

Ramesh Karri, Waste to Energy Plant conflict, India

Background

India's first commercial waste to energy plant is Timarpur-Okhla Municipal Solid Waste Management project located in the outskirts of Delhi, National capital of India. The project started with an aim to utilize about one third of Delhi's municipal waste ~ 1350 tonnes to produce electricity of ~ 16MW renewable energy for approximately 6 Lakh houses. The company committed to social and environmental values with highest operational standards. To earn Carbon credits, the company also registered with UNFCCC. The conflict was between sukhdev vihar residents and TOWMCL, DELHI government against the waste to energy plant construction and its operation. The plant has to utilize Delhi's municipal waste to produce clean and renewable energy and also to clear the landfill near the national capital which is already about 60 meters.

Evaluation of conflict

The Sukhdev Vihar residents complains that ever since plant operation begins, they exposed to continuous air pollution emitted by the plant. The solid waste transported to the plant by hundreds of trucks daily causes additional problems such as huge traffic, noise pollution and dust in the air. The residents appealed against Okhla waste to energy plant by filing a case in the high court of Delhi.

In addition, waste pickers rebel that it is affecting their means of livelihood and they feel that they should be given priority of collection of waste in the capital over private players. The All India Khabadi Mazdoor Mahasangh, Safai Sena and Green Flag trade unions have been demanding to include them in the waste management system. The mass demonstration in front of United Nations about inclusion of the plant in Clean Development's carbon credits scheme was to target officials and highlight their issue in the international arena. The Okhla Bird Sanctuary also exists around 10 km away and the plant is affecting the biodiversity in that region. The UP State government also objected the plant due to the proximity to the Eco sensitive zone. The environmental rights organization states that the emission can cause serious health hazards to the local residents. The plant is also constructed against the Delhi master plan. There are several academic institutions, hospitals existed nearby even escalated the conflict further. The conflict grown into street demonstrations and mobilization activities.

In January 2013, National Green Tribunal is hearing the case of Okhla plant. The Tribunal permitted to run the waste to energy plant by observing that sustainable development is not possible without affecting the environment. The NGT fined the firm to pay Rs. 25 Lakhs for violation of many rules and regulations. The residents are offering their roof tops to government to install solar power panels as an option for waste to energy plant. Other hand, waste pickers unions are still proposing to give them a better conditions and they will recycle it properly.

Keywords and stake holders

Waste to Energy plant, Bird Sanctuary, Carbon Credits, Local residents, waste pickers, government and TOWMCL

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