Subject: Indus Orphans

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THE INDUS ORPHANS

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" Development should be centered on human beings. Because an

individual's well-being is multifaceted, a multidimensional approach

to development is essential. Therefore any formulation of strategies,

policies and national, regional and international actions has to be

based on an integrated and comprehensive approach" - New approaches

to development (UN Briefing Papers `The World Conferences:

Development Priorities for the 21st Century.

The global concerns

The world is seized with environmental problems faced by the global

community. The major ones relate to depletion of Ozone layer, global

warming and resource exploitation. The Agenda 21, a comprehensive

programme of action for global action in all the areas of sustainable

development, addressed economic areas ( combating poverty, changing

patterns of production and consumption and demographic dynamics) and

conserving and managing the natural resources (protecting the

atmosphere, oceans and biodiversity, preventing deforestation and

promoting sustainable agriculture). Rio Declaration on Environment

and Development supports Agenda 21 by defining the rights and

responsibilities of the states regarding these issues. Main emphasis

is on the entitlement of human beings to a healthy and productive

life in harmony with nature. Statement of Forest Principles, a non-

legal binding statement of principles for the sustainable management

of forests, makes it a moral responsibility of the developed

countries to `green the world' through reforestation and conservation.

UN Follow-up

The Earth Summit succeeded in presenting new perspective on economic

progress. Though widely acclaimed it entailed reservations about its

implementation due to financial constraints. Achieving sustainable

development worldwide depends on changing patterns of production and

consumption, impact on developing countries and UN effectiveness in

conflict resolution. WTO or UNEP are main actors to draw a line

between commerce and environment. The human being does not figure

anywhere and this trend is finding more acceptance in the South.

Though the so called development of the west has been the main cause

of environmental deterioration, the burden for correction was rested

on all the countries. The countries of the south where population

pressure is high and gross national product too low were not able to

fulfill their commitments. The Global Environmental Facility (GEF)

which was set in 1991 promptly took over responsibility to fund

activities aimed at achieving global environmental benefits in four

areas: climate change, loss of biodiversity, protection of

international waters and the depletion of Ozone layer. Five years

after Rio, the answers to meeting the goals continue to be negative.

And Pakistan is no exception.

Pakistan scenario

Agriculture is the main stay of Pakistan's economy and the water is

its crucial input. Since creation of Pakistan many hydrological and

morphological changes have taken place due to division and diversions

of Indus waters between new born states of India and Pakistan, the

states within Pakistan. As much as eight link canals were constructed

to transfer water from Indus to meet deficit of the eastern rivers

now in use by India. The inter-provincial water distribution

continued to be made on adhoc basis till a water accord was reached

in early nineties. This accord resulted in great loss of biodiversity

and adversely affected the economy of delta people.

Harsh decisions and wicked choices

The Indus delta presents a unique situation in the world of

environment and to understand this one has to travel back in history.

The Indus Basin is seat of the oldest civilization in the world. The

people were prosperous, well educated and deeply lost in their glory.

The mighty Indus sustained this civilization through the ages, till

the history turned a new page in sixteenth century with burning of

Thatta a large port city and a great seat of learning by the

Portuguese pirates, who instead of spices and gold found intellect

and education, the commodities they were not willing to take back to

Europe. The Indus is a meandering river and has continued to move

westwards specially in its lower reaches. It was the only inland

waterway that connected Larkana, Sukkur, Multan, D.I.Khan and even

Lahore with the outside World.

Shah Bandar (Bandar means Port) was a flourishing centre of trade and

commerce at the very mouth of Indus. There are plans to revive this

port. There is a question mark as to the sincerity of purpose. Many

think it is an eye wash. A study conducted by Pakistan Council for

Research in Water Resources about the navigation on Indus supported

possibility of inland transport on these water ways. The success of

Shah Bunder as sea port will again depend upon availability of water

to provide sufficient depth for passage of ships. The mighty Indus

has already deposited enough silt to create a shelf extending into

sea for many miles.

The Lower Indus Basin is distinctly separated from its northern part,

and has different physical characteristics. The people lived along

the river and its branches (locally called `naro') and thrived on its

bounties: trade, fish catch and fertile agricultural belt depending

on inundation. The British forced migration of militant people from

Punjab and settled them along the eastern naro, a branch of main

river and a river by itself, in 1901. Sukkur Barrage was constructed

in 1932 and more settlers were brought in. This increased the

population pressure and brought a social change. Larkana, Eden of

Sindh, was totally disconnected with main line of river communication

and suffered the most. The west of Indus throughout its course has

thus remained backward and under developed till today.

After partition, more water began to be withdrawn from the Indus in

upper reaches. The construction of Kotri Barrage and Kotri Barrage

confined the natural habitats of the Blind Dolphin and the Indus

Salmon. The coastal areas dried up and salt intrusion deprived the

population of safe drinking water. The natural habitat of shrimps in

sprawling mangroves is becoming a part of history.

The Dolphin

Owais Tohid in his article ` Blind dolphin on verge of extinction in

Pakistan' (reported in Green Press Newsletter No. 54) indicates that

the endangered blind dolphin in Pakistan's Indus river is on the

verge of extinction under the threat of environmental degradation and

fishermen who believe its oil can impart sexual strength.

Excessive hunting of the blind dolphin, whose habitat used to stretch

over 2,800 kilometers (1,750 miles) covered by the mighty Indus

river, has forced the marine mammal into a 170-kilometer (106-mile)

section of the river between the Sukkur and Guddu dams. Although

the stretch of water has been declared a dolphin reserve, wildlife

conservationists fear the blind dolphin may be facing its last years

before being driven to extinction. According to an estimate, there

are only around 400 blind dolphins all over the world and all of them

are found in the Indus River.

Water pollution, a general decline in their habitat, including the

construction of dams, are contributing factors to the demise of the

species. Pollution of the Indus river is a great threat to the

Dolphin Reserve area, especially since dolphins are mainly restricted

in this reserve due to construction of barrages.

Richard Garstang, a consultant working with IUCN, has expressed a

concern that the most serious and immediate threat to the survival of

the Indus River Dolphin is genetic deterioration. The remaining

population is isolated into two, possibly three, segments so we are

not dealing with one large population of 600 or so, but several

smaller ones. There have been some stark recent examples of what

can go wrong once genetic problems set in. The Black Rhinoceros is a

good (bad) example. After a recent evaluation of the Indus River

Dolphin's predicament he came to the conclusion that with no finite

or reliable demographic data available for the Indus Dolphin, no

genetic baseline studies and a general environmental trend that will

progressively isolate surviving dolphin communities and thrust them

into an ever-increasing cycle of exposure to pollution, human

activities and development, it must be concluded that the Indus

Dolphin is at severe risk. A population crash in any of the larger

remnant populations for any of the above mentioned reasons could

force the species into a rapid decline and extinction.

According to Tahir Wadood Malik, who in 1973/74 was working in and

around Kashmore, where Guddu Barrage is located, and saw the blind

dolphin, it was a playful animal/mammal? and would come upto the boat

to see if we would throw some tit-bit to it, the fishermen would hunt

it, for oil, and as it ate the fish, how much, I am sure not enough

to effect their catch. In 1990, I was in Sukkur, and it was difficult

to see a dolphin in the back water of the barrage.

The choice between development and environment

According to Tariq Binori, the main point of disagreement between

environmentalists and conventional development people is that the

latter think that if something is not being utilized by human beings

DIRECTLY, then it is a waste. Environmentalists, on the other hand,

take these other activities seriously, and view nature as a

sophisticated system in which nothing is wasted. If you take

something away from a particular use, it will have costs-- to nature

in the first instance (if it was being used primarily for sustaining

the ecosystem) and to humans ultimately. There are very difficult

choices to be made.

The economic benefit at social costs

Much advocacy has appeared about the protection of Blind Dolphin of

the Indus. The dolphin is no doubt on the verge of extinction if

corrective measures are not taken early. So is the case with green

turtle, the salmon and the shrimp. By impounding water upwards, more

benefits will accrue to the people of those areas, electricity would

be generated, industries will flourish and more area would be brought

under the plough and so on. Assuming that the dolphin, the salmon,

the shrimp, the mangrove, etc. are of no consequence as compared to

people in upper reaches, then what is the crime of deltaic people to

suffer for the comforts of their fellow human beings else where. Only

if realization came that the deltaic people are not to be treated as

orphans, a little generosity shown to them will not be merely an act

of philanthropy to ensure their participation in development, but a

means to preserve the exotic species of the delta and the coast, as

well.

The nature is always in balance

The nature maintains its balance unless the human hand causes a tilt.

To maintain a watery link between the sea, it was decided that a

minimum flow of ten thousand cusecs will be maintained down stream

Kotri Barrage, the last in the network. This quantity is not set

aside as a common use, but included in total water availability for

distribution among the provinces (states).

As lower repurians, these people have no control over the withdrawals

upcountry where the demand is fully satisfied before the remainder is

let to flow down, in contravention of universally accepted principle

of sharing the waters proportionately. Though the mechanism to ensure

this exists, its effectiveness is shadowed by high handedness. The

weaker has to yield and the stronger has no intention to be

considerate.

The natural balance at creating an enabling environment for economic

and social development of the Indus Orphans is highly disturbed and

assertions at international forums to create such an enabling

environment for people-centred sustainable development are quickly

forgotten. The sustainable livelihood of these people is jeopardized

and the state of their poverty has further aggravated. The UN

documents stress access to technology and finance; and, this does

come, its benefits do not filter down and reach these people. The

ECOSOC subgroup on Macroecomic and Social Framework chaired by World

Bank does not identify best practices at micro level to support the

economy at macro level. The Bank developes standards on modes of

Service Delivery and issues priced publications. The task is

considered to be complete and the reports adorn the shelves.

Participation and Partnership

The United Nations and the World Bank do consult the inter-

governmental bodies, national governments and the NGOs around the

World. But they consult the wrong quarters. One NGO from Pakistan

which represented Asian region on World Bank-NGO Global Committee for

six years is reported to have not held any consultations with the

NGOs of the region it represented. It's commitment was also said to

be not known to the government, NGOs and people of the country!

Pakistan's representation at World Forums is also said to be

entrusted to people who manage a change of climate.

The people deserve to be taken into confidence for development of

plans before `to implement effectively action plans' that make a mark

on their destiny. There is need to reiterate call for genuine

partnership partnership. The access to the targeted population as

essential to the broadbased changes that are required for poverty

eradication and provision of basis social services.

The Indus Orphans need no sympathies but want back up support and

strength through sincere participation and partnership of those who

matter; to discourage the elements that with every rising sun plan to

rob them of basis tools of production, and water is most crucial to

keep blood running in their veins.