

Let the Last Free-Flowing Stretch of the Teesta Run Freely

Written by International Rivers
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The Teesta River has become a contested battleground between the government and the indigenous Lepcha and Bhutia communities in Sikkim, India. The government of India hopes to dam the last free-flowing 13 kms (8 miles) of the Teesta River for hydropower. Already over 71 kms (44 miles) of the river – which flows through earthquake-prone, ecologically and geologically fragile terrain – is either in reservoirs or diverted through tunnels for hydropower generation.

The Lepchas were the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim. The Dzongu tribal reserve, part of the Kanchenjunga biosphere reserve, is an indispensable part of their sacred landscape, a landscape in which rivers – including the Teesta – and mountain peaks are places where life originates and where the souls of their ancestors reside. The Lepchas – now a minority in their own land – have sustained strong resistance in the form of a long and peaceful protest to save their sacred river and prevent the desecration and defilement of their sacred landscape. To protect their cultural identity, Dzongu is recognized under the Indian constitution as a reserve for the indigenous Lepcha tribe.

Sonam Paljor Denjongpa, a senior Buddhist monk of the region, has stated that projects like the Teesta IV Dam would destroy the Dzongu Reserve, the heart of their sacred land. The environmentally destructive activities of diverting rivers, tunneling through rocks and mountains, and cutting down forests have already violated their sacred landscape. “We hope the state and central governments and their expert committees will honour our cultural and religious heritage and allow no more destruction of our sacred landscape.”

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The 520 MW Teesta IV hydropower project is being considered – without the proper public consultative process – on November 23, 2012 for environmental approval and November 29, 2012 for approval of the diversion of forest lands.

Support the Lepchas, Bhutias, Indian environmental groups and civil society, and the Power Minister of the State of Sikkim who all oppose this project. Join the protest against the Teesta IV Dam now. Sign the petition [here](#) .