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Point for discussion this month

Role of EIAs in infrastructural projects

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Dear Readers,

The life began from the sea billions of years ago. Vastness of clean water and air always delights minds. The clean and beautiful beaches like Dive Aagar, Konkan, in Maharashtra state of India give energy to strengthen the efforts to control Climate Change. Bali summit concluded without any strong resolution or action.

SERI's Ecotechnology actually helps in two ways - control generation of GHGs from waste degradation and secondly atmospheric carbon dioxide is sequestered by green plants growing in the treatment systems. So, for the waste management, ecotechnology is the best option.

A new organization - TransNVtech has been incorporated to fight with the pollution generated from point sources. This organization will give ready-to-use treatment units for the sewage purification. The aim is to provide compact units for residential buildings, hotels and hospitals and achieve a sizeable pollution control in the international year of sanitation - 2008.

A visit to origin of Pravara river's origin was a feast for trekkers. The river rises fort Ratangad near Bhandardara at about 4200 ft from MSL in highest mountain ranges of Sahayadri - Western Ghats.

Wish you all very Happy and Prosperous New Year 2008.

Thank you,
Chief Editor

Newsviews

Environmental Clearance: Hurdle or Navigator?

In one of the guest lectures in the all India workshop of irrigation engineers, the trainee executive engineers tried to hold the talk on stalling of the 'Dam' (damned?) projects due to environmental clearance. It was surprising to know the views of engineers about ecosystems and impact of their 'civil/infrastructural' development on local to global processes. Humankind is awakened due to imminent threats of global warming and climate change. Is 100 % regional development possible by infrastructural projects without giving heed to environmental processes and alterations?

National Environment Appellate Authority has invalidated the environmental clearance for multi crores project - Polavaram Irrigation Project in Andhra Pradesh on Dec. 19, 2007 considering the flouting of rules during EIA studies and denying affected people to access the information. Because public hearing was not conducted in the affected areas of other states - Orissa and Chhattisgarh. This project has brought one more dimension in the light - interstate conflict of necessities, impacts and concerns of people. Earlier Sardar Sarovar Project - epicentre of conflicts had issues of interstate disputes.

Recurrence of such issues and ruling are leading to many questions like -

1. Are present accounting systems, GDP etc. insensitive to local demands, ecological damage and restoration of altered environmental processes?
2. Is infrastructure centric development willing to consider local to global environmental impacts (L2GEI) and to take preventive actions and to implement corrective actions?
3. Can "construction" group take up the task of correcting "environmental aberrations" or would they be able to give justice to impact mitigation measures (which is not their work profile)?
4. Is restoration of environmental processes again another civil / infrastructural project or ecological project?

5. In this fast developing world, local communities do not have aspirations for modern facilities? Or they should sacrifice for others already developed and wanting more? Will it lead to equitable sustainable development from the view of River Basin Development?

6. Does compliance with EIA rules and requirements of environmental clearances hinder the process of development? If so, then our request is to quash the rules and then lobby in such a way that ensures no return of such rules again. (In one organizations assessment, it was just requested to tear off all the NC documents where they didn't commit to comply with the rules).

7. Are we really heading towards sustainable development or just another imbalanced economy trying to patch the ever widening gap between development and healthy environment? Does it serve the poor people in the country?

Isn't it confusion between development and environment? Is the goal of our national leaders to provide equitable economic growth to poorest of poorest individuals? Does that include environment quality? Or is it only economic upliftment?

Will environmental impact assessment studies and clearances suffice the requirements of administrative and executive machinery? Will it be useful to set the goals of regional development?

The project developer may not have the understanding of regional development and progress to improve the livelihood of local communities. But the EIA report is comprised of baseline studies of environmental resources as well as socio-economic status in the project area. Therefore it becomes very authentic document of strengths and weaknesses of the region. Then developer has to widen his vista to look at imminent changes - short term and long term as a result of his act / project in the upstream and downstream of project giving overview of entire river basin. Then, there will be perfect planning and implementation of mitigation of negative impacts to increase the viability of the project.

- Sandeep Joshi

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NewsAnalysis

Impact of climate change on Businesses

Every 2.5 °C increase in temperature in India will lose five percent of its GDP. According to Dr. R K Pachauri, Chairman, IPCC says that developing country like India is vulnerable to impacts of climate change to a substantial degree and it will be one of the biggest business disruptions in the years to come. Most of the people's livelihood is still dependent on agriculture only.

Extreme weather conditions due to climate change may cause major risks to infrastructure and the property damage potential at the rate of 2-5% every year. 45% of the factories such as refineries and chemical manufacturing plants being built in the coastal areas for bulk cargo transportation are at high risk of flooding due to rising of sea levels.

A global survey of 1000 companies reported that 20% of respondents think that Climate change is not very important issue for their business and 86% don't have strategy for responding climate change.

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India's eco-diplomacy worked at Bali again

Developing and poor countries have for past several years demanded that rich countries pay them to maintain and increase the forest covers at the cost of their economic development.

The Indian delegation led by science and technology minister Kapil Sibal at the UN conference on the climate change, succeeded and made the conference to accept the country's demand that the rich world will compensate developing countries for afforestation drives and for avoiding deforestation.

The contact group has accepted most of the demands but the clearance will have to go through two more steps- clearance from

other subsidiary body of the conference and the complete house before bringing funds to India. Bali will provide an in-principle approval to the idea and it could take another two years for finalization of the details of the scheme allowing India to apply and start getting funds. With stamping approval Bali has assured India's investment for the ailing forestry sector.

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Environmental Bali Bali (Balle Balle)!

The EU and US insist that developing countries must contribute to the global warming solution and avoid the mistakes by rich countries while they grow. This is because lower carbon technologies are 50% more expensive than coal fired power plants of same capacity and produce power at best in one third of time. Secondly developing countries are investing in energy related infrastructure and will grow by 2030. Thirdly, the suppliers of the available lower carbon technologies are all in rich countries and forcing developing countries to undertake GHG mitigation.

The Indian approach at Bali prevailed because the arguments of the EU and US were unfeasible and indefensible. A recent Indian study using energy-economy model concluded that to reduce just less than 10% of emissions in India from what they would be otherwise be in 2036 would require additional investment of 2.5 trillion US dollars! This is well 2½ times India's current GDP, and would have to be supplied with basic infrastructure amenities and facilities.

In this way poor countries will remain poor for many generations more and their corporate will found large new markets for their technologies. The problem can be solved if costs of renewable energy (solar, wind, biomass) become competitive with those of fossil fuel technologies. This will require huge R & D effort, money and time. India has the necessary scientific capacity to contribute effectively to such project.

- Priya Kapole

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New beginnings

TransNVtech: Attempt to serve better to Friends of Environment

A step forward to serve better to the sensitive citizens of India who are friends of environment in true sense wanted to treat the wastes emanating from their commercial and residential complexes. World class modern technologies packed in small ready to use units are the simple products developed by TransNVtech. These are useful for the sewage as minimum as 1000 lit. / day to 200000 lit. / day.

Nowadays, many townships are coming up in metropolises with independent facilities and amenities for the comfort of their residents. They are already full of all beautiful residences, flats, gardens, entertainments, pure water supply, leisure activities, clubs, sports complexes and roads. In addition to these, if sewage is treated with state-of-the-art-treatment-unit, there will be saving on freshwater use for garden or toilets (if possible); no fouling of premises by overflowing septic tanks, no flies and no threat to the health of residents.



Four types of ready-to-use equipment for sewage treatment are developed based on aerobic or anaerobic principles such as CAB (Compact Aerobic Bioreactor), A² (Anaerobic followed by Aerobic), Biopure (conversion of sewage to drinking water) and Stech (Sewage Technology of Rotating Biological Compactor). Automation can be done to avoid manual operations of the units. These can be easily maintained by any person with some induction training. TransNVtech has vision to begin awareness of healthy environment for citizens of India in the International Sanitation Year 2008.

- Prashant Dhotekar

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New beginnings

Post Graduate Diploma in Environmental Planning and Management

SERI has decided to start one very comprehensive course on environmental planning and management from June 2008. It will be a post graduate diploma of one year. The eligibility is post graduation in any stream of knowledge means science, engineering, commerce or arts. Disciples of commerce or arts faculties who have the experience of at least two years in the environmental compliances or activities can join the course

The course will include classroom teachings, field experiments and project works to equip the student with skills and knowledge to plan, execute and manage various projects with perfect flavour of environment quality. The main objective of the course is to develop environmental planners and managers who understand the short term and long term impacts of projects on environmental processes and plan to mitigate the negative impacts or restore the damage caused by the project execution or operational activities.

The emphasis will be more on learning through experiences than theory. In addition to essential theory lectures, there will be students' seminars, presentations, guest lectures, visits to various locations and sites, sharing of experiences and knowledge, activity reports and project reports.

After completion of course, the student can work in any government or private sector project planning or executing organization confidently with result oriented objectives. He / she will be able to increase the cost effectiveness of the project without compromising the results. For more details please send email to Course Coordinator on envedplm@yahoo.com.

-Deepak Kalyanshetti

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