

PRESS RELEASE

Aaranyak and 'State Innovation and Transformation Ayog' (SITA), Government of Assam are jointly organising a webinar at 11.AM to 12.30 PM (90 minutes) on September 27, 2020 on the theme "State of rivers in Assam: Challenges of sustainable management for ecological and human well-being" to celebrate the World Rivers Day.

Rivers all over the world are facing grave threats from pollution, over exploitation, flow fragmentation due to structural barriers and ecological degradation. It goes without saying that free flowing and healthy rivers are essential for maintenance of natural ecosystems with their functions and basic human needs of water supply, irrigation, agriculture, navigation, fisheries, small scale energy production and economic development. Rivers are also an integral part of religion, culture, folklore, literature, music and the history of mankind.

The current state of rivers in Assam is a cause for serious concern. With increasing pollution, decreasing hydrological connectivity, abuse of river flood plains and dwindling aquatic biodiversity, rivers are crying for our attention and protection. Too much of structural intervention are fragmenting flows, riverine ecosystems and flood plain integrity. Deforestation in catchment areas and accelerated soil erosion resulting in excessive sediment load are adding to the dwindling health of rivers.

To address these and many other issues arising around rivers and riverine ecosystems, Aaranyak is planning to hold a series of discussions over the next one year. This webinar is the first initiative to begin a discourse on rivers from a multidisciplinary perspective with an aim to highlight myriads of services and values of rivers, need to halt further degeneration of rivers and importance of adopting climate sensitive and adaptive policies for sustainable management of rivers both at national and state level.

The objective of holding this webinar is to (i) make people aware about the current problems that have led to degradation and near death of many small rivers, rivulets and streams that play important role in provisioning of eco-hydrological services to human societies and wildlife; (2) help people understand the myriads of values of rivers and appreciate rivers for their services rendered to human societies and environment ; (3) inform people about the existing policies and practices for addressing problems of rivers; 4) emphasise the need of conserving, protecting and rejuvenating dying and degraded rivers and (5) promote the importance of river management policies at national level and in states for integrating sustainable development, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and resilience.

The webinar will also mark the commencement of an action research project on '**Dying rivers of Assam: A study on degradation of selected rivers and riverine ecosystems in the Brahmaputra Valley for developing a community-based action plan for their rejuvenation**'. The project will be carried out by the Water, Climate and Hazard (WATCH) Division of Aaranyak with support and collaboration of the State Innovation and Transformation Ayog, Government of Assam during October 2020-September 2021.

The webinar will have participation of seven expert panellists drawn from academia, government and civil society. They are: (1). Dr. Mridul Hazarika, Vice Chancellor, University of Science & Technology Meghalaya (USTM), Former VC, Gauhati University and Adviser, State Innovation and Transformation Ayog, Government of Assam; (2). Er. A. K. Mitra, Former Secretary, Water Resources, Government of Assam, Chairman, Technical Advisory Committee, Department of Water Resources, Government of Assam; (3). Prof. S. P. Biswas, Department of Life Sciences, Dibrugarh University; (4). Prof Chandan Kumar Sarma, Department of Sociology and Department Social Work, Tezpur University; (5). Dr. Arun Kumar Sarma, Director General North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR), Department of Science and Technology, Government of India; (6). Dr. Sanchita Boruah, Associate Professor and HoD, Department of Zoology, D.H.S.K. College, Dibrugarh, (7). Dr. Bidyut Bikash Sarma, Environmental Scientist.

The speakers will highlight major issues about the present status of health of our rivers, policies and practices of managing rivers, significance of rivers for environment, society and culture and recommend a way forward for new outlook and management strategy for rivers derived from modern science, technology and traditional knowledge combined with the need and principles of sustainable development for ecological and all-round human wellbeing.

We expect to have about a hundred interested participants, with a sizeable representation of the young generation, as audience and interactors who are curious to know about and understand rivers. They will be from a large cross section of society such as researchers, environmentalists, social activists, students, grassroots communities and general citizens who love and care for rivers.

The webinar will be moderated by Dr. Partha J Das, Head, 'Water, Climate & Hazard Division', Aaranyak. Logistics for conducting the webinar will be facilitated by Media Production and Communications Division (MPCD), Aaranyak.

For more information, please contact:

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