

A Short Introduction to the Rampur Hydropower Project

by Ann Kathrin Schneider, International Rivers Network, June 2006

The Government of India is planning to build the 412 MW Rampur Hydropower Project in Himachal Pradesh with support from the World Bank. The Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests granted an environmental clearance to the project in March 2006. The World Bank has issued a Project Information Document in fall 2005 and is planning to appraise the project in November 2006. The planned Board date for the project is March 2007.

This project will be the Bank's first step in its planned re-engagement in the hydropower sector in India after more than ten years of shying away from funding water infrastructure projects in the country. The project developer, Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam, (SJVN - previously the Nathpa Jhakri Power Corporation – NJPC) is a joint venture between the Government of India and the Government of Himachal Pradesh. The project is located near Rampur town on the Sutlej river downstream of the Nathpa Jhakri project, which is also funded by the World Bank. The Rampur project will not consist of a dam, instead, it will use the tailrace waters of the Nathpa Jhakri project to produce electricity in a power house located on the right bank of the Sutlej river.

The communities to be affected by the project and the South Asian Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) have concerns with the project and the related decision-making process. A villager from Brow village, which will be affected by the project tunnel, explained to International Rivers Network "We want to get told the whole story about the project. Only then we can decide properly whether we agree with the project or not. Our water resources will disappear and water will get scarce. We want to be sure that our drinking water is ok and we want to receive benefits from the project."

The villagers and SANDRP have identified fundamental flaws in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Rampur project. They found out that the EIA is based on observations at two dates only, instead of during an entire year. The EIA does furthermore not discuss the impacts of the proposed transmission lines and does not give sufficient information about the land requirements during the construction process. The EIA also fails to discuss potential geological project impacts such as landslides and erosions. SANDRP's EIA critique raises serious doubts about the justification for the project, citing the unjustifiably high project costs and the lack of options and needs assessments that could have identified less costly projects. The rationale for the project also needs to be challenged as the project does not produce peaking power, which is the most needed electricity in India.