

PROCEEDINGS OF THE WORKSHOP ON

Multi-stakeholder consultation for piloting the WEFE nexus approach in the Koshi River basin: Key discussion points

31 March 2022

Background

A multi-stakeholder [consultation for piloting the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem \(WEFE\) nexus approach in the Koshi River basin](#) brought together representatives from concerned government and non-government agencies, the academic and donor communities, and private sector bodies to discuss the WEFE nexus piloting plan for the Koshi basin in Nepal and gather suggestions and inputs concerning its implementation.

This consultation, held on 31 March 2022, was a follow up to a November 2021 workshop on the [WEFE nexus in the Hindu Kush Himalaya](#) (HKH) during which the Koshi River basin was recommended as a pilot site for the eastern HKH and the Indus River basin as a potential site for the western part of the region.

The consultation workshop was organised as part of our collaboration with the [Transboundary Rivers of South Asia \(TROSA\)](#), [OXFAM](#), and [United Nations Economic Commission for Europe \(UNECE\) Water Convention](#). TROSA is supported by [the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency \(SIDA\)](#).

Below are key points resulting from the March 2022 consultation.

Discussion points

A. Definition and scope

- There is a need to clearly define the scope of the nexus approach and how its implementation can address the barriers intrinsic to working in silos. Such clarifications can help establish clearer and more easily communicable linkages between the water, energy, food, and ecosystem sectors.
- The nexus approach needs to identify gaps where sectors need to work together. There is a need to establish clarity and distinctions between what is possible with the implementation of the water-centric Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) approach and the

WEFE nexus approach, which considers all corresponding sectors equally and incorporates relevant aspects of IWRM.

- The WEFE nexus approach is a nature-based solution and not a separate entity. However, it is recommended that clear, individual definitions be formulated for both keeping donor priorities in mind.
- The WEFE nexus approach is important for cross-cutting issues such as disaster risk reduction and climate change.

B. Connecting the dots

- A nexus is against silos, but sectors work through siloed approaches. Therefore, it is important to administer relevant policy and connect the dots across sectors to achieve intended outcomes.
- Silos and sectoral interventions exist because of administrative and investment processes.

C. Piloting

- Piloting of the approach should be small in scale; capture the demands, aspirations, and plans of communities in the pilot area; and explore opportunities for integration. However, the scale should be big enough to be able to provide clear feedback for policy.
- The WEFE nexus approach should be built into existing programmes. The Koshi River basin has the right conditions – transboundary and transect aspects, and interactions between upstream and downstream communities – for the piloting of the nexus approach. Additionally, similar projects are already being implemented in the basin, which makes the implementation of the approach all the more conducive.
- A small-scale WEFE pilot in Nepal’s Chure region would be ideal. The scale would be just right in terms of enabling the generation of policy-level feedback.

D. Key sectors and stakeholders

- Government, non-government, and private sector organizations; donors; and the academia should be key stakeholders across the water, energy, food, and ecosystem sectors.
- The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority of the Government of Nepal is a relevant agency as disaster risk reduction (DRR) should be an integral part of the nexus approach.
- The Water and Energy Commission Secretariat of the Government of Nepal has installed rain gauges to produce water balance estimation covering less than 100 square kilometres for each *palika* (an administrative unit equivalent to a municipality). This process will keep accounts of water usage, waste, and extraction, among other details, which are extremely relevant to the nexus approach.

E. Research

- Research on the nexus approach should focus not only on government agencies but also look into the possible roles each sector can play to encourage integration.
- Demand and supply analyses for water, food, energy, and ecosystems should be prioritized.

- As energy and environmental footprints are directly related to the nexus, analyses of such footprints in products such as agricultural produce and electricity should be prioritized.

F. Mapping possible synergies and trade-offs across sectors

- There is a need to quantify resources in terms of character, flow, use, and process, such as the amount of water supplied/used corresponding to the amount of food produced using the water supplied. Outcomes of such exercises can provide context regarding the nexus among the water, energy, food, and ecosystems sectors.
- DRR is relevant to all four sectors of the WEFE nexus. In the Koshi basin, the nature of disasters differ in the upper, mid, and lower reaches. To capture these and the corresponding differences in the feasibility of various pilot activities, it is important to identify risks and explore means by which to convert them to opportunities.
- Any development initiative should have a nexus approach that brings together sectors to understand the benefits, competition, integration, and trade-offs for different sectors. Before acting at the policy level, it is important to pilot a given approach on the ground and gradually grow to reach the policy level with relevant feedback.
- There is a need for clarity on how to address additional unanticipated outcomes related to climate, business, sustainability, and disasters, among other factors.

G. Conflicts in jurisdiction and responsibilities

- The nexus is not only about connection but also about conflict. Loss of agrobiodiversity and changes in farming systems as a response to conflict, climate change, and water availability should be considered.
- As different sectors are involved in the WEFE nexus, caution should be taken in defining roles and responsibilities and avoiding any overlaps.

Recommendations

- Adopt *gatha jor* ('connect and create' in Nepali) as the agreed-upon Nepali term to refer to the WEFE nexus.
- Utilize the implementation phase of the pilot to resolve challenges posed by silo deafness, which leads government agencies to work independently with minimum information sharing. Work closely with relevant agencies to understand such disconnects.
- Clarify the concept of the WEFE nexus approach for community members in the pilot area. Implementing agencies should be able to point out what added value the nexus approach brings and explain this very simply to community members.
- Identify 'transects' where the nexus is operational as part of the natural process. An example – in the transport sector (which features a nexus of water, food, and energy), there are nexus solutions as well as problems. While watercourses enable the transport of goods at cheaper

rates, this same phenomenon leads to a nexus conflict – the issue of locals not being able to sell their products because those that are imported can be sold at more competitive prices.

- Explore opportunities to leverage ‘narrow nexuses’ (sub-nexuses), whereby institutional arrangements for collaboration can be made during disasters and emergencies. Such sub-nexus opportunities can help identify interlinkages amongst possible relevant partners and support attempts to move beyond a silo mode.
- Advocate for learnings from the WEF E nexus piloting to be integrated into the IRBM approach, which is already internalized in policy and practice. The nexus approach needs to have the same impact to convince buy-in from the government.
- Explore how used water may be recycled and how the energy and water footprints may be relevant to the nexus as an exercise for the pilot site.
- Ascertain whether the hydropower sector considers the ecosystem and nexus aspects during the development phase.
- Identify trade-offs and synergies and ascertain which relevant recommended actions to include in policy feedback. An example – to address depleting groundwater levels in Janakpur, the provincial government is investing in creating ponds; identifying the nexus approach for pond construction could be a way forward.
- Consider what aspects of the food, energy, water, and ecosystem sectors to include in the WEF E nexus. Some examples – wastewater or clean water, aquatic or land-based food, renewable or other natural energy.