

ENVIRONMENT AND DAMS IN NORTH EAST INDIA: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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INTRODUCTION

The very opening paragraph in the concept note with the given message of the Inter-government Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is touchy which certainly would make any thinking and responsible man a leader of the change to the changing climate. It clearly states the unprecedented rate of global warming with pivotal role played by 'WE, the human species'. That is, the mankind's want for more happens to be the main cause of the catastrophe which is irreversible and would continue on a multi-century to millennial time scale.

NORTH EAST, INDIA...IN BRIEF

Endowed with rich water resources, North-East India is fated to become the future source of power for the country. The combined annual water potential of the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers is 586 Billion Cubic Metres (BCM), which is the highest among all river basins in India. The government has identified numerous potential large dams in this region. However, these mega dams are causing conflicts and crises in the Northeast, particularly in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH...IN BRIEF

Arunachal Pradesh, located in easternmost tip of North-East of India, is a land of abundance (in bio-diversity, human culture and beauty of the land and rivers), away from the religious influence of the north and further away from the cultural influences of the south, a land isolated from all the influences of the world, nurturing its own culture from the lullabies of the nature. The land rich in rivers, with the 18 districts in the state named after the river flowing through its land. Most beautiful and most prosperous among all these districts is the Siang District bifurcated into three district- East Siang, West Siang and the Upper Siang.

THE RICH SIANG VALLEY, ARUNACHAL PRADESH- A GLIMPSE



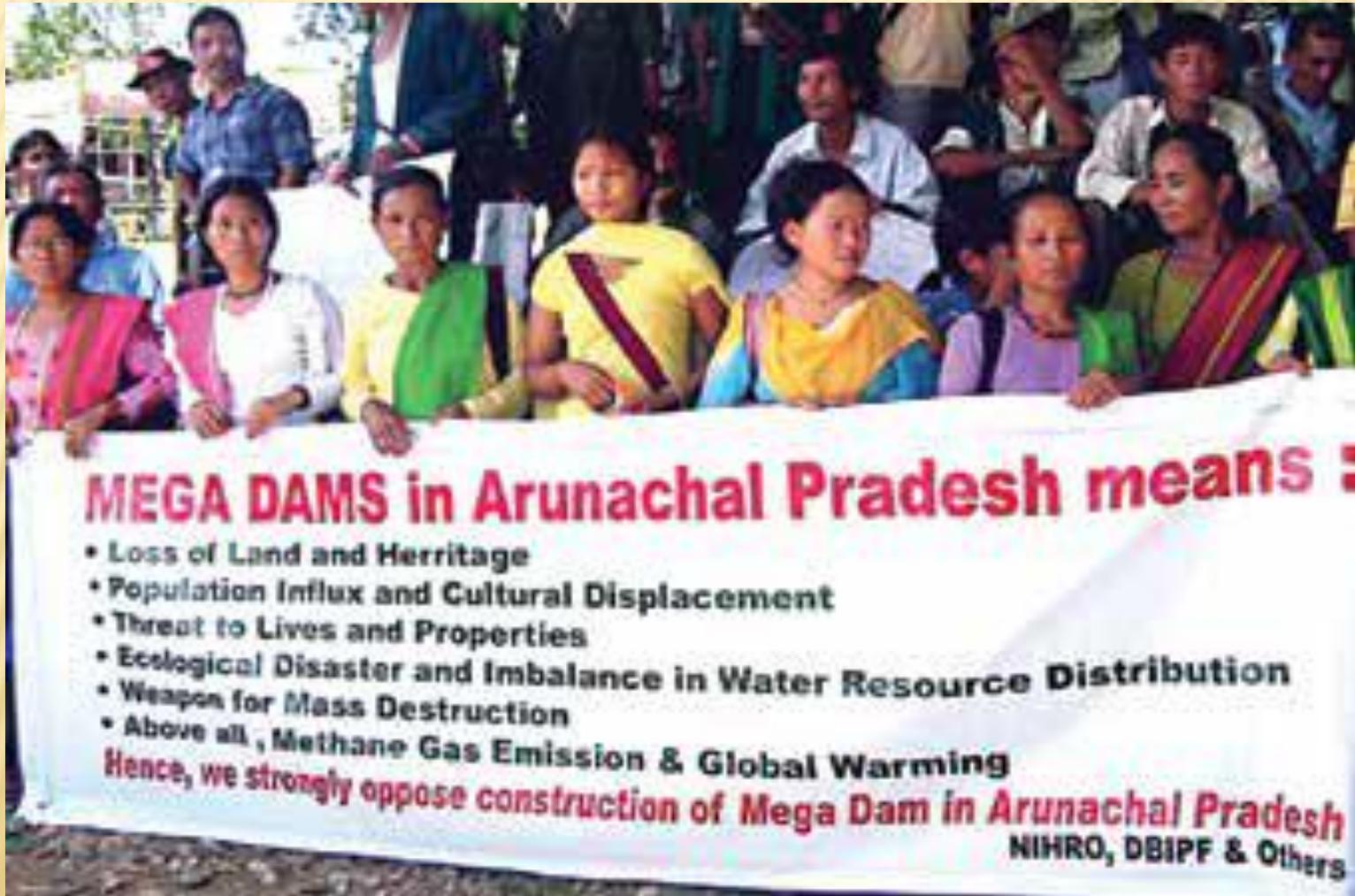
BACKGROUND & ISSUES...

The Indian government introduced a national policy on hydropower development in 1998, which prioritises hydropower with emphasis on unharnessed potential, especially in the Northeast region. India is said to rank fourth in the world in terms of its number of dams and the pace of building new ones. Hydropower is now increasingly in focus in the country, overtaking thermal power plants in its development agendas. However, the very guidelines for the construction of dams remain unclear, and the government bodies involved, lack transparencies. Even the pivotal issues like tragic human sufferings and disastrous environmental impacts of such development are largely ignored.

ORIGIN OF CONCERN...MIGHTY SIANG !!!

The Mighty Siang River is known as Tsangpo in Tibet, Dih-ang in Upper Assam and Brahmaputra in lower Assam and Jamuna in Bangladesh thereafter it meets the Bay of Bengal ocean. The literal meaning of Siang in Adi is Si for River and Ang for mind, viz., river that flows through our mind, which means 'the river of emotions'. Dear Friends, I am standing before you all today on this august gathering neither because of my intellect nor am I a good orator but because of my conviction in the free flow of Siang River.

PEOPLE'S VOICE...



MEGA DAMS in Arunachal Pradesh means :

- Loss of Land and Heritage
- Population Influx and Cultural Displacement
- Threat to Lives and Properties
- Ecological Disaster and Imbalance in Water Resource Distribution
- Weapon for Mass Destruction
- Above all, Methane Gas Emission & Global Warming

Hence, we strongly oppose construction of Mega Dam in Arunachal Pradesh
NIHRO, DBIPF & Others

DAMS..IN HIMALAYAS, RISK & SAFETY

Dam engineering in the Himalayas is relatively recent. All aspects of dam building in the Himalayas are not yet fully understood, and the risks not fully appreciated. Inadequate studies, lack of expertise, and haste in dam building make the situation even worse. Other concerns include the safety of dams and the suitability of their location. Vital considerations of the seismicity of the region and the impacts of complete submergence of hundred of hectares of Forest Land under the reservoirs of Mega Dams to generate 5000 MW as envisaged in one of the Hot Biodiversity hotspots of the world and **which will be an undisputed reason for climate change are being ignored.** While debates about the necessity of dams exacerbate, the concerned ministries in the centre, state departments, and responsible nodal agencies pay no heed to the human and environmental disasters waiting to happen. Despite the controversies they are embroiled in, these dams are being sanctioned and commissioned by state governments at a rapid pace.

DAMS IN ARUNACHAL..HOW IT STARTED???

The people have no inkling of the project and are yet to understand its implications on their lives. The Prior-Informed-Consent of the people was not taken with everything hushed up efficiently. The rightful owners of land and rivers were kept in dark while the state government continued its spree of MoUs and MoAs in the Siang valley and all over Arunachal Pradesh. The Adis, the owners of Siang Valley, believe that they have been dishonored as the *kebang* (Traditional socio-political Institution) has been undermined because the *kebang* makes decisions on all community land and water rights and other civil and criminal cases.

THE UNREST..ON ONE HAND

The unrest has been amplified since the first public hearing notice which was issued on April 28, 2010 for the 2700 MW Lower Siang Hydro Electric Project (LSHEP) to be conducted on May 30, 31 and June 1, at Pessing in West Siang, Pangin in East Siang and Jeying in Upper Siang respectively. Recently on Sept 16 2012, the third public hearing notice was issued and scheduled to be conducted on Oct 18, 19 and 21 at Aalo, Pangin and Jeying respectively. Organisations like the Siang Peoples Forum, Adi Students Union and Forum for Siang Dialogue opposing the project have been conducting awareness on the affects of big dams by touring the Adi villages since last year.

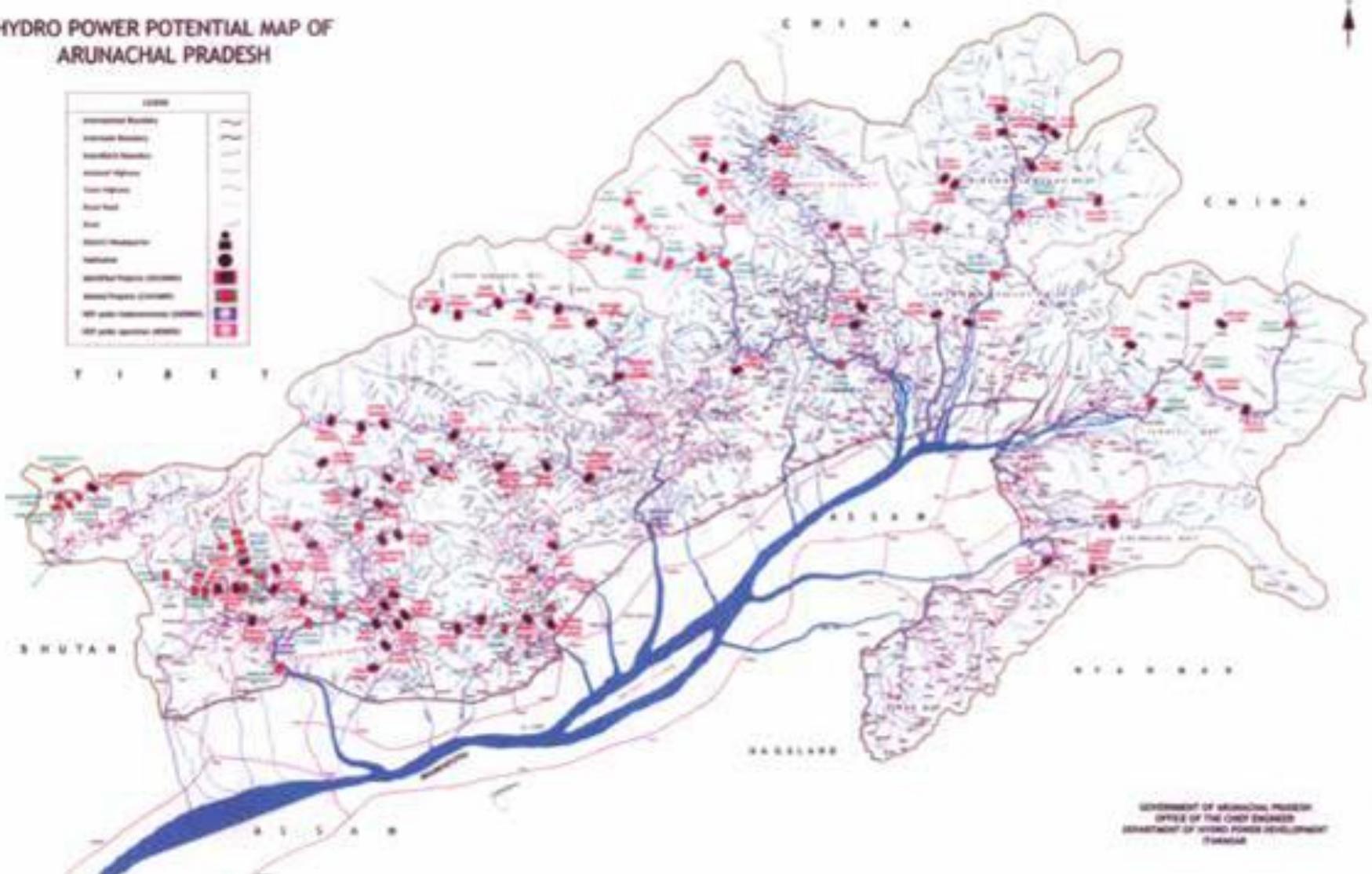
DAMS & DEVELOPMENT...

On one hand, the state government and the Jaypee Arunachal Power Limited (JAPL), a subsidiary of Jaypee Company have been promoting the project as a developmental initiative for the local people and building up favourable opinion on it; with establishment of a JAPL funded Industrial Training Institute at Rottung village. On the other hand, JAPL has been doling out monetary benefits to the local people, appointing Public Relations Officers and giving other petty jobs to the locals for building favourable public opinion.

DAM- A GOLD RUSH IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH ???

Since the declaration of Arunachal Pradesh as the future Power House of India, way back in the year 2003, about 226 hydro power projects have been proposed within the state. Today, out of 226 proposed Hydro Power Projects the state has already signed about 186 Memorandum of Association with different Hydro Power Proponents. Of the 186 hydro power projects, 6000 MW Upper Siang stage I, 3750 MW Upper Siang stage II and 2700 MW Lower Siang Hydro Electric Project (LSHEP) are some of the biggest projects. The Government of Arunachal Pradesh signed the Memorandum of Association with Jaiprakash Associates Ltd on February 22, 2006, granting 40 years concessions to develop LSHEP on Build-Own-Operate-Transfer basis. The MoA provides for the Government of Arunachal Pradesh to own 11% of the special purpose vehicle to be incorporated for the implementation of the projects. Pursuant to the MoA, the company has agreed to provide free power of 12% (First 10 years) and 15% (11th Year onwards).

HYDRO POWER POTENTIAL MAP OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH



GOVERNMENT OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER
DEPARTMENT OF HYDRO POWER DEVELOPMENT
ITANAGAR

TRIBAL - ECOLOGY....RELATIONS

At the moment, the effects on the ecology of the entire Siang valley from the project is a concern which the people opposing the project are yet to comprehend as the issues of land and rights are at the forefront. The elements at play have only added confusion in the simple lives of the mostly illiterate villagers who have an umbilical bonding with the forests and rivers they inhabit. For that matter, dam opponents states that no amount of compensations can bring back the productive rice fields and that it would certainly disrupt whole Adi society itself; people come and express their apprehensions on lose of land due to the project while the government and the company wants to go on with the project, hook or crook.

THE THREATS...

The push by the Centre to accelerate hydropower development in the Siang valley and particularly the 2700 MW LSHEP to counter the Chinese hydro power projects on the Tsangpo has intensified the chaos. The project has only succeeded in sowing the seeds of major conflicts in the future for the Siang valley. The villagers of Pongging protesting the project near a Jaypee camp had to face violent action by the Central Reserve Police Force and state police in May 25, 2010, injuring several people including womenfolk. This was the first of such incident in the state and has set a dangerous precedent in the otherwise peaceful state.

THE CONCERNS.....

Having stated the above, which some may consider most irrelevant with regard to the global warming systems, one cannot negate the fact that any human intrusion in natural system leads to enormous effects not to the nature but to the organisms, like we the human beings, which indeed is in need of the nature and its systems. What really is important, is not the human movements against the Dam Projects, but numerous dam envisaged by the government of India and especially the Government of Arunachal Pradesh is certainly going to effect the climate not only in Arunachal Pradesh but the whole of South East Asian Countries.

CONCERNS....

Dams are known to destroy the environment and bring on environmental catastrophes. Dam projects result in significant losses of arable land, flora and fauna. Dams affect the continuity of the river flow and causes total or partial change in the natural river hydrograph. However, justifying dams, dam proponents and Central Water Commission (CWC), Government of India, say that “dams have no effect as far as river drying is concerned. In fact it is the other way round, where there is no dam there is a risk of the river drying up.” The Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India and CWC have a lackadaisical attitude towards maintaining proper environmental flows or e-flows in rivers.

CONCERNS...

Proponents and government nodal bodies for dams claim that they try to ensure minimum alterations of the water flow by taking care of the design and choosing the best site location for a dam. However, it is not clear how dam developers and nodal bodies like the CWC and Central Electricity Authority (CEA) ensure minimum water flow prescribed in the environmental clearance. There are no clear guidelines about the monitoring of minimum water flow. The EAC presently recommends the release of 20% of the average lean season flow for lean months, 30% of the average monsoon flow for monsoon months, and between 20 to 30% of the average flow for non-lean, non-monsoon months. Worse still, when dam developers claim that they cannot release these flows which are inadequate in any case, the EAC readily negotiates with the project proponents. This standard prescribed by the EAC is entirely arbitrary, without any scientific, ecological or sociological basis. Although various groups and bodies like the Wildlife Institute of India have recommended higher environment flows in select rivers, the EAC remains heedless.

...WHAT WENT WRONG????

EAC has never recommended the development of a more holistic and participatory method for assessing e-flows. It has also never recommended that certain rivers should not be dammed. In some cases, the EAC has recommended the calculation of e-flows using the holistic Building Block Methodology (BBM). According to SANDRP, EIA consultants do not use this methodology while falsely claiming that they use it. For example, SANDRP has written to the EAC pointing out that WAPCOS Ltd. has used the Tenant Method to determine e-flows in the Lohit River Basin, while claiming that they have used BBM. However, the EAC accepts what the EIA consultants claim and do not question them.

..PUZZLES...

The maximum number of dams to be permitted on one river is still not clear. It seems there is no fixed rule about or limitation to the maximum number of dams that can possibly be built on one river. The Terms of Reference of basin studies also do not include such a rule.

WHAT ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST SAYS..??

Alteration of significant river flow is a major concern amongst environmental activists. Members of the EAC also accept that the river flow is altered to an extent. The challenge for the government is to keep the alterations to a minimum. Since rivers are lifelines of communities, changes in their flow impact people's livelihoods dramatically.

EFFORTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS BELITTLED

Many government officials and developers are of the view that environmental groups and activists are trying to sabotage the dam building process for their own vested interests. This leads to a failure on the part of the government and developers to take into consideration the concerns of such groups. In many cases, vital concerns raised by environmental groups were ignored at first, but accepted subsequently. For instance, government bodies did not initially understand the crucial need to carry out cumulative impact assessments of projects and maintain environmental flows. Later on, they accepted these measures as necessary.

EAC ...??

Based on many years of experience, SANDRP concluded that “the EAC has shown its strong bias against people, the environment and all those who represent the interests of the local communities and the environment.” In February 2012, three organisations working on issues related to water and dams, i.e. SANDRP, the River Research Centre, Kerala and International Rivers, were invited for a discussion with the EAC. There has been little impact of this discussion on the functioning of the EAC. Similar approaches by many other NGOs have been neglected by the EAC which avoids a concrete dialogue with these groups.

MOEF-??

The MoEF seldom invites NGOs for discussions even after repeated strong representations from environment groups. The representations have also shown derelictions in following orders of the courts and the Central Information Commission. The MoEF has not met NGOs to discuss their suggestions on amendments required to the EIA notification, even though officials in the MoEF admit that there are problems with the EIA notification.

CONCLUSIONS....

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Rio, 1992, agreed that conservation, sustainable use, and access and sharing of benefits for local communities could have been a boon for riverine biodiversity. About 10.8 million people depend on riverine fisheries in India.

CONCLUSIONS...

However, in the case of mega dams, many environment groups feel that the Convention on Biological Diversity was of little help in protecting Indian rivers, riverine biodiversity and dependent communities. On the contrary, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change encourages and certifies hydropower projects of all sizes as climate friendly projects under the Clean Development Mechanism. Many environment groups are concerned with the projection of mega dams in Northeast India as climate friendly, particularly as dam developers seek carbon credits and profits from the Clean Development Mechanism. This for us, I believe, is a ‘?’, a big question mark.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

- ✘ A big question mark to all the environmentalists, researchers and scientists all around the universe, in trying to make people like us believe that, killing of billions of trees giving us life, destroying millions of hectares of land enriching and making plants, trees and all creatures survive on it, killing billions of micro organisms responsible to maintain the ecosystem by submerging them under water produces clean and green Energy. And being treated as the unthinking Guys by the Thinking guys in propagating this wrong propaganda is a very big question. And given the choice, We think, they are the unthinking and unconcerned guys for the safety of the environment and climate change. “ So We, shall always believe that Hydro Dams are Hydro bombs for destroying the People, the environment and the atmosphere”.
- ✘ I thank the organisers of this conference for giving me this privilege for letting the world know that “We are convinced and convicted that Mega Hydro Dams are not Green and Clean”.

THANK YOU