

**CONFERENCE  
ON THE  
FLOOD ACTION  
PLAN IN  
BANGLADESH**

*Taming two of the mightiest rivers of the world ?*

*Test case for global disaster management coordinated  
by the World Bank ?*

Photo Walter Keller

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## CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES

- present the controversial aspects of the Flood Action Plan to an international audience
- request parliamentarians and officials at the European and national levels to take serious notice of such criticisms
- discuss possible development alternatives which are acceptable both from an environmental and a social point of view
- build up an international campaign network to follow up the conclusions of the Conference



## CONTROVERSIAL ASPECTS OF THE FLOOD ACTION PLAN (FAP)

The FAP will likely cause the resettlement of several million people living on the delta.

Construction of embankments will have an adverse effect on the environment and biodiversity of the country, in particular the fisheries.

Eighty per cent of Bangladesh's population are peasants and fishermen. Despite the drastic changes the FAP will have on their lives and livelihoods, they are not being consulted and are thus not allowed participation in the planning.

The FAP does little to address the greater threat to human life of coastal storm surge flooding, nor does the FAP adequately support emergency preparedness.

## THE WORLD BANK'S FLOOD ACTION PLAN

Three rivers, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna drain a catchment area of about 1.72 million square kilometers in India, Nepal, China, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Only 8 per cent of the catchment area lies within Bangladesh.

Flooding occurs to some extent every year in Bangladesh. Melting snow from the Himalayas and the South Asia Monsoon have combined over the centuries to form the delta country, and they remain today as the dominant forces shaping both the culture and the landscape there.

The Flood Action Plan is the response of Bangladesh's foreign aid donors to the unusually excessive river floods in 1987 and 1988. The French government, under President François Mitterrand, appointed a team of 30 engineers to find a permanent solution to flood damage, while Japan, the United Nations' Development Programme (UNDP) and the US engaged their own experts to devise elaborate flood control schemes. Under the auspices of the World Bank (which the Group of Seven (G7) countries and former Bangladeshi President Hossein Mohammed Ershad asked to coordinate the various efforts), the Flood Action Plan was adopted at an international conference in December 1989 in London.

As coordinator of the project, the World Bank is attempting to combine four different proposals, several ongoing projects and donor assistance from 14 international funders into the largest development project in the country's history (\*).

The essence of the FAP is an attempt to control the entire water shed of Bangladesh through the construction of embankments and polders along the major rivers. From the outset, the FAP has been severely criticised as a capital-intensive and environmentally destructive scheme. Many projects such as those proposed in the FAP already exist in the country. The few that have been properly studied and analysed have proven to be dismal failures which created environmental disaster areas.

The \$150 million initial studies will be completed soon, and some pilot projects have been initiated. The World Bank expects these to lead to a first five-year expenditure of \$500 million on new and ongoing projects. If built as originally conceived by the World Bank in its 1990 plan, the FAP will cost 5-10 billion dollars.

(\* ) The Flood Action Plan is funded by four multilateral donors: the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, UNDP and the EC, and 11 bilateral donors: Japan, Canada, US, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

