

## Comments on Tidong I hydroproject's application for CDM benefits

We have come to know that the 100 MW Tidong I Hydroelectricity project is being considered by UNFCCC for the grant of CDM benefits. We, the residents of the project affected area would like to put forth our arguments against granting any CDM benefits to this project:

I. Section B of the PDD relates to Application of baseline and a monitoring methodology.

The sub-step 1a of the Section B.5 mentions, "Alternative a: The proposed 100 MW THP project activity undertaken without being undertaken as a CDM project activity. As outlined in Step 2 and 4 below THP is not a financially viable project and NTPGPL only decided to invest and go ahead with the proposed project activity after taking into account the additional revenue from the sale of CERs. On this basis this alternative is not credible and is hence cannot be a part of the baseline scenario."

This contention of the NTPGPL (project proponent) is belied by the following facts:

- a. The project was granted Techno-economic feasibility approval by the Central Electricity Authority on 23rd July, 2007. This approval had been given despite income from sale of CERs not having been factored in in this analysis.
- b. The project started construction in April, 2009 without any assurance of obtaining CDM benefits.
- c. The project has been going ahead with construction by paying up heavy penalties (100 % over and above the prescribed rate for destruction of forest resources) to the Forest Department. Surely, a project that is projecting itself to be dependent upon CDM benefits for being viable can ill afford to make such deliberate cost overruns.

II. Sections D1 outlines the Environmental Impacts of the project as envisaged in the Environmental Impact Assessment report of the project, based upon which the project is granted environmental clearance. These impacts include those on ambient air quality, water quality and those resulting from the dumping of muck generated by project activities. The information in this section is incomplete and the project management has been flouting the standards specified for air and water pollution in the national legislations. This is evident from the following facts:

- a. Section D1 does not mention the impacts of the project on the forest resources. According to the Forest Clearance granted for the project by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Central Government, diversion of 39 hectares of forest

land and 1261 trees had been approved. The company has destroyed much more than these approved forest resources.

- b. Show cause notices have been issued by the Himachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board (HPSPCB) to the project authorities for irresponsible dumping of debris from construction of the road to surge shaft which was damaging trees and causing air pollution. Such notices were issued on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2009 and 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2009.
- c. Heavy penalties have been imposed by the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department (HPFD) for violating the Indian Forest Act and the Forest Conservation Act during the construction of the project due to illegal destruction of forest resources beyond what was permitted by the Central Government. Even a report has been registered by the HPFD with the Kinnaur police. The project authorities have been paying up the damages and have continued to violate forest laws.
- d. The illegal destruction of forests by the project authorities have been highlighted by various news papers/portals. Some of these news items also show the forest scenario at the construction site before and after irresponsible dumping of debris by the project. Some of these news items can be accessed at :
  - i. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/inquiry-nails-tidong-power-project/561273/>
  - ii. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20091209/himachal.htm#3>
  - iii. <http://hillpost.in/2009/12/08/kinnaur-tribal%E2%80%99s-of-himachal-agitated-over-damage-to-rare-chilboza-pine-trees/17574/environment/ravinder>
  - iv. [http://www.himvani.com/news/2009/12/08/tidong-i-project-encroaches-government-property-and-violates-forest-laws/3812?wpmp\\_switcher=mobile](http://www.himvani.com/news/2009/12/08/tidong-i-project-encroaches-government-property-and-violates-forest-laws/3812?wpmp_switcher=mobile)
- e. The damage done by the project has also been amply highlighted by the one man committee (Avay Shukla Committee) that was set up by the Himachal Pradesh High Court to assess the damage done to the environment by the hydroelectricity projects in the state. The report, available at the website of the High Court at [http://hphighcourt.nic.in/Environmental\\_Compliance.pdf](http://hphighcourt.nic.in/Environmental_Compliance.pdf) states regarding the Tidong I project,

*“There is a major problem of muck dumping. The unscientific manner in which excavation and cutting is being done on the Surge Shaft road and on the road to Adit I, and the callous manner in which the resultant debris is being dumped in the forest areas, is taking a huge toll of trees, and will ultimately lead to soil erosion on a large scale.”*

Elsewhere, the report says,

*“The issue confronting the project and the government here is of massive environmental implications. The damage already caused by road cutting, and the even more damage likely to be caused in the future, is environmentally unsustainable and unacceptable. To recapitulate, the project has approval to fell 1261 trees (in itself a very large number). It has already illegally destroyed 509 more trees and in the assessment of the deptt. will inevitably destroy another 4815 trees; in other words it shall destroy 5405 more trees than what has been approved – 400% more than the sanctioned number! This makes a mockery of the original DPR of the project and the FCA application. It also raises the question whether they deliberately understated the number of trees in their application in order to get FCA approval – had the government or the forest deptt. been aware that the number of trees involved was 6666 rather than 1261 it may not have given approval for the project at all.”*

- III. Section D2 of the PDD is supposed to inform the decision makers at UNFCCC CDM whether the project is to likely to have major environmental impacts. Since the construction on the project is already going on for the past almost two years, it can be emphatically said that the project has caused immense and irreparable damage to the local ecology, irrespective of what the PDD or the environmental management plan of the project claim.
- IV. Section E of the PDD states, The response of the majority local residents of the affected villages Rispa and Thangi were either not obtained while preparing the PDD (as claimed in the PDD) or are totally misrepresented. The forests areas that were diverted for the project as well as the ones that got illegally destroyed by the project due to unscientific practices adopted during construction are *Chilgoza* (*Pinus gerardiana* also called *neoza*) forests. Chilgoza is a rare species of Pine that is found in very few areas including Kinnaur (this district) and Afghanistan; a tree takes 40-50 years to mature. The fruit of

this tree is prized as a dry fruit which the local people sell annually to earn handsome incomes. Apple is the other mainstay of the thriving local agricultural economy.

The people of these villages are distressed by the way the project has been damaging the nearby Chilgoza forests were not a part of the officially diverted forest land. They have permanently lost the incomes that they used to get from the trees that have been illegally destroyed by the private agency and its contractors.

The project does not offer a viable employment opportunity to the local people, except for a few petty contractors, since the local people are already well off by the virtue of sale of apple and chilgoza.

The resentment of the local villagers against the project is reported in the news item accessible at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20091230/himachal.htm#2>.

Considering the above mentioned facts, the Tidong I project does not deserve to be given CDM benefits. We fear that the grant of CDM benefits to the project would make the project proponent flout environment and forest laws with greater impunity as these would help it pay up the penalties imposed by the government.

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