

Ranganadi: Dam, dyke and flood: Whose responsibility to be fixed?



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Of late, the Ranganadi Hydropower project seems to have generated no less controversy across the [state](#). The controversy erupted when a huge volume of [waters](#) unleashed disaster in the form of flood in Lakhimpur where nearly [ten](#) people met watery grave.

Precisely, the hydro power project started generating electricity from 2002 in the power strapped north eastern [state](#) of Assam. The dam of 68 meter height with 405 MW of generating capacity is based at Yajali in [Arunachal](#) Pradesh with North Lakhimpur District of Assam in the downstream area where the people at Times, have to bear the brunt of its adverse impact. This is what the perennial misery for lakhs of people.

The brimful misery of the downstream people in the time of flood is enough to negate the theory of minimum impact of the run of the river project. Now the river in question goes dry in winter and the overflow of [waters](#) in summer keep posing a serious threat to the aquatic species of rich varieties.

As a result, the people in the river banks have been lingering in the back stage with a ravaged socio-economic condition. The flood that strikes fury in the downstream areas due to release of excess [waters](#) from the dam, flashing of debris to protect the main dam [wall](#), the unsettled issues of R & R (Rehabilitation and Resettlement) in the downstream confirm beyond [doubt](#) that run of the river project is not at all safe.

Cost and benefit: The disaster of the run of the river project needs no further explanation. The real picture emerges clear after the excess [waters](#) are released to crush the spine of the downstream lot in the form of flood fury. But the government who keeps talking of development never consider the adverse impact of the dams and washes its hands off by distributing relief materials in the time of flood fury. This despite a plenty of evidence to prove the adverse impact of the mega dams, the government concentrates power generation as if the things can't move without [hydel](#) power. [Hydel](#) power would be the engine of growth if is not at the cost of the downstream people. For perennial sufferings, what these people get? That's why, a comprehensive downstream profit and loss analysis is the need of the hour which can reflect the real situation. It must include socio-economic, cultural and biodiversity issues in the cost and benefit analysis.



Administrative response: The attempt to mitigate misery of the flood hit people in Dhemaji and Lakhimpur and Dhemaji by the administration is temporary only and the government approach is casual in the post flood scene. There is no dearth of example. In the time of flood on June 13, 2008 the affected people blamed the project authority. NEEPCO tried to escape the responsibility talking to earlier notification on June 2. Now the district administration is to be blamed for not taking steps to minimize the loss. Since then. NEEPCO kept sending letters issuing warnings. 4th Oct 2013, 18th Feb 2014, 18th Feb 2014, 30th June 2014, 14th Aug 2014, 23rd April 2015 are the dates recorded notice by the project authority.

It is signifying that the administration is in the know of the impending flood. The notices often go unnoticed. Heading to the administrative chief in 2nd June, 2006 and in other notice, it was inform to the village headmen and others that “This is for information to all concern that during monsoon period depending upon increase in inflow of the river Ranga the gates of Ranganadi reservoir dam may require opening from time to time according to inflow of the river all the concern authorities, village headman are therefore requested to bring the same to the notice of all villagers, individuals, temporary settlers etc. residing on the bank of river Ranga and other nearby areas in the reservoir and on the downstream on the dam to refrain from going to the river and also to restrict to refrain from going to the river and also to restrict their pet animals too from moving around the river/reservoir during the monsoon period. The Corporation will not take any responsibility for any loss of life of human, pet animals etc. and damage of property & others due to carelessness of the individuals and the responsibility on ... losses/damages will be rest on the defaulters only”. Why the people were not informed about those devastating notices? or they [don](#)’t possess the capacity to look after such challenges.

Early warning: The visit of the Union home minister is the possibly the best occasion to know the real face of thr government. He asked the administration to keep in touch with the project authority to get update information for immediate flood fury. There are numerous ways of taking action after the warning. Is there any early warning mechanism available? Yes, there is an early warning system available. First the project authority predicts the district administration about water release through letters, send messages. Next the message transferred to the villagers by the village headman and other responsible persons.

Moreover eight public early warning stations (Siren) were installed in 2009 at the downstream areas. These are some executable early warning systems. Administration receive the information rightly, village headman also informed by the authority and sometimes somebody with a loud voice along the embankment by cycling also informed to the villagers. Administrations warn the people of the flood with loud speakers prior to two hours before the destruction if they able to confirm the change of breach. Sirens are never heard. Almost all warning stations are inactive now. Looking to these situations the advice of home minister to getting touch with the project authority by the district administration seems unrealistic now. We can say it a political delusion as he needs to manage the people's emotions. Even after the flood, they have not managed to operate the rescue operations. At least this will be able to save the lives from the jaws of death. Even though this process sounds affective, in reality it is impossible. There is 69.61 km long embankment in both banks of Ranganadi it's confluence up to River Subansiri. Lets imagine a situation if the warning is allowed to pass to inhabitants lives all along both banks of the embankments. It would be chaotic. The capacities of the district administration id not unquestionable, even the [state](#) government has not that much capacity to handle the situations. So, better to ignore such kind of situations and gets smartly engaged in distributing some relief materials, compensations to the [victims](#) kiths and kins.



Prevent flood through embankment: In 2008, the excess water released by opening from 5.2 meter of gate triggered untold misery in the downstream areas. Same it happened in 2017 when a huge volumn of excess [waters](#) were released--- two time higher than that of the 2008. Not only that the authority simultaneously released debris to make the scene more [worse](#). The carrying capacity of Ranganadi is 1291 cumecs. But the debris thus released to the downstream was not admissible measured by any standard.. What is the role of the engineers? Why these probabilities ignored before the construction of the dam? They, in fact, play with their knowledge only and keep challenging that nobody can do anything against them. Long back, it was assured that an embankment can prevent the flood from taking a grim turn which was accepted with allocation of required funds to maintain the dykes. But of no avail. The results are not visible. What about those in the chars of Ranganadi? This is the abode for more than 5000 people from 30 villages who are bound to [fight](#) the unpredictable situations. What forces the engineers to keep mum? Everyone who experiences long realizes that embankments are not a solution for the flood. So much of embankment was constructed in the name of checking floods. But these embankments not at all instrumental to prevent flood. Now a days, the floods, mostly, are manmade and these can't be prevented through embankments. Presently 100% floods in Assam are manmade. The unplanned construction of [roads](#), bridges and embankments make the riverbed shallow. The riverbed increases above the banks due to huge siltation. And the rivers like Ranganadi have turned into mega dams. Merely eyewash indeed. These have been fetching money only for a circle of political [leaders](#), contractors and engineers where the people are made to suffer. This, it has proved beyond [doubt](#) that embankments are not a panacea to prevent flood of the Ranganadi. Need of the hour is a long term cumulative planning which the government needs to understand.

Responsibilities shared by social organizations, [Political](#) parties, Students and other groups to individuals: Assam is full of endless issues and situations. Especially flood or other disasters fetch opportunities for a section of the people who keep waiting to pick up the first buck. If one woos favour another would prove existence. This is what their agenda. Some others keep blaming and questioning the project authority. Sending memorandum, Protest rally, and hunger strike have become a day to day business to be followed by distribution of relief materials so long as the flood [waters](#) stay. There are no dearth of groups who enjoy field day collecting fund to feed the flood hit people. These are no less emotional endeavour.

Those doing research find space to fig out something new input. To cap it all, a flood wave brings an undeclared competition to gain public empathy to fulfill political agenda. Even the retired government employees do not sit idle. Some plans a trip of exposure to the affected areas to gain knowledge. Overall the disaster is converted into a disaster festival (dis-festival). Huge amount of money and psycho-physical effort are spent in those dis-festivals from last [ten](#) years. If we able to find out root causes of the problem and spent those physical and financial efforts lost last [ten](#) years, maximum troubles might end. Such a situation would not have prevailed these days. Since 2008, they we got [ten](#) years to implement it, unable to craft appropriate use of it. Shame! Without a sea change in the behavioral attitude of the people, it is impossible for even the God to bail out the people from these disasters.

Affected people? What they want? As the flood waves vanish, the scene changes. Settlement and rehabilitation issue dominate the post flood scene. Same it takes place in the Ranganadi downstream areas.

Firstly, Those living in between the embankments of the Ranganadi, especially in the chars are 6000 in number have no access to the life saving mechanism. They are victim of perennial flood. But hardly they are considered flood hit. When the embankment breaches and water flows out from their area, they feel happy to be the inmates of the relief camps.

Secondly, the people lives outside the embankment, feel safe till the embankments exist. They are always in stress with the warning of water [level](#) rise in the river. The disaster got focused if these areas are affected. More affect to the township leads more highlight. Intensity of damage is also high in this situation.

When the upstream get affected the downstream people feel safe or vice-versa. If the left side embankment breaches, then the right bank communities will feel secure. Same way the left bank communities feel secure when the right part is washed away. In this way, whole the downstream communities are busy with isolating game in their small pockets. They want their own territory to be safe. On the other hand, the continuous political proliferation paralyzes the ability to observe the things. They keep waiting to move the people to strike advantage in the time of election. In fact, these flood hit are the most deprived people, who lack freedom of speech and hope against the hope. Among them who knows little bit are busy to take opportunity of the situation and who wants to work been fully pressurize not to move.

End of the story: What is the way out? Who can resolve the tensions? The [Governor](#) of Assam visited to affected areas and spoke in favor of project authority. Ensued hundred percent supports to Lower Subansiri Project. He has already spoken out like a spokesperson of project undergoing near Parshuram kund (1750 MW Lower Damwe) in [Arunachal](#) Pradesh. Rather than a [Governor](#) of Assam, he acts as a brand ambassador of large dams. Same way, from last [ten](#) years the chief minister, [ministers](#) are busy with comparing every incidents with overseas. The game of safeguarding chairs in Dispur is on. It was shameful to the disaster management minister, when the [state](#) was caught with a series of disaster; he was busy measuring the efficiency of the school teachers. The agriculture minister maintained stoic silence . Same it was in the case of the irrigation, health and rural development [ministers](#). Some of their counterparts are busy with browsing Facebooks to raise the cosmetic issues. The officials, mostly, lack skills and prefer to stay in safe track zone. Thus, the affected people in the downstream areas of the Ranganadi Project will have to co exist with immense sufferings.

The possible way forward is to stand united cutting across the barriers of political affiliation.

First, go for cost and benefit analysis for Ranganadi power project and its downstream with immediate effect.

Secondly, it was observed that there was no Environmental Impact Assessment was done for Ranganadi HEP. So it is important to do an EIA for the project.

Third, until the completion of the studies, need to dredge the riverbed to increase the carrying capacity for short term relief.

Fourth, proper [compensation](#), resettlement and rehabilitation to the affected people and for the people permanently settle in the chars of Ranganadi.

Fifth, immediately activate of all the flood early warning stations.

Sixth, introduce a participatory governance mechanism for maintain and manage Ranganadi project including entire stakeholder.

Seven, the most urgent is to form an investigation team to find out the pos and cones to reduce the tensions.

Keep it in mind that Ranganadi needs to release stored debris in a cyclic manner which will make downstream [worse](#) again. The hopes reflect only through the above mention points to be implemented within four to [ten](#) years of timeframe.



Photo from: <https://sandrp.wordpress.com>

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