Resettlement in the Pakistan Ghazi-Barotha Hydropower Project

**Background:**

The Ghazi-Barotha Hydropower Project consists of three main components: A barrage at one end of the Indus River; A power complex downstream which would generate power, and; A 52km concrete-lined power channel with a width of about 58.4 meters. It is the power channel which is being financed by the Bank, and it is also the focus of most of the resettlement issues involved in the project. The governmental authority in charge of the project is the Water and Power authority of Pakistan (WAPDA) which is also the second largest employer outside of the federal government. The total project cost is estimated at $2.2 billion USD.

**Developing a Plan:**

In order to build the system, it was necessary to acquire 5000 Hectares of land. From the earliest stages of the project there has been the participation of all stakeholders. “Scoping Sessions” occurred in all 54 villages affected by the project in order to discuss the project at large and the necessary steps of land acquisition and the resulting resettlement. Three main NGOs also participated in the project at this stage in order to assist in minimizing the environmental, social and resettlement impacts of the project. The Pakistani chapters of the World Conservation Union, the World Wildlife Federation, as well as Sungi, a Pakistani NGO, held extensive consultations with the local populations and were actively involved in the design and preparation phases.

An independent Environment and Resettlement Panel was formed at the pre-feasibility stage to assist in oversight of the project as it was being prepared. This panel, consisting of internationally recognized experts, has continued on throughout the later stages of the project. Since it has been critical of both the Bank and the NGOs involved, the panel has gained acceptance and legitimacy. Its reports have been translated and disseminated locally, and the Bank has had to at least acknowledge the panel’s recommendations, often being held accountable to them by other stakeholders.

Due to the consultations and inputs from all of the stakeholder groups, concerns over the environment, resettlement and the protection of certain sites were considered in detail in the evaluation of design alternatives and led to the adoption of a number of modifications. As a result, the power channel’s original path was changed dramatically. In order to avoid submerging certain sacred sites, cultural heritage sites and graveyards, as well as many homesteads, the channel was moved to higher ground. Instead of the straight path as originally conceived, the channel’s path meandered. While this added a great deal of cost, about $50 million USD, and required more complicated engineering to the project, this change also reduced the number of people who were to be relocated from 40,000 to 1,000. The greater complexity and cost of the new design was made up in the fact that it was much more socially and environmentally responsible.
**Consultation During Implementation:**

In addition to the continuation of the environment and resettlement panel, Project Information Centers (PICs) were instituted and have been an important component in easing the process of carrying out the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) prepared by WAPDA. The PICs are for both information dissemination and grievance redressal. If someone has a complaint about how they or their property is being treated during project implementation, they can come to the nearest PIC and explain their complaint. The staff attempts to be proactive to these complaints and will, if possible, attempt an instant response. The staff of the PICs have continued ongoing consultations with the local communities and they give formal updates on the project every 6 months and publish a newsletter on the project.

The PICs are staffed by a number of sociologists, including two women who focus on gender issues. For example, these women went out into the communities to talk with women and ask what their problems are with the project. The sociologists learned that WAPDA was kicking children out of certain schools so that space could be made for the children of WAPDA employees. They also found some cases of male relatives declaring dead the women in their families so that they could receive the compensation from the project. The sociologists began to inform these women of their rights as well as taught them about microcredit. Going into the communities both increased the knowledge of the project team and allowed for greater participation of local citizens.

The PICs have created a database of the grievances to better help the staff address the problems as quickly as possible. The database catalogues the vulnerable communities, gender issues, how information has been disseminated, and project outreach. The centers also serve as a point where contractors can recruit local labor. They assist people in getting work permits and have lists of the skills for those seeking work.

An NGO steering committee was formed by the communities in the project area. This grassroots group, whose members were chosen by the communities themselves, meets once a month at rotating venues. The committee undertakes advocacy activities on behalf of the communities themselves as the NGOs represent local concerns. It is viewed as a mouthpiece for the Project Affected People. The minutes are circulated throughout the communities and often a local World Bank staffer is allowed to observe the meetings.

**The Problem of Land Acquisition:**

In order to facilitate the process of land acquisition, the Ghazi-Barotha Development Organization (GBDO) was specially formed. It is an independent organization, whose Board consists of 13 members, 6 of whom are representatives from the community and half of whom are women. GBDO’s role is to be responsible for the implementation of the integrated regional development plan for the economic and social development of the affected areas. This organization was also tasked with an advocacy role on land acquisition and compensation issues. In practice, however, it developed into a kind of arbiter in the process. The RAP recommended the creation of Land Valuation Committees (LVC) in order to try to determine a fair market value for land that would be bought for the project. On the LVC were 5 members: Two representatives from the community, one local government official, one WAPDA representative and one representative from GBDO.
The problem which evolved was that as more people became aware of which land was to be bought for the project, land speculation began. Government officials joined in the speculation and the total cost of the land, which was expected to be about 2 billion rupees, skyrocketed to 8 billion rupees. In that instance the project was halted. The LVCs were part of the problem as land valuation became highly politicized and the local government officials were trying to get as high a price as possible for the land. The GBDO went into all 54 communities and negotiated with the land holders in order to get around the LVCs. They explained that without reasonable market values for the land, the project would not move forward and the people in the end would get nothing. While a neutral organization, the GBDO became an advocate of the implementing agencies, trying to keep project costs down. Through its actions, the GBDO gained the trust of the people affected, the NGOs and the implementing agencies. The result was that GBDO was able to negotiate the land purchases down to 4.5 billion rupees – still much more than the original estimate, but low enough to keep the project on track. Currently GBDO is attempting to mobilize communities to determine how they want to be involved with the project. Options include extending microcredit or training for new jobs.

On the side of the agency implementing the project, the WAPDA Environmental Cel (WEC) was created. This group of engineers based in the field see to it that the social mitigation and appropriate environmental assessment are taking place. While these may be “reluctant” participants in easing the social and environmental impact, the fact that they are part of a systematized process that helps bring the reality of the impacts into the implementing agency.

**Conclusions:**

The process of consultation at every stage of the process helped both project design and in creating more acceptance for the project among the affected communities.

Allowing the creation and involvement of independent organizations, the advisory panel, the NGO Steering Committee and GBDO, gave legitimacy to both the project and the actions which were ultimately taken. These arbiters, whether neutral or not, were viewed as having interests separate form the Bank and WAPDA. This allowed for a kind of external check on the actions taken in the name of project implementation. Also, in the case of GBDO, has proven to be important in finding solutions to major problems which could halt the project.

Consultation is also important in determining the impacts on and needs of highly vulnerable groups. The women who were approached by the staff of the PICs would not have come to the centers on their own. Their issues would have remained hidden as the project continued to go forth.

By creating institutions which build on the consultations, a process is created by which people affected can attempt to gain recourse to their grievances and through which information can be disseminated. Also these institutions become important “ears to the ground,” which can warn the project teams of impending problems.

The Ghazi-Botha project demonstrates that a highly consultative process before entry and throughout project implementation can yield benefits to all involved.