

# **Dams and Damages**

## Why in news?

The recent Uttarakhand flash flood is not a natural disaster as it claimed to be.

## What is the cause for the flash floods?

- Two hydropower projects- 13.2 MW Rishiganga and NTPC's 520 MW which are located close to Reni are found to be the cause.
- The use of explosives for dam construction, construction of other infrastructure projects such as roads in the fragile Himalayan State is the root cause.
- In June 26, 2019 Uttarakhand High Court order questioned the use of explosives on the Rishiganga site that too for illegal mining in the name of dam construction.
- Moreover deforestation takes place when dams are constructed & compensatory afforestation norms are often flouted.
- The construction material which is supposed to be dumped on separate land is often dumped into the river which blocks the stream's nature path.

#### What does Chopra Committee say about in 2013 floods?

- The committee was formed in October 2013 after the Supreme Court ordered the Union Environment Ministry to constitute an expert body to assess whether dams exacerbated the 2013 floods
- The report mentions that dams aggravated the 2013 floods as riverbeds were already raised from the disposed muck at the dam construction sites.
- Hence it could not contain the sudden increased flow from floodwaters.
- It proves that dams are not only damaged in floods but also cause immense damage in downstream areas due to increase in the destructive capacity of the water.
- It suggested that 23 of the 24 proposed dam projects which it reviewed needs to be cancelled due to the potential damage they could cause.
- In an affidavit submitted on December 5, 2014 in the Supreme Court, Ministry of Environment acknowledged the adverse impact of dams in the 2013 floods.
- However, even after all these years, the matter remains pending in the Supreme Court and environmental norms for dam construction continue to

be flouted in Uttarakhand.

### How does climate change impact the ecosystem?

- Himalayan glaciers are receding and disintegrating due to climate change and the snow cover in the Himalayas is thinning.
- Research shows that there will be increasing number and volume of glacial lakes due to increase in temperatures.
- This means there will be rapid increase or decrease in the reservoir water level in the dams & the projections on the life of a dam reservoir may not stand due to erratic events such as floods.
- This could rapidly fill a reservoir with muck and boulders brought along with the floods.
- And there is also the threat of earthquakes as Uttarakhand lies in Seismic Zone-IV (severe intensity) and Seismic Zone-V (very severe intensity).

#### What can we infer from this?

- Ignoring these threats many dams are constructed as a source of revenue in zones that are under high risk of witnessing severe earthquakes.
- Now the State plans to construct up to 450 hydropower projects of 27,039 MW installed capacity ignoring the disastrous impacts of rampant dambuilding.
- It is clear that dams worsen disasters which is ignored by the State authorities is unfortunate one.

#### Source: The Hindu

