

## TRANSFORMATIVE WOMEN LEADERSHIP FOR INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY WATER MANAGEMENT

### Transboundary rivers of Mahakali, Saralbhanga and Brahmaputra Basins, India

The transboundary Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) basins provide for food, water, and energy to a very large population. However, unregulated infrastructure developments, unsustainable land use practices, and climate change pose a threat to the river system. Conflicts over natural resources cause poverty and marginalization of riverine communities, with women being adversely affected by how water resources are managed, having to deal with flash floods, temporary displacement and other water related shocks, including water scarcity in summer months. The women in these villages have no voice, platforms, organization or unions to influence the decision making at the local or state level. The Transboundary Rivers of South Asia (TROSA) is a five-year (2016-2021) regional programme that, embracing a gender and human rights-based approach, facilitates communities' participation in water governance by helping them advocate for their rights and shape decision making.

The initiative promotes inclusive trans-boundary water governance, allowing women, youth, and marginalized groups to partake in decisions and policymaking processes undertaken by government and the private sector. Following interventions by TROSA partners, women have been educated and organized into groups such as Women's Water User Groups (WWUG); Village Development Management Committee (VDMC); and women-led citizens' forums, to identify water related issues, find solutions and participate in planning processes. Outreach and training activities have also been organised around International Women's Day, Water Day, and River Day. Selected representatives were also given further exposure to knowledge exchange platforms and trainings, on how to improve access to information and government schemes and programs.

Increased participation, improved strategizing and clarity on how to engage with Government officials, and vocalizing their demands have made women more confident to take leadership roles in their communities around water-related decision making. The initiative also helped influence political leaders to put an embargo on the boulder mining for flood protection and river ecology. In the Saralbhanga basin, improved people-to-people dialogues led by women leaders and CSOs resulted in the revival of a traditional and indigenous irrigation system benefiting around 15,000 farmers, safeguarding ecosystem services for river-based communities. Moreover, the project has paved way for transboundary cooperation around water between India and Bhutan, involving stakeholders from the government, academia, CSOs and local communities.



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