



Dams in China over Transboundary Rivers

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Why in News

Recently, a **US-funded study** has highlighted the possible **impact of China's dams on the Mekong river** (known as **Lancang river** in China) and **countries downstream**.

The study was published by the **Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership in Bangkok** and the **Lower Mekong Initiative**.

- The Lower Mekong Initiative is a **US partnership with all the downstream countries** of Mekong **besides Myanmar**.
- The Mekong flows from **China to Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam**.

Key Points

- **Key Findings of the Study**

- It also raised **questions on other Chinese dams** on rivers which originate in China like **Brahmaputra** and their similar **impact on neighbouring countries** like India.
- China's **southwestern Yunnan province** had **above-average rainfall** from May to October 2019. However, there was **severe lack of water in the lower Mekong** in 2019 in comparison to 1992, based on **satellite data**.
- The **Mekong River Commission** has emphasised on the need of more scientific evidence to establish whether dams caused a 2019 drought.
 - The **Mekong River Commission** comprises of **Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam**,
- According to the study, **six dams** built since the commissioning of the **Nuozhadu dam in 2012** had **altered the natural flow** of the river.

- **China's Stand**
 - It has **called the study groundless** and highlighted the **drought faced by Yunnan** because **Lancang only accounts for 13.5% of Mekong's flows**.
 - China has maintained that the dams, it is building, are **run of the river dams** which **store water for power generation**.
- **India's Stand**
 - According to Indian experts, the study is **not conclusive** because it only considers the water flowing into the lower basin at one station in Thailand.
 - It **did not consider other dams and water-use along the course** of the river.
 - The lower basin is **not entirely dependent on flows from China**, but also **receives water from tributaries in all other countries** it flows in, which the study did not account for.
- **India's Other Concerns**
 - India has been **expressing concerns on Brahmaputra** since **2015** when China operationalised its **first hydropower project at Zangmu**. Currently, three other dams at **Dagu, Jiexu and Jiacha** are being developed.
 - For India, **quantity of water is not an issue** because these are run of the river dams and **will not impact the Brahmaputra flow**.
 - More importantly, **Brahmaputra is not entirely dependent on upstream flows** and an **estimated 35% of its basin is in India**.
 - However, India is concerned about the Chinese activities affecting the **quality of water, ecological balance and the flood management**.
 - **India and China do not have a water sharing agreement**. Both nations **share hydrological data** so it becomes **important to share genuine data** and have **continuous dialogue** on issues like **warning of droughts, floods** and **high water discharges**.

Source: TH