

Karachi: Policies of donor agencies criticized

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KARACHI, Oct 17: Speakers at a conference criticised the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) for their keen interest in mega projects and alleged that these institutions were more interested in usurping resources of the country instead of its development.

These views were expressed at a national conference on "Role of IFIs and impacts of mega projects", organised by the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum here on Tuesday.

The speakers rejected the notion that the lender-funded 'mega projects' could bring any positive change in the lives of the masses. In this regard, they quoted the examples of big projects like Kalabagh Dam, Left Bank Outfall Drainage (LBOD) and Right Bank Outfall Drainage.

They deplored that every successive government of the country had keenly tended to sell out its resources to the IFIs like World Bank, Asian Development Bank and IMF at the expense of lives and livelihood of the people especially those belonging to the poor and unprivileged segments.

Talking on technical flaws of the LBOD, Sheikh Abu Bakr of the PFF informed that the destruction of the livelihood of people of the coastal Badin owing to IFI-funded LBOD was a clear example of the IFI's real motives. The project destroyed about 3.5 million acres cultivable land and resultantly livelihood of some 2.7 million people was affected, he said.

Sikandar Brohi of Participatory Development Initiatives (PDI) threw light on the aspects of the Sindh Coastal and Inland Community Development Project in Thatta and Badin, funded by the ADB. He claimed that the proposed project had not addressed the key issue of water rights of the lower riverine areas, especially those situated downstream Kotri Barrage.

Another key issue, the erosion of land owing to the intrusion of sea was also ignored he added saying that similarly billions of dollars were spent on LBOD but to no avail and damages caused by this project were ignored while planning for other big projects.

Mushtaq Gaadi, researcher on water problems, said that Pakistan needed funds of \$5billion every year only to maintain its water reservoirs. The IFIs are always ready to lend debt to Pakistan as in return they earned a lot of money in head of heavy interest, he noted. He asked for formation of a coordinated channel of fishermen communities to bring the Indus River back to its original shape.

Idrees Rajput, former Sindh irrigation secretary, urged the government to ensure availability of at least 10MAF of water for riverine area of 2.112 million acres of Sindh for protection of its livelihood, resources, mangrove forests and fishing sector.

He disclosed that the World Bank had admitted its mistakes during the construction of LBOD and its later damages. The WB is still not ready to provide funds to make up the damages but intended it wanted to lend more money for the so-called mega projects to earn more and more interest, he added.

Reviewing the project of RBOD, Naseer Memon, civil engineer and expert on water reservoirs claimed that the RBOD had destroyed the Manchhar Lake as saline and polluted water of the upper

areas of the country was discharged into the lake.

Mr Memon said that it had completely destroyed the lake and affected people whose livelihood depended on it.

He said that the RBOD would be completed in 2008 at a cost of Rs31 billion but in this project negative impacts on hill torrents ecosystem were not taken into account besides ignoring other such key aspects.

The chairman of the PFF, Mohammad Ali Shah, stressed the need for devising a comprehensive strategy to save people from hazardous affects of lender-funded mega projects.

He also called for launching a political struggle against the increasing role of these institutions in Pakistan and demanded of the government to compensate and rehabilitate millions of people displaced from their areas in the name of mega uplift projects.

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