



# Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna Civil Society Organisation Network

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework



The Asia Foundation

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) is a transboundary river system spanning five countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, and Nepal. Water resource management in the GBM region faces many challenges, stemming from its diverse socio-political and ecological context, as well as the absence of regional basin level approaches related to water resource management.

A large number of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the region are working on water management issues with local communities. These organisations could potentially play a greater role in sustainable transboundary water management. Unfortunately, most CSOs do not have access to technical knowledge, or the capacity to effectively engage and influence decision-making resources. As a result, the CSO community continues to have relatively little impact on regional water dialogues and decision-making process.

To tackle these challenges, the BRIDGE GBM project, facilitated by IUCN, aims to build the capacity of a network of CSOs in the GBM basins to improve their ability to engagement in transboundary water management issues.

In the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) basin, the BRIDGE project is funded by [The Asia Foundation](#) and the [Transboundary Rivers of South Asia](#) (TROSA) programme of Oxfam Novib. The BRIDGE GBM programme has developed a regional network of more than 30 CSOs from the five GBM countries. Through a series of regional dialogues and consensus building activities, the GBM CSOs Network developed a common vision, which is articulated in the document entitled, '[A civil society vision for connecting the people of the Ganges-Brahmaputra- Meghna \(GBM\) river basins](#)'. The vision, which was launched in October 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, advocates for the equitable utilisation of shared river resources in the GBM basins.

BRIDGE GBM is currently facilitating activities to support the institutionalisation of the GBM CSO Network. This is being done through continued capacity building, and the development and the adoption of governance mechanism and a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for measuring the impact on the network on shared water governance issues.

The M&E framework established indicators for assessing the impact of CSOs on shared water governance issues. IUCN initiated two regional surveys to identify priority areas for the development of this M&E framework. One of the surveys targeted key government agencies linked to water governance in the four GBM countries (Bangladesh, China, India and Nepal); and the other survey targeted members of the GBM CSO Network.

The outcomes of the surveys were summarised in two reports: *Strengthening CSOs engagement in water governance*; and *Contribution and influence of CSOs on water governance in the GBM basins*.

The M&E framework has been developed with funding from The Asia Foundation. Moving forward, IUCN, with the support of Oxfam Novib's Transboundary Rivers of South Asia (TROSA) project, will work closely with members of the GBM CSOs Network to ensure that they formally adopt the M&E framework.

## 2 THE GBM CSO NETWORK AND VISION

BRIDGE started its activities in the GBM in 2016, focusing on engagement with CSOs working on water governance issues in the five target countries. A regional network of more than 25 CSOs was created and a common vision was developed to guide the activities of the network. The Vision is titled: [A civil society vision for connecting the people of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna \(GBM\) river basin](#). The vision represents a milestone for transboundary water governance, as it is the first time that CSOs from five different countries joined forces and contributed to the development of a common agenda and strategy for improving regional water cooperation in the GBM region.

The vision advocates for the equitable utilisation of shared river resources in the GBM Basin, based on consensus and cooperation at all levels catalysed by multi-level cooperation among the CSOs themselves.

In pursuit of the vision, the GBM CSO Network members committed themselves to a common objective to cultivate a sustained culture of transboundary cooperation among the countries of the GBM Basin, with the aim of creating an enabling environment for enhanced cooperation for the conservation, long-term economic growth, livelihood security, and sustainable management of the GBM rivers through an ecosystem-based approach.

Guided by the vision, the GBM CSO network agreed to uphold the principles of inclusivity, equity, no harm, reasonable use of resources, and protection of ecosystems; protect important local ecosystems vital for the GBM river basin, including Himalayan glaciers, the Sundarbans, and Chalabil; and explore the economic rationale and the potential for mutual benefit through collaboration. The network will adopt a constructive approach towards engaging with governments, one based on mutual respect and trust.

To operationalise the vision, the GBM CSO Network committed itself to collaborating and engaging with all relevant organisations and stakeholders to deliver on the following five themes: a) transboundary cooperation; b) policy and legislation; c) research and knowledge; d) capacity-building; and e) communication, outreach, and advocacy. The overall aim of the five themes is to develop and support mechanisms for cross-border dialogues at local, national and regional levels and to ensure that existing information and knowledge can be shared and applied effectively and efficiently, contributing to regional cooperation at all levels for the sustainable development of the GBM basin.

For each component, the vision identifies cross-cutting actions (a total of 21 actions under five components) to support the operationalisation of the Vision's goal (See Annex 2, GBM CSO Vision).

The log-frame of the proposed M&E framework for the GBM CSOs Network builds on these actions and identifies indicators and means of verification to monitor progress on each component and the actions identified by the vision explained in section 3.

## 3 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE M&E FRAMEWORK

The goal of the M&E Framework is to demonstrate the impact of the GBM CSO Network and to promote it among the key water governance stakeholders.

The M&E Framework is not only designed as a monitoring tool, but also as an awareness and advocacy element to support and promote the operationalisation of the GBM CSO vision. The M&E framework is aligned to the five themes identified by the vision and identifies indicators for monitoring the network activities with respect to the goals and objectives of the GBM CSO Vision. Once formally adopted by the network, these indicators will support reporting on the members' water governance activities and the quantification of impacts of the network as a whole at regional, national and local levels.

Dialogues with government representatives and key stakeholders on water governance have indicated that the credibility and the capacity of CSOs are two important factors in ensuring that governments support CSO engagement in transboundary water governance.

#### 4 METHODOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE M&E FRAMEWORK

This monitoring framework builds on a number of dialogues and products developed by the GBM CSO Network. The specific activities which formed part of the development of this M&E Framework are listed below:

- A set of indicators for the monitoring framework was drafted based on the review of the GBM CSO Vision, and analysis of the functioning of similar networks of organisations, such as Indo Nepal Joint Action Forum (INJAF) and SaciWATERS-CapNet programme. The indicators were discussed with the members of the GBM CSO Network during a half-day meeting on 28 June 2018 in Kathmandu.
- The M&E Framework builds on the gaps identified by the report: *Contribution and Influence of CSOs on Water Governance in the Transboundary GBM Basins*, which was produced by IUCN based on the survey of CSOs conducted in June and July 2018. More than 17 participants from Bangladesh, China, India and Nepal participated in the survey. The survey identified technical capacity-building of CSOs on hydro-diplomacy and regional cooperation as an important element to ensure their constructive engagement in transboundary water governance.
- The monitoring framework also draws input from the discussions on CSO-government cooperation on transboundary water governance held during two multi-stakeholder dialogues: 'Strengthening Institutional Framework for Cooperative Governance in Mahakali/Sharda,' held in Kathmandu, Nepal, 24-25 June 2018; and 'Benefit Sharing to Enhance Multi-level Cooperation for Integrated Management of the Meghna Basin,' held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 405 July 2018. These dialogues highlighted the need to establish communication mechanisms between governments and CSOs for improving trust and programmatic engagement.
- The monitoring framework also builds on the input received during one-to-one surveys of government representatives conducted on 21 July 2018 and 29 August 2018 by IUCN country offices in Bangladesh, China, India and Nepal.

#### 5 OVERVIEW OF THE M&E FRAMEWORK

The monitoring and evaluation framework proposed for the GBM CSO Network is composed of two mutually reinforcing elements: The M&E Logframe and the Most Significant Change (MSC) approach.

##### 5.1 THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION LOGFRAME

The M&E Logframe articulates an outcome statement for each of the five themes of work identified by the BRIDGE GBM CSO Vision. Each outcome is monitored through a set of outcome-related indicators, looking at long-term achievements and changes. The outcomes are supported by specific outputs with associated output indicators and means of verification. The indicators can be assessed periodically to quantify the changes taking place in the regional, national and local context, induced by the activities of the network and its members. The M&E Framework also proposes a frequency for data collection and reporting for each indicator.

Below is an overview of the content of the M&E Framework. For details please see Annex 1, The Monitoring and Evaluation Logframe for the GBM CSO Network.

### 5.1.1 Transboundary cooperation

**Outcome statement:** Cooperation between CSOs at regional and national levels has been strengthened and results in an improved effectiveness and interaction with government stakeholders.

The quantification of benefits to the CSOs from their engagement in cooperation mechanisms and evidence of interaction of government-led processes with the GBM CSO cooperation mechanisms are proposed as indicator to monitor the progress against the outcome. Furthermore, the evidence of commitments from states to engage in dialogue with broader group of stakeholders and an MSC survey approach is proposed as a means of verification.

To achieve this outcome, the following two outputs are proposed under the M&E Logframe:

**Output 1: Regional and national CSO cooperation mechanisms have been created and enhance the cooperation between CSOs and governments.** To achieve this output it is important that the regional and national networks of CSOs are created, with clear terms of reference (ToRs), operational guidelines and governance mechanisms. The national-level platforms will improve the impact of the regional network at the national level and enable closer engagement with government counterparts. In time, the development of CSO cooperation mechanisms will also contribute to strengthening the water governance programme among CSO members.

Proposed means of verification include: Approved and validated ToRs and operational guidelines signed by members, minutes of meetings of governance bodies, workplans and progress reports on the activities of regional and national CSO cooperation mechanisms, and a higher percentage of water governance projects in the portfolio and number of staff working on water issues in individual CSO organisations. These will help assess the achievements of the network under Output 1.

**Output 2: Community exchange and cooperation are strengthened through support from CSO cooperative platforms** at local and transboundary levels. The number of cross-border community dialogues, study tours, and collaborative transboundary water governance projects involving communities – facilitated by the members of GBM CSO Network – will be assessed using the M&E Framework to quantify the level and effectiveness of community engagement in trans-boundary activities resulting from the activities of CSO-led initiatives.

### 5.1.2 Policy and Legislation

**Outcome statement:** The legal and policy framework on water governance has been strengthened, harmonized, and developed at local, national, and regional levels

The indicators for monitoring the progress of this outcome include strengthened and harmonised policies, laws, and river basin governance guidelines in the GBM Basin.

The text of improved, new or revised policies, agreements and laws, joint statements from the governments of the GBM Basin and surveys and interviews of the of government and key stakeholders provides a means of verification.

The M&E Logframe will monitor this outcome through the following two outputs:

**Output 1:** Recommendations and guidelines on policy harmonisation and improvement are developed and disseminated at regional and national levels by CSOs.

The Indicators of progress include gaps, challenges and opportunities identified by CSOs and development of policy recommendations. The number of government policies and customary laws reviewed by the network members; number of reports with gaps, challenges and recommendations disseminated by the CSOs; and number of policy events organised are the means of verification.

**Output 2:** CSOs are actively engaged in policy dialogues. The output will be monitored through the number of relevant policy dialogues organised by governments where the members of the GBM CSO Network were invited to make suggestions and share the results of their activities. It will also be monitored through CSO-led capacity-building and outreach policy events and projects with the involvement of local and national governments.

#### 5.1.3 Research and Knowledge

**Outcome Statement:** Regional knowledge on water resources in the GBM is gathered, documented, and disseminated with support from the GBM CSO Network, contributing to transboundary cooperation and decision-making processes at all levels

The indicator for monitoring outcomes includes evidence of GBM CSO Network-produced knowledge being used as a reference in decision-making at all levels. To verify the progress, government interviews and an MSC survey have been proposed by the logframe.

The M&E Logframe identifies three outputs and associated indicators which are summarised below:

**Output 1:** CSO data-sharing mechanisms are working and enhance the cooperation between CSOs regionally and with governments. The development, maintenance and promotion of a functional web portal consolidating the knowledge on the GBM resources, and the amount of information and reports shared and used by the government, are selected indicators to assess the effectiveness of the data sharing platform.

**Output 2:** Harmonised regional research programmes are developed and guide the work of the CSOs at regional, national and local levels. The development and implementation of a regional research strategy will be tracked and verified through the number of reports and scientific publications on research gap analyses produced by CSOs, the amount of joint research conducted, and the number of peer-reviewed papers published.

**Output 3:** Best practices on river basin management, including relevant local knowledge, are documented, disseminated and used. The M&E Logframe will assess the development of regional guidelines on the conservation and management of river basins on specific themes (E.g.: disaster risk reduction, ecosystem-based adaptation, climate change, and eco-tourism). It will also track evidence of government and community-level projects and plans using the guidelines.

#### 5.1.4 Capacity-building

**Outcome Statement:** Communities and CSOs have the capacity required to actively engage in water governance processes and initiatives.

The improved capacity of CSOs and community members are indicators of success that will be verified by capacity surveys of CSO and community members and by capturing MSC stories.

The two outputs below were identified to monitor progress on this outcome; they aim to enhance the capacity of the network members as a strategy to strengthen their own water governance capacity building programme toward communities.

**Output 1:** Capacity of GBM CSOs network members on water governance issues have been strengthened at national and transboundary levels.

The indicators to track progress on the outcomes are: A regional capacity-building programme is developed and carried out for the GBM CSO Network members and supported by partner organisations, and a regional network of trainers is built. The number of reports identifying capacity gaps, number of Training of Trainers events held by each CSO, and the number of community capacity-building events



facilitated by the trainers, as well as the capacity survey of beneficiaries, have been identified by the M&E Logframe as means of verification.

**Output 2:** Community capacity on water governance is enhanced by the GBM CSO Network. The indicator to track this outcome is the existence of capacity building programmes for communities conducted by CSO Network, verified through the number of trainings conducted at community level and capacity surveys of communities trained.

#### 5.1.5 Communication and Outreach

**Outcome Statement:** The GBM CSO Network and its members are more visible and recognised by policymakers and relevant stakeholders and their messages are better heard.

For tracking progress, the indicator is the improved visibility of the GBM CSO Network and associated community-led initiatives, as verified by the number of media reports, number of references in government and non-CSO communications, and the number of acknowledgements in reports, plans and guidelines prepared by governments referring to the activities of the GBM CSO Network. This indicator will be supported by the MSC survey approach.

Communication is a cross-cutting theme and is important to ensuring the visibility and credibility of the network. The dialogues with governments on CSO engagement in transboundary water governance activities have clearly highlighted the need to communicate the activities and outcomes of CSO water governance activities, as a strategy for building trust between governments and CSOs and opening spaces for programmatic engagement between the two sectors. Therefore, the following output is proposed for tracking progress towards the outcomes:

**Output 1:** The GBM CSO Network develops and implements a communication and awareness strategy promoting civil society-led events and effective use of multi-channel communication and media engagement. To achieve this, a GBM CSOs regional communication and awareness strategy needs to be validated and implemented. This will be monitored through the number of civil society-led communication and awareness events on water governance conducted, including media trainings.

## 5.2 Capturing the most significant change

The Most Significant Change (MSC) approach provides a way to measure changes in the behaviour, capacity and influence of target stakeholders on water governance issues. This is particularly important when dealing with changes or regional harmonisation of transboundary water governance policies.

Stakeholder perception may not be fully captured in a quantitative or structured approach to monitoring. Further reasons for adopting this approach as the part of this monitoring framework are listed below:

- It is a participatory form of monitoring that requires no special professional skills. Compared to other monitoring approaches, it is easy to communicate across cultures. There is no need to explain what an indicator is. Everyone can tell stories about events and outcomes they think were important.
- It encourages analysis as well as data collection because people have to explain why they believe one change is more important than another.
- It can deliver a rich picture of what is happening, rather than an overly simplified picture where organisational, social and economic developments are reduced to figures and numbers.
- It can be used to monitor and evaluate activities that do not have predefined outcomes against which to evaluate

- It promotes an organisational culture where it is acceptable to discuss things that go wrong as well as success
- It deepens the awareness of key individuals on progress achieved. Those individuals can then act as ambassadors or champions for the promotion of the outcomes and results achieved;

The overall MSC approach needs to be tailored to each context, but follow key steps:

Steps to data collection		Implementation
1	<p><b>Work out who is participating:</b></p> <p>Who are the stakeholders?</p> <p>Who is measuring the change?</p>	<p><b>Survey:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff members of the GBM CSO Network</li> <li>• Relevant government agencies</li> <li>• Communities benefiting from the activities of GBM CSO Network</li> </ul> <p>IUCN will identify the small group of participants for the MSC interview and report the outcomes.</p>
2	<p><b>Define the domains of change:</b></p> <p>What changes are we interested in?</p> <p>(based on the 'domains' of change identified in the M&amp;E Logframe)</p>	<p><b>Changes in the level of CSOs' own engagement and influence on trans-boundary water governance</b></p> <p><b>Changes in the behaviour of stakeholders/beneficiaries of the CSO projects</b></p> <p>Decide how to measure changes and impacts: e.g. joint statements by stakeholders, percentage of time spent on transboundary activities, relationship with government stakeholders, etc.</p>
3	Define the reporting period	Changes will be captured over a period of one year
4	Collecting SC stories through regional CSOs workshops and one-to-one meetings with the project beneficiaries	<p><b>GBM CSO Network, governments and communities</b></p> <p><i>Looking back over the past one year, in your opinion, what were the most significant changes that took place in relation to the outcomes under the four components identified by the M&amp;E Logframe?</i></p> <p><i>From among all these significant changes, what do you think was the most significant change of all? Why is this so?</i></p>
5	Develop an annual report and future planning of the network's activity	<p>Draft report shared with the GBM CSO Network</p> <p>Based on feedback, revise the monitoring report</p> <p>Plan for the year ahead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What else needs to be measured?</li> <li>- Adaptive management: what can be done better?</li> <li>- Identification of success stories and its replication within the GBM region</li> </ul>

### 5.3 M&E implementation methodology, timeline and reporting

The responsibility to implement the monitoring framework and collection of data is shared by IUCN and the Members of the GBM CSO Network. As indicated in section 5.1 above, the monitoring framework identifies outcomes, outputs and indicators for the five main themes identified by the GBM CSO Vision (See Annex II).

For tracking the achievements on intended outcomes for each component, the data will be collected every two years through CSO surveys and the MSC approach and measured against the indicators for each outcome.

For tracking output indicators, data will be collected annually on the specific means of verification for each output. For generating the data, annual surveys and dialogues with the members of the GBM CSO Network will be conducted, as along with one-on-one meetings with selected beneficiaries from government, academia and communities. The regional events facilitated by the BRIDGE GBM project will also be used for data collection on specific indicators.

An annual report summarising all of the data will be produced, and will provide an analysis of how the GBM CSO Network is contributing to the proposed outcomes and the gaps and opportunities for improving the effectiveness of individual CSO members' activities.

The report will also use visual methods to interpret results. Different colour codes for each indicator will be assigned by the members of the GBM CSO Network to indicate the cumulative impact of the GBM CSO Network.

## 6 REFERENCES

1. Contribution and Influence of CSOs on Water Governance in the Transboundary GBM Basins (September 2018)
2. Workshop Report: Strengthening Institutional Framework for Cooperative Governance in Mahakali/Sharda basin, 24-25 June 2018, Kathmandu
3. Workshop Report: Benefit Sharing to Enhance Multi-level Cooperation for Integrated Management of the Meghna Basin, 4-5 July 2018, Dhaka
4. A guide to monitoring and evaluating policy influence by Harry Jones (Overseas Development Institute, February 2014)
5. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Water Governance Indicator Framework 2018

## ANNEX I: GBM CSO NETWORK LOGFRAME

	Indicators	Means of verification	Frequency
<b>I. CSOs Transboundary Water Cooperation</b>			
<b>Outcome statement:</b> Cooperation between CSOs at regional and national levels has been strengthened and results in improved effectiveness and interaction with government stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CSOs engaged in cooperation mechanisms benefit from the cooperation mechanisms</li> <li>- Government processes include evidence of interaction with the GBM cooperation mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evidence of commitments from states to engage in dialogue with broader group of stakeholders</li> <li>- Most Significant Change survey</li> </ul>	every two years
<b>Output 1: CSO cooperation mechanisms have been created at National and Regional levels and enhanced the cooperation between CSOs and governments</b>	1 -The <b>GBM CSO network is created and adopted</b> by the members, functions well, and includes representatives from the 5 countries of the GBM region,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Approved/validated ToRs and operational guidelines documents signed by members</li> <li>- Minutes of meetings of governance bodies of the GBM CSO Networkm, workplan and progress reports</li> <li>- Number of joint statements by CSOs</li> </ul>	Annual
	<b>2- National CSO water platforms are created</b> and enable coordination of CSOs within countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ApprovedValidated TORs of country CSOs Forums</li> <li>- Minutes of meetings of governance bodies of the platforms, workplans and progress reports</li> </ul>	Annual
	3- Regional and National CSO cooperation mechanisms <b>interact with governments on a regular basis</b> and provide input to dialogues and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of meetings with governments</li> <li>- Number of meeting reports</li> </ul>	Annual
	4- Cooperation mechanisms <b>lead to strengthening of the water governance programme within CSOs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number and percentage of water governance projects in the portfolio of individual CSOs</li> <li>- Numberof staff working on water issues, percentage of women, total budget allocated to water related projects</li> </ul>	Annual
<b>Output 2: Community exchange and cooperation are strengthened through support from CSO cooperative platforms at local and transboundary levels</b>	<b>5 -Cross border community dialogues and study tours on transboundary issues</b> are supported and lead to input and recommendations from communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- at least three transboundary dialogues</li> <li>- workshop reports</li> <li>- participant feedback</li> </ul>	Annual

## II. Policy and Legislation

<p><b>Outcome statement:</b> The legal and policy framework on water governance has been strengthened/harmonised/developed at local/national/regional levels</p>	<p>Policies/laws/river basin governance guidelines strengthened/harmonised in the GBM basin</p>	<p>Text of improved/new/revised policies, agreements and laws of joint statements from the governments Survey to gather evidence from government and key stakeholders using the recommendations Most Significant Change survey</p>	<p>every two years</p>
<p><b>Output 1: Recommendations and guidelines on policy harmonisation/improvement are developed and disseminated at regional and national levels</b></p>	<p>7 - Gaps, challenges and opportunity analysis of the current legal and policy framework is produced and disseminated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of policies and laws reviewed annually by GBM CSOs Network</li> </ul>	<p>Annual</p>
	<p>8 - Community Customary law is reviewed and feeds policy dialogues at all levels</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of reports and policy briefs produced</li> <li>- Number of events conducted</li> </ul>	<p>Annual</p>
	<p>9- Policy recommendations produced at all levels and disseminated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of analysis and policy papers produced</li> <li>- Number of policy-related events organised</li> </ul>	<p>Annual</p>
<p><b>Output 2: CSOs are actively engaged in policy dialogues</b></p>	<p>10 - CSO Network Members invited to relevant policy dialogues organised by governments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of CSOs participating in policy dialogues facilitated by governments</li> </ul>	<p>Annual</p>
	<p>11- CSO-led capacity-building and outreach events and projects on policy with the involvement of local/national governments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of governance projects with government as partners annually</li> <li>- Project progress reports and communication pieces, number of workshop reports</li> <li>- Amount of participant feedback</li> <li>- Number of participants in each workshop</li> </ul>	<p>Annual</p>

<b>III. Research and Knowledge</b>			
<b>Outcome Statement:</b> Regional knowledge on water resources in the GBM is gathered, documented, and disseminated with support from the GBM CSO Network contributing to transboundary cooperation and the decision-making process at all levels	GBM CSO network-produced knowledge becomes a reference and is used in decision-making at all levels	gGovernment interviews Most Significant Change survey	every two years
<b>Output 1: CSO data sharing mechanisms are in place and enhance cooperation between CSOs and government</b>	12 - A GBM web portal is in operation and CSO members regularly contribute data and information to the portal	- Web-portal created; - Number of documents on the web portal - Number of monthly hits to the web portal - Number of references to the web portal on other platforms	Annual
	13 - The information produced by CSOs is shared with governments and is used and referenced in government-led work/decisions	- Number of references to the web portal on other platforms - Number of references to knowledge products in government documents/projects - Interviews with government stakeholders	Annual
<b>Output 2: A strengthened and harmonised regional research programme is developed and guides the work of the CSOs at regional, national and local levels</b>	14 - A regional research strategy is developed and guides the work of the CSOs	- Report on research gaps analysis - Report on CSO research strategy - Evidence of dissemination at national and regional levels	Annual
	15 - Joint research conducted and results are validated, disseminated and scientific publications are produced	- Amount of joint research conducted - Number of peer reviewed papers published	Annual
<b>Output 3: Best practices on river basin management, including relevant local knowledge, are documented, disseminated and used</b>	16 - Regional guidelines on the conservation and management of river basins on specific themes, including integration of local knowledge, are produced (E.g.: DRR, EbA, Climate Change, NBS, Eco-tourism);	- Number of regional guidelines produced - Number of copies distributed	Annual
	17 - Government projects and plans are using the guidelines developed through/by the GBM CSO Network	- Government interviews - Evidence of use of guidelines in government reports (e.g. references, citations)	Annual
	18 – Community-level projects and plans are using the guidelines developed through/by the GBM CSO Network;	- Community interviews - Evidence of use of guidelines in community work	Annual

<b>IV. Capacity-building</b>			
<b>Outcome Statement:</b> Communities and CSOs have the capacity required to actively engage in water governance processes and initiatives	Improved capacity of CSO members Improved capacity of community members	Capacity surveys conducted with CSO members and community members Most Significant Change survey	every two years
<b>Output 1: Capacity of GBM CSO Network members on water governance issues has been strengthened at national and transboundary levels</b>	19 - A regional capacity-building programme is developed and carried out for GBM CSO Network members and is supported by partner organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of reports identifying capacity gaps and priority areas for the capacity development of CSOs and communities on shared water governance issues;</li> <li>- Number of training modules and tools developed that apply the principle of equity, gender and social inclusion</li> <li>- Number of CSOs benefiting from the training and dialogues on shared water governance</li> <li>- Capacity surveys of CSOs</li> </ul>	Annual
	20 - A regional network of trainers is built	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of Training of Trainers for CSOs</li> <li>- Amount of training conducted by trainers</li> <li>- Capacity survey of trainers</li> </ul>	Annual
<b>Output 2: Community capacity on water governance is enhanced by the GBM CSO Network</b>	21 – Capacity-building programmes for the community are conducted by CSO Network members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of trainings conducted at community level</li> <li>- Training reports</li> <li>- Capacity survey of communities trained</li> </ul>	Annual
<b>V. Communication and Outreach</b>			
<b>Outcome Statement:</b> The GBM CSO Network and its members are more visible and recognised by policymakers and relevant stakeholders and their messages are better heard	Visibility of the GBM CSO Network and associated community-led initiatives has improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of media reports</li> <li>- Number of references in government and non-CSO communications</li> <li>- Number of acknowledgements in reports, plans and guidelines</li> <li>- Most Significant Change survey</li> </ul>	every two years
<b>Output 1: The GBM CSO Network develops and implement a communication and awareness strategy promoting civil society-led events, use of multi-channel communication and media engagement</b>	22 - A GBM CSO regional communication and awareness strategy is validated;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Text of the regional communication strategy</li> <li>- Validated workplan for the implementation strategy</li> </ul>	Annual
	23 - Civil society-led communication and awareness events are conducted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of cultural festivals to promote people-to-people interactions at the transboundary level</li> </ul>	Annual
	24 - Media trainings are supported and enhance media organisation awareness of water governance issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of media trainings conducted and associated training reports</li> </ul>	Annual

## ANNEX II: A CIVIL SOCIETY VISION FOR CONNECTING THE PEOPLE OF THE GANGES-BRAHMAPUTRA-MEGHNA (GBM) RIVER BASIN

### **A common ecosystem, a shared heritage, and a joint destiny**

The global significance of the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) river basin is profound and far-reaching. With a total area of just over 1.7 million km<sup>2</sup> and home to more than 630 million people, the GBM river basin is one of the largest and most populated river basins in the world. Flowing from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, the GBM river system is considered to be a single transboundary river basin, whose rivers join just a few hundred kilometres upstream of the mouth of the Bay of Bengal. Shared by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India and Nepal, the GBM is truly transnational.

The GBM river basin is the third largest freshwater outlet to the world's oceans; over 1,000 km<sup>3</sup> of water per year are discharged into its common outlet, the Bay of Bengal. The GBM river basin is also one of the world's most biologically diverse river basins, second only to the Amazon and the Congo. This biological richness is exemplified at the Sundarbans World Heritage Site, which supports the largest mangrove forest in the world and is an important habitat for globally endangered Bengal tigers (*Panthera tigris*) and vulnerable Irrawady dolphins (*Orcaella brevirostris*). The GBM river basin is also home to a number of other threatened species, including the Gangetic river dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*), the gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*), and the white-bellied heron (*Ardea insignis*) as well as to economically important species such as the hilsa (*Tenualosa ilisha*).

The aquatic ecosystems of the GBM river basin provide vital life support services to over half a billion people, providing them with the means to run fisheries, set up inland navigation ways, and supply water for drinking, agriculture, industry, and energy.

The importance of the GBM river basin, however, extends far beyond its biodiversity and its water resources. From China to Bangladesh, the rivers of this vast basin are the thread that binds a vast diversity of cultures, art, faiths, and ethnicities. The GBM river basin has been the cradle of civilizations, shaping them and nurturing not mere life but also rich traditions and spirituality. It has given birth to myriad rituals, celebrations, songs, and myths.

The GBM river basin is a paradox. Although endowed with rich natural and human resources, it is among the poorest and least-developed regions in the world. Its population density is high and increasing steadily, thereby exacerbating the likelihood that poverty will become yet more pervasive. The natural habitats of the GBM river basin are critically threatened by a wide range of pressures such as industrialization and urbanization; the resultant degradation and destruction have adversely impacted not only biodiversity, but also the livelihoods and economies of communities and even entire countries which depend on the basin's ecosystems. Urbanization and encroachment on floodplains inevitably modify ecosystems, reducing the quality of services they provide and their resilience to change.

Numerous projects, including infrastructure development proposed, underway, and completed, threaten the unique and fragile balance of the GBM's ecosystems by changing the structure of water bodies and their natural flow, impacting their capacity to hold water and exacerbating water scarcity. Deforestation and unregulated mining are changing basin morphology by increasing erosion and landslides in upstream regions and downstream delta regions are sinking. Coupled with increasing pollution, these changes inevitably degrade the GBM's ecosystems and the quality of their services, a result which, in turn, leads to impoverishment, migration, social unrest, and a serious depletion of resilience. Climate change is exacerbating these pressures in all countries of the GBM river basin. In fact, the basin has been identified as one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to the impacts of climate change. With the rise in temperature, the melting of Himalayan glaciers is increasing, thereby increasing the likelihood of associated disasters, such as glacial lake outburst floods. This glacier melting also



foreshadows the future drying up of this globally important water tower, one which feeds most of the sources and tributaries of GBM rivers. Droughts are already critical in some areas of the GBM river basin and adversely impact local livelihoods and natural habitats.

The peoples of the basin also share a common legacy of flooding. This has never been felt more acutely than today, when the nations of the region are struggling with the largest floods of the century. In 2017, hundreds died as a result of devastating floods and landslides in parts of northern India, Nepal, China and Bangladesh; thousands were marooned, and many millions more were otherwise affected. The sea level is rising more dramatically in the delta of the GBM river basin than in other parts of the world, directly threatening millions of people. This rise, combined with the decrease in freshwater in the Ganges, places wetlands such as the Sundarbans in grave danger. The rest of the basin, its people, and its economy are no less at risk.

Despite these common challenges, the GBM nations struggle to find joint solutions and approaches. Instead, their relationships reflect the relative power differences between upstream and downstream countries. A number of bilateral agreements have been signed and commissions established, but these have failed to adequately address the pressing issues confronted by the region. With the troubled history of the region weighing heavily on people's minds, and with the current asymmetric power relationship between countries, the level of mistrust is high. Trust can be restored only by addressing the multifarious issues facing the region by pursuing a wise, multilateral vision for the cooperative management of the transboundary rivers of the GBM river basin by all the concerned riparian governments.

There are no multilateral joint operational strategies for the management of the GBM rivers, nor is there much sharing of knowledge or strategies for dealing with uncertainties such as floods, despite the opportunities that many recent global and regional compacts have offered and despite the fact that recent floods have reinforced the importance of regional cooperation to find solutions and build genuine GBM unity. That said, the waters and ecosystems of the GBM could be successfully used and managed as the basin's arteries and life-support system to promote water connectivity, security, sustainable economic development, and peace-building.

In recent years, GBM countries have begun a discourse on regional cooperation through cooperative platforms such as the *Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN)* Initiative, the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation (BCIM), and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). The governments of the GBM countries are also committed to a number of multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention, and the Convention on Migratory Species, all of which involve a certain level of transboundary cooperation. They have also designated several protected areas (including Ramsar and natural World Heritage sites) in the GBM basins as a sign of commitment toward the conservation of natural resources and biodiversity. In addition, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a new framework for sustainable development. In particular, SDG 6 targets the implementation of “integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate,” as well as the protection and restoration of “water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.” All the GBM countries have also committed to implementing the Paris Agreement, which marks a milestone in tackling the global threats caused by climate change. Even if their commitments are “nationally decided,” given how interdependent the countries of the GBM river basin are, those commitments cannot be translated into actions without the real and productive cooperation of all GBM nations.

There are opportunities to go beyond political and administrative boundaries to establish new and innovative ways to cooperate and change the narrative. Most of the countries in the GBM river basin have vibrant civil society organizations (CSOs) and a diverse array of local and national groups that engage in development activities related to water and rivers. CSOs offer the benefits of informal and formal knowledge-sharing and have the capacity to support decision-making, implement frameworks,

and creatively encourage their respective governments to engage. A number of documented community efforts and local initiatives in the management of water and other natural resources in the GBM river basin could successfully support a regional dialogue, thereby enabling the replication of lessons learned. These facts suggest that CSOs could collaborate in a manner that would enable them to act as catalysts of change in the GBM river basin and contribute toward new avenues of peaceful and constructive cooperation.

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In view of the urgent need to foster regional cooperation and to include it as part of the dialogue process, supported by the Building River Dialogue and Governance in the GBM initiative (BRIDGE GBM), a group of CSOs came together and initiated a network guided by a common vision: *“To ensure that the rivers and freshwater ecosystems of the GBM river basin are well-protected and healthy and that they are economically and socially sustained on the basis of the equitable and reasonable utilization of natural resources through consensus and people’s active cooperation at local, national, regional, and international levels.”*

In pursuit of its vision, this nascent GBM CSO network commits to a common objective to cultivate a sustained “culture of transboundary cooperation” among the countries of the GBM basin with the aim of creating an enabling environment for enhanced cooperation for the conservation, long-term economic growth, livelihood security, and sustainable management of the GBM rivers through an ecosystem-based approach.

The GBM CSO network will follow and uphold the principles of inclusivity, equity, no harm, reasonable use of resources, and protection of ecosystems. It will work to protect important local ecosystems vital for the GBM river basin, including Himalayan glaciers, the Sundarbans, and Chalabil, and explore the economic rationale and the potential for mutual benefit through collaboration. The network will adopt a constructive approach towards engaging with governments, one based on mutual respect and trust.

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The participants of the GBM CSO network commit to collaborate and engage with all relevant organizations to deliver on five themes – transboundary cooperation; policy and legislation; research and knowledge; capacity-building; and communication, outreach, and advocacy — using the following cross-cutting actions:

#### Transboundary Cooperation

1. **Initiate the development of a CSO cooperation mechanism** at the transboundary and national levels on the conservation and sustainable use of the rivers and wetlands of the GBM river basin through action research, capacity-building, and communication;
2. **Support cross-border exchange for people of the river to engage in direct dialogue** facilitated by the CSO network;
3. Work towards the **institutionalization of a GBM CSO network** by establishing **working groups at both regional and national levels through interaction with government counterparts**;
4. **Develop and promote a CSO Regional Strategy for the GBM river basin linked to a harmonized set of country-level CSO action plans** contributing to the conservation and utilization of critical ecosystems in the GBM, including Himalayan glaciers, the Sundarbans, Ramsar sites, World Heritage sites and rivers and wetlands, while creatively engaging with stakeholders in national and local development policy and planning frameworks;

## Policy and Legislation

5. **Apply ecosystem-based approaches** to scientifically assess current ecological conditions and their linkages with water and land-use regulations and the adequacy of current conservation and management frameworks;
6. **Propose, contribute to, and provide advice on river zoning and land-use controls** which balance the needs of both local and national socio-economic development;
7. **Review existing legal and policy frameworks** with a view toward designing strategies for restoring ecosystems with a focus on climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and navigation;
8. **Review existing customary laws and indigenous knowledge related to natural resource management** in order to identify lessons learnt and advocacy elements for policy uptake;
9. Support the **development of a harmonized legislative and policy base relevant to the GBM river basin** based on a regional review which identifies gaps and inconsistencies and make recommendations for amending existing national laws and regulations;

## Research and Knowledge

10. **Begin compiling existing research and sharing public data** among CSOs working on GBM management and initiate the development of a regional public database which gathers knowledge relevant to hydro-diplomacy and water governance (including data on climate change and water pollution and their impacts on social and ecological systems) from CSOs in all five GBM countries;
11. Identify gaps in research and knowledge and **initiate joint action research projects involving stakeholders from across borders using community-based participatory action research and monitoring mechanisms** and turn the learning into transboundary practices;
12. **Develop regional guidelines based on the best practices in ecosystem services conservation, management, natural-resource use, disaster risk reduction, and climate change** to integrate into policies, use to improve existing legal frameworks, and operationalize at the transboundary, national, and local levels to build the resilience and adaptive capacity of local communities in the GBM river basin;
13. **Promote ecologically and culturally sustainable activities** that benefit local communities and support the conservation of riverine ecosystems, including the development of possible transboundary social, cultural, and economic collaboration; ecotourism circuits; and an annual regional calendar of river-based festivals and events;
14. **Ensure that sustainable indigenous local knowledge and practices are documented and that they support decision-making** for the sustainable management of the GBM river basin;

## Capacity-building

15. Initiate a capacity-building needs assessment, identify key priority areas and **develop and/or promote the use of training modules on transboundary water governance and management** (including a legal framework for cooperation) that take into account gender, social inclusion, and poverty and emphasize the principles of equity and the reasonable use and sharing of shared water resources;
16. **Build CSO capacity to facilitate grassroots engagement**, including communication, advocacy, and negotiation skills for the members of the GBM CSO network on shared water diplomacy and governance supported by training-of-trainers programmes on the common strategies and concepts promoted by this vision;
17. Support peer-to-peer learning by arranging regular **exchange visits and organizing regular water/river-basin forums, meetings, and workshops**.

#### Communication, Outreach and Advocacy

18. With the participation of river communities, **develop and implement a regional GBM CSO communication and awareness strategy** that is linked to national-level strategies and focuses on gender, social inclusion, and poverty;
19. **Support the promotion and coordination of regional cultural festivals** in which all five countries participate in order to promote people-to-people interaction and to build bridges of empathy and understanding;
20. **Advocate and lobby for legal reforms and benefit-sharing approaches** based on national and international standards, regional research, and dialogue;
21. **Promote innovative use of multi-channel communication, traditional and popular culture, and social media** to help raise awareness of the value of cooperation in the GBM river basin.

#### GBM CSOs that contributed to the development of the BRIDGE CSO Vision:

Abhiyan Nepal; ActionAid Bangladesh; ActionAid India; ActionAid Nepal; Asian Confluence, India; Association for Protection of Environment and Culture (APEC), Nepal; Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA); Bhutan Water Partnership; Brotee, Bangladesh; Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK), China; Center for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS), Bangladesh; Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), India; CUTS International, India; Development Alternatives, India; Indian Environmental Law Organisation (IELO); Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (ISET), Nepal; Koshi Victim Society, Nepal; Nav Jagriti, India; Niti Foundation, Nepal; Office of International Affairs, China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation, China; Oxfam Bangladesh; Oxfam India; Riverine People, Bangladesh; Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN), Bhutan; SaciWATERS, India; SEE Foundation, China; Shan Shui Conservation Center, China; TARAYANA, Bhutan; Union for Culture, Human and Environment Protection (UCHEP), Nepal; Waterkeepers Bangladesh; WWF Bhutan; Yunnan University, China.



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