

Water Justice:

Experience of Bangladesh



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3rd International Conference of the Global Network of Water Museums

June 12, 2019. Valencia, Spain

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Background

- ▶ The United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water. Rights of the river is yet to be widely recognized across the globe.
- ▶ Water: a transboundary agenda in South Asia (Bangladesh is sharing rivers with India and Myanmar)
- ▶ Bangladesh: a land of rivers (Bangladesh's terrains crisscrossed by 800+ rivers)
- ▶ ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB): works on pro-people water justice and water democracy from the lens of commons in South Asia since 2008/09



AAB's works on Water Commons

- Advocacy for water justice
 - Right to water
 - Rights of the rivers
 - Defending commons
- Established a 'Water Museum' in Kalapara, Patuakhali, Bangladesh in 2014
 - The first ever 'Water Museum' in Asia
 - It's a people's initiative: involves people's participation
 - Community engagement and ownership
- Hosting international water conferences: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019



Water Museum, Bangladesh

- The 'Water Museum' was established by ActionAid Bangladesh in 2014.
- Displays water samples of more than 100 rivers including all the transboundary rivers across Bangladesh
- Different display items representing:
 - culture and heritage
 - photographs showing people's connection to rivers
 - maps showing all the rivers in Bangladesh
 - digital resources on water management.



Water Museum.. continued

- ▶ A community-based center, pledges support to people's initiatives and actions to protect water resources
- ▶ Strives to uphold the water issues and sensitize people to build critical awareness around Water Commons
- ▶ Promotes ideas and actions relating to water roots innovation
- ▶ Contributed to mobilizing public demands for the recognition of river as a living entity in Bangladesh



Realizing rights of the rivers

- ▶ Landmark High Court ruling in Bangladesh: all the rivers are given legal rights (the status of “legal person”) on January 30, 2019.
- ▶ Recognition of ‘a rights-of-nature approach’
- ▶ Other examples of legal status for the rights of rivers: New Zealand, India, Colombia.
- ▶ New direction in the advocacy agenda: establishing the rights of the rivers in Bangladesh
- ▶ Water Museum will be an iconic institution in protecting the rights of the rivers and people’s rights to water





Concluding remarks

- ▶ How can the local initiative like the Water Museum be connected to the global platform such as the WAMU-NET?
- ▶ How our collaboration can strengthen the interventions on water justice?
- ▶ What would be the role of global actors to foster trans-border water activism and alliance building?

Thank you !

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