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**CLIMATE CHANGE****'Water Towers of Asia' Show Cracks**By [Keya Acharya](#)

**GUWAHATI, INDIA, Jan 12, 2011 (IPS) - A concerted effort to formally document the magnitude and directions of climate trends in the Eastern Himalayas and thereby decide regional adaptation strategies is critical to ensure the region's water security, according to water experts.**

In Nepal, the Imja glacier is retreating almost 70 metres per year. In Bhutan, where glacial melt is the least perceptible currently, 25 of 677 glaciers are categorised potentially dangerous, with an 'alarming' glacial retreat rate of 20-30 metres per year, says G. Karma Chhopel of Bhutan's National Environment Commission.

It is more important to gather statistics on the effects of climate change than to get preoccupied with China building dams in the region, says Professor Jayanta Bandyopadhyay of the Centre for Development and Environment Policy at the Kolkata branch of the Indian Institute of Management.

"Building more dams when waters are anyway threatened due to climate change is accelerating the issue of water loss. It's a bit like 'cutting off your nose to spite your face'," Himanshu Thakkar, of the New Delhi-based South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, told IPS.

Sharing of water is an important issue, says Thakkar. "India needs to leverage its huge trade dealings with China to form a water-sharing accord."

Bandyopadhyay says a conflict-resolution system is a 'good idea', "But we still don't know the nature of changes in the region. What will the treaty be based on?" he asks. "I must again stress on the need for developing indigenous climate models for the region. Adaptation strategies will be very difficult without this," Bandyopadhyay told IPS. "The whole issue of Asian Development depends on this."

The Eastern Himalayan mountains - stretching 1,500 miles across Nepal, Bhutan, northern Myanmar, south-eastern Tibet and northeast India - and referred to as the 'water towers of Asia' are also known as the Third Pole due to their having the largest glaciated area outside of the two poles.

The region is home to three massive river basins, the Indus in the west, Ganges in the centre and the Brahmaputra in the east, featuring major rivers including the Ganges, Indus, Brahmaputra, Yangtze, Mekong, Salween, Xingjian, Chao Phraya, Irrawaddy, Amu Darya, Syr Darya and Tarim, flowing through central, south and south-eastern Asia.

The mountains directly impact water resources in Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India and Nepal - and supply more than 1.3 billion people.

China's dams on the upper reaches of the Mekong basin have caused concerns of shrinking waters in lower riparian Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

In Nov. 2010, China's damming of the Yarlung Tsangpo, or the upper- Brahmaputra, at Zangmu, some 300 kilometres from Lhasa raised concerns in India.

Bandyopadhyay says China's share of water from the Yarlung Tsangpo is only about twenty percent of the amount of water that flows through to India.

"The apprehension is political perception, that's all," says Bandyopadhyay. "The Chinese share is minimal - sensitive only in the lean, winter months when the discharges in the regional river basins dry up."

Bandyopadhyay says that addressing climate change in the eastern Himalayas - the source of the river basins - should be an urgent issue of concern instead.

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The eastern Himalayan region is particularly hampered by a lack of statistics on climate patterns, glacial melt and climatic variations for the entire Himalayan region. Bandyopadhyay says eastern Himalayan models for even baseline information for temperature and rainfall patterns are lacking.

Shresth Tayal, glaciologist from the New Delhi-based The Energy Resources Institute (TERI) says studies by ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) based in Nepal, showed warming in high altitude areas was far higher than in the lower reaches.

The East Rathong glacier in Sikkim, one of India's north-eastern States, has shrunk from approximately 7.125 square kilometres in 1966 to 0.46 square kilometres in 2009 - a massive loss of 93.54 percent in 43 years, according to a TERI GPS survey.

R. Krishnan, head of Climate and Global Modelling at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune, in the southwestern State of Maharashtra, says the Institute now has state-of-the-art equipment to build regional models. "We are ready to share data and collaborate in inter-disciplinary research," Krishnan says.

In Guwahati, scientists, international agencies and experts from South Asia's eastern nations agreed that regional co-operation was an urgent necessity.

In its efforts to bring together Himalayan nations to act on the impacts of climate change in the region, Bhutan has initiated a series of high-level consultations between Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan and will be holding a Ministerial summit, 'Climate Summit for a Living Himalayas' in Oct. 2011 to prepare a joint accord.

Bandyopadhyay suggests a major eastern Himalayan adaptation strategy could include payment for ecosystem services, which would entail judicious use and conservation. (END)

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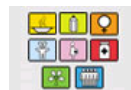
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