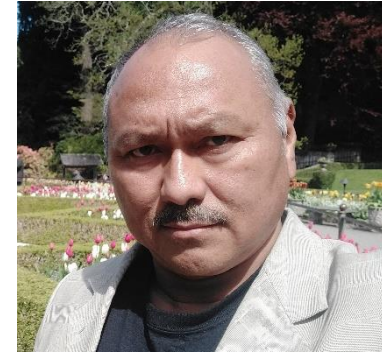


Public Participation in IA – Experiences from Nepal



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Milan Dahal

Manager (Environment)

Environment and Social Studies Department

Nepal Electricity Authority

Kathmandu, Nepal

Email: milandahal@yahoo.com

Introduction

- Nepal is a small Himalayan country of great diversity in geography, climate, ethnicity and language.
- Nepal is a developing country, so environment and social impact assessment is crucial for its sustainable development.
- Nepal's estimated hydroelectric potential is 83,000 megawatts.
- This paper is on public participation in the Impact Assessment of hydroelectric projects, considered over the period between 2001 AD till the Covid-19 pandemic .

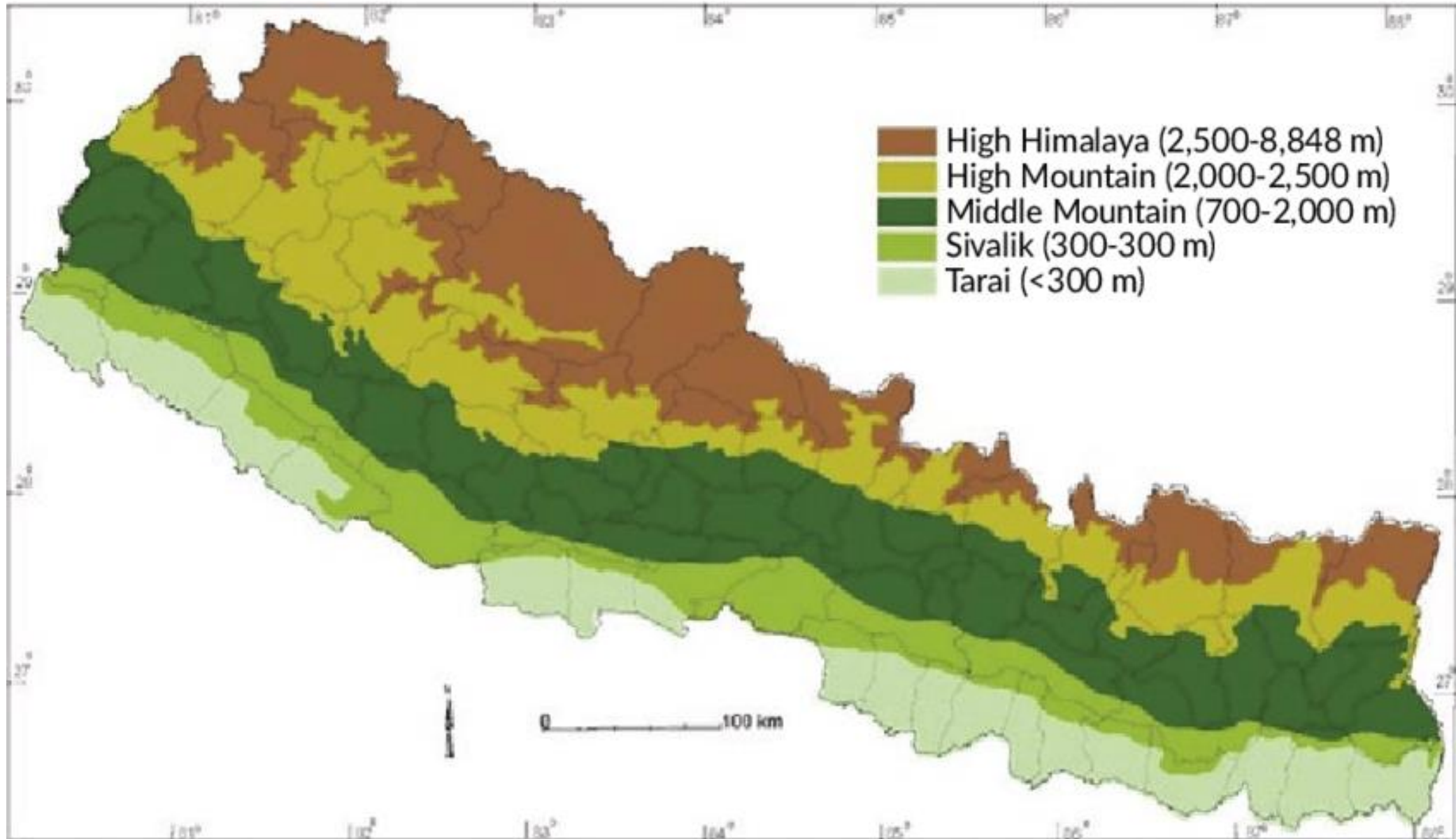


Location Map of Nepal in World



Nepal,
Population= 32 million
Land Area= 147,000 sq km

Physiographic Regions of Nepal



Impact Assessment Practices in Nepal

1980s • Concept of IA introduced in major infrastructures projects

1993 • Environmental Assessment Guidelines

1996 • Environment Protection Act

1997 • Environment Protection Rules

2019 • Environment Protection Act

2020 • Environment Protection Rules

Public Participation in IA

Purpose of public participation (PP)

- Bridging conflicts and avoid hostilities
- Win public support and speed up development process
- Create ownership feelings
- Improve mitigation measures

**Manual for Public Involvement in the
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
Process of Hydropower Projects**



**Department of Electricity Development, HMG Nepal,
in Collaboration with
United States Agency for International Development
and International Resources Group**

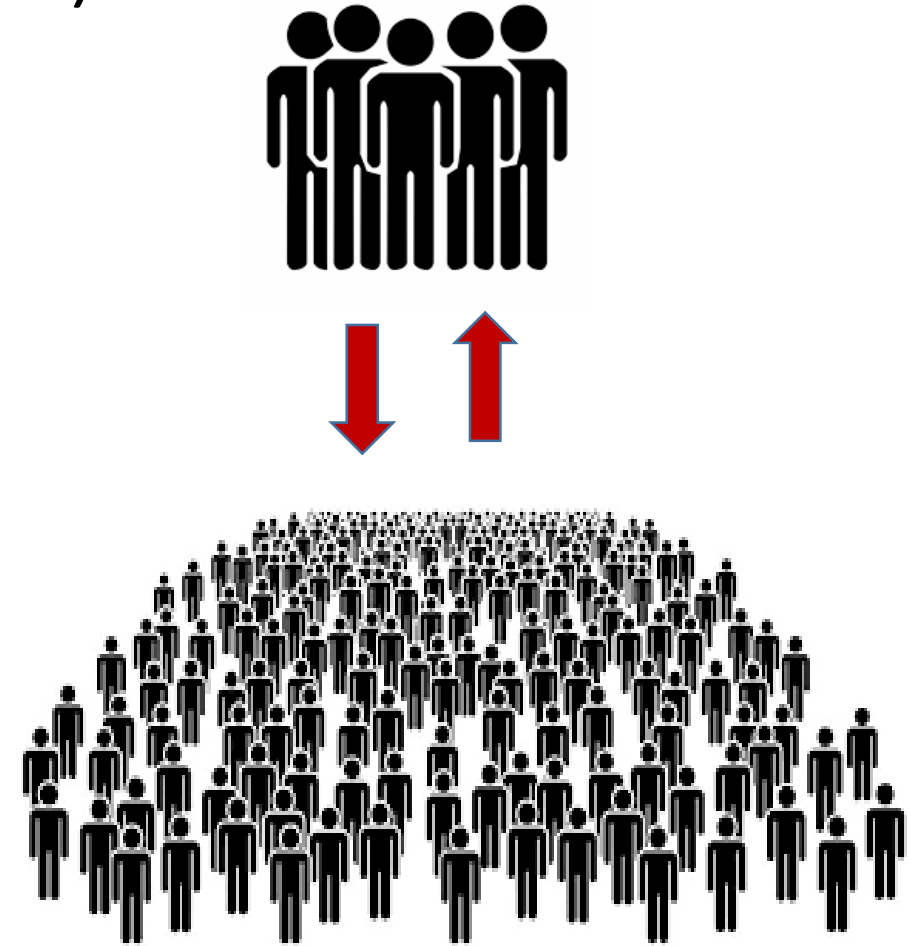


Public Participation in IA (contd)

- In the Nepalese EIA system, PP in impact assessment is incorporated :
 - Consultation meeting with stakeholders and local project affected people
 - Notice publication calling for comments and opinions from stakeholders and local project affected communities on the proposed project features
 - Public hearing program at the project sites.

Public Participation in IA (contd)

- Basically, two things are carried out in the Public Participation process:
 - Project information dissemination from the project proponent to stakeholders and project affected communities
 - Collection of comments and opinions on the project features and possible alternatives.



Photographs of Public Consultation Meetings



Public Interaction



Current Public Hearing Practices

- Public hearing program is mandatory for all kinds of IA (EIA/IEE/BES).
- Public hearing program must at least two times.
- Notice publication in local newspapers and announcement by radio stations.
- Audio-visual of the programs must be recorded as evidence.
- Covid-19 pandemic has changed public hearing style- nowadays
 - It is conducted in series in smaller groups (usually 20 to 30 people).
 - It tries to cover more parts of the project area (one program in one municipality).
 - Less formal and less dominated by high rank officials and elites.
 - Use of local languages in the program.
 - Getting more meaningful and effective.

Public Hearing Programs



Before Covid-19 Pandemic



During Covid-19 Pandemic

Problems & Challenges

- The PP practice was executed in top-down process .
- New environmental laws (EPA 2019 and EPR 2020) has tried to overcome this shortcoming.
- There are still problems and challenges to achieve meaningful public participation in the impact assessment.



Problems & Challenges (contd)

No adequate participation and representation of the project affected communities in IA because of:

- Difficult mountain terrains in the project areas of hydroelectric projects and transmission lines.
- Scattered human settlements in the project areas.
- Unfavorable seasons- Monsoon (June-July-August) and Winter (Dec-Jan-Feb).
- Poor infrastructures (road, telecommunication etc) in the remote mountains.



Problems & Challenges (contd)

Other limiting factors to achieve meaningful public participation in IA are:

- Poor level of literacy in rural areas.
- Poor socio-economic conditions of people in rural areas.
- Different ethnic groups, cultures and languages in the project areas.
- Male dominated society.
- Vulnerable social groups (untouchable caste) due to Hindu belief system.
- Feudal system prevalent in some extent.
- Political influences.



Lessons learning.....

- During the four-decade journey of IA in Nepal, the EIA system has been gradually evolved and established.
- PP is being elaborated and advanced to achieve meaningful participation.
- However, in the Nepalese EIA system, it takes 1 to 3 years to complete an EIA of a hydroelectric project. So, it is often criticized and blamed for hindering the development of the country.
- The increasing accessibility to internet and the use of social media in developing countries like Nepal can be introduced into the EIA system of Nepal, and this would help to achieve meaningful PP in IA.

Conclusions

- In the past two decades, impact assessments of hundreds of hydroelectric projects and transmission lines were carried out.
- PP always remained challenging in Nepal because of various problems and limitations. It is now being elaborated and advanced.
- In the coming years, the internet and social media as well as the changes in the Nepalese society itself and better infrastructures will make PP easier and more effective.
- The IA practice should encourage achieving meaningful public consultation with continuous improvement so that sustainable development could be assured.

Thank You