



North East Water Talk Report

PUC NSS UNIT



OCTOBER 1-3, 2023
GARAMUR MAJULI ASSAM

What is Northeast Water Talk?

North East India Water Talk (NEWT) is the First platform of its kind that brings together various stakeholders, including academicians, bureaucrats, activists, water experts, and representatives of NGOs. They participate and showcase the best ideas and practices in the water sector from the Northeast region (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim), NEWT is all about creating awareness, sharing knowledge, and promoting best practices related to water management and conservation in Northeast Region.

Background

The concept of NEWT originated following an inspiring day-long discourse at "Vikalp-Sangam," (Alternatives Confluence) a gathering of unconventional perspectives on environmental and developmental matters. The Vikalp-Sangam initiative commenced in 2014, arising from the quest for practical alternatives to the prevailing model of 'development,' which often hinges on ecological harm and growing disparities. The idea of organizing a similar "Vikalp Sangam" centered on water concerns in the Northeast region emerged as a catalyst for the establishment of NEWT.

NEWT 1.0

The first-ever "NE Water Talk" was held in 2019 at Guwahati by call from *K.K. Chatradhara* with more than 70 participants from the eight states.

Image 1: Participants representing Mizoram

NEWT 2.0

Northeast India Water Talk 2.0 took place in Majuli, Assam, from October 1st to 3rd, 2023. Over 150 stakeholders hailing from the Northeastern regions convened in Majuli to engage in discussions regarding water-related issues in the region. Notably, this event provided us with the privilege of representing Mizoram, courtesy of N.S.S., Pachhunga University College. Situated on the Brahmaputra River in Assam, **Majuli** holds the distinction of being the world's largest river island. In 2016, it earned the honor of becoming India's inaugural island district. Renowned as the cultural hub of Assam, Majuli's cultural and geographical importance draws a substantial annual influx of tourists.



Image 2 Skilled Local Artisan Women Crafting Pottery by Hand



DAY 1 – 1st Oct.

Field Visits and Inaugural Session

The 8 of us were split together into two groups along with other participants for field visit to Dakshinpat and Auniati Satras respectively.

Group A

Dakshinpat Satra and Salmora Village :

Recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, Dakshinpat Satra established in 1654 is one of the oldest Satras in Assam. The traditional, historical ambience this place held was mesmerizing. Various antique pieces such as a 600-year-old wooden Horai were on display.



The interaction with the people of Salmara village was eye-opening and problems faced by them threw light on how important it is to incorporate local voices in policy making. We were lucky to see their incredible skills of indigenous pottery-making without the potter's wheel. The artisans were also skilled boatmakers.

Group B

Auniati Satra and Mazorsapori Village : Along with the visit to the religious Satra, we also witnessed the confluence of the two rivers, Brahmaputra and Subansiri. We talked with locals about how their lives are affected by the constant flooding and soil erosion.

Day 1 ended on a special note through the inauguration of NEIWT and the Majuli Theatre Festival at the 'Majuli Natghar'. A famous play of 'Raslila' – anecdotes of Lord Krishna's life was beautifully presented through acting, local folk music, and dance.



Image 3:1) Group A with locals of Salmora Village.

3:2) Group B at the lawn of Community school of missing tribe, discussing their issues.

3:3) Group B at the Confluence of River Subansiri and the Brahmaputra.

DAY 2 – 2nd OCTOBER 2023

TRIBUTARY TALKS AND CONFLUENCE TALKS

It began with a presentation by **Dr. Partha J Das** and **KK Chatradhara** on the important issues of the water situation in the Northeast followed by 5 parallel **TRIBUTARY TALKS** on Water Problems, Forest, Aquatic Life, and Water; Indigenous Perspectives of Water; Climate Change and Water, and Water Governance and 2 **CONFLUENCE TALKS** on *Women and Water*; *Way Forward I*.

The important issues highlighted were that there was not a lot of well-sourced information on the main issue of water, no aquifer mapping for groundwater, no wetland census with almost no implementation of 2017 wetland rules, rapid drying up of various small streams in many regions of Northeast India, decrease in the amount of rainfall over the years, river pollution, loss of riverine biodiversity and ecosystems. Sadly, we encountered the fact that the Northeast region has one of the most polluted streams of water in India.

The confluence talks highlighted how the problems of water only keep becoming larger as they trickle down to the women of our region, be it walking several miles to fetch water or having access to water to meet our bare minimum needs. The light was shed on the changing patterns of flood and rain, on how important mitigation at the root level of the problem is necessary, and voices were raised against palm oil cultivation.

DAY 3 – 3rd Oct.

STATEWISE TALKS, CONFLUENCE TALKS, AND INTERACTION WITH THE FOREST MAN OF INDIA

It started with the state-wise discussion where the various aspects of water involving the problems, management, conservation, and actions to be taken were discussed concerning our state Mizoram among all the representatives of Mizoram.

This was followed by a Confluence talk – “*Youth and Water*” where our teammate B. Luson Chakma presented our ideas. The final Confluence talk – *Way Forward II* followed where a 7-step plan was formulated which will be positively implemented by all the participants of NEIWT 2.0

The major takeaways include-

1)Water is not a commodity but an inherent human right that is sadly not accessible to everyone in today’s world. 2)Rapid, continuous collaboration, cooperation, and solidarity among the northeast states is very important. 3)Taking action is the need of the hour. 4)The youth need to be aware and involve themselves in documentation. 5) brainstorming ideas, using resources like social media, and reconnecting with nature. The interaction with the Forest Man of India, **Padma Shri Jadev Payeng** was truly an eye-opening and inspiring experience. His love and respect for Mother Earth are exactly what we need in today’s world. His literal words included, “*If we do not respect and take care of Mother Earth, she’ll fall ill and that would leave us with nothing.*” He called on everyone to conserve our natural resources and not only plant trees but also take care of them responsibly.



Image 4:1) NEWT Mizoram Team

4:2) Shri Jadev Payeng addressing the NEWT

OUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

The North East India Water Talk 2.0 was a truly remarkable experience for me. From our journey's start on October 1st to the 3rd, it was a journey of discovery and enlightenment. Exploring Dakshinpat Satra's, UNESCO world heritage museum and witnessing traditional pottery making in Salmora village were eye-opening experiences. *The Natghar International Theatre Festival* showcased incredible talent from around the world. Participating in sessions about forest-water linkages and women's role in water conservation was enlightening. Meeting Jadav Payeng, the Forest Man of India, was an honor. This event has left an indelible mark on me, reinforcing the importance of conserving North East India's environment for future generations.



Aditya Kumar, B.Sc. Biotechnology

The North East Water Talk event was a collaborative effort by various NGOs across the North East states of India, aimed at discussing and finding effective measures for water conservation through constant discussion and interactions. The event's second session took place on Majuli Island, Assam, the largest river island globally. It gathered scientists, students, and activists from across India to enhance our understanding of water ecosystem conservation in North East India. The event provided a valuable platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration among individuals and organizations dedicated to preserving North East India's precious water resources. The Mizoram team actively participated in discussions and gained insights into effective water conservation strategies.



Ankit Roy, B.Sc. Biotechnology

For me going to Majuli was a very different experience than any place I have been before in terms of the combination of the magnificent beauty of nature and, the different cultures and practices that prevail in their society. Being in the Northeast discussing what everyone says "water crisis in North East India" was something very ironic to me, because the Northeast is a place where annual precipitation is around 2000mm and yet it suffers the ease of access to Safe drinking water. Following the event, we engaged in focused discussions with experts from eight North Eastern states to explore water-related issues, their origins, and the prospects for positive change. These dialogues left us feeling optimistic about the potential for awareness-building and transforming this into a national concern, with the ultimate aim of benefiting both the local public and the environment.



Faiz Imam, B.Sc. Biotechnology

My first exploration of a place outside my state was for the North East Water Talk in Majuli, Assam. Every experience was new and exhilarating, with eye-opening and astonishing turns at every corner. The event we attended had a population ranging from college students and Social Activists from different states of North East which led to a wider exploration of adversities faced by each of the seven states. My gain was quite immense, from learning about the condition of other states regarding water and its shortage, to harboring new ideas on how to improve the water status of my state and elicit a societal eagerness towards developing a better water system.



J. Vanlahmingchungnungi, B.Sc. Environmental Science



The North East Water Talk, conducted on the serene island of Majuli, Assam, proved to be a truly enriching experience. During this event, we had the opportunity to connect with exceptional individuals hailing from various states across North East India. Our discussions delved deep into the multifaceted issues surrounding water resources, encompassing not only the challenges but also the innovative solutions to address them.

Furthermore, our conversations offered valuable insights into the primary factors contributing to the phenomenon of floods, particularly those stemming from the operation of hydropower plants in the region.

Luson Chakma, B.Sc. Physics

Being an environmental science student, I learned a lot of things from Northeast water talk 2.0 from problem to solution. We met the amazing people from the East and their true stories. I am very grateful for the hospitality of Majuli and the whole Northeast Water Talk Team, there are tons of things to learn from each other, and I am excited for the next meeting of Water Talk.

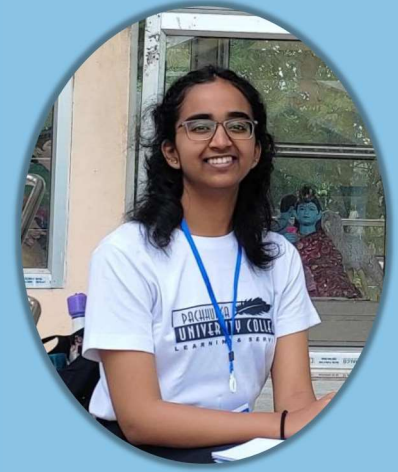
Neeraj Singh Rawat, B.Sc. Environmental Science

The North East Water Talk held in Majuli, Assam, was a truly unforgettable experience. Gathering with people from different states of North East India added depth and diversity to the event. We engaged in insightful discussions about the region's water problems, brainstorming potential solutions, and highlighting the concerning issue of floods caused by hydropower plants. However, what made this experience even more special was the opportunity to meet the Forest Man of India. His genuine smile and unassuming simplicity were like the cherry on top of our Majuli experience, leaving an indelible mark on all of us. It was a powerful reminder of the remarkable individuals dedicated to environmental conservation. This event left me with a profound sense of responsibility toward safeguarding our region's precious water resources, making it a truly enlightening and inspiring journey.



Rudra Pratap Singh Chauhan, B.Sc. Biotechnology

Hello, being part of the Northeast Water Talk 2.0 was a great experience where we could not only interact with like-minded people but also voice our opinions and concerns on climate change, especially water. The picturesque beauty of the riverine island of Majuli is unforgettable. I am very thankful for the opportunity through which I could make myself aware of many situations related to Mother Earth and the harm we are causing to her knowingly or unknowingly. The essence of simplicity that is reflected in the lives of the locals there as well as highly accomplished people like Padma Shri Jadav Payeng is impeccable. The most important takeaway is that we need to take action today, not only for a better tomorrow or the next generation but for today and ourselves.



Yerrabelli Dedeepya Reddy, B.Sc. Biotechnology



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