

Promoting Gender Inclusiveness and Empowerment in Hydropower Development

Overview

Seventy percent of Uttarakhand's population is involved in agriculture, primarily subsistence agriculture. Average landholding size in the hills per household is 0.68 acre. In the Tehri Garhwal district, 45 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.

HI-NEX examines connections between the effects of hydropower projects (mainly small and medium) on agricultural livelihoods in the Bhilangana river basin with a focus on women and youth—the main actors responsible for collection of water (mostly from springs), fuelwood and fodder from forests and most farming activities (except ploughing) in addition to housework. Ever-higher male out-migration from the area has further heightened women's roles in agriculture such as in the cultivation of paddy, other grains and pulses such as lentils and vegetables.

The main goals of the project are, to:

- i) develop a knowledge base on interconnections among water resources, energy, food production and livelihoods with a focus on women and youth and,
- ii) identify policy and institutional opportunities and obstacles.

Recommendations

- Involve women in HEP planning by means of carefully coordinated, participatory planning processes
- Integrate sufficient downstream environmental river flows into HEP projects to accommodate water needs of local livelihoods dependent on agriculture, wild plant/fodder collection, forestry and fishing
- Water harvesting activities to combat HEP effects on household and agricultural water supply should be given priority when planning the use of the Local Area Development Fund
- Timely and unrestricted supply of LPG cylinders must be ensured to reduce women's workload and pressure on forests enhanced due to HEPs
- Transparent and efficient HEP benefits sharing to provide local communities a share in annual profits generated by the projects. Ensure women have priority access to shares



Research Findings

- Women and youth in rural households are largely responsible for collection of water (mostly from springs), fuelwood and fodder (from forests, river banks and fields) and most farming activities (except ploughing), in addition to household work.
- Women and other community members such as youth are severely affected by HEPs because these often lead to loss of forest resources, drying of springs, loss of sufficient irrigation water and damage, especially during HEP tunnel blasting to agricultural land, irrigation canals, homes and cattle sheds.
- Women and youth's workload and drudgery has increased while household income from farming has declined.
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- Women in affected villages feel more insecure from disasters like tunnel bursts, earthquakes, and landslides induced by hydropower projects.
- Hydropower-affected rural communities do not get a just share of the benefits (energy, irrigation water, employment and power profits).
- Women and their organizations have been active in protesting for more equitable sharing of irrigation water, greater compensation for HEP construction-related damages to land and infrastructure and demands for development projects such as roads, health centers and schools.



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