

ARUNACHAL DAMS

I on behalf of the "**Dibang Indigenous Peoples Welfare Society(DIPWS)** and the people of twin Dibang Valley district would like to share following few lines as follows:-

The Dam Debate

The Indian government has in recent years initiated several policies to facilitate investment and utilization of natural resources in Arunachal Pradesh, under which it plans to develop hydropower projects. These power projects have been proposed to meet the increasing demand for energy in the country. However, success of these policies will be determined by careful considerations of multi-faceted problems and the level of public participation. Large dams in Arunachal have the potential to severely alter the cultural and ecological landscape of the region. It will have huge social and environmental costs such as displacement, influx of migrants, and destruction of forests. These devastations weigh heavy on the local tribal people who use these land, water and forest resources as the basis of their livelihood. Recent years has seen protests growing over large dams in Arunachal Pradesh. Several tribal communities in the state are totally opposed to building of multiple mega projects in their homeland. They see dams as threat to their socio-cultural fabric, where forced development will uproot them from their land, home and livelihood. These projects were created as public policies to meet India's growing demands for energy but have become source of conflict between the government and the people. Although government has forced reconciliation for some of the conflicts, controversy over several of the ongoing projects remains unresolved.

Projecting Arunachal as power house of the country

Decades of isolation has made Arunachal Pradesh one of the least developed states in the country with fragile infrastructure system and poor resource base. This has made state heavily dependent on central government for resources. The region's isolation mainly owes to colonial rule that consolidated and accentuated separateness from rest of the country. To bridge the divide, the government is currently charting a course for 'development' with over hundreds dams planned for Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal fell under the eyes of policy maker due to its rich water resources endowed with highest hydropower potential in the country. The centre has identified Arunachal Pradesh as the powerhouse of the country. According to an estimate of the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) and private power developers, Arunachal has the potential to generate over 57,000 MW of hydro power. The government plans to exploit this large perennial water system to produce cheap, plentiful power for the nation, which will bring economic benefits and employment generation.

Ineffective EIA studies.

1. **Commulative Impact Studies** : Since numerous dams are coming up along the Dibang river basin, all the project proponent, inclusive of NHPC must be asked to take cumulative impacts of dams in the Dibang river basin.
2. **Compensation and Livelihood rights** : Apart for the submergences of 4009 ha. an area of 10539 ha. is required for the Catchment Treatment Plan. The community as

whole will be lost in this area, since no livelihood activity or habitation can be taken in this area. This area in context to the Dibang Multipurpose Dam consists of Mithun Grazing areas, the mithun which is a major asset of the fully affected area, there is no data or estimate/valuation of this animal in the EIA report. Without any compensation, the livelihood rights can not be taken away from the community.

3. **Inadequate Wildlife conservation studies** : The EIA studies carried out by the project proponent in regard to the Wildlife conservation are inadequate. The EIA reports the presence of schedule – I animals, like Mishmi Takin, Tigers, Leopard, Hoolock Gibbon, Pangolin and Leopard cat. The Dam literally submerges all the minor mineral rich streams, where all the salt lick spots are there. All the winter migrations of the Mishmi takin, Serows, Goral takes place towards the lower altitude ranges of 600 mts. Elevation.

A mere allocation of 317 lakhs rupees under Bio- Diversity Conservation & Management plan doesn't support the survival of Schedule- I Animals in the vicinity of the dam. Note: at 250 m elevation at dam site a Takin was killed.

4. **Assessment of Economic and Medicinal Plants**: All the EIA studies carried out by the NHPC is not all project specific nor of community focussed. Most medicinal plants of present day usage, like piper mellusa, Paris Polyphylla are traded and found in the submergence zone. The EIA doesn't even have a reference of this economically valuable plants not to talk its assessment and compensation.
5. **The Seismic threat** : The Great Assam Earthquake of 1950 (M=8.7) originated along the fault line of seismic domain of Mishmi thrust, Lohit thrust and Eastern Himalayan Plate. The design of the dam specifies about the earthquake resistant structure. But the major destruction of 1950 earthquake was because of the natural dams formed due to landslides. The local population of the Idu mishmi according to the Assam gazetteer, Sadiya Division in 1930 was 26,000/- The impact of the 1950 Earthquake reduced to the population to below half and still remains stagnant at 12,000/- Can the project proponent simulate a model, wherein with the Dam structure and Earthquake of similar scale impact on the mountains along the reservoir. Is the Dam Axis and Reservoir standing along the seismic fault line.
6. **The Dibang Drainage System** : The Dibang river maintains the drainage system of all the tributaries of the upstream and the downstream of the dams axis. The impounding the drainage system by building a dam will have major effects on the tributaries below the dam axis. Rivers like Deopani and Epipani, Aya, Eche, Ashu and many other streams have major siltation problems. A regulated flow of Dibang river will reverse the normal silt flow below the dam, causing flood and inundations. Particularly Deopani drainage and siltation status is greatly required. An EIA studies in to regard downstream impact is absolutely mandatory.

The state response

Virtually every large hydropower projects in Arunachal are treated fait accompli. For example, the Arunachal Pradesh government received an advance payment of Rs. 225 crores from the NHPC Ltd (project executioner) for the Dibang Project on 25 June, 2007. This move came before the public consultation process had begun. The Dibang dam was yet to receive environment, forest and techno-economic clearances by then. Therefore, these clearance processes became merely cosmetic exercises.

In another show of constitutional disrespect, the government of India subverted its own environmental norms. The Prime Minister of India laid the foundation stone on 30 January, 2008 for the Dibang project at Itanagar, state capital of Arunachal Pradesh which is about 500km away from actual project site. The foundation was laid the day after the first public hearing for Dibang Multipurpose Project was completed. These gestures of the government were a clear expression of disrespect for people's concerns giving way for doubts.

Also there have been a spate of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with public sector companies and several private players by the state government. The state sees its rivers and the hydropower potential as the proverbial goose that will lay the golden eggs. It expects to earn abundant hydro-dollars, similar to Arab countries which are awash with petro-dollars[i]. So in this rush for hydro dollars, Arunachal Pradesh Government has signed upto 233MoUs with hydro power developers to generate more than 63,000 MW of power. These MoUs are accompanied by upfront money, which the power developers pay to the state government. The total amount received as upfront money starting from the year 2005-06 to present is whopping Rs 144281.53 lakhs[ii]. This upfront payment treats the project as fait accompli.

The rush to sign MoUs with power developers has continued even while protests were growing against large dams. People of Siang basin have accused the government to have kept them in dark while the state government continued signing MoUs and MoAs with power developers in the Siang valley[iii]. It is evident that while formulating the policy to build large dams in Arunachal Pradesh, there was a clear absence of public participation and prior consent. Affected villagers of Dibang project have also alleged similar attitude of government of keeping them in dark about the dam at initial stages of planning[iv].

In recent years, the Arunachal Pradesh government has also started to mobilize paramilitary forces in the state. It planned to deploy 20,000 police personnel for the inter-state (Trans-Arunachal) highway, and 25,000 police personnel for the various hydropower projects being built in different parts of the state[v]. To contain the growth of protests growing against the dams in Arunachal, several anti-dam movements and activists were also branded as 'Maoists' by the state governments[vi]. Such repressive measures have forced reconciliation for some of the conflicts such as for Dibang project where the local community has given up their resistance movement[vii]. The government of Arunachal Pradesh has continued to overlook people's concern and it only appears determined to go ahead with the constructions of dams.

Rezina Mihu
Dibang Indigenous Peoples Welfare Society
Arunachal Pradesh
rezinamihu@rediffmail.com
rezinamihu2011@gmail.com