



# CONCEPT NOTE

## Intangible Values of Water



## BASIC INFORMATION

### Activity Information

Project ID P167479	Product Line Advisory Services & Analytics
Short Name Water Values	Full Name Intangible Values of Water
Project Status Active	Completion Fiscal Year

### Processing

Is this a Reimbursable Advisory Services (RAS) (CN is required for RAS activities)?

No

What kind of task description is needed?

Concept Note with a Review (Track 2, including Programmatic)

Is this a Programmatic activity?

No

Is this a joint Bank-IFC activity?

No

### Accountability

Region OTHER	Country, Regional or World World
Requesting Unit SARVP	Team Leader Upneet Singh
Responsible Unit GWA06	
Practice Area (Lead) Water	Contributing Practice Areas



## CONTEXT : STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

**Water carries multiple values and meanings.** These are expressed in spiritual, cultural and emotional terms and found in the heritage of water language, norms and artefacts. Water occupies a central place in the practices and beliefs of many religions. Most religions use it in ritual ablutions, especially for ceremonial purposes. Often, these beliefs have led to water being worshipped in many parts of the world, including rivers which are deified as goddesses in some religions. Water is also considered as a source of life, a primary building block that has been the foundation for many societies and civilizations.

**Compared to any other natural resource that interfaces with human beings, the discourse around valuing water is the most complex.** Water serves many conventional uses, the most obvious being for human consumption and food production. In addition, water is used in mining, industry, energy, navigation and recreation and to support the environment. Such conventional uses usually have an economic value that can be monetized and as such gets reflected in water development planning and policies. The utility of water lies also in its recreational uses, in the appreciation of nature that the conservation of water provides, and its spiritual, cultural and religious uses as described above. By contrast, the non-conventional uses of water described above are less well acknowledged, more difficult to monetize, and less understood in water policy planning, perhaps also because of the lack of solid methodological, empirical and theoretical bases.

**Recognizing the multiple values of water can help water managers make comprehensive decisions about water policy.** Everyday practices surrounding water (and related to that sanitation) often serve to solidify hierarchies, especially those around gender and caste. For example, spaces within “water writ large” are often divided by norms around what is considered ‘feminine’ with women participating in decision making on domestic water and its use, and men in other spheres of water, such as used in irrigation. Hence, non-monetary values have a bearing on the behavior of individuals and societies, especially their responses to water-related reforms or interventions. People may actively boycott or passively reject a policy reform in the water space if it goes against their belief system. Hence, development projects (including both public and private ventures) run the risk of facing local resistance, if they overlook the multiple values of water. With a large and growing Water investment portfolio, a better understanding of the non-conventional values of water and how these can impact its investment in water reforms and interventions, is vital for the World Bank.

## DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE

The development objective of this activity is to draw on global literature and test methodological approaches to measure the non-conventional, intangible values of water, and to suggest ways to facilitate recognition of these values in the design and implementation of water related investments [subject to approval of the CN].



## ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Subject to approval of the CN, the study will have three components (i) review of global literature on non-monetary, intangible values of water; (ii) qualitative data collection and testing of methodological approaches to assess non-monetary values of water; and (iii) suggest effective ways in which non-conventional values of water can be leveraged for modern day water governance.

## DETAILED ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

**A recent High Level Panel on Water (HLPW) convened by the United Nations Secretary General and the World Bank Group President recognizes and focuses on the multiple “values of water” as an important theme.** The panel calls for making all values of water explicit and giving recognition and a voice to dimensions (such as spiritual, cultural and religious) that are (otherwise) easily overlooked. This means recognizing and considering all the benefits that water provides, which may take many forms appropriate to local circumstances and cultures. According to the panel, attention to these dimensions may entail more than a cost-benefit analysis and tradeoffs especially when water is scarce. But not recognizing these multiple values may entail costs that can lead to steeper trade-offs. The panel therefore emphasizes the importance of making collective decisions, such that the values of water are reconciled in ways that are equitable, transparent, and inclusive and lead to management and protection of all sources of water, for current and future generations.

**Simultaneous to the HLPW, analytical work within the Bank has attempted to unpack some of the nonconventional values and dimensions of water.** In recognition of the nonconventional dimensions of water, a recent report from the World Bank, *The Rising Tide* expands the conception of water beyond its use as an asset or a service. Instead, it offers a framework, a ‘thinking device’ which sees water as manifesting in three ways—as an asset, a service, and a “space”. Assets arising from water become productive through infrastructure that processes natural resources or transports water, labor that renders assets productive, and technology that aids both. Conversely, water can also be a risk or a liability when it is unexpectedly abundant or scarce, such as during floods or droughts. The idea of services is slightly more straightforward. Water-related services comprise water supply, sanitation, and hygiene and include irrigation, waterways, and information and technology. In contrast, the idea of spaces is more complex to comprehend. But the report emphasizes on it for it is the notion of water as a “space” that brings out both the physical and esoteric dimensions of water. Water not only occupies physical space, but it also carries cultural, social, political, and religious significance.

Subject to approval of the CN, **this activity proposes to take forward the notion of water as a space provided by *The Rising Tide* and systematically assess what is known about the non-conventional values of water, and how they can be measured.** Specifically, the activity will seek to answer four overarching questions:

1. What are the different social, ethnic, religious, spiritual and cultural values associated with water? How do these differ across communities, geographies, religions and identities? What are the intangible values that stakeholders (users and non-users) associate with the Brahmaputra river?



2. Why should water managers account for these non-conventional, intangible values of water?
3. What are the different methodological approaches available for measuring intangible values of natural resources such as water? How can the methodology to assess non-monetary values of water be made more rigorous (using selected riparian countries in the Brahmaputra basin as a pilot context)?
4. Finally, how can social, spiritual and religious aspects of water be leveraged for modern day water administration and governance?

**Since the discourse on all these issues is vast, this activity proposes to focus on the intangible values of water as seen in the Brahmaputra Basin.** While these aspects are admittedly even more salient – and varied - for another South Asian river basin (the Ganga), the Ganga is relatively well documented. The Brahmaputra Basin is also an important basin but is less well understood than the Ganga. The riparian countries to the Brahmaputra, and the riparian States within these countries, represent a diverse array of social, ethnic, cultural, religious and spiritual identities, to understand how different religious and social traditions value water. Further, from a policy and programmatic perspective, we expect that this analytical work will leverage both a proposed investment project on water resources in Assam and an ongoing Technical Assistance program to promote transboundary water cooperation in the Brahmaputra basin.

**The first phase of this activity - summarized in this technical annex– comprised a review of the global literature on the intangible values of water and methods to assess them in practice.** During this preparatory phase, the team undertook an indepth review of the literature on the methodological approaches available for valuation of natural resources. We found that while this field is rich, this is not the case for measurement of intangible values of such resources, which are under-researched; techniques such as accounting for cultural flows are still emerging.

Subject to approval of the CN, **the next stage of this work proposes to supplement the literature review through qualitative work and some small area surveys in the Indian part of the Brahmaputra basin.** More specifically, it proposes to test the wide variety of approaches available to measure the values of water where the Brahmaputra flows as a pilot context. While the World Bank is engaged in a technical assistance program to promote transboundary water cooperation, there is a view that increasingly transboundary conflicts are not international. Instead they are usually locally rooted, between river developers and locals who expect to be adversely impacted by these projects (Conca 2005), with the point of conflict being shared across states and driven by the intangible values that people associate with the river. This activity will therefore look at the intangible values people hold for the Brahmaputra river and how to assess them in two riparian states where the Brahmaputra flows – India and possibly Bangladesh.

The material from both phases will be written up at the end of the second phase as a report. Embedded in each of aforementioned questions are significant knowledge gaps which the report will attempt to fill. However, some questions cannot be answered entirely until primary data collection and analysis is undertaken. New and unexpected questions will inevitably arise when primary data is collected and may impact the enquiry in unanticipated ways. For that reason, this concept note focuses on describing the literature that is available for answering these questions, the methods and approaches that will be used in the second phase, noting that these neither represent the complete set of issues, nor are they certain to be answerable.



## DELIVERABLES

Group By: Pillar

Name	RAS	Lead	Type	Completion Date	Processing Type
<input type="radio"/> Final comprehensive report		Upneet Singh	Analytical		DR Required

## EXPECTED RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Should this CN be approved, this activity is intended to enrich a conversation started within the Bank (most notably through the *Rising Tide*), and externally with its clients and other development partners, on the importance of intangible values of water to design and implementation of effective water related interventions. It will provide a systematic review of the global literature on this theme and seek to test methodological approaches to measure these non-conventional values of water in the context of the Brahmaputra river basin. Based these activities, it will distil a series of lessons and effective ways to incorporate the intangible values of water, and trade-offs arising therein, in the design and implementation of water related interventions.

Do you want to track result indicators for this activity?

No

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## RISKS

Please describe the risks related to this activity and how they can be managed.

The key risk is that the recommendations may not significantly influence the policies of the Bank or those of riparian countries to the Brahmaputra. This risk will be mitigated by working closely with Bank teams undertaking analytical and investment activities in the Brahmaputra basin countries and by a strategic and well designed dissemination of knowledge products produced through this activity.

## DISSEMINATION and OUTREACH STRATEGY

The High Level Panel on Water, where the Bank and other partners issued a call to focus on the multiple values of water, noted the lack of solid methodological and empirical (and even theoretical) grounding for this theme. This



indicates an interest and constituency within the “water world” for this work. The analysis provided by this work will help to inform Water related investments specifically, as well as investments in other natural resources more broadly. Through the analyses (report, papers, presentations etc.), the task will help provide a systematic and evidence-based narrative on the multiple values of water and why recognizing these is important to the effectiveness and sustainability of water related interventions.

**MILESTONES**

**Schedule**

Name	Original	Revised	Actual
AIN Sign-off			
Management Approval of Concept			
Completion Summary			

**BUDGET**

**Budget Plan vs Actual (USD)**

Source of Fund	Cumulative Budget			Current FY (2018)			
	Activity Plan	Actual Expenditure to Date	Actual vs Plan (%)	Activity Plan	WPA Plan	Expenditure (YTD)	WPA Burn Rate (%)
Bank Budget							
Bank Trust Fund							

**Budget Plan (USD)**

Do you want to plan the budget by FY?

No

Source of Fund

Cumulative Budget

**Grand Total**

Grand Total Direct Cost

For Official Use Only



Bank Budget

Bank Trust Fund

**Clients or Audience**

Does this activity have a client?

No

Please specify the audience type, check all that apply.

- Central Ministry       Parastatal Agency       Bilateral / Multilateral Agency
- Line Ministry       NGO / CSO       Academic / Research Institute or Think Tank
- Subnational / Local Government       Private Sector       Other

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**TEAM**

**Project Team**

Name	Role	Title	Unit
Upneet Singh	Team Leader ( ADM Responsible )	Water and Sanitation Specialist	GWA06
Halla Maher Qaddumi	Team Member	Senior Economist	GWA06
Soumya Kapoor Mehta	Team Member	Consultant	GWA06
Nirmala Chopra	Team Member	Team Assistant	

**Extended Team**

Name	Title	Organization	Location
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**INSTITUTIONAL DATA**

The task is primarily

Analytical

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Does this activity inform other existing Bank's projects or activities?

No

Does this activity address climate change adaptation, mitigation or both?

No

Is this activity an Impact Evaluation (IE) or does it include IE deliverable(s)?

IE is the study of causal relations between a program, policy or project intervention and outcomes of interest. IE employs counterfactual analysis to evaluate program, policy or project interventions that are either Bank-financed or financed by other governments and institutions.

No

**ANNEX A. DELIVERABLES DETAILS**

**Not Categorized**

Deliverable Name	Decision Review Required?
Final comprehensive report	Yes
Status	Deliverable Creation Date
Planned	
Planned Completion Date	
Lead	Type of deliverable
Upneet Singh	Analytical

Provide a brief description of the deliverable

Subject to approval of the CN, the major outputs of this study will be one comprehensive report, and 2-3 high quality research papers, and several shorter notes and powerpoint presentations. A multi-disciplinary advisory group will be set up to mentor this research and will function as a sounding board to share the proposed approaches, tools and emerging findings. Throughout the research process, results will also be shared through BBLs to receive feedback from a larger group internally and papers will be presented at conferences. Consultations and dissemination activities will also be made with clients in riparian countries to Brahmaputra and in transboundary water management fora that are being supported by SAWI.

Provide a brief summary of outputs before changing its status to Delivered (or before recommending decision review of the deliverable, if needed). If applicable, include links to external documents and websites

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#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Kindly refer Technical Annex for literature review on Intangible Values of Water.

[This Concept Note (CN) is the sole deliverable under P167479. A decision has been taken not to pursue financing and execution of this CN. ]