

Comments on ‘Adequacy of EIA’ for Sahstrakund Multipurpose Project in District of Yeotmal by GMIDC, Aurangabad - Considered in 69th EAC Meeting

Subject: Concerns about Sahastrakund Multipurpose Project

Respected Chairperson and Members,

We see that Sahastrakund HEP will be discussed in the upcoming EAC Meeting on the 11th and 12th of November for “Adequacy of EIA”. It is unclear what this means. The Project is not listed in any categories of information on the MoEF Website. No information about the project is available on MoEF website in violation of CIC orders. We hope that EAC will not consider this project in its upcoming meeting.

Sahastrakund has a major irrigation component and is not an HEP, as mentioned in the MoEF website. Additionally it is a category A project as it is extremely close (about 3 kms) from Painganga Wildlife Sanctuary. From primary information available, we see that the project involves displacement of 14 villages and 2 tandas (settlements). Against this the electricity generated was a mere 25 MW. While the submergence was 6277 hectares of fertile, irrigated and cultivated land, the command area was a mere 9500 hectares.

1. Peaceful Protest at Public Hearing: Public hearing for the project was held on the 11th January 2011. The Public hearing was not held either in the command or the submergence area, but nearly 52 kilometers away from our remote submergence area. Nonetheless, 6000 women and 8000 men, a total of 14000 people travelled on their own and attended this public hearing and peacefully protested the project. The villagers have been consistently passing Gram Sabha Resolutions against the project.

2. No information about change of scope: Since then, there is no information given to project affected about any change in scope. According to a document which was supposedly presented at the India Water Week, April 2013, organized by Ministry of Water Resources by some Engineer of the Godavari Marathwada Irrigation Development Corporation and Assistant Professor from WALMI, Aurangabad,[1] a new plan has been devised for Sahastrakund project which will result in submergence of 2570 hectares and increased command area of an unbelievable 24950 hectares! Hydropower generation has been reduced from 25 MW to 20 MW. It also states some untrue information. It claims that only 4 settlements (tandas) will be displaced. However, there are only 2 tandas (Bhojnagar Tanda and Ratan Naik Tanda). Population of just these two tandas is approximately 3000 people from scheduled castes and tribes. In addition, we have more than 1000 bhoi families dependent on riverine fisheries, who will be affected by the dam.

The villages here still follow “Bara Balutedari” or barter system and have a large proportion of landless labours and sections like cobblers, barbers, cleaners, who do not own land, but barter their skills for food grains. These communities will be worse affected by the dam project as they will get no compensation or rehabilitation benefits. Affected villagers have not received any correspondence or information in about any change from the original plans.

We strongly urge that EAC MoEF should subject the project to a complete project cycle of environmental appraisal from Scoping Clearance, TOR, EIA Studies, Public Hearing and then consideration for Environmental Clearance.

3. NBWL Clearance not secured: The proposed project is barely 3 kilometers away from Painganga Wildlife Sanctuary and hence requires Wildlife Clearance. National Green Tribunal has ordered in case regarding construction near Okhala Barrage Sanctuary, that NBWL Clearance will have to be secured first, before the project is considered for Environmental Clearance.

4. Redundant Project submerging fertile, irrigated and cultivated land: The area under submergence of Sahastrakund project is already irrigated by Esapur Dam Project. This is fertile irrigated land cultivating cotton, soyabean, turmeric, oranges, sweet limes, sugarcane, etc. All of this can be submerged for a dam project with unclear benefits. Looking at the dismal irrigation efficiency of projects in Vidarbha Region, the dam will not irrigate even a fraction of command area, as claimed.

5. Command area already irrigated by several projects: In fact the command area is already irrigated by several medium and minor schemes! These include Jambh Nalla Project, Ningnur Dam Project, Takali Dam project, etc. The farmers from command area also support the project affected and have given written Gram Sabha Resolutions that they do not water this project.

Considering these serious issues, the Ministry of Environment and Forests should not consider a project as problematic as Sahastrakund. It requires complete appraisal, including scoping clearance, TORs, EIA, Public Hearing and consideration for Environmental Clearance,

Thanking you ,

Yours Sincerely,

Parineeta Dandekar

[1] <https://indiawaterweek.water.tallyfox.com/documents/innovative-concept-hydropower-generation-case-study-sahastrakund-hydro-electric-project>