

From: "Gagan Bhalla" <gagan_bhalla@h...>
Date: Tue Apr 9, 2002 10:12 pm
Subject: Bilgaon Micro-Hydel Q & A, and Pictures of Project site

Hi all,

This email provides a summary to the questions that were discussed at the last CSH about the Bilgaon project. Also, I have uploaded some of the pictures (thanks to Ravi@AID Mumbai) from the project site and have attached the corresponding links. I know there is a lot of info being sent your way via this email, and at the pics website. However, I request you to please do go through these, when you get a chance. I hope we can take a vote on this project at the upcoming CSH this Saturday.

Meanwhile, please do not hesitate to get in touch for any additional questions or clarifications about this project.

Regards,
Gagan

Q & A

Question: Legal issues regarding diversion of water - have they been taken into account ?
answers: There's a problem only if you make and sell power. For self-use no problem.
Village committee will figure this out clearly. Ravi of AID India has taken this up, and will figure this out more clearly with PSE.
PSE has done 10-15 projects earlier, and are aware of these issues.

Question: What happens if village(s) gets on to national grid?
answers: Govt. is positive about it. not objecting to power benefits. They're just saying it'd be easier to fund irrigation.

Construction before monsoon - easier since stream flow is low

Question: how about trying to get village on grid?

Answer: Given the history so far, no scope for grid connection (You will notice in the attached pics also that there are no power lines/grids to be seen for miles)
distance to nearest village with elec - 12km.
Dhadgaon(nearest town)->Bilgaon (20KM)

Also, from our discussion with Ravi of AID India, the closest grid connectivity right now is at Dadgaon, about 11-12 kms away, and there are umpteen villages between Dadgaon and Bilgaon. This means that it is not a simple matter of just extending the grid to Bilgaon. There has to be a mess scale to get this area anywhere on the radar screen of Govt officials who haven't considered any long-term project to get the umpteen villages

connected yet. So, no question about Bilgaon, at least in the foreseeable future (maybe 10+ years down the road??)

Question: Is this a stop-gap project or is it a model for all other villages to follow? are these isolated villages?

Answer: This is not a stop-gap project. There is no timeline associated with getting these villages on the grid. From above answer, you will see that implementing a large scale project for getting grid power here is not a pressing agenda for concerned officials. Media attention and all is not possible for facilitating this. But creating a model like this is strategically important for their other activities. They expect other villagers also to demand electricity from the government or the Andolan...and they will try to find some way. This is one of the most important strategic advantages of doing this project. It will help get this model noticed and then media attention/govt attention will be much easier to bring to the region.

From above question, you will see that this village has neighboring villages which would benefit from the direct/indirect benefits of media/govt attention from successfully implementing this project.

Question: what is expected life of project ?

Answer: Life of project : Big dam projects has problems like silting etc. same holds good here too...but it can be managed since its a much smaller scale. Life-time limited by turbine life time and wear/tear. Therefore, the upkeep/maintenance of these is important and hence the training of village operators. In big problems for motors/turbines, the plan is to get engineers from Dhadgaon etc to look into them, as a first plan of action, and if not then, the PSE people will be called. Again, PSE has implemented many such projects (10-12) and is experienced in these areas and how to control the upkeep in the course of normal wear and tear.

If some repair etc. happens, Anil and Madhu are at the site for the first two months to oversee. They will also train a few villagers to operate turbine and control panel. Village folks dont understand technical details of these. If problem after anil/madhu leave, they'd have to call an electrical engineer from the nearest town.

Question: what about fcra clearance?

Answer: For this project, the funds will be transferred to Bombay Sarvodaya Friendship Center, which is a trusted AID partner and has FCRA clearance to receive foreign funds. They will open a separate account for this project where disbursals for construction and procurement will be managed. This is the model that is the quickest to get the funds to the project in a timely way. These is a 65 day turnaround period for funds to become available (contact me for any breakdowns of this) and thus the faster we get moving the better it is.

Question: What is the main occupation of villagers ?

Answer: Occupation: Rain-fed agriculture, live off forest (collect and sell minor forest produce). In dry spells, forced to migrate. Daily wage labor for part of the year depending on how the monsoon season pans out.

Question: what are benefits of electricity besides lighting ? occupational -based benefits? what happens if the village grows ? will the project be enough ?

Answer: In addition to what I had presented in terms of community oil extracting units, easier access to drinking water.

PSE feels village crushers and grinders have to be used...and the utility has to be increased slowly.

Other elec uses etc. - they'll discourage things like T.V for individual homes. Maybe running a radio will be allowed. Village committee will figure out clearer rules.

There's enough power with the 13kw that could potentially have powered 3 villages instead of 2 albeit for less number of hours/day. Idea is to provide power for necessities and not for power-hungry luxuries. For these, they would consider setting up a community room(s) for tv/fridge type needs, but maybe later on not now. Clarification - even though in March, the flow is only 40 liters, there's a 2m high (90m wide) storage dam that will be used to collect the water in the day..and water will be let through in the evening for 3 hrs when there is peak demand.

Question: how will billing be done?

Answer: The village committee will be responsible for figuring this out. Right now, the expected answer is that since they pay Rs. 30-40 per month of kerosene anyways, they will be able to reach consensus on a comparable number. From an AID perspective, the idea is to get them to start bearing some of the costs of the project , so that they can also realize that they will need to have a disciplined approach to billing.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the village people are really excited about ownership of this project. For them, it is very important that they would be able to 'construct' something that will for their own consumption, since they already are involved in migrant construction labor. This will give them pride and a sustainable source of growth in the community. The people wont lose interest that easily since they'd contribute to the construction. Construction is something that comes naturally for them since that's what they do as daily-wage laborers. So, other kinds of alternative energy projects like wind or solar will not get them as excited.

Question: what happens if we dont fund...what's plan b ?

Answer: AID India is trying to go about this project in a phased approach. Thanks to the funds promised and approved from AID Ann Arbor and AID MD they are already constructing the control panel and turbine. There is a slim chance of goat funds. But on a more optimistic note, there is a private trust in Bombay that has expressed whole-hearted interest in doing this project. But they have a 'all or nothing' approach to it. Ravi of AID India is driving this forward as much as he can, but since the trust is wanting to meet PSE folks, project site, similarly implemented projects by PSE there could be a long drawn out process almost into late May, and may or may not come to fruition. But, since they cannot sit tight and wait for this private trust to decide, that is why AID is requesting chapters for funding in a phased way, although there are many more AID chapters that

have expressed interest in funding this than AID India has currently approached for support. In the welcome event that the private trust decided to fund the entire project, the monies approved by all the AID chapters will not be needed and obviously the preference would be get the private trust's funds to contribute. However, in that case we wouldn't need to fund the whole project we would have played a critical role. So, hopefully between AID support and possible support from the private trust, somewhere therein is a plan B. More importantly, AID would have played a key role in getting more local support and some key decisions on the outcomes of this project which will definitely have a positive ripple effect on the surrounding villages.

Question: how come distribution to maal costs only 2 lakhs?

Answer: This is the budget outlay of extending the power lines to Maal. Although Maal and Bilgaon are neighboring villages, the distribution infrastructure to reach both is approximately the same.

Question: More about PSE? Fees? Non-profit?

Answer:

There seems to be no fees component for PSE - yes. In kerala, they do get some funds, but here except for one small component there is no compensation for them.

Deepak Malghan (from AID MD) has visited PSE in Kerala and worked with them.

history: Anil and Madhu came for narmada satyagraha (I think in 2000 - Ravi). After that two village activists (champalal and chogalal) went to kerala and trained under them at PSE. They went around and surveyed where they could do such a project, they suggested this as the ideal site to start a micro-hydel effort in this region. Since then, PSE was called back and the project drafted. PSE is not even charging for the transportation costs of these 2 engineers back and forth from Kerala. There is a possibility that part of the 15,000 for "PowerHouse" in the estimated budget may be for their services, but most of it would still be consumed at the project and not for PSE'. PSE has also implemented a similar project in Domkhedi (this was mentioned in last weeks presentation), and there was no fee charged for their services as a show of support to aid the area.

Question: What if the cost goes up due to unforeseen things?

Answer: current budget: $9,25,000 + 75,000 = 10,00,000$. For the project, they are seeking 10 lacs. The \$19000 being asked for AID support is the part towards 9,25,000. The 75,000 is the cushion in case anything unexpected pops up.