



Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ)

नेपाल वातावरण पत्रकार समूह

Implementation status of Environment Management Plan of Melamchi Drinking Water Project

Press release

Two people have died due to an accident inside the tunnel within a week of the governments' testing the tunnel to bring a total of 510 million liters of drinking water per day from Melamchi, Yangri and Larke rivers at the rate of 170 million each. The Ministry of Water Supply has formed an investigation committee to investigate the unfortunate accident. After almost 23 years, the water test done in the tunnel has given some hope to the people of Kathmandu. Water testing has been stopped after the accident. The governments' claim that Melamchi water can be delivered to the tap in a month is not being fulfilled at present.

In the first phase, after nearly two decades, the work of bringing 170 million liters of water per day (MLD) from the Melamchi River alone is in the final stage. The government has promised to distribute water from the project at different time frames. At present, the construction of the project has reached at its final stage and according to the Ministry, water will be discharged into the reserve tank at Sundarijal within this July.

In 2012, the demand for drinking water in Kathmandu was 350 MLD but the KUKL had supplied only 150 MLD in the wet season and 90 MLD in the dry season. People of Kathmandu Valley met their water demand from deep and shallow tube wells, tanker, bottling company, and traditional stone taps. At present, water demand has reached to 430 MLD and supply is 103 MLD, i.e. 1/4 of its demand is supplied. People of Kathmandu met shortage from private sector tankers and about 650 tankers are estimated in current operation. At the time of water scarcity, the issue on water quality has not been raised.

As of March 2020, headwork is under construction; access roads, 26.5 km long tunnel and 4 adits, and water treatment plant in Sundarijal have been constructed; local roads including road joining with Kathmandu Valley have been improved; and Project has provided demand-based financial support for infrastructure development, education, health and income-generating activities as parts of Social upliftment program (SUP). As per contract agreement in September and October 2019 with Sinohydro Corporation of China, the remaining work of the project including tunnel and construction of the headworks will be completed by the end of 2020.

NEFEJ conducted the study to update the implementation status of the Environmental Management Plan under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report of the legally approved project. Based on discussions with project officials and site observation, implementation of adverse impacts mitigation measures is unsatisfactory for construction period. Measures related to occupational health and safety (OHS) as mentioned in the agreement have been effectively implemented while other measures were considered non-implemented. At its final stage, the project has reduced the time (man-

months) of the Environmental Officer and did not include its position that limits to make the project environment friendly and sustainable.

Outcomes of this study are summarized below:

- Construction of road and school building and student scholarship and implementation of income-generating activities under SUPs have improved socio-economic conditions of the local people and opened multi-doors for economic activities & benefits. Workers have enhanced skills; and workers have used safety equipment and significant accidents were avoided. But independency of local people have negatively impacted.
- Water source has dried-up in some places and water has come out from Gyalthung and Sindhuadits; muckdisposal sites have yet to stabilize; stones and soils from disposal sites may reach farmland during heavy rain; sanitation in workers camp and drinking water quality should be improved;
- Lack of appropriate oxygen inside the tunnel, headwork constructions and successful test of water diversion in 1 km long tunnel and still remain the testing of tunnel areas
- Only one-fifth of the total SUP expenditure is on environment management. The EMP has not been implemented; and environmental monitoring has not been carried out.
- Environmental measures related to soil erosion control, pond construction and watershed conservation, replacement plantation, air quality maintenance and waste discharge/disposal were not seen or understood implemented.
- During Project operational stage, the Government should provide 'levy' to local governments to implement activities to maintain or improve crop & fish production, operate water mills, and improve livelihood of fish-dependent population, and provide drinking water to local people.

Effort in making the Project environment-friendly and sustainable through the implementation of environment protection measures is sufficiently side-lined. Taking into consideration the state of project construction work, EMP implementation, and non-implementation of the legally approved EIA report, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Implement adverse impacts mitigation measures, as contained in the EMP, to make the Project environment-friendly by creating stakeholders awareness about the importance, needs and usefulness of environment conservation;
- Make public an annual monitoring report about possible impacts of river water diversion on e-flow, water mills, trout fish, and crop production during Project operational stage;
- Implement measures to maintain river water flow while considering the demand for 'levy' from local government and people, and 'payment for environmental services'; and
- Develop a system to provide prior information to the Project about the possible impacts of all types of infrastructure development, socio-economic and income-generating activities in Project affected areas and future liabilities (to/on the Project).

The Government of Nepal has received assistance from the Asian Development Bank, JICA, Nordic Development Fund and OPEC for the construction of this project.

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