert-scientific knowledge in the mainstream conservation discourses and practices of Protected Areas.
- The indigenous knowledge and practices are marginalized, undervalued, or still peripheral.
- There is an opportunity to reorient conservation paradigm policies, and state-IP relationships by appropriately recognizing indigenous knowledge and practices for sustainable, socially just and equitable conservation.
- The newer interventions should appreciate and support diverse knowledge systems.

## 2.2 Neema Pathak Broome, Member of Kalpavriksh and ICCA

The key messages from the presentation '**Politics of Knowledge vs Knowledge Justice**' are highlighted below:

- The crisis we are facing today is not due to the supremacy of one knowledge system over the other but due to the politics by which it is created.
- Unlike the customary systems that see humans as part of the nature, the modern science is based on separation of humans from nature, hence ending up in human development destroying nature.
- Important factors are: 1. who is using particular knowledge and for what purpose (the use of knowledge with a certain wisdom), 2. Whether it is based on concentration of power (power of politics, power of finances or others). The most detrimental scenario is when post-industrial modern science is used by powerful sections of the society for concentration of political and economic power.
- In countries with colonial history like in South Asia, the use of particular knowledge systems becomes eminently possible because there is already a huge power gulf between those who have and those who have not.
- Historically voiceless communities were (and continue to be) regarded as encroachers and didn't have any rights to defend their lands and territories from any of the external threats. Their traditional knowledge is being appropriated and not credited but used for their own deprivation.
- There are assumptions that tigers and local people cannot coexist and, across India, about 9000 families from protected areas were evicted or relocated between 2000-2004.
- Until 2019, about 49.4 million dollars have been invested in tiger conservation including for relocation of communities from these habitats, and this has also been done without their consent and through inhumane practices.
- Communities were relocated from some areas within the protected areas based on expert knowledge that their relocation was very important for conservation. However, these areas have now been used for diamond mining, hydro-electric and thermal projects based on an argument that there is no wildlife in these areas. So local communities who believe biodiversity to be important for their well-being as well as for future generations, are protesting and such areas have become war zones and local people conserving the area are labelled terrorists.

- The conservation policies and practices continue to be informed by selectively created and used knowledge.

## 2.3 Anushiya Shrestha, SIAS

The key messages from the presentation **‘Knowledge Politics in Natural Resource Management: Reimagining Resource Governance in South Asia’** are highlighted below:

- The focus of water management practices has been largely on the supply-side of water provision and driven by the narrative that Nepal is rich in natural resources and the need is to tap into this and to distribute water.
- Despite massive extraction, we still have demand-supply gap and although initiatives are coming up around conservation of water sources, these have largely failed in practice.
- Lack of collaboration and ownership by the local governments once the project phases out is a challenge.
- The participation of local communities has been driven by neoliberal ideas.
- Instead of encouraging conservation of the water sources, they are considered to be unreliable and instead large-scale water supply projects are promoted, such as the ADB funded project seen in the research site. Private taps have been prioritized.
- Women’s representation has largely been limited to rhetoric and not extended to meaningful participation and influence in the decision-making process.
- The local government has the authority to make local management rules and policies so as to match the local context, but they rely on the centralized approach of tapping ground water or distance surface water and shifting towards large scale water supply project.
- Water governance in Nepal is very much an engineering domain and the engineering expertise and engineered solutions focusing on infrastructure are prominent.
- There is a need to switch and combine private and community governance to produce reliable traditional water sources, rather than declaring them inefficient.
- Alternative water management practices appropriate for the local context of climate change impacts and water induced disasters should be involved.

## 2.4 Vishal Narain, Management Development Institute (MDI), India

The key messages from the presentation **‘The politics of knowledge creation in urban water governance’** are:

- There is a strong link between water education at university level and water governance across the sector.
- The physical augmentation of water supply is assumed to be the solution but within the policy circles, there is very little understanding that there is not a uniform water crisis that pervades the country and it is not the same for everyone.
- One of the important discourses around water governance in South Asia is about why the water sector has been dominated by men.
- A lot of research in India and South Asia draws attention to peri urban water security issues.
- Urban political ecology studies have thrown light on the politics of water access in the urban areas.
- The role of researchers is to translate the lived experiences of people into the scientific discourse of climate change or to mainstream this as scientific knowledge, and to bridge the gaps between people’s narratives of climate change and the language of scientific discourse, whilst studying the processes of marginalization and deprivation of the peri-urban context.
- Optimism is gained from the fact that the new generation of water professionals will look at water in an interdisciplinary way with more women professional’s engagement in the water sector.
- The dichotomy between rural development and urban planning needs to be

challenged and professionals need to be trained to look into these kinds of relationships to bring attention to issues of equity, rights, inclusion and gender to be mainstreamed in education curricula.

### 3. Discussion

The discussion was moderated by Dr Naya Sharma Paudel (ForestAction) and primarily focused on views in relation to what knowledge is currently dominating governance, the state centric top-down agency and the kind of knowledge hegemony active within the operators of the state. Participants shared about the need of going through the policies or laws enacted previously, prior to the introduction of radical laws citing the examples of Forest Rights Act in India. There was a focus on continuously exploring diverse knowledge on inclusive research experiences to influence transformative development.

The discussion and queries from the participants were around three questions:

- a) Which/whose knowledge are influencing natural resource management policies and institutions and in which ways, and which/whose knowledge are being excluded?
- b) What efforts are being made to bridge knowledge traditions and with what effects?
- c) How might we better share experience and learning in knowledge politics across countries and sectors?

#### 3.1 Summary of Discussion:

**Q1. Which/whose knowledge are influencing natural resource management policies and institutions and in which ways, and which/whose knowledge are being excluded?**

**Q2. What efforts are being made to bridge knowledge traditions and with what effects?**

The first round of discussion on the two questions mostly covered the issues and queries around knowledge politics, exclusion of indigenous knowledge in policy making and lack of attention of gender integration in water management and conservation. The summary of discussion is presented below:

International policies as well as practices have not incorporated and acknowledged indigenous peoples' worldviews and their way of conserving nature, neither are these issues discussed in forums. It is high time that the government revise and update the outdated laws considering conservation concepts and indigenous knowledge. Ms. Neema pointed out that the model of economic and human development is the responsible factor driving power and politics around knowledge. So massive grassroot movements and change in the way we look at human wellbeing is required to be able to address the injustices.

The participants further raised the issue of gender integration and noted that gender issues are being neglected in human-wildlife conflict management as well as water management processes in Nepal and further pointed to its ineffectiveness in implementation and associated challenges. Further, they also raised questions around what aspects motivate women to negotiate during violence of systems in human-wildlife conflict management in a sustainable way. In response, Ms. Neema shared that the women are facing dual challenges, systemic struggle and struggle within the community to fight patriarchal systems and that the external stimulus as NGO/government support can stimulate women's agency to reflect their voices in their community circle.

Likewise, in water management sector, whose knowledge is counted and respected for equality and gender justice was of concern. Dr. Vishal responded that understanding heterogeneity of the community and their voices is important and at the same time, the concept of intersectionality with differential vulnerability helps to improve our understanding on whose knowledge counts.

The discussion also instigated issues of policy being driven largely by quantitative (visual data and numbers). Qualitative data mostly comprise of indigenous knowledge, nevertheless, they do not get space in policymaking in water governance and conservation sectors. Dr. Vishal responded as the policy makers do not prefer narratives and are instead inclined towards numbers. Teachers and academics have an important role to play in incentivizing students in different ways of creating knowledge. Further, barriers to integrate diverse knowledges and making conservation inclusive was also raised.

### **Q3. How might we better share experience and learning in knowledge politics across countries and sectors?**

Some engagement strategies emerged from the discussion include the following:

- a) Thematic seminar/workshop can be organized to discuss specific issues on forest/pasture management across India-Nepal and South Asia
- b) Linking and supporting each other's work and joining hands to bring visibility to issues and similarities and constraints in different networks. Can join a study group of researchers, academics, practitioners and policymakers to assess knowledge that exists in similar research area.
- c) New researchers' work in co-creating knowledge involving communities, can be brought into discussions
- d) In terms of networking, we can explore in going beyond our narrow, but intensive, network to unfamiliar or relatively new ones. Networking with India youth water network and engaging with students could be an avenue.
- e) Engaging with civil society organizations that are engaged in action research and communities of urban, rural and peri-urban areas
- f) Edited book or journal special issue can be thought of to expand the network and bring people together

## **3.2 Detailed discussion:**

### **Q1. Which/whose knowledge are influencing natural resource management policies and institutions and in which ways, and which/whose knowledge are being excluded?**

### **Q2. What efforts are being made to bridge knowledge traditions and with what effects?**

- *Interestingly, one of the questions that came up with decades of research shows where the politics of knowledge actually is, but why is it that none of this research is being translated? Why are we not seeing changes in international policies that is acknowledging indigenous people's worldviews and indigenous people's way of conserving nature? But unfortunately, that never goes in the discussions.*
- *The government need to be mindful of the fact that they need to bring appropriate changes in the old laws and policies while introducing new laws challenging the outdated concepts of conservation and indigenous knowledge.*
- *How the training of State agencies continues to be in the old school when research and knowledge has already changed, is that going hand in hand?*

-Roshni Kutty



- *In Nepal, while integrating gender roles and gender issue in human wildlife conflict management has been very difficult issue with big challenge, and the gender aspects are very much neglected, and even there are some policies to support gender integration, it is not implemented in practice to certify satisfaction but I have a question to Neema: if she can provide us some real very stimulating experience, the question is about the fact that you told; women users, grassroots women or other policy women negotiate when there will be violence of systems in the human wildlife conflict management. But I want to know what are those aspects or those factors that motivate them to do that in a sustainable way?*
- *Referring to the experience of Nepal, still there are big gaps for gender integration or consideration of gender issues in water management processes but my question is how did your research gear towards the collection of the three aspects you mentioned? i.e., Whose knowledge counted? Whose knowledge incurred? Whose knowledge respected for equality and gender justice?*

*-Kanchan Lama*

- *I think of what the larger questions of who drives the policies is very important. I feel, specifically in the mountain communities from the mountain community's perspective is because the marginalized geographies are usually in the case of India, but it's kind of a blanket policy I don't know if we should expect more out of it because policies, sometimes need to be general because it can be tailored for the state users, so I think my first question in the discussion point would be who drives the policies and it is inclusive of the politics of knowledge, as well as the politics of representation at policymaking?*
- *I find as a researcher and as a student researcher and a researcher who is working from an interdisciplinary framework, what we have come to see at the ground level is what qualifies as data? I think the policy in a way is driven by things you can see, so largely it's the number churning and if you can show numbers and graphs and all those things the visualization of your information, in terms of numbers tend to be given more preference over things which are more qualitative. So overall oral indigenous knowledge, a traditional knowledge falls under the other spectrum, so it always find difficulty in getting space within policymaking.*

*-Rinan Shah*

- *I'm trying to make a question and comment that brings some issues from water governance and conservation together, I think, for me, I'm quite interested in the people who maybe excluding the knowledge or preventing indigenous knowledge from being included in policy. Many of them would like to have more inclusive conservation where their knowledge is integrated and I wonder about the barriers they face in their work and when they go into the field and when they work with different marginalized communities, how can they become allies? What the barriers are for involving conservation professionals, water professionals into this more critical stance of integrating diverse knowledges?*

*-Omar Saif*

## Response by Neema Pathak Broome

Ms. Neema responded by saying that there are certain drivers to why a certain kind of knowledge is useful for us that come from the larger world view. And lots of problems emanate from the fact that we have a certain model of economic development, human development and as long as we have that model to sustain, we will need systems which have concentration of political power and capital power. So, unless there is a drastic change in the way of looking at human wellbeing, it would be kind of difficult to address these kinds of injustices, inequity that we currently see. She added, there will have to be massive grassroots movement, like the rights for nature movement that certain indigenous communities are pushing for. Responding to the question of women, she stated that when they go and talk to the community, women always share their struggles at two levels, first on behalf of their community with the larger structure- larger systemic struggle and the second struggle is within the community to fight the generations of patriarchal systems. Women tend to explore their own agency or discover their own capabilities and start coming up and reflect voices in numerous communities involved when there is external stimulus as NGO/government support that respects the women's agency.

## Response by Vishal Narain

Responding to Ms. Kanchan's point on whose knowledge counts and how do we improve on this, he said that we need to understand the strong differences within the communities. And when we want to understand community voices, it's important to deconstruct this notion of community to look at the differences within them. And it very useful to engage with the concept of intersectionality, as our society is segregated along many lines and hence, we need to understand that the vulnerabilities are different. It's not just for instance about the differences between men and women, but there are a lot of differences among women and in India and Nepal, caste is an important aspect of social differentiation. Regarding the query about what qualifies as data, he said there is always a misconception that data means numbers but they are both qualitative and quantitative. However, the policy makers don't listen to narratives and want numbers however as teachers and academics there is an important role to play in incentivizing students in different ways of creating knowledge, different ways of doing research and building greater empathy for different ways of creating knowledge.

### **Q3. How might we better share experience and learning in knowledge politics across countries and sectors?**

#### **How might we better share experience and learning in knowledge politics across countries and sectors?**

- *I think the value of a more thematic sort of seminars or workshops to discuss a specific issue on certain areas, for example forest management or maybe high and pasture management and all the other empirical issues so that we can have a shared understanding or developing new research questions around this issue across the region, perhaps more intensively within in India and Nepal but we can also think about networking with other countries in South Asia.*  
-Dil Khatri, SIAS
- *How can we actually create linkages with each other in our work where we support each other's work and try and bring visibility to the issues and similarities and constraints in different spheres, in different networks different policy makers, maybe this could be one thing.*
- *I would actually like to invite some of you to be part of a group which is like a study group of researchers, academics, practitioners policymakers, who have come together in exploring what does it mean to look at things in a landscape perspective and not in bits and pieces and not in divided ecosystems, so we look at an entire landscape and we look at everything related to that and see what kind*

*of research exists there, what kind of politics exists, what who are the communities, how are they interacting with their resources. Now we're just sharing and we were amazed to find even though we work in the same area, how much knowledge actually exist even about different landscapes so that could be one thing, that can be pursued, maybe could join or maybe we can think of other landscapes, where there is similar work happening joining hands.*

- *I'm very highly inspired by the work of new researchers who are actually going with the communities and doing this co-creation of knowledge kind of work. And in some of the areas which is where people have not been because they have not been areas of interest to probably others coming up with some really phenomenal work, so how to bring these new researchers and their work to our kind of forums could be one of the things that we can think about.*

*-Neema Pathak Broome*

- *In the networking part, there are some already existing ones, but these are relatively narrow in terms of our historical legacy and all that but one of the discussions that we need is how to go beyond our narrow but more intensive network and to reach out to many of the people who are relatively new or unfamiliar to these digits.*

*-Naya Sharma Poudel*

- *There is this loosely formed network of youths called India youth water network and they organize seminars in organizations, I think these are good opportunities to communicate and at the same time, engage with students who are currently undergoing education or engaging as a part of their work.*
- *There are a lot of civil society organizations engaged in action research and they engage with communities in different forms in the rural, urban, peri-urban areas but a lot of that action research does not speak to the research in the academia. There is a very loose connection and communication that is happening there and I think that is a great opportunity for these types of exchange of political ideas and thoughts and experiences and I think this also gives us opportunity to reflect back upon the design of the projects that are done in academic groups.*

*-Dhaval*

- *In terms of expanding the network and also doing something that's more long-lasting durable one could think of an edited book or journal special issue, bringing together people who are engaging with these questions.*

*-Vishal Narain*

## 4. Key summary/Conclusion

Lastly, Dr. Hemant Ojha from IFSD in his commentary shared about the cross-cutting observations and commented on the presentations and discussions. On the question of whose knowledge is influencing current natural resource governance politics, he said that not only on the biodiversity and urban water management sectors, there are large cross cutting interface on other sectors as well, however, these two sectors actually reflect certain confrontation in relation to what knowledge is currently dominating natural resource governance. In the urban water sector, we have a similar legacy, but maybe not equally entrenched between forest and water. But, more or less there is sort of similar kind of knowledge hegemony that is active at the moment within the operators of the State, but also supported, reinforced in different ways by the collaborators of the state. Investment in India is huge and the investors work very closely with the government department, so we have whole infrastructure, resource, economy and system that reproduces this particular form of knowledge. It is integrated so well with the state power, so in that sense the knowledge is not independent of the power.

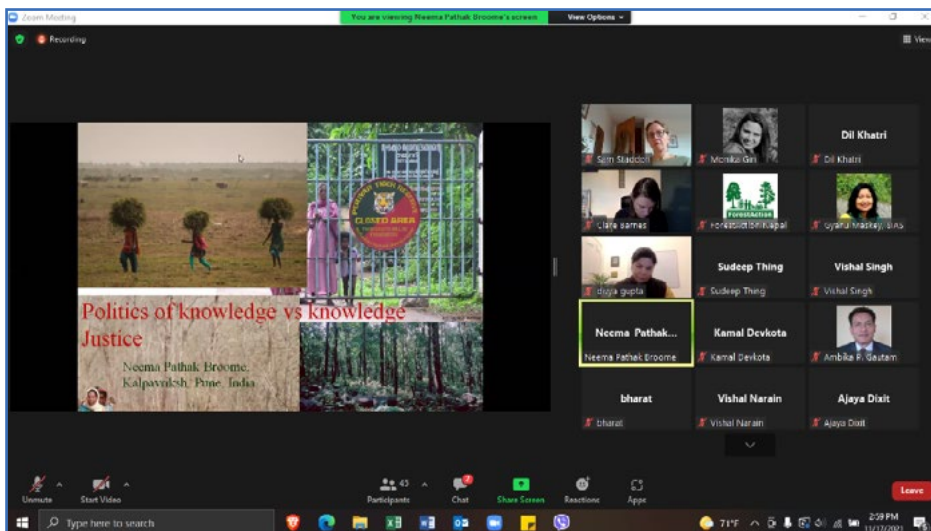
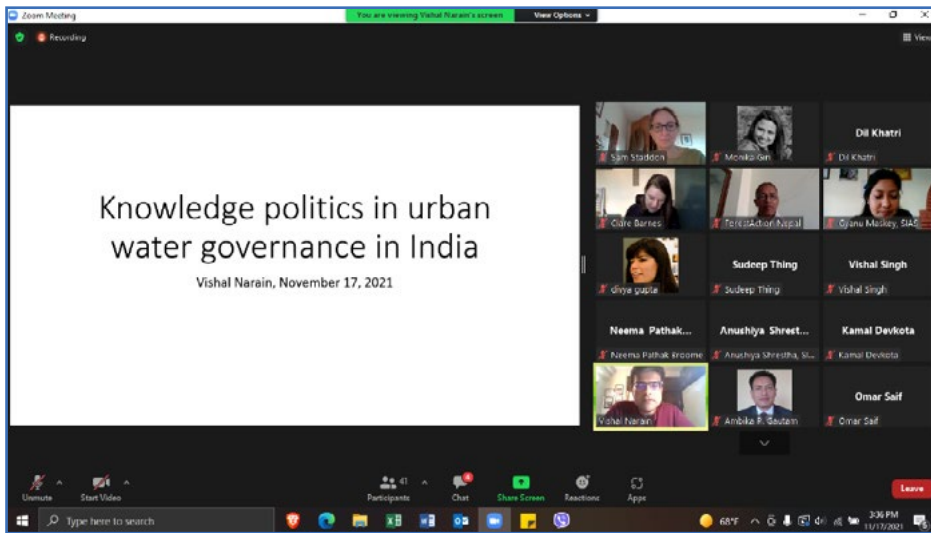
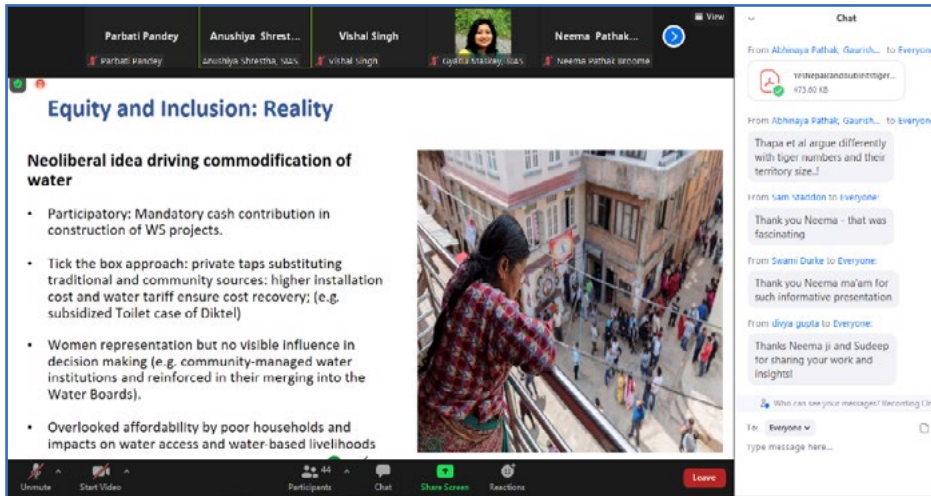
Responding to the second question on efforts to bridge knowledge traditions he stated, a lot of participatory decentralized community-based solutions have emerged in South Asia, and both Nepal and India are actually at the forefront of various aspects of really transformative reforms. Community based forestry in Nepal, Forest Rights Act in India, Food Security Act of India and all those sorts of radical transformative changes in natural resource governance have emerged in the two countries in different arenas. But again, there is another whole area of the state and bureaucracy and power centers which are opposing these reforms, so actually they are not fully translated into practice and at least are very slow in implementation. So, on this second question, what he finds a little frustrating is despite all these rhetoric of innovations, we are still fighting the struggles that started 30-40 years ago. The struggle is not over and in certain cases, there has been even more regressive changes. Especially around the rights of indigenous people and protected areas, as the ecosystem and biodiversity get more modern and gain recognition as global goods and this has a regressive effect on the political positioning of local indigenous people.

Lastly, on sharing experience and learning in knowledge politics across countries and sectors, he said, the first important factor is agency: who is going to initiate the change? There is a strong agency within marginalized groups but in a number of situations, we also see marginalized groups looking for some instigating support and that's where the role of critical action research lies. So, a lot of these struggles are not about bringing new change, it's all about defending the change that was brought about in certain political moments. We shouldn't just romanticize indigenous peoples but empower, nurture and bring out that hidden knowledge. Secondly, he said, bringing the agenda forward, empowering the disadvantaged and virtual cross sectoral trans-disciplinary cross-border sharing is also useful, but is not enough. We need to ask who we are and to what extent our work gets connected to the people whom we are talking about. And talking about the pathways of transformative change, he mentioned changes takes so much time and it gets reversed along the way so it is very imperative to identify how the different kinds of collaborations either youth networks, NGOs or any other activism emerge in moments of change, how the politics unfold in different contexts and how those actors of change and agents of change can engage. All these pathways are important and can become our thinking elements for reframing the resource governance in South Asia.

## 5. Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the key presenters and all the participants of the meeting for their valuable participation and contributing in lively discussion.

# Annex 1: Photos



Zoom Meeting  
Recording

## Protected area and dynamics of scientific-indigenous knowledge systems

Sudesh Jena Thing  
Nive Sharma Paudel  
Rahul Karis  
Sakar Jha  
Shrabya Timisna


Curtin University

Zoom Meeting grid showing participants: Sam Staddon, Monika Giri, Dil Khatri, Clara Barnes, Forestation Nepal, Syanu Maskey, SIAI, diya gupta, Andrea Nightingale, Sudeep Thing, Vishal Singh, Neema Pahal Ebome, Kamal Devkota, Sreesh Gupta, Anshika P. Gaudam, Vishal Narain.

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Zoom Meeting  
Recording

### Our shared interests for the project



**'NOB'**  
Social justice  
Equity + Inclusion  
Power + Politics  
Context  
'Scaling-up'  
etc.

**'LEARNING'**  
Dialogue  
Critical spaces  
Contribution of research  
Reflective learning  
Learning from 'mistakes'  
etc.

British Funding Council | GCRF | THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Zoom Meeting grid showing participants: Sam Staddon, Monika Giri, Dil Khatri, Clara Barnes, Forestation Nepal, Syanu Maskey, SIAI, diya gupta, Andrea Nightingale, Sudeep Thing, Vishal Singh, Neema Pahal Ebome, Kamal Devkota, Sreesh Gupta, Omar Zaf, Dil Khatri.

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Zoom Meeting

Zoom Meeting grid showing participants: Sam Staddon, Monika Giri, Dil Khatri, Clara Barnes, Sreesh Gupta, Shiv Khatri, diya gupta, Syanu Maskey, SIAI, Forestation Nepal, Kanchan Lama, diya, Vishal Singh, Rahul Karis, Omar Zaf, Andrea Nightingale, Sudeep Thing, Shrabya Timisna, Vishal Narain, Anshika P. Gaudam, Anshika, Himant, Anshika Shrestha, SIAI, Himant, Parbat Pandey, cedra.

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## Annex 2: List of participants

S.N.	Name	Affiliation	Email
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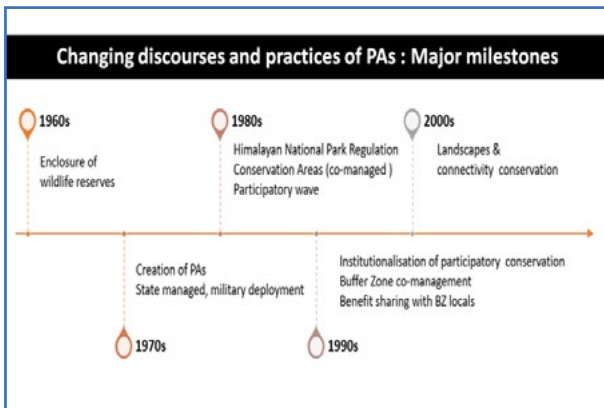
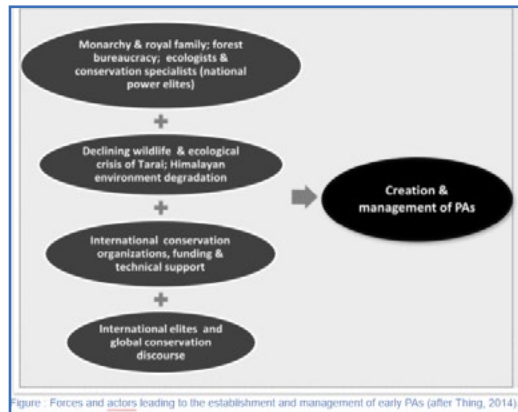
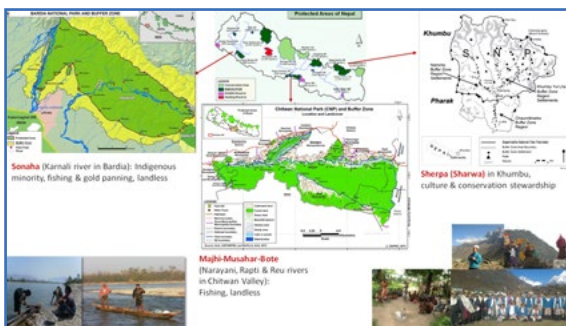
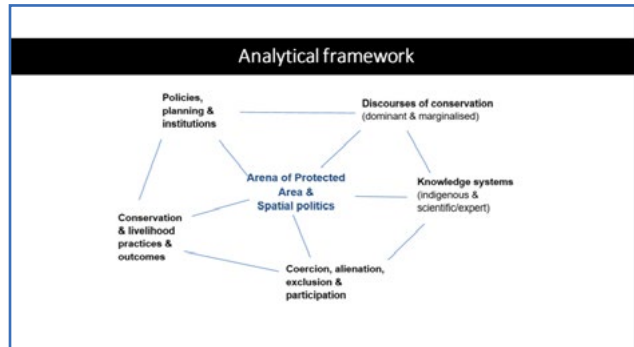
# Annex 3: Presentations

## Protected area and dynamics of scientific-indigenous knowledge systems



Sudeep Jana Thing  
Naya Sharma Paudel  
Rahul Karki  
Sakar Jha  
Shrabya Timsina





## Dominance of scientific knowledge and its outcomes

Nature-culture divisions

Legitimisation of coercive power & spatial control

Crisis of customary livelihoods

Threats to conservation & sustainability

## Key messages & way forward

#### Key messages

- ❖ Despite changing conservation discourses & shifts away from protectionist paradigm towards participatory conservation:
- dominance of expert-scientific knowledge in the mainstream conservation discourses and practices of PAs.
- indigenous knowledge and practices are marginalised, undervalued, or still peripheral.
- ❖ Amidst pressures on PAs and indigenous peoples, there is an opportunity to reorient conservation paradigm policies, and State-IP relationships by appropriately recognizing indigenous knowledges & practices for sustainable, socially just and equitable conservation.

#### Way forward

- Respect, appreciation and space for diverse knowledge systems
- Documentations
- Support
- Dialogues & meaningful inclusion of IPs in the policy and planning arena
- Participation to partnerships
- New PA paradigm
- Embrace indigenous knowledge, worldviews, practices in new interventions

# Urban water management policy and practices in Nepal: A critical reflection

17<sup>th</sup> Nov 2021

Anushiya Shrestha  
Gyanu Maskey  
Kamal Devkota  
Dil Khatri

Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies



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## Outline

- National context
- Urban water management practice and the issues
- Knowledge politics driving this process.



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## National context

- Over 60% of "urban" population, average growth rate: 3.98%/yr.
- Increasing water demand-supply gap (KV: demand 470 MLD supply 91 MLD (KUKL, 2021).
- Ambitious targets:
  - ✓ safe, accessible and adequate water supply and sanitation services to all urban populations (National SDG by 2030).
  - ✓ high or medium level services for at least 1/3rd urban population by 2017 (NUWSSP 2009)
  - ✓ upgrade water supply services at least to medium level by 2014 (NUWSSSP 2014)
- Multiple actors involved, municipal government mandated ensure urban water management (LGOA 2017).
- Policies under revision as per the federal provisioning.
- Climate change pronounced impacts on water resources (WECS, 2011).

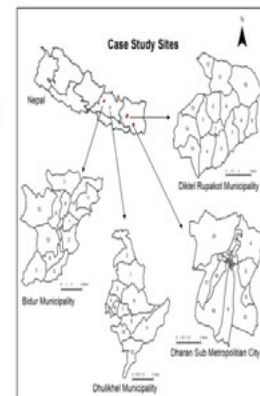


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## Urban water management practices

### Supply Augmentation

- Supply augmentation seeking engineered "solution" using the conventional approach of tapping and distributing "abundantly" available water sources
  - Dhulikhel: targets "One-house-one-tap" by 2022; Multiple Deep bore wells, ADB-funded largescale project
  - Dharan: ADB-funded largescale deep borewells; massive groundwater extraction
  - Bidur: Multiple sources tapped; ADB-funded deep borewell based supply.
  - Diktel: ADB-funded deep bore well despite local contestation



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## Source conservation

Conservation of water sources consistently a policy priority (e.g. WRA 1992, WRS 2002 to NWRP 2020) but translating that into practice remains a challenge.

Some examples:

Appropriate measures to protect all water sources (NWSSSP 2014)  
"One-house-one-recharge pit", "one-village-one-recharge-pond" (Nepal WASH Sector Dev Plan 2016-2030).

"Water resource conserved area" (NWRP 2020)

NWRP 2020 envisioned the coordination among federal, provincial and local government for conservation and development of water resources

Unclear and overlapping responsibilities to manage, regulate water use and conserve water sources and watershed area (Constitution, LGOA, NWSSSP 2009).

NWRP 2020 promotes research and evidence for water resource conservation, development and regulation

Policy provisions to translate these into practice are stagnant (Bill in parliament for last 2 years)



## Source conservation in practice

Source conservation ignored, degradation of local sources has paradoxically legitimized largescale projects.

- Source conservation not a priority (local community, water suppliers, local government (e.g. "blue roof" in Dharan; PES (Payment/Power) approach of Dhulikhel).
- Limited knowledge on the interconnection between source conservation and sustainable water supply (e.g. piloted recharge pond concretized Diktel, Dhulikhel)
- Individual tap connection disincentivize upkeep and maintenance of traditional water sources.
- Local water sources discarded as "unreliable" "to meet the demand for water supply for the rapidly and haphazardly growing towns and cities" (see NWSSSP, 2014), impetus to the largescale water projects (see NWRP, 2020).



## Equity and Inclusion

Latest policy documents have prioritized inclusion aspects in water management but not adequate and poor in practice.

- Participatory water governance: Consumers, especially women, poor and marginalized groups, encouraged to participate in the decision making processes at all levels (NIWSSSP 2009; NWSSP 2014)
- Inclusion of women a priority, not mandatory (Drinking Water Supply Management Board Act 2006).
- NWRP 2020 addresses upstream-downstream water issues, with assurance of job, livelihood trainings for the communities affected by the water projects.
- Contradicting prior rights: Irrigation policy 2013 article b (1.6.10) versus Drinking Water and Sanitation Bill (chapter 2 article 4.2)



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## Equity and Inclusion: Reality

Neoliberal idea driving commodification of water

- Participatory: Mandatory cash contribution in construction of WS projects.
- Tick the box approach: private taps substituting traditional and community sources: higher installation cost and water tariff ensure cost recovery; (e.g. Toilet case of Diktel)
- Women representation but no visible influence in decision making (e.g. community-managed water institutions and their merging of into the Water Board).
- Overlooked affordability by poor households and impacts on water access and water-based livelihoods



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Photo: Tolly Smith

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## Devolved authority vs municipal capacity

Local government formally authorized to make local water management acts and policies (LGOA, 2017). In practice, reliance on centrally-driven generalized water management approach continues.

- Contextual issues, local experiential knowledge and alternative water management opportunities ignored (e.g. Wastewater reuse in Dhulikhel, RWH in Dharan)
- Water sources beyond local jurisdiction, largescale projects more vulnerable to disasters.
- Policy provisioning for disaster-resilient urban water infrastructures weak (e.g. Bidur, Dhulikhel; Covid-19 pandemic impacts on all sites).
- Capacity mismatch- resource and responsibility devolved but technical capacity hampering delivery and sustainability of services



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## Technocratic knowledge politics

- Water resource governance dominated by engineering discipline supply focused "solutions" using "participatory" approach and the notion "equitable" cost recovery.
- Limited space for issues of inequity, exclusion, gender, rights and conservation of water sources ignored.
- Poor and marginalized water insecure although access to clean drinking water and sanitation constitutionally a fundamental right.
- Resource sustainability and the interlinkages between different water uses/users need to be incorporated as part of project.
- Sensitize and capacitate water supply authorities to ensure equity and inclusion for water security.
- Mixed approach (larger and smaller schemes; private, communal, traditional/public taps, alternative water mgmt) for resilient and equitable water supply systems.



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## The politics of knowledge creation in urban water governance

Vishal Narain, November 17, 2021

## Understanding politics and power

- Politics, or the balance of power underlies all aspects of human and social interaction, though it is rarely made explicit
- In social sciences, we debate relevance of research paradigms positivism vs interpretivism/social constructivism/ critical social science research
- Positivism is considered to be objective, value neutral or a 'safe, defensible way' of doing research
- Knowledge creation and dissemination are presented as 'value free, socially sanitized' processes
- Rarely pause to reflect on how unequal power relations among disciplines shape processes of knowledge creation and dissemination

## But this is absolutely necessary !

- The status quo can not be changed unless it is understood and made explicit

## What does this mean for how water problems are addressed ?

- The large bulk of India's water professionals have been trained as civil engineers
- So there seems to be an engineering solution to every water problem
- Since engineering has been the prerogative of men, it also means that there is a gender imbalance in the composition of the water sector (e.g. Kulkarni 2009)
- And little attention to issues of gender and social inclusion or of water rights and equity (more broadly in South Asia)

## Peri-urban water security

- Often compromised in the process
- Assumed hegemony of cities, implicit biases in urban planning about who modern cities are meant for ( e.g. Shatkin 2017; Roy 2004)
- Urban political ecology studies have thrown light on the politics of water access in urban areas (e.g Swyngedouw, Bryant and Bailey)
- When applied to a periurban context, throw light on
  - Urban metabolism (how it manifests)
  - How the ecological foot-print (1992) of urban expansion is borne ?

## Water Resources Education in India

- Conventionally, water management has been understood to be a technical discipline
- Reproduced in narratives surrounding the water crisis, and in professed solutions to ameliorate it
- The crisis is rarely understood as one of access, rather than that of availability
- The crisis is not the same for every one, and certainly not the same every where
- Addressing the crisis therefore requires us to “reframe it” as an institutional one, rather than a physical one (Shah and Narain 2019)

## What does this mean for urban water governance ?

- Cities have been seen as engines of growth, associated with economies of scale
- In the phase of neo-liberal economic reforms, cities have expanded as centres of outsourcing, IT, under special incentives for special economic zones
- Strong imperatives to provide infrastructure (including water) for cities, often by appropriating land (and water) from peripheral villages
- Pushing land and water dependent livelihoods into marginalization, deepening social and economic inequalities in peri-urban areas
  - (e.g Narain 2014; Nagendra and Ostrom 2004; Roth et al., 2018)

## In a larger context of climate change... what does this mean ?

- Climate change aggravates the impacts of diminishing water access in peri-urban areas (decline of monsoon rainfall, changes in the seasonal distribution of rainfall, fewer rainy days but increased intensity of rain in short duration) (e.g Narain and Prakash 2016)
- Challenge of bridging people's narratives of climate change with the language of the scientific discourse

## How do we bridge this gap? What is our role here as researchers and activists ?

- Strong role for Action Research (strong evidence in South Asia)
  - Building civic engagement (Narain et al., 2020)
  - The Negotiated Approach (Gomes and Hermans 2018)
  - Participatory Action Planning (Halkatti et al., 2003)
  - Community mobilization of peri-urban communities (Dahiya 2003a, b)
- However, power and politics are key here, too
- Need conscious strategies to address power differences

## Changing Nature of Water Resources Education in South Asia

- Existing water programs have been reoriented to inter-disciplinary programs
- E.g the SAWA initiative of SasiWATERS
  - Focuses on getting more women into the water sector
  - In Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka
  - Introduces modules on gender, climate change, and inter-disciplinary research methods
  - Will change how water challenges are addressed in the future
  - There will be more women water professionals in the region in the future
    - (gender is also a form of power relation!)

## But there is strong hope for the future

- The Nature of Water Resources Education is changing in South Asia
- There are new inter-disciplinary water resource education programmes in India, that will shape a new breed of water professionals
  - TISS
  - Teri School of Advanced Studies
  - Shiv Nadar University
- Focus on aspects of gender, rights and equity: water conflicts; water institutions and governance
- A better gender balance in enrolment than conventional engineering programmes

## What else should we do ?

- Train and build capacities of state agencies to understand issues of equity, gender, rights and inclusion
- Include water providers (e.g. the PHED) but also urban planners
- Emphasise concepts of urban metabolism, ecological foot-print in current curricula for urban planning
- Challenge the rural-urban dichotomy/binary in development, research and education
- Impress on students the fluidity in definitions of “urban” and “rural”; the blurring of urban and rural boundaries

## Annex 4: Chat box discussion

- **Abhinaya Pathak, Gaurishankar Conservation Area**01:20:56

Thapa et al argue differently with tiger numbers and their territory size..!

- **Sam Staddon**02:03:02

1. Which/whose knowledges are influencing NRM policies and institutions and in which ways, and which/whose knowledges are being excluded?2. What efforts are being made to bridge knowledge traditions and with what effects?3. How might we better share experience and learning in knowledge politics across countries and sectors?

- **Roshni Kutty**02:20:47

Yes, Rinan. TOtally agree about the oral data being marginalized in research. I would add that I see oral traditions of indigenous communities are also marginalized even within a law that aims to acknowledge and recognize rights of traditional knowledge. For eg. Requirement of sketch maps, written management plans that “fix” indigenous knowledge

- **Sreoshi Gupta**02:22:33

Interesting presentations and good discussion. Need to leave due an urgent personal commitment.

- **Sam Staddon**02:22:58

Many thanks for joining us Sreoshi

- **Sreoshi Gupta**02:24:19

thanks for inviting. would be interested in being part of more such webinars.

- **Basundhara Bhattarai**02:26:43

Thank you everyone for very interesting discussion.

- **Roshni Kutty**02:28:00

Thank you Neema for your insightful and optimistic comments :) Always a pleasure to discuss with you :)

- **Sam Staddon**02:31:51

I am very interested in our third question – on how do we SHARE our critical ideas and insights – I wonder what everyone thinks we need MORE of in order to share these? Do people feel there are enough opportunities for this right now e.g. with so many webinars, or is there more we could do?

- **Sam Staddon**02:35:03

Also, how do we get beyond the ‘normal suspects’ of those of us who share these ideas?

- **Sam Staddon**02:38:24

Thank you Neema for those very practical suggestions

- **divya gupta**02:40:51

I agree with Neema ji listening to water and PA presentations together illuminated the understanding of the overarching issues in the governance process in general.

- **Neema Pathak Broome**02:41:20

Agree with Dhaval, good points



- **Roshni Kutty**02:41:29

Tapping our networks – be it at the ground level working with communities; middle level – practitioners and researchers and academics; national and international level – INGOS or Inter-governmental organisations, while consciously trying to balance the representatives from each level. WE also need to think out of the box on formats of sharing, considering that most individuals are either zoom fatigued or have poor or no internet connectivity.

- **Sam Staddon**02:43:44

Thank you Roshni for those ideas – our other focus in this project on the use of film in engaging with knowledge politics in NRM grows out of the need to engage with other formats of engaging...

- **Roshni Kutty**02:45:50

I look forward to the film, Sam! That is a more accessible means of understanding and spreading different knowledge worlds.

- **Shrabya Timsina**02:45:52

I think Dil sir's suggestion about meetings on thematic areas is useful for the specific purpose of bringing together academics/practitioners with communities affected by those specific issues. For e.g. if I remember correctly, we were hoping to organize a workshop featuring semi-nomadic yak herders and policy-makers/other professionals

- **ForestAction Nepal**02:47:29

Thanks Shrabya. Yes we are planning for those issue-specific country level meeting in Nepal in next couple of weeks.

- **Dil Khatri**02:48:37

And, we can think of some regional discussion on issues such as forest management and other issues in future.

- **Sam Staddon**02:55:39

I want to thank everyone on behalf of our students at Edinburgh – as listening to you all gives us (Clare and I as teachers there) extra emphasis and urgency in our work to engage these students with these critical debates – thank you

- **Roshni Kutty**02:57:21

Goodbye everyone! Thank you Divya, Clare, Sam and Gyanu and others who have organized this seminar. It has been very exciting to experience this sharing of knowledge and I thank all those who have done that. My apologies for not being able to sit till the end. Other responsibilities call.

- **Sam Staddon**02:57:44

Thank you so much Roshni for all your great input and insights

- **Kanchan Lama**03:01:11

Thanks to all for such a rich session. Hope we could continue exploring diverse knowledge on inclusive research experiences to influence transformative development.

- **Dibya Gurung**03:01:41

Thank you all the presenters and organizers for very informative sessions. Learnt a lot.

- **Anuja**03:02:21

Thank you all for a very interesting discussion

- **Neema Pathak Broome**03:02:37

Thank you for inviting,

- **Dhaval**03:02:47

Thank you everyone- interesting insights from forests and urban water- lot to learn.

- **Clare Barnes**03:02:48

Thank you so much everyone. This has given me a lot to reflect on, and it is great to feel the solidarity in the room. Many thanks to all speakers for sharing and inspiring and helping us to think of ways forward

- **Sudeep Thing**03:02:59

I wonder it is a good idea to organise intercultural dialogues where local or indigenous reps, critical researchers, policy makers, bureaucrats, professionals sit together, listen to each other, barriers and opportunities

- **Rinan Shah**03:03:03

Thank you everyone for creating such a space!

Thanks everyone!