

***Political Ecology of River: Indo-Swiss Exploration of Hydrosocial Dynamics  
in the Ganges Lower Basin***



Waterscapes -or landscapes like rivers, estuaries, deltas, mixing land and water- are characterized by dynamism and uncertainty. To further the understanding of cultural, social and political interactions with waters, Political Ecology of Water scholars (Karen Bakker, Erik Swyngedouw, Jamie Linton, Jessica Budds, Gabrielle Bouleau, Rutgerd Boelens, etc.) have developed what is known as the hydrosocial framework. This Indo-Swiss project aimed to explore hydrosociality in the Ganges Lower Basin, with a geo-historical perspective.

This one-year exchange programme involved research teams from IIT Kharagpur, Humanities Department (Jenia Mukherjee, Baghirath Behera) and University of Lausanne, Institute of Geography and Sustainability (Christian Kull, Flore Lafaye de Micheaux). The main activities that took place were field visits, networking, preparing research outcomes such as conference talks (2 in Switzerland, 2 in India), a joint paper, and 2 book chapters (forthcoming).

The main result of this one-year programme has been to reveal that sediments are a relative blindspot in research and policy. This joint exploration of the Lower Gangetic Basin showed how sediments transported by rivers are intricately intertwined with river-society interactions. In this tropical estuarine-deltaic land(water)scape, hydrosociality assumes greater complexity by encountering sediments; water-society dynamics transform into water-sediment-society dialectics.

These outcomes, as well as the hydrosocial framework, will be further disseminated through a course for faculty members at IIT Kharagpur (October 2017). Two project proposals - outcomes of field findings and exchange exposure financed under the ICSSR-UNIL Scholar Exchange Grant have been submitted for funding.



Field visits were given importance in this exchange programme. In India, field studies were undertaken in the Ganges Lower Basin, mainly in Malda and Murshidabad *chars* as well as in the inhabited islands of Sundarbans. East Kolkata Wetlands and fisheries were also visited. In Switzerland and in France, for comparative insights, the glacier-source of the Rhône, the Rhône valley as well as the Rhône delta (Camargue) were explored. Meetings with professionals and experts from water/environment agencies and organisations (WB State Pollution Control Board, WWF-India, Conservatoire du Littoral, Parc naturel régional de Camargue, CPIE Rhône, etc.) were also arranged to discuss informed and fair conservation strategies and policies.