

Himalayan Glaciers Fragmenting: Dr. Suraj Mal

“Glaciers in the Bhilangana basin are fragmenting and resulting in the formation of glacial lakes. This is increasing the risk of floods due to glacial lake bursting.”

Dr Mal was speaking at a workshop to present the results of a collaborative research project on hydropower irrigation nexus in the upper Ganga headwaters here today.

Dr Mal’s study has revealed that there were 26 glaciers in the Bhilangana basin in 1968 and due to fragmentation, the number has increased to 30.

He presented a data on recession and shrinking of the Khatling and Phating glaciers. The information presented has serious implications for development projects in the Bhilangana basin.

The research project is a collaboration between the University of Arizona (USA), People’s Science Institute, Dehradun, Delhi University and ICIMOD, Kathmandu. It is funded by the water, land and ecosystems programme of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

Mussoorie-educated Prof Chris Scott of the University of Arizona spoke about the project, its objectives and shared results from hydro-meteorology analysis. He said there was a tremendous potential to enhance livelihood in mountain villages by using hydropower generated to lift river water for irrigation.

Former Chief Secretary Dr RS Tolia called for integrating forest-hydrology linkages and understanding mountain geology and spring systems.

Dr Ravi Chopra from the PSI said a grievance redressal mechanism was needed at the state level to respond to problems related to hydropower development in Uttarakhand raised by local communities.

Experience of Phalenda and Chaiyeen villages indicated that hydropower companies could be directed by state or district officials to compensate damages suffered by local people.

Rashmi Shreshtha of ICMOD shared perspectives of hydropower developers. She mentioned that the local area development fund and CSR activities could be used to minimize tradeoffs.

Among other people who spoke at the workshop were Vibha Puri Das, former FRDC, Uttarakhand Government, Ajay Verma, chief engineer (Garhwal), Department of Irrigation, P Jeyraj, PCCF (Planning and Management), Department of Forests, Bihari Lal from Lok Jeevan Vikas Bharti, Budha Kedar and Dr KN Vajpai of UNIDO.