

FORUM BRIEFER 01-27

PAKISTAN

Irrigation Project Sparks Social, Environmental Issues Anew

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Barely 17 months left before the completion of the final stage of the Chashma Right Bank Irrigation Project (CRBIP) in Pakistan, affected communities have yet to be appeased on issues involving anomalies in consultation, compensation, relocation and damage to the environment.

The CRBIP primarily involves the construction of a 274-kilometer long canal, taking off from the existing Chasma Barrage, which runs roughly parallel to and on the right side of the Indus River. It also includes the construction of 72 distributaries, 68 cross-drainage structures and 91 bridges. As this canal is meant to irrigate a command area of 606,000 acres—the area bound by the canal and the River—building watercourses and water management is the final stage of the project (i.e., CRBIP Stage III). The project started in 1992 and is set to be finished by 2002.

ADB finances 64% of total cost, while the Pakistani Government and KfW Germany shoulder 22% and 14%, respectively. In 1992, the project was estimated to cost Rs. 1,570.43 million. Today, this figure has ballooned eleven-fold, to Rs. 17,000.5 million. (In June 1999, ADB awarded a Chinese contractor for the construction of distributary canals amounting \$4.8 million; the project commenced in May 2000.)

Over the years, the affected communities were more adversely affected than expected. In a survey made by Sungi and Damaan, two local NGOs in the area, the following objectionable features of the project were observed:

- **Lack of consultation with affected people.** Almost all of the affected people interviewed by Damaan complained about the lack of information regarding the project. No one gave them notice, no one told them what would happen to their lands and assets, and the only time they got wind of the project was when the contractors' men showed up to pull out their trees and crops.
- **Insufficient compensation.** The people are unsure whether the valuation of their losses - specifically their land and other assets like trees,

crops, tube-wells and buildings - was correctly made. In 11 affected villages, the people estimated their lands to be worth about Rs. 60,000 per acre. On the other hand, it was felt that the government would pay less than half that. The villagers also doubt that the loss to their livelihood would be compensated.

- **Adverse environmental impact.** Excavation and cutting up of about a thousand miles of land would destroy trees, crops, and other assets, besides ruining at least 30,000 acres of land. Moreover, the Punjabo portion of the main canal, which is 64 miles long and includes 52 distributaries and FCCs, would cut up the land into 53 pieces, at 1.2 mile intervals. These structures, with their high embankments, would cause soil erosion and generate a lot of dust. The canal would block the water of the 'Nullahs' in spite of the X-drainage. Previously, the Nullahs had been causing some erosion in the riverbank. When the water in the drains starts flowing faster and stronger, soil erosion would increase and result in greater siltation.
- **Failure to consider indigenous/more environmentally appropriate alternatives.** The "Rowd Kowhee" (or Hill Torrents) system (RKS) is the traditional irrigation system in the area. The RKS uses monsoon rainfall which gets deposited in the Suleman Range and which runs roughly parallel to the main canal at a distance of about 30 kilometers. The Hill Torrents bring huge quantities of muddy, swiftly flowing water to specific areas. The people can either use this abundant water or let it flow towards the Indus River, by alternately blocking it and letting it loose to water their fields. Had this natural way of channeling rain water been used rather than a cross drainage/canal structure, people would not have been displaced nor natural habitats of animals and plants threatened. It is estimated that if all the real costs are internalized, the project would cost over US\$25 million.

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* The NGO FORUM ON ADB (FORUM) is a network of diverse non-governmental organizations (NGOs), peoples' organizations (POs), community-based organizations and other public interest groups with advocacy and campaigns relating to the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The Manila-based Secretariat can be reached at: Room 402, 107-A Kalayaan Avenue, Diliman, 1101 Quezon City, Philippines; Telefax: +632 9297987; E-mail: forum@pacific.net.ph. Visit our homepage: www15.brinkster.com/ngoforum

THE CRBIP-AFFECTEES' INITIAL CHARTER OF DEMANDS

- 1) ADB, WAPDA (the government agency involved) should come with a Framework for participation of the people and the civil society organizations in CRBIP and with a system for information sharing and transparency.
- 2) As none of the four components of the Project has been completed, an Inspection Panel on CRBIP should be arranged.
- 3) Proper, Affectees-represented valuation of the losses and effective compensation should be guaranteed, including compensation for crop losses over the period between destruction of traditional system of irrigation through Hill Torrent and restart of irrigation through CRBIP.
- 4) Detailed Environmental Analysis and Environment Management should be initiated at the earliest.
- 5) Alternatives to Drain nullahs (the cross drainages) and other unnecessary structures should be adopted with the local consultations, their construction be stopped immediately.
- 6) Transparent plan for resettlement of the dislocated villages/communities should be announced.

-Endorsed by participants of the Regional Strategy Meeting of Asian NGOs on ADB Advocacy, 30 March -1 April 2001, Subic, Philippines.