

Press Note

The issue at stake in the Mahanadi basin is not one of Chhattisgarh Vs Odisha; but one of agriculture Vs industry – the people's organisations of Chhattisgarh and Odisha join hands to oppose the political efforts to divert the attention of the people of both the states from the basic issue

The Mahanadi is the lifeline of the people of both Chhattisgarh and Odisha, as it the most important water source for the farmers and other citizens of both these states to meet their domestic and livelihood needs. Over the last few months, some of the political parties in both the states have been trying to create a situation of dispute and conflict over sharing of the Mahanadi waters. Against this background many academics and civil society activists from all over India and different people's organisations from both Chhattisgarh and Odisha met in a day-long meeting at Vrindavan hall in Raipur on 11 August 2016 to discuss the basic issues and principles of water use and allocations and also the emerging political landscape around the Mahanadi basin. Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India (Forum to be brief) organised the meeting, and presented data and insights emerging from its research in the Mahanadi basin over the last three years. At the end of the discussions, the people's organizations of both the states decided to organize a 'Mahanadi Bachao Yatra' to save the river.

During the meeting, people from both the states expressed deep concerns about the unnecessary tensions that are being created by the political parties in both the states over rights on the Mahanadi waters. In fact, all the participants strongly felt that the inter-state issue is being raked up by these political parties to divert people's attention from the basic issue. The basic issue is that both the state governments are looking at the Mahanadi as a resource to benefit the industries and this is completely against the interests of the farmers and the people. The critical question in the context of this dispute is why the political parties of both the states are not concerned about the original form of the river and environmental flow when it is increasingly becoming clear that the water flow in the river is steadily decreasing. With continuous interventions in the river in the form of dams and barrages, the river's original character is being destroyed. The other critical issue is about inter-sectoral water allocations and use. While both the state governments are determined to increase the water allocation

to industries they do not seem to be concerned about making water available to agriculture and to meet basic domestic water needs. This pro-industry policy becomes all the more clear as there is no provision for water for agriculture in seven barrages in Chhattisgarh. Similarly, increasingly more and more water is being allocated for industrial use from the Hirakud dam and its downstream delta region. This is also destroying the livelihoods of both the river bed cultivators as well as the fishermen. The third important issue is the rising pollution in the river affecting the drinking water, water for irrigation and the aquatic life. The meeting discussed in detail issues related to agriculture and industrial water allocation and use, environmental flows, water pollution and groundwater use in the basin.

Figure: Panel Discussion on the inter-state water dispute between Chhattisgarh and Odisha



Joint statement and demands of people's organisations of Chhattisgarh and Odisha

The people's organisations from both Chhattisgarh and Odisha, taking a common stand, decided to oppose the rising politicisation of Mahanadi waters. The real issue is not one of Chhattisgarh Vs Odisha, but one of protecting the original natural conditions of the river and the environmental flows. The time has come for the state governments and the political parties to make clear policy around water use that prioritise and

privilege the water use for domestic needs and for agriculture and also to come up with a river policy. The people's organizations present in the meeting demand that:

1. Do not create misunderstanding amongst the people of Chhattisgarh and Odisha on the issue of Mahanadi waters and put an immediate stop to the dispute
2. Prepare a very clear and transparent policy on the water use of the river by taking the local communities into confidence
3. Prior to construction of any more dams and barrages on the river, undertake a comprehensive study to ensure that the new structures would not affect both the basic character of the river and flow in the river
4. Put an immediate stop to the present illegal industrial water use from the river
5. Put an immediate stop to the water pollution caused by industries and cancel the environmental clearance given to such polluting industries

Prafulla Samantara, Lingaraj Bhai, Saroj Mohanty, Sudarshan Das (all from Odisha), Anand Mishra, Nandkumar Kashyap, Lalit Surjan, Lakhan Singh, Parivesh Mishra, Alok Shukla (all from Chhattisgarh), Shripad Dharmadhikary, K. J. Joy, Himanshu Kulkarni, Manoj Misra, Nafisa Barot, Partha Das, Abraham Samuel and Eklavya Prasad (all from Forum) along with many others from the two states participated in the meeting.

Prominent people's organizations that participated in the meeting include Lok Shakti Abhiyaan, Paschim Odisha Kisan Samanvya Samiti, Odisha Nadi Suraksha Samukhya (all from Odisha) Chhattisgarh Bachao Aandolan, Kheti Bachao Jeevan Bachao Aandolan, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, Ekta Parishad and Prayog Samajik Vikas (all from Chhattisgarh).