

Energy Generation: Needs a New Model of Development

Dr. Mohinder Kumar Slariya, Govt. Postgraduate College, Chamba Himachal Pradesh, India

1. Existing model of development:

The existing model of development put more pressure on the resources and compelled the government to plan more developmental projects to meet out the growing need of the people. The need of any sort is to be fulfilled only by the exploitation of natural resources which are less in number and to be finished very soon at the present pace of their utilization. Every natural resource has been heavily targeted for exploitation.

During the course of study it has been realized that the most important ideas of alternative approaches have been emerged from popular struggles of affected people. Developmental and planning era has been evidenced by many developmental struggles. The only reason responsible for these struggles is that the concerns of local people either displaced or people who are living in the vicinity of developmental projects have been ignored in the process of decision-making and implementation. The voices of the people coming from different movements advocate strengthening the efforts, visions, plans and approaches of development so that prevailing problems can be solved.

The need for energy and electricity has been increased with the development of civilization. In view of the present need, many countries including India are suffering from severe shortages and even crises. All of them face very real and very difficult questions of how to meet these needs. Energy generation through hydropower dam in the Himalayas has been found as a solution to meet a substantial part of these requirements.

Undoubtedly, these projects generate thousands of units of electricity, but at what cost? The economic cost has been calculated by the policy makers as well as by the executors, and these calculations have been made public. But at the same time, the cost of the projects in terms of social, environmental, livelihood, health, psychological and cultural impacts, impacts on the lives of local indigenous people living in the remote valleys of the Himalayas have always been ignored. The projects in the Himalayan region are threatening the identity and culture. Projects are being pushed forward under the pressure of lobbyists, unmindful of these social, environmental and cultural impacts, impacts that have not been fully and properly assessed.

Unfortunately, the people who have been/will be most severely affected have had little say in the planning, design and implementation and have no place in the decision-making structures. And social, environmental, psychological and cultural issues as compared to financial and economic are not important enough to be taken into consideration in the decision-making process.

2. Invitation to disaster:

Pushing ahead such a massive dam-building program in the fragile Himalayan region without proper social and environmental assessments and safeguards and ignoring the likely impacts of these projects including climate change may have catastrophic and unanticipated

consequences. The recent devastation caused by the breach in the embankments of the Kosi River in Nepal and the subsequent change of course that wreaked havoc with the lives of millions of people is an indication of what lies in store if we undertake far-reaching interventions in sensitive regions of the Himalayas without fully evaluating the possible consequences.

The whole dam-building programme in each river basin in the Himalayas needs a comprehensive review. The existing data suggest that an alternative approach/model is required to fulfill the required energy need of any country in a sustainable manner. The choices are not easy, and the process will be difficult because the decision to adopt such type of approach/model is to be taken by the policy makers and by the leadership in the respective countries.

3. Involvement of local people in decision-making:

Local people must have a say in decision-making processes. They should be involved by visiting the local sites where the developmental project has been proposed. Every sacrifice made by them should be calculated and compensated before the commencement of any developmental project. To prevent traumatization, the concerns of oustees as well as native of the area should be considered and their rights respected. The interests of the local people must be given priority along with national interests as they are the custodians of a treasure that is the common heritage of the entire world – the Himalayas.

4. Proposed model of development:

The approach in my research is to find a strategy for long-term optimal benefit from natural resources promoting a sustainable growth path. Two questions appear: First, how to utilize the resources, e.g. at what pace should the resources be exploited? Secondly, how to get benefit from the exploitation of resources with the participation of local stakeholders, e.g. how should the earnings be used for the benefits of the local people as well as to sustain the local environment?

I propose to concentrate on Benefit Sharing Participatory Model of development (BSPM) as an answer to the existing lobbyist-pressurized model of development. Along with this I propose to include SIA (Social Impact Assessment), LIA (Livelihood Impact Assessment), PIA (Psychological Impact Assessment) and HIA (Health Impact Assessment), CIA (Cultural Impact Assessment) in EIA (Environment Impact Assessment). Environment does not mean physical environment; the term environment should be used in a comprehensive manner. On the basis of these assessments, the stakeholders of a proposed developmental project should be involved in the process of decision-making. Monetary benefits drawn out from the developmental initiative should be shared with the affected as well as with the native people of the area concerned. A minimum percentage out of the profit earned should be agreed upon and be disbursed among stakeholders so that the real fruits of development can be reaped. I propose to develop a tool through which the above mentioned aspects can be measured, and the participation of the affected community can be ensured. This would help the decision makers to make better decisions when, where, and how to deploy the development initiatives in Himalayas as well as in any part of the world.