

5581107724 : MAJOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

KEYWORDS: WATER GOVERNANCE HYDROPOWER EQUITY AND SUSTAINABILITY DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

SANGAY TASHI: THE ROLE OF WATER GOVERNANCE IN HYDROPOWER IN BHUTAN: A CASE STUDY OF MANGDECHHU HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT. ADVISOR: JAKKIRT SANGKHAMANEE, Ph.D., 156 pp.

This study investigates hydropower development in Bhutan, and analyses its roles of sustainability through the frame-work of water governance, focusing on the decision making process. The Royal Government of Bhutan's aspiration to achieve "economic self-reliance" by the year 2020 has accelerated the construction of hydropower in various river basins. However, with its limitations on the implication of effective decision-making process and the nation's water governance, impacts and resistance have emerged at the local level where the hydropower project are developed.

The ongoing Mangdechhu Hydroelectric Project development at Trongsa is taken as a case study to examine decision making process in water governance. To understand the dynamism, twenty five key informants from various organizations including Mangdechhu Hydroelectric Project authority were extensively interviewed. Besides, two participatory focus group discussions in the villages of Samcholing and Kungarabten were held to understand people's perspective. Lastly, this study also draws data from official reports, documents and Medias.

Using the concept of water governance, this study argues that there is a lack of water governance in Mangdechhu Hydroelectric Project. The study shows that while the process towards water governance is ongoing and being challenged by internal and external factors, the situation in country's whole management can be considered merely as "water government". The decision making process is still of traditional nature, a top-down approach. The other interesting phenomenon observed is the notion of "national interest" which indeed has overshadowed the new approach of decision making, i.e. the bottom-up or grassroots approach. This analysis helps us to understand why general public and the government tend to correspond to a call for greater national interest; at the time leaving a section of affected society unhappy in the GNH driven society.

However, there is strong indication from the government in working towards water governance. Therefore, a paradigm shift from "water government" or from "state centric" to more "decentralized" integrated water governance is necessary for sustainable hydropower development in the country in general and Mangdechhu in particular.

Field of Study: International Development Studies

Academic Year: 2013

Student's Signature

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