

24 FEBRUARY 2001 MEETING ON CRBIP – ADB, WAPDA, AFFECTEES

by Ahsan Wagha, DAMAAN

In continuation of the campaign the CRBIP-Committees of Affectees have launched to mitigation of their grievances, a group of 26 affectees reached the Chhapri Camp of Texar company, the contractor of the Project in Stage-III, to participate in a meeting on February 24 2001. The meeting was arranged by the agencies responsible for implementation of construction plan viz. WAPDA etc. as part of the site-visit of Mr Akira Seki Director Department of Agriculture and Social Sector of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the major financier of the Project. Although no independent sections of the civil society, or any organized groups of the farmers were informed about the event, the Affectees representatives along with their facilitators from NGOs namely DAMAAN and SUNGI, thanks to timely intervention by the Country Representative of ADB, were, however, allowed to participate in the meeting otherwise a simplistic show of all Ok by WAPDA and the District Administration.

To our comprehension of the problem after this meeting, the implementers of CRBIP-the government officials and the contractors-remained ill-briefed on the role of their so-called beneficiaries of the Project. It seemed, in this case, the officials involved simply lacked appreciation of benefits of the peoples participation in the process thus they took it as advantageous going through by exercising administrative authority. The affectees, on the other hand, became increasingly sensitive to the defaults in the Project for practical reasons unconceivable to the implementers.

The big gap in the perceptions of the two sides: the affectees and the implementers was evident in this meeting. This required to be bridged over by regular, mediated dialogue between the two.

A brief Report of the 24 February meeting written by Khadim Husain, the NGO Consultant on CRBIP follows. We endorse it as DAMAAN s version of the Report and wait for a version from the host of the meeting i.e. the office of the Project Director. Exchange of these reports will be a step in reaching consensus to developing a framework for the affectees participation in the project.

The Report

(Prepared by Khadin Husain)

The meeting started about an hour before the time given to SUNGI and DAMAAN (3PM); therefore the meeting went on without the participation of DAMAAN's organised affectees committees. In this session, leaving a few individuals who were seeking remedies of their personal grievances, all others were the project officials or members of the local administration. In any case, some 26 representatives of the affectees committees joined the meeting at 3 PM; the group welcomed Mr. Akira Seki and then these representatives, one by one, started articulating about the various problems and the concerns of the communities in relation to the project.

Attitude of the Project Director (PD)

Whenever any affectee raised the question or brought up his grievances the PD interrupted him half way through and started responding. He utilized mainly two methods to handle the issue. Either he tried to undermine the concerned person and didn't consider the issue as a valid concern of the community or quickly promised to resolve it if and when the aggrieved persons would visit project office in D. I. Khan. He repeatedly declared that everything was just fine and his men were doing an excellent job. This rhetoric he applied to deviate from the actual concerns of the people and consume time. Most of the time he never waited for the English translation of "what was being said" for expatriate dignitaries. The other government officials were no different in their approach towards the affectees.

The salient issues and the PD's response:

- Excavations the people complained about the destructive excavations (most of these being done illegally) all around. PD declared that everything would be the same again within six months. {Being an engineer, he knows very well that these excavated lands can't be reclaimed even within two years.}
- Distributaries level the participants pointed towards the high level of some distributaries, especially when these were not being lined; so there would be abundant seepage and water logging. PD first dismissed the concern and then promised to look into it.
- Threats of Flood to Shadan Lund Zafar Lund of HIRAK (a local NGO) explained to the officials how constructing a new combined path for three hill torrents would endanger villages and particularly the town of Shadan Lund. A debate went on but the PD and the other officials didn't agree to him. All they could say was that Shadan Lund was always at the risk of floods. The communities fully agreed with Zafar's view.
- Disruption of pipelines--some community representatives informed about the disconnection of water supply from across the canal or the distributaries the construction activity. PD was extremely cool and said, "we will set them right".
- Defective design and locations of the outlets (**Mogas**) Shahnawaz, a staff of the OFWM pointed out that such and such outlets (tens of them in the D-27, 28 etc.) and hence the watercourses therefrom would not be able to irrigate the lands, particularly the lands adjacent to the outlets. His seniors tried to shout him down and even disowned him as the staff of the OFWM by saying that he was working on contract basis. When the affectees raised their voice and complained about

the inappropriate response, the PD used his time-tested tact and promised to set everything right.

- Similarly, when Shafi Qaisrani pointed out that in one case there were five outlets in four *chaks*, the project staff retorted, "impossible". When Mr. Qaisrani invited them to visit the site for proof, the PD said, "we will look into it".
- Jobs for the affectees Jawad Shah of Kotla Shah demanded that the people, who had lost their whole land in the project, should be given some job in the project. PD asked him to bring such a list to the Project Office and he would consider the demand.
- Bridges the people complained about the lack of bridges on the drains and the distributaries. In many instances the communities are divided by these structures and serious problems of mobility exist. PD looked at their staff and shrugged his shoulders.
- A representative of **Bhabhana** village (this is the village who had gone to the High Court against the construction of a Xdrain) complained that the village was being punished by delaying the construction of the distributary which would irrigate the village s lands. Instead of answering the complaint PD announced that 170 million Rupees--for the compensation of the lands lost in the drain had been deposited with the commissioner office and Section 17 of the Land Acquisition Act will be invoked soon.
- To the demand for reasonable valuation and better rates of compensation, the PD said I have on record how cheap these lands were before we started this project. He, with rest of the

Administration, seemed convinced to compensate at the minimum possible. And this was one of the major fears of the Affectees.

Akira Seki s response

After thanking the participants he said,

"This is a big and very promising project and will result in development of the area. When I had visited this area twenty-two years ago, this land was barren and now it is green all around (*he did not know that the canal had not yet started irrigating this area*). Project of such a dimension always bring some problems for some people. I agree that the problems should be solved. From the experience of my life I know that the development doesn't come as a whole, it is in stages and at different places; so as to integrate these into whole communities have to put some efforts. We (the bank) will welcome such initiatives and will agree to provide funds. Most of the time, the technical aspects of such a huge project are not easily comprehended by the target communities and they do have apprehensions. However their problems should be solved."

Lessons Learned

From the responses and statements of the project officials serious contradictions emerged, which can be sketched out in the following.

1. To reinforce the response of the PD, Mr. Basharat Hussain of OFWM said that they had rectified about 200 complaints in relation to outlets and watercourses by shifting and realigning these. So he concluded that, as the complaining participants never came to OFWM office they were either not serious or couldn't be right. Earlier, during various meetings, each official of the project (WAPDA as well as ADB) stuck to the position that there was no technical fault in the project i.e. location, design and alignment of the watercourses and distributaries were

perfect. They always stress that, as the common people are unable to understand the technical/engineering aspects, their apprehensions are baseless. There is clearly a contradiction between the two.

2. If during this public meeting the officials were not willing to fully hear the concerns of the people, why they would be sympathetic to them when they visit the offices. So it became clear to the people that the officials just wanted to pacify them in the public gathering.
3. There are actually a couple of examples of some people approaching the authorities and later getting the distributaries shifted to new locations. This means changing the locations of all the watercourses, chakbandi and all. So it becomes evident that the usual sanctification of the "design features" carries no weight.

So far, it seems that both WAPDA and ADB like to deal with the issue by dilly dallying and wasting time, they want to quickly finish the project and leave the mess they have made for the local administration to deal with. Meanwhile ADB strongly advocates in favor of the philosophy of the project and doesn't want to hear any criticism in this direction, nevertheless it shows a human face to the affectees. In this way it tries to shift the blame to the implementing agency (WAPDA). It always shows readiness to bring more funds (loans) to remove the complaints of the communities. On the other hand WAPDA wants to deal with people in the typical bureaucratic way; that is, first to ignore them (PD told DAMAAN that he didn't read the survey report), then to split the people by threats, co-optation, bribery in the form of favors, etc. etc.