

Karachi Circular Railway resettlement proposal
by Arif Hasan
August 2012

The KCR Affectees Action Committee (AAC) and JICA Contacts:

There is a KCR Affectees Action Committee (AAC), which has been constantly in contact with the Urban Resource Centre (URC). However, no one from officialdom ever contacted them. In April 2009 they read a report in the newspapers that an EIA on the project was to be held on 18 April 2009. They arrived there in large numbers and were given permission to attend with great difficulty. They submitted written objections to the rehab proposals but they received no reply and nor did they receive any minutes of the meeting. At the EIA a committee of three members of the community, secretary transport, DIG traffic and a member of the local government was formed. A meeting of the committee was held but again no minutes were provided to the KCR-AAC. They made written requests for the minutes but the requests remained unanswered. Another meeting of the Committee was held with the consultants to the project in which the Project Director was also present. Objections were given in writing by the KCR-AAC at the meeting but again they were not responded to and nor were the minutes of the meeting provided to the KCR-AAC. The KCR-AAC has documentary proof of all the requests it had made and of the objections it has raised.

The JICA Proposal and the KCR-AAC Objections:

The JICA rehabilitation proposal consist of providing an 80 square yard plot about 25 kilometers away from where the affectees currently live. In addition, there is provision of Rs 50,000 (US\$ 525) per family. The objections raised by the KCR-AAC are:

- They are being shifted away from their places of work and their childrens schools. As a result, their children schooling will be disrupted. Their women, who work as domestics and in the services sector in the neighbourhoods, will be out of work. Their travel costs will increase manyfold and as a result, they will come poorer. Many of them do part-time extra jobs which will no longer be possible since they will be commuting for atleast two to three hours every day from home to work and back whereas most of them now walk to work and back.

- After being bulldozed, they will have to find a place to live until such time that enough infrastructure is developed on the proposed site so that they can begin living there. Rs 50,000 is too small a sum to cater for providing for this move from the existing home to a rented accommodation and later on to the proposed rehabilitation site.

- The rehabilitation package includes a plot of land but provides no funds for constructing a house and paying for the necessary utility connections.

The Lyari Expressway affectees were offered the same package. Studies by the NED University Urban Research & Development Cell, URC Karachi and the SPDC all show that as a result of the Lyari Expressway Rehabilitation Project, the affectees have become more poorer than before. Many of them have become destitutes and moved back to rented accommodation in their old settlements. The main sufferers have been women and children. I can send you these reports if you are interested.

The KCR-AAC Proposals:

The KCR-AAC has given two alternatives:

1. It has identified three open areas near the city where it is prepared to be rehabilitated by the provision of an 80 square yard plot complete with amenities. It has already informed JICA of these locations and the area available in acreage terms. This land belongs to the railways and as such can be easily acquired by the relevant government department.
2. The KCR-AAC are willing to accept the market price of their properties. On the payment of this price they will move out voluntarily from their homes.

The KCR-AAC prefer the second option because they feel that in the case of the first option they will be provided with plots but with no money to build their homes. Also, they foresee delays in the provision of infrastructure and large scale corruption. They are justified in their fears. Both these things have happened in previous rehabilitation projects. On these issues, the Lyari Expressway case has been well documented.

Arif Hasan's View:

In my view, the second option proposed by the KCR-AAC should be accepted. What it means in financial terms is given below:

- Total KCR project cost : US\$ 1.558 bn = Rs 149,568,000,000

- Cost of rehabilitation project : Rs 2,477,412,477 or 1.6% of total KCR Project Cost

- Site clearance and infrastructure : Rs 1,541,512,097

- Amenities : Rs 626,594,195

- O&M for four years : Rs 309,306,174

There are 5,000 affectee families. So, the cost works out to Rs 500,000 per family. For the Lyari Expressway, the rehabilitation project was estimated at Rs 2.1 billion. However, it has ended up at Rs 8 billion. A similar increase in costs is more than possible for the KCR Rehabilitation Project as well. Therefore, I feel that if Rs 2,000,000 are paid to each family they will happily leave. This would increase the cost of the rehabilitation project from 1.6 % of the total cost of the KCR project to 3.2%.

There are other possibilities as well which the KCR-AAC have pointed out. There are shacks with no electricity and water connections. There are homes with tin roofs and there are homes with concrete roofs and first and second floors. Different packages can be prepared for them which would help lower the rehab cost from 3.2% of total project cost to something lower. However, for this the survey results of the settlements will have to be made public. So far, the JICA team has not shared them with anyone inspite of requests from the KCR-AAC to do so.

If the proposed plan goes through, it will be a gross violation of human rights and common sense. It will increase poverty, violence and alienation. I strongly feel that the UN-Habitat should involve itself in forcing JICA to understand Karachi's ground realities and in seeking a just solution. With Rs 2 million, the affectees will be able to buy homes, acquire plots and build on them and also to invest in improving their lives.