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Transboundary Water Cooperation over the Brahmaputra River: Legal Political Economy Analysis of Current and Future Potential Cooperation

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Description / Abstract

This report presents findings from the project 'Water Diplomacy: Making Water Cooperation Work'. It analyzes key factors that affect transboundary water cooperation over the Brahmaputra river basin. Water cooperation over the Brahmaputra is heavily influenced by socio-economic and political factors, as well as biophysical and material contexts. This reports focuses on understanding the factors at play in order to improve future cooperation.

The Brahmaputra River (also called Yarlung-Tsangpo in China; Jamuna in Bangladesh; and Manas River in Bhutan) is one of the largest rivers in South Asia. The river originates in the Tibetan area of China and flows through four countries, including China, Bhutan, India and Bangladesh, before reaching the sea at the Bay of Bengal. It provides an important source of livelihoods for the riparian populations, many of whom use the river for agriculture and fisheries. The river also encompasses a huge potential for hydropower electricity generation with some dams planned or already operating within China, Bhutan and India. The use of its water resources has become the source of contention between different users in some parts of the river, involving multiple jurisdictions and countries. Sharing of water resources over several jurisdictions can potentially create conflict among various actors.

Publication year

2017

Country

Bangladesh Bhutan China India

Region

Asia

Publisher

The Hague Institute for Global Justice

Keywords

Brahmaputra River Basin Fisheries Agriculture Hydropower Conflict Management

Thematic Tagging

Transboundary

Language English

View resource

Source <https://beta.toolbox.venthic.com/resource/transboundary-water-cooperation-over-brahmaputra-river-legal-political-economy-analysis>
URL: