

Project Update: February 2008

The Project aimed at setting up a national level EIA Resource and Response Center (EERC) to challenge faulty Environment Impact Assessment Reports which fail to account for the actual loss of biodiversity as well as long term ecological impact. The project aimed at challenging projects based on faulty EIA. We are happy to state that we have achieved our first success by getting a faulty approval granted to a mega irrigation project which would have destroyed vital forests and wildlife habitat quashed by the National Environmental Appellate Authority. My aim was to demonstrate that with proper research it is possible to revoke faulty approval. This is clearly the first of its kind. On the other hand, EIA issues are getting more visibility and a significant part of the project is aimed at media outreach so that it is greater awareness is generated on the need for these issues to be in public domain. Over the next few months we are hopeful of greater visibility and presence so as to make a difference to nature conservation in India and the EERC will be a credible group with National Presence.

The project was formally launched last year and some of our significant findings were:

- A database of over 200 Environment Impact Assessment Reports have been created. An electronic database has been created at www.life-in.org (Please visit ERC). This is the first electronic resource base of EIA reports. The data base also contains updates on court hearings as well as issues which are being followed.
- Five capacity building Training programme's have been organized leading to the training of about 180 people representing NGO's, communities and other concerned persons on how to participate in the EIA Process.
- Educational materials in the form of FAQ's have been developed and are being distributed in local languages. An electronic version has also been uploaded.
- A formal MOU is being finalized to give a formal shape to EIA Response Centre with the participation of interested Civil Society Groups so as to lend greater credibility to the Centre.
- 22 Industrial, Mining and hydel power projects in ecologically sensitive areas have been challenged in different forums such as the National Environmental Appellate Authority, Committee of the Supreme Court and other forums. This is for the first time that in a systematic manner these ecologically destructive projects have been challenged. That in recognition of this role the grant recipient has received the 2007 "Sanctuary- ABN Ambro Wildlife Service Award' for protecting wildlife habitats by challenging falsified EIA Reports. See: www.theearthheroes.com
- Over 16 Field investigations have been conducted over the last 10 months and these have revealed significant gaps in the manner in which EIA's are conducted. One of the

most significant expose was of the Ashapura Minechem Ltd which exposed the manner in which a Russian EIA report was copied in a mining project in Western India. The same was covered widely in National and International Media:

See:

<http://www.livemint.com/2007/12/27000203/Are-the-govt8217s-green-cle.html>

- For the first time ever in the judicial history of India, a Mega Project has been quashed by the National Environmental Appellate Authority on the ground of faulty environmental clearance. The Polavaram Project in the State of Andhra Pradesh would have submerged over 4000 Hectares of forests including Wildlife Sanctuaries and displaced over 2 Million people most of whom are tribal. The Success in the Polavaram has demonstrated that with proper research and investigation it is possible to quash a faulty approval granted to a project. The Same has been widely reported in the media:

See: <http://www.merineews.com/catFull.jsp?articleID=128805>

<http://mbbhushan.wordpress.com/2007/12/25/disastrous-polavaram-dam-illegal-clearances-neaa/>

<http://www.livemint.com/polavaram.htm>

<http://www.elaw.org/news/ebulletin/text.asp?id=3594>