

Hydropower Dams and Development: Local Perspectives

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Abstract

Arunachal Pradesh is today poised as the powerhouse of India with a total untapped hydro-power potential of 49,126 MW from 89 identified schemes. As a consequence, the State and the Central Government encourage private sector participation (both Indian and Foreign) in the development of hydro-electric power projects in the State. However, the construction of dams is a matter of great concern for the local inhabitants (including upper and lower riparian) and environmentalists. In this context, the present paper attempts to give a broader overview of the local people perceptions and state government policy towards hydroelectric project. The work focuses on the central zone of the State within Siang River Basins. This work is primarily based on the secondary sources of data, but the primary data have also been collected through anthropologically standard field techniques such as personal observations, interview with the dam builders (company officers), student bodies, political leaders, village elders and members of civil societies. The author feels that there must be proper liaison between the State government, dam-developers and the local people. They need to come on a single negotiable table for harnessing hydropower projects of the State through mutual cooperation of all concerned.

KEYWORDS: Dams, Development, Environment, Local Perspectives, River

I. INTRODUCTION

Human being has been damming rivers for thousands of years and it is continues to be at a rapid pace (Pandit and Grumbine, 2012). Today, more than 45,000 large dams exist worldwide (DiFrancesco and Woodruff 2007), that provides water supply, flood control, waterpower for mills, hydroelectric power, improved navigation, recreation, and waste disposal (Graf, 2002)¹. However, over the past several decades, there have been heated debates over the pros and cons of damming. Beyond the physical and ecological impacts associated with damming, growing global concern about the social costs of large dam projects and about how to solicit meaningful participation from those most affected, resulted in the formation of the World Commission on Dams in 1998 (Tilt, Braun and He, 2008).

Hydro power dam is no doubt a renewable, economic and non-polluting source of energy. It can bring many benefits, such as energy, drinking water supply, employment opportunities and water for irrigation. At the same time, the revenues generated through

¹ Graf, W.L., 2002. Dam removal: science and decision making. Washington, DC: The H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics, and the Environment.

electricity sales can finance other infrastructure essential for human welfare². Besides that, dam site attract tourist resort centre such as view point, water sports etc (Har, 2002).

But all these benefits can also come at great social and environmental cost. Moreover, until recently, physical and ecological impacts associated with damming were the main concern of the most scientists. The concerns were mostly economics and politics. The discussion were tends to be science-talk or economics-talk. In addition most of this discussion tends also to work from top-down, globalist, universalist perspectives largely emerging from wealthy nations of the north (Padel, 2011).

In India, since independence, national development has been largely equated with economic growth and surplus. All the human and ecological costs were justified in its name (Singh, 1997). Large, centralized industries, irrigation projects have been symbols of such development, which through the process of industrialization promised to set India on the path of modernization and development. One of the inevitable outcomes of this has been massive environmental degradation and ‘development induced displacement’ (Padel, 2012).

Hydro power projects in India have always been regarded as “secular temples of modern India”. Proponents of the dam argue that for their own good, the ‘backward and savage’ adivasis need to be assimilated into the modern mainstream. If we look closer to society of Arunachal Pradesh, most of the communities are nature-based; largely self sufficient economies of tribal people are sustained and nurtured through their life which is in close proximity to forest, river and mountains. It is on this background, that people’s movements have raised several fundamental questions. Who benefits from projects like large dams? Who has paid the price? Who decides and who obeys? Why? Can development that impoverishes communities, particularly the poor and the marginalized and destroys ecological balance for the sake of powerful classes be called development at all? Struggles against the destruction and devastation caused by large dams have challenged the very basis of State’s unquestioned power to take control of people’s lives and resources. They have argued that just and sustainable development cannot take place by forcing some people to ‘sacrifice’ for others (Ibid). People’s right to know, to be informed, to participate in the process of shaping their life and future has been the very basis of these struggles.

Keeping all these perspective in mind, the paper attempts to give a broader overview of the local people perception of proposed hydro power projects in the Siang River basin of Arunachal Pradesh. The study had been conducted since 2011 to 2014 in the East Siang district. However, for this paper, some generalization is made and expanded to whole Siang basin. And to illustrate author points, author extensively reviews published and unpublished materials pertaining to the issue in the region.

As a matter of fact, much has been written on the issue, but still there is a dearth of empirical work on the issue. However, scholars like Ramachandra Guha (2012) and

² The Role of Hydropower in Sustainable Development, International Hydropower Association (IHA), IHA White paper, February 2003, http://www2.ce.metu.edu.tr/~ce571/links/announcement/LowRes_Hydropower_in_Sustainable_Development.pdf

Sanjib Baruah (2012) had given a broader framework of looking the Dam project in the state. Guha (2012) in his article “*Dams and the damned: Growth at what cost*” warned of the dangers posed by unregulated dam-building in Arunachal Pradesh. He argues that the path of development currently being followed in India is short-sighted, destructive and socially polarizing. And thereby advocated for smaller project as an alternative to large mega-projects, which would be more economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive. Sanjib Baruah (2012) in his article “*Whose River Is It Anyway? Political Economy of Hydropower in the Eastern Himalayas*” focuses on the Lower Subansiri hydropower dam and controversies surrounding the project. He argues that despite the protest, the people of Brahmaputra valley may not have any choice but to learn to live with the risks of mega dams.

Arunachal Pradesh, on the North-eastern tip of India is a land of pristine beauty, abundant with water and forest resources. It would not be wrong to say that in each kilometer you find a river or a rivulet with perennially flowing river water. Most of the rivers origin from the mountains within the state, but few have its sources of origin from the glaciers of the mighty Himalayas (Medha, 2010). Some of the well known rivers are Siang, Subansiri, Kameng, Lohit, Tirap, Dibang etc. Of all the rivers, the Siang is the biggest river with its source from the great Himalayas (Nyori, 1993).

Fig.:1 Proposed Dam Projects in Siang River Basin of Arunachal Pradesh

Sl. No	Name of Project	Name of River	Name of Agency	Date of signing MoU	Install capacity (mw)	District
1	Siang Upper Stage-I	Siang	Yet to be allotted	Data Not Available	6000MW	Upper Siang
2	Siang Upper State-II	Siang	Yet to be allotted	Data Not Available	3700MW	Upper Siang
3	Yamne-I	Yamne	Abir Constructions	05 Mar. 2008	60 MW	Upper Siang
4	Yamne-II	Yamne	Abir Construction	05 Mar. 2008	60 MW	Upper Siang
5	Lower Yamne-I	Yamne	M/s Yamne Power	29 Nov. 2008	50 MW	Upper Siang
6	Lower Yamne-II	Yamne	M/s Yamne Power	29 Nov. 2008	40 MW	Upper Siang
7	Palsi	Palsi	Meenakshi Infra	27 Aug. 2010	24 MW	Upper Siang
8	Pango	Sirapteng	Meenakshi Infra	27 Aug. 2010	96 MW	Upper Siang
9	Sipit	Sipit	Aswani Power	29 Nov. 2010	7 MW	Upper Siang
10	Nyikgong	Nuyikgong	Aswani Power	29 Nov. 2010	8 MW	Upper Siang
11	Jidu	Yangsang	Meenakshi Power	20-Jul-11	92 MW	Upper Siang

12	Sippi	Ringong	Meenakshi Power	20-Jul-11	96 MW	Upper Siang
13	Ringong	Ringong	Yet to be allotted	Data Not Available	150MW	Upper Siang
14	Mirak	Ringong River	Yet to be allotted	Data Not Available	141MW	Upper Siang
15	Minningg	Ringong	Yet to be allotted	Data Not Available	195MW	Upper Siang
16	Tato-I	Yargyap Chhu	Velcan Energy	30 Jun. 2007	170 MW	West Siang
17	Tato-II	Siyom	Reliance Power	22 Feb. 2006	700MW	West Siang
18	Siyom	Siyom	Reliance Power	22 Feb. 2006	1000MW	West Siang
19	Naying	Siyom	DS Cons. Power	22 Feb. 2006	1000MW	West Siang
20	Hirong	Siyom	Jaypee Power	Data Not Available	500MW	West Siang
21	Taiyong	Siyom	Abhyudaya Power (P) Ltd	Data Not Available	56MW	West Siang
22	Rapum	Siyom	Raajratna Energy	Data Not Available	40MW	West Siang
23	Rego	Yargyap Chhu	Tuff Energy (P) Ltd	Data Not Available	70MW	West Siang
24	Kangtangshiri	Yargyap Chhu	Raajratna Energy	Data Not Available	35MW	West Siang
25	Pema Selpaku	Yargyap Chhu	Raajratna Energy	Data Not Available	70MW	West Siang
26	Sangoshi	Yargyap Chhu	Chadalavada Constructions	Data Not Available	12MW	West Siang
27	Saechhu	Yargyap Chhu	Chadalavada Constructions	Data Not Available	15MW	West Siang
28	Tagurshit	Yargyap Chhu	L & T Power Development	Data Not Available	60MW	West Siang
29	Tagurshit Stag-II	Yargyap Chhu	Chadalavada Constructions	Data Not Available	27MW	West Siang
30	Pitgong	Siyom	Nano Excel Power	Data Not Available	14MW	West Siang
31	Hirit	Hirit	Velcan Energy	Data Not Available	84MW	West Siang
32	Hirit Korong	Hirit	Saisudhir Energy	Data Not Available	30MW	West Siang
33	Soying Korong	Hirit	Saisudhir Energy	Data Not Available	68MW	West Siang

34	Siri Korong	Hirit	Saisudhir Energy	Data Not Available	58MW	West Siang
35	Sibu	Hirit	Supereco India	Data Not Available	4MW	West Siang
36	Sitting	Siyom	Abhyudaya Power (P) Ltd	Data Not Available	24MW	West Siang
37	Gameng	Siyom	Yet to be allotted	Data Not Available	37MW	West Siang
38	Pauk	Siyom	Velcan Energy	30 Jun. 2007	120 MW	West Siang
39	Heo	Siyom	Velcan Energy	30 Jun. 2007	210 MW	West Siang
40	Jarong	Siyom	M/s CESC Ltd	25 Nov. 2008	90 MW	West Siang
41	Kaying	Pitgong	Sartda Eco Power	27 Aug. 2010	08MW	West Siang
42	Lower Siang	Siang	Jaypee Power	22 Feb. 2006	2700 MW	East Siang
43	Simang-I	Simang	Adishankar	06 Feb. 2008	67 MW	East Siang
44	Simang-II	Simang	Adishankar	06 Feb. 2008	66 MW	East Siang
45	Yemsing	Yembung	KVK Energy	02 Mar. 2009	15 MW	East Siang

Historically, the people of the state came into contact with the civilization almost very recently and until then it was ruled by the law of the land. When the British annexed the land they adopted the policy of isolation with less interference from the plain society (Baruah, 2008). Basing on the principle of the isolation, after Indian Independence, a popular policy was adopted “development along the lines of their own genius” (Elwin, 1960). Although the policy still continues to be operational, but in recent years, keeping the need and overall development of the state, lots of developmental programmes and dam projects in particular have projected in the state.

From 2000 to 2012, the state government has signed more than 180 memorandums of understanding (MoU) and memorandums of agreement (MoA) with various companies to harness the potentials for power development of the state. Some of the popular companies are National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO), Jindal Steel and Power Limited (JINDAL), Jagran Production Limited (JAPL), Patel Engineering, Sew Energy, Athena Energy, Reliance Power, Jindal Power, Jaiprakash Associates, Abir Infra, Coastal Infra, Navayuga Engineering, Mountain Fall India, Larsen and Toubro Power (L&T Power), Sai Krishnodaya Industries, Meenakshi Power, Velcan Energy and Adishankar Power

etc. A majority of them is stuck due to issues ranging from the delayed forest clearance and lack of infrastructure to opposition from local people.

Interestingly, the local tribes consider dams as an existential threat to their socio-cultural fabric; environmentalists meanwhile have been raising the alarm since the dams would be built on fragile ecological zone prone to frequent earthquakes. Many intellectuals argue that “the central policy of accelerating hydropower development in the state is undesirable³”. As per the expert knowledge about the regions ecology and geology of the area is not suitable for construction of large dams and hydro projects (Taher and Ahmad, 2007). The hydropower policy of Arunachal Pradesh, however, looks at it differently. The document states that, “the state provides ideal conditions for the development of hydro power projects...The small rivulets are perennial in nature and therefore provide an ideal condition for developing mini and micro hydel projects⁴.” According to the state government hydropower will be the future engine of growth for the State's economy.

II. ECOLOGICAL MILIEU OF SIANG RIVER BASIN

The present work focused in the central zone of the state within Siang river basin, which covers the three Siang districts namely Upper Siang, East Siang and West Siang district. All these districts are named after the Siang River. The entire area is mountainous and rugged topography and covered with dense forest and rich flora and fauna.

Most of the rivers of Siang basin namely Siang, Siyom and Simang etc., originate in Southern Tibet. Among these rivers, the Siang is the largest and it originates in the Chemayungdung mountain ranges lake in the Mount Kailash range in Southern Tibet. The river Siang enters Arunachal Pradesh near Gelling from where it is known as Siang. The total length of Siang River is 294 km till its point of confluence with Dibang and Lohit River. After entering India the river traverses approximately 197 km to join the Siyom River. From there the length of the river till Assam border is approx 86 km⁵.

The climatic condition of the area is greatly influenced by the Himalayan Mountains. The entire area is located in the south Asian monsoon region, experience humid subtropical climate with hot summer and mild winter. During monsoon season most of the rivers in the area are common in flood, landslides which are hazardous to the environment and human infrastructure (Gohain, 2008).

The area is inhabited by indigenous tribal people with distinctive socio-cultural life co-existed from time immemorial. The major people inhabited in this area are Adis and Galos. Apart from them, other tribes such as Mishmis, Membas, and Khambas are also inhabited in the region. These three districts occupy an area of 18,518 square Km with a total population of 24, 6580 as per 2011 census. The people are closely associated

³ Kiren Rijiju, MoS, Government of India, posted in a Facebook on 6th May 2014

⁴ Hydro Electric Power Policy Arunachal Pradesh, Government of Arunachal Pradesh

⁵ Parineeta Dandekar and Himanshu Thakkar, SANDRP, Cumulative Impact Assessment Study of Siang Basin in Arunachal Pradesh: Serious shortcomings; pro large hydro bias, February 18, 2014

with forest and rivers and highly dependent on it. The people still owned community land, forest and rivers in the region⁶. This diversity of communities comes with unique socio-cultural, agro-ecological and land-holding systems (Vagholikar and Das, 2010). In fact, most of the tribal communities of the state don't considered land and rivers as private property, they are mostly owned collectively by clan members or villagers.

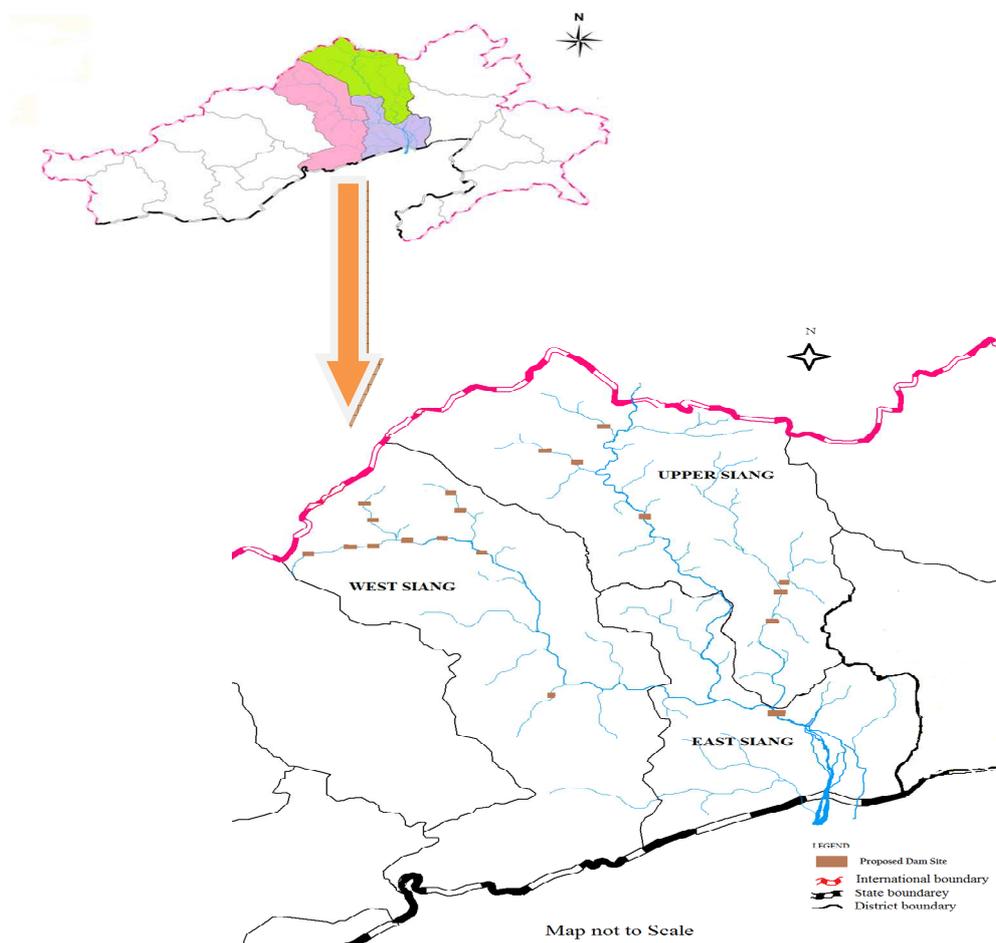
The area is rich in biodiversity and is home to many important populations of various wildlife species. In spite of rich biodiversity, the area is still unexplored region. There are numbers of endangered species of plants and animals dwell in the region. As per the official estimation, 82.26% of the Siang basin is under forest cover (more than 15,000 sq kms), it is rich in orchids (more than 100 species), holds 16 species of rhododendrons, 14 species of Bamboos and 14 species of canes and overall 27 Rare, Endangered and Threatened (RET) species and 46 endemic plant species⁷. As per the executive summary of the Hiron Hydro Electric Project, "Dam's construction in the state holds possibilities of significant damage on the river ecosystems⁸. Therefore, the developmental constructions should be done after detail study of the area.

⁶ Interim Report Independent People's Tribunal on Dams in Arunachal Pradesh, February 3, 2008, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India, pp.8.

⁷ Parineeta Dandekar and Himanshu Thakkar, SANDRP, Cumulative Impact Assessment Study of Siang Basin in Arunachal Pradesh: Serious shortcomings; pro large hydro bias, February 18, 2014

⁸ Forestry survey of India 2005.

Fig.2: Area of Study



III. CULTURAL MILIEU OF SIANG RIVER BASIN

Water is not only a physical substance, biological necessity or scarce resource, but also an intrinsic part of people's identity, cultures, worldviews and religious perceptions of themselves and the Otherworld or the life thereafter (Baviskar, 2007). There is no doubt about how Siang River plays an intrinsic role in the lives of the people. The people of the Siang river basins largely depend upon the nearby forest and river resources for their daily uses since time immemorial.

The water bodies such as rivers, streams, lakes and springs forms an indispensable part in their socio-cultural life. They have explored all such bodies of water of their area and have given them appropriate names. For instance, the Adis like many of the tribal inhabitants of the state have their own distinct term for water which is popularly known as *Asi*. They distinguished the water resources available to them according to their size and volume, to them natural springs is known as *Hirung* or *Hikur*, river as *Korong*,

rivulets as *Kobung*, and big river as *Hinne* (Tapak, 2012). Small streams and rivulets are commonly known by the term *Kojik or Rojik Korong*. Moreover, many spirits both malevolent and benevolent are believed to dwell in the rivers and their source, in forest and mountains. The galos also have their own distinct term for the water called Aashi similar to Adi. Tomo Riba (2003) provides many insights into the Galos relationship with their natural environment. He explains how the Galo perceive water and relate these natural resources with divinity. In their local concept Siang River is known by female gender, *Ane Siang* which means mother.

The Siang River is also noted for beautiful scenery, and the tourists from all across the globe do come and visit. Even in Indian tradition, rivers have always been regarded as divinities. Moreover, the water has been treated as a natural right - a right arising out of human nature, historic conditions, basic needs and notions of justice (Shiva, 2002). According to the people, the River Siang is the source of all life in these hill regions. In their legend, it is the abode of unseen spirits guarded and protected by Asi Uyu, Bumbo-Yiiying, Tusin-rodong and Hili-Hidong (All are water gods). Everything that exists and lives in the water is assigned to be the property of these water spirits. Whenever a person goes out to the jungle or nearby river water, he is obliged to propitiate the presiding deity before carrying out any of his tasks.

In the cosmogony world of the Adis and Galos, every natural resource like forest and river are believed to be the dwelling place of spirits, who guarded and protected it from intrusion of any kind. They inflicted various kinds of disease and sufferings on that person who break away the sacred ethos. For instance, whenever a man leaves for fishing activities his wife is taboo from weaving and knitting clothes of her husband. It is believed that if she does not do that her husband will face difficulties and will return empty. Although rivers and streams is an economic asset for the people, but they perceived it to be the dwelling place of many unseen spirits. Thus, fishing and allied activities in water is embedded with various socioeconomic and cultural implications. Even though the ground reality around the community has changed or is fast changing with rapid exploitation of the nearby resources, they attempt to guard the essence of their life and are reluctant to resist or lack the necessary attributes for acquisition and intensification of resources use.

IV. DAM AS DEVELOPMENT: LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Fig.3: Women activists at a protest rally against large dams held in Itanagar, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh, in July 2007 (Source: Vagholikar and Das, 2010)



Behold, you highland dwellers
To the neo-colonialism with its ugly hoods
Inundating the paradise with human floods
To cleanse the varied cultural philosophy
Depleting the vast and rich ecology
Wait not for the time opportune
Create not your own fortune
Unite, integrate, and stand up to erupt
Against the anti-Indians, terrorist and corrupt
-Vijay Taram (18 April 2011)⁹

The people of the region have a great apprehension to loss community land at large scale. They argue that proposed Dam project should be lessened to minimize the logical and physical impact on the cultural cosmology of the region. Today, several organizations have emerged in the area in opposition to current dam building practices in the region. Most of the local natives hold the view that the proposed dams in the region are posing as a great threat to the local people and it biodiversity. There are organizations like the Forum for Siang Dialogue (FSD), Siang Peoples' Forum (SPF), Mebo Area Bacho Committee (MABC), West Siang Dam Affected Peoples Association (WSDAPA), Lower Siang Project Affected People Action Committee (LSPAPAC) and Lower Siang Dam Project Affected Youth Association (LSDPAYA) active in the region.

⁹ Vijay Taram, Posted in a Facebook group-ADI A MAJOR TRIBE on 18 April 2011

Among all the organizations, the most active forum in the region is the Forum for Siang Dialogue (FSD)¹⁰ led by Ojing Tasing and Vijay Taram. In an interview with Vijay Taram¹¹ on 23 December 2013, he says:

“Dam over the Mighty Siang River is an unjust developmental pursuit. The lush green fields around the villages on the high hills are what we consider our wealth. Our identity is our culture and culture thrives on the nature. Therefore, destruction of nature is impingement to our culture and impingement of culture is cleansing of our identity”.

Many Adi intellectuals argue that they need development, but not at the cost of destroying their ancestral land, forest and rivers. Ojing Tasing, the chairman of the Siang People Forum says: “No dams on river Siang at the cost of our extinction”¹². In similar line, Oni Panyang¹³, President of Lower Siang Dam Project Affected Youth Association (LSDPAYA) says:

“Our land is gifted with rich minerals, resources, and abundant flora and fauna. But today, some hungry politicians are running after our god gifted resources to rob it, declaring these resources as ‘the property of nation’ disrespecting us who lived in this region for generation”.

Mr. Ajing Pertin (2011) writes: ‘the push by the Centre to accelerate hydropower development in the Siang valley to counter the Chinese hydro power projects on the Tsangpo has only succeeded in sowing the seeds of major conflicts in the future for the Siang valley. The villagers of Pongging protesting the project near a Jaypee camp was open fire by the CRPF and state police in May 25 2010¹⁴. In response to this incident, the apex student organization of the Adis, “AdiSU warns govt of revolt¹⁵” and warned to launch “Quit Siang movement¹⁶” if their protest against Lower Siang Hydroelectric Project is not looked into.

In an interview with Israel Perme¹⁷, General Secretary of AdiSU (2010-2012) says:

“With a population of more than one lakhs work forces, the Jaypee Groups have to clear vast patches of lands for the humanly dwelling of these workers. These vast clearances of green reserve would certainly create imbalance in eco-system of the whole Siang valley.

¹⁰ The forum was formed in 2001 and since then the Forum is crusading awareness campaign over the impacts of Dam Projects in Siang Valley.

¹¹ Personal Interview with Vijay Taram on 23 December 2013 at Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh

¹² SPF Chairman Ojing Tasing said in a joint Press conference here last evening ,the Hindu, December 2, 2010, Tribe fears Arunachal dam will extinct its people

¹³ Personal Interivew with Oni Panyang at Pashighat, on 21 December 2013

¹⁴ Four injured at Pongging as CRPF open fire at protestors, The Arunachal Times, May 27, 2010, P-1

¹⁵ AdiSU nullify outcome of meeting on Dam, the Arunachal Times, 9th September 2010, P-1

¹⁶ Students to launch “Quit Siang movement”, The Arunachal Times, June, 07, 2010, P-1

¹⁷ Personal Interview with Mr. Isreal Perme, General Secretary of Adi student’s Union on 11 June 2011 at Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar

The research work done by Tanyang Yaying (2007) on Siyom Hydro Project in the West Siang is worth mentioning, the author writes:

“The proposal of 1000mw Siyom hydro project had made the people uncomfortable and forced them to vacate the places occupied by them since time immemorial. As per the EIA report of 2000-01 the total submergence area will be 2854.36 ha, out of 3285 km² of catchments area actual submerged area is 1891.41 ha. And about 290 families and 1070 population are getting affected by this project. Two villages will submerge under the reservoir of the dam namely Pame and Reying villages comprising of 37 families” (Page 25-26).

The majority of the lower Siang people hold the opinion against the proposed Mega dam project. According to Okom Megu¹⁸, General Secretary of Lower Siang Project Affected People Action Committee:

“Construction of a Dam in our region would certainly need large human resources. As per the information from a reliable source, the total number of skilled and unskilled labourers only, in the construction site would be approximately of about 30,000/ (Thirty thousand) persons, excluding their family members. At an average of 4 persons a family, the total populations to be arriving at the construction site would be approximately of about 1, 20, 000/ (One lakh twenty thousand) persons. This population statistic itself is alarming because the total human population within the radius of 10-15 Kms from the construction site presently is hardly 10,000/ (ten thousand) persons. Leaving it aside, even the total local population of the whole East Siang District would hardly reach 1, 00, 000/ (One lakh) persons. A drastic and enormous demographic change is imminent with commencement of construction of the Dam over River Siang. The resultant factor of the population imbalance would be nothing but ethnic cleansing, leading to complete annihilation of the rich culture and traditions of the local populace of the project areas”.

Most of the people argue that the 2700MW mega dam will be a decision in haste and advocated for the reduction of the capacity. Apart from that common fear, an argument also put forward in Facebook that apprehend the abolition of Inner Line Permit which will become a necessity. This issue has found space in a number of groups on the social networking site Facebook. Number of Facebook users from the Adi has reacted to the dam project in Siang belt. The present General Secretary of Adi Student's Union (AdiSU), Mr. Obuk Gao¹⁹ writes:

My personal view on hydropower development in the State is to go for developing mini/micro or small hydro power projects ranging from few kilowatts to few megawatts. We have huge resources for developing these ranges of power in the State”.

¹⁸ Personal Interview with Okom Megu at Pasighat, East Siang, Arunachal Pradesh on 5 May 2011

¹⁹ Obuk Gao, posted in his facebook account on 16 July 2012

He further says that they are ready to take even extreme action if the government continues to pursue big dam projects in the area. In similar line, Behon Jamoh,²⁰ a young engineer student writes:

“Our Arunachal Pradesh is situated in one of most vulnerable tectonic plates classified under Seismic Zone -V. If the Assam earthquake of 1950’s is a historic past, then the latest Sikkim earthquake is not celluloid screening at all. These are the warnings and indications of The Mother Nature for the people to stop irreversible and harmful intervention to the systems and processes of nature which are but supreme. Neither Japanese Engineers & Technocrats could design and develop the human accentuated earthquake & natural disaster proof structure nor there is any human being in this planet who can ever create one. The bottom line is that, the mega dams are destructive and suicidal for the people of Arunachal Pradesh”.

However, it appears that some sections of people are happy with the proposed Dam projects in the region owing the constant power failure. For them dam projects is for development and prosperity of the region. Okom Tamuk²¹, a social worker from Pashighat is of the opinion that:

“The pressure groups opposing dam is only behind cash. How long we will bag from the central govt. Just blindly opposing Dam will not going to give us anything at the end. We should be practical and see how we can secure our future with the coming of Dam projects”.

Truth to be told, the history of the developments with respect to dam project on Siang River has not successful enough. The earliest attempt to construct the dam over the river was undertaken by the Brahmaputra Flood Control (BFC), since 1978. The attempt was a complete failure. They had to give away their utopian dreams. After the failure of the BFC, National Hydro Power Cooperation arrived with new plans and policies to construct a series of Dams over Siang River. They too had to double up showing their back to the river. Today, the Jaypee Groups have arrived to complete the task to tame the river. Till date this company was involved in petty construction works only. This company actually survived through availing sub-let works under the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation. Herein lies the greatest question, is this company competent enough to be allowed to undertake Dam Project over the Mighty Siang River.

The perspectives of the various tribes on the Dam projects in Arunachal Pradesh are quite similar. Most of the people across the state are neither against the Dam project nor supporting the Dam project. According to Rihu Mihu²², “people living in the proposed Dibang Multipurpose Dam project hold the opinion that the project is very big which is impossible to be accepted since it has great impact on the environment”.

²⁰ Behon jamoh, a young social activist of Adi, posted in his facebook account on 3 November 2013

²¹ Okom Tamuk, posted in facebook forum, Adi a Major Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, 27 April 2012

²² Rihu, Mihu, 2014, Dibang Multipurpose Project - Communities' perception, TheMishmi.com, <http://www.themishmis.com/index.php/resources/paper/32-dibang-multipurpose-project-communities-perception.html>

According to Raju Mimi²³, the proposed project will submerge an area of 4009 hectares, and a backwater reservoir of 43 km will be created. The project will acquire 5827.8 hectares of land; of which 5056.50 ha is community forest land classified as Unclassed State Forest (USF). More recently, Parag Jyoti Saikia²⁴ (2014) writes:

“The impacts of the Dibang multipurpose project are going to be severe on the river, people and overall ecology of Dibang river basin. But the sad part is that no proper assessment of these impacts has been done till now”.

Recently, in the general convention of Bogum Bokang Kebang on 14 & 15th October 2012 held at Pessing, Upper Siang, Arunachal Pradesh, a decision was taken to oppose the Lower Siang Hydroelectric Project (2700 MW) at any cost. In his inaugural speech, the president of ABK, Mr. Kangir Jamoh says that “Ngolu Adi among sok 24 Dam takam solok ke Lower Siang Dam atel petom sim mai oppose dun. 23 Dam sim oppose mang. Seko development dem miiman (We all believe in development, we will support the entire small 23 dam projects, but the big dam project of Lower Siang is not at all acceptable)

Today, it seems that “following western materialistic model of development many developing countries give a blind eye to nature, social reality...which has had the effect of divorcing us from nature and social world reality” (Padel 2009; 313-14). The issue is clear, the question is right to life of some persons cannot be compromised or bartered just for providing more comforts to many people. Felix Padel (2011) argues that the greatest problem faced in development of tribes is how best to bring the blessing and the advantages of modern science and technology without destroying the rare and precious values of tribal life, not interfering with their ways of life, but helping them to live it.

Thus, it is obvious to remark that the local people are not against the Dam project, but against the proposed major project. Unfortunately, such movements have been branded as ‘Maoists activity’ by the state governments. It is a fact that the comprehensive development approaches towards state in general and Siang Valleys in particular should emphasize on the prosperity of the region, so that the local livelihood, environmental conservation and social justice should be harmonized. The various developments must not seek material wealth only, but wealth that enables people to live justly and sustainably within the capacity of supporting ecosystems.

V. CONCLUSION

Arunachal Pradesh is industrially backward state as per the national committee’s report on industrial dispersal. However, the problems of development lie not in the lack of natural resources but in the large investments required for infrastructure development. From the point of view of infrastructure development the principal problem in the region is the inadequacy of communication facilities. Arunachal is exceptionally rich in natural resources. It has all the attributes of a national powerhouse and reservoir that could

²³ Raju Mimi, 2014, The Dibang Multipurpose Project: Resistance of the Idu Mishmi, TheMishmi.com

²⁴ Parag Jyoti Saikia, Six years after PM Laying the Foundation Stone: No Clearance, No Work for 3000 MW Dibang Dam, SANDRP, South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, Posted on January 31, 2014 by sandrp

transform the region, ameliorate poverty, and generate national wealth. The gifts of water and biodiversity offer tremendous potential that requires vision, will, and careful planning if they are to be converted into bountiful, renewable resources for sustainable development. However, unregulated waters currently vent their fury in destructive which leads much of social agitation and social unrest in the society.

Therefore, it is essence to address that acceptability of the project to community per se. as community are the sole owner of resources their needs and aspiration should be justified. Development for national interest should not harm the tribal community. For that there must be extensive socio-economic study regarding the particular people who going to lose their land, forest, and rivers. Some sections of the community do against the dam project because for the reason for this was cited as “non-fulfillment of basic environmental conditions and the lack of completion of crucial studies and plans”. So, there must be proper liaison between state government, power developer and community people. They should need to come at one negotiable standard to harness development through mutual co-operation with community. It will enhance mutuality of development and communities’ aspiration.

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