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‘Do not accept environmental impact report on Gundia power project’

Pramod Mellegatti

Put off August 6 meeting, says Vriksha Laksha Andolana of the Western Ghats



TAKING STOCK: Environmentalists holding a meeting in the Gundia forest area in Sakleshpur taluk.

SHIMOGA: Environmentalists in the Western Ghats region who have been opposing the proposed Gundia Hydro Electricity Project in Hassan district have urged the Government to give it up in view of the “incalculable damage” it may cause to environment.

The Vriksha Laksha Andolana (VLA), an environmental organisation of the region, which has been spearheading the movement against the project, has urged the Government to drop it as it is not only “unviable” but can be a potential threat to the region as Gundia is situated in the midst of the Western Ghats.

The VLA has urged the Government not to accept the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report for the project prepared by the Institute for Catchment Studies and Environment Management (ICSEM) as it has consists of “glaring” mistakes and “limitations”. The VLA has said that the report seems to have been prepared hurriedly for the mere purpose of strongly advocating the project.

It has pointed out that the EIA report seems to have been done without undertaking in-depth studies on ecological, social, economic and technical aspects while arriving at the conclusion in favour of the proposed project.

VLA State Convener Ananth Hegde Ashishar told *The Hindu* here on Tuesday that the meeting proposed to be held at Hongadahall in Sakleshpur taluk of Hassan district on August 6 to hear public grievances should be put off and the EIA report replete with “mistakes and inaccuracies” should be dropped.

The anti-Gundia Power Project movement has been going on in the Gundia valley for the last three years with the support of several environmental activists, including the Seer of the Sonda Swarnavalli Math of Uttara Kannada.

The proposed project, which is expected to generate 400 mw power, involves the construction of weirs across the Yettinahole river, the Kerihole river, the Hongadahalla river and dams across the Bettakumari river and the Hongadahalla river.

Water is transferred from these rivers through an inter-connecting tunnel to the Bettakumari balancing reservoir from where it is further carried to the underground powerhouse to be located at Gundia to produce power through two units of 200 mw each.

The Karnataka Power Corporation has submitted a detailed project report for Phase I along with EIA report to the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board for environment clearance. It has submitted the detailed project report to the Central Electricity Authority and its clearance is awaited.

Meanwhile, a study undertaken by the research cell of the VLA on the project has found that the legal status of 774 hectares of forestland and 107 hectares of grassland is not mentioned in the EIA report as it is not known whether it is reserved forest or revenue land.

The study has pointed out that a safe site (landfill) has not been identified yet. The project is expected to dump about 36 lakh cubic metres of rock muck and there is no comment of its impact on environment. Besides, the Union Government has made it clear that no forestland could be used for such activities.

The project site is covered on all sides by protected areas such as Pushpagiri, Brahmagiri and Kudremukh wildlife sanctuaries. The area sees movement of wild animals and if these corridors are blocked, man-animal conflict and crop damage would increase.

“This aspect cannot be overlooked as mentioned in the EIA report,” it said.

It has said that the loss of forest cover under the proposed project is 1.93 per cent in Shikaripur taluk. The EIA report has listed only the economically important timber species leaving aside the non-wood forest products, including medicinal plants.

The VLA has suggested that a floral and faunal study be conducted to assess the extent of the loss of non-wood forest products.

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