

DAMAAN UPDATE: September 2001

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JUNE-AUGUST, PROGRESS ON MAJOR ISSUES:

- **ADB Review Mission on CRBIP;** For about two years, DAMAAN, with support from other national NGOs and NGO NetWorks--SUNGI and ActionAid, Islamabad, and NGO Forum Manila, for instance--has been engaged in Advocacy for the CRBIP Affectees who demanded retraction of, and inquiry into technical, economic, social and environmental lapses in the Project. The major investor i.e. Asian Development Bank, ADB responded by agreeing on formation of 'Independent Review Mission'. The Mission's advance team, i.e. the Social Assessment Specialists met various stock holders including WAPDA, Affectees, representatives of DAMAAN, SUNGI, alNoor and other NGOs, visited the area and came with a Report made public on Sept. 11 (copy should be available with PAEDAR Islamabad Office). A Stake Holders Workshop in D I Khan was to follow on Sept. 19 which has been postponed for the American tragedy. A new date is to be announced by ADB.
- **The threatened agro-ecosystem of Damaan;** Species with their genetic variation, which encourages natural selection and adaptability, guarantee the vital complexity of ecosystem. The geographic zone of Damaan, the region between Indus and the Sulaiman mountain range, stretched between 29°N to 30°N on 70°E i.e. from Dera Ismail Khan in NWFP about 200km down into Punjab, is a combination of shrub lands, small sandy deserts and irrigated lands. The solitary terrain marked with geo-historic protection and continuity developed a bio diversity of its own. But a world wide problem, Damaan area too faces grave challenge of rapid changes causing extinction of many important features of biodiversity. Facilitated by GEF, DAMAAN consulted the basics of conservation with Dr Poswal and Ms Mehreen of CAB, Rawalpindi, and invited Dr Shahzad Nasim of NARC, Chak Shahzad, Islamabad, a seed conservationist, to conduct a survey and come with recommendations. 'The rate of genetic erosion was faster in canal and tube-well irrigated areas', he noted in the initial report of his field survey on 9-11 Sept. 2001. He showed particularly concern for the local varieties of sorghum viz. *Ghogha*, *chutalia*, *tundi* and *makh*. Development of a Gene Bank and a centre for conservation by DAMAAN is in process.
- **Chashma Right Bank Irrigation Project, CRBIP;** Environmental issues being central in DAMAAN's mandate, our attention to the project was initially drawn for the local activists' concern about environmental changes consequent upon construction of CRBIP-III. The project is marred with delays and this makes a factor. Initial works on CRBIP such as feasibility studies conducted about 20 years back predate formulation of modern environmental obligations, it is said. Convention of Biological Diversity, CBD requires observation of Environmental Impact Assessment, EIA procedures. Pakistan signed CBD in 1992 (ratified by Cabinet in 1994). Legislation on environment started even earlier. Pakistan's Protected Areas, PAs were created in 1970, the relevant article in Constitution 1973, the Pakistan Environmental Protection Ordinance and the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act were in place in 1973, 1983 and 1997 respectively. Construction work on CRBIP stage III actually started after 1995 (after so many changes in PCIs and multiple increase in budget), had already lost the environmental context in which it was agreed upon by the people and the politicians. Take example of the forests only, about two decades ago, the fast growth of wood with fertile waters of *Rodkahi* allowed the Damaan farmers to practice 'slash and burn' method of land preparation. Today, CRBIP demands no less than complete change of a habitat. Invasive crop species pose severe threat to local seeds plant species while deforestation will eliminate the wild relatives of the cultivated varieties. Remedy being beyond DAMAAN's resources alone, we plan to hold a Workshop on scope of conservation in the Canal Area to invite civil society's focus on the issue.
- **DAMAAN-TVO Primary Schools for girls;** In the Project area, previously, there was one school for girls against about 9 for boys. During July-August 2001, the hardest of the Damaan's seasons, a smooth start of the project was made by recruiting a 7 member Education team. Recruitment was conducted experimenting advance standards of Ad. and interviews. On August 5, a 6 member, gender-balanced panel of local experts, interviewed some 101 candidates (female forming 53% and graduates, 17%) working 9.30am--8pm without a proper lunch break. Some male candidates, fed up of waiting, left unattended, but not a single female candidate was reported leaving without attending the panel-a **touching manifestation of the urge for economic independence in the women folk of the area.** Selection and training of the staff (with ROZAN in Islamabad) completed, the teachers took over the schools started teaching jumping other arrangements such as furniture etc. which are halfway. Initial target of 25 children in one school is achieved, although, a lot has to be done for a change in the community. **Overcome collective apathy among the male towards girls' education, and get bunches of little girls crowding their 'ustani'** without investing any extra efforts.

DAMAAN is NGO working on imperatives of development and conservation in Damaan area.