

SAVE FORESTS RALLY

December 31, 2009

Organized by: Indus Development Organization

Indus Development Organization (IDO) organized a “Save Forests Rally” from Khyber Stop to Sekhat Stop Main National Highway in District Matiari (Pakistan declared year 2009 as year of Environment 2009). The leading civil society activists in addition to a huge number of forest dwelling communities along with their cattle participated in the historical event. The participants were more than hundreds of people relating to the forests and Katcha (Riverine) area, particularly farmers communities including livestock holders/Shepherds. This rally had a historical perspective due to the participations of thousands of cattle (Cows, Buffaloes, Goats and Sheep) from the Riverine area of Matiari. This was the second rally in the history of Pakistan which comprised thousands of cattle/domestic animals, (*The first rally was also organized by IDO on March 18, 2007, which was reported as first cattle rally of that kind in the history of Pakistan by Daily DAWN-Karachi of March 19, 2009*).

The current Rally was led by Executive Director of Indus Development Organization, Zain Daudpoto with other civil society leaders, Mr. Abrar Kazi, Mr. Nazeer Memon-Water Expert, Prof. Dr. Fatah Mari-Agriculture Expert, Mr. Zulfiqar Halepoto, Mr. Mustafa Nangraj-Agricultural Expert, Professor Aijaz Qureshi-Social Development Expert, Mr. Ali Mir Shah-Provincial Coordinator SAP-Pk Sindh, Representatives of Save Education-Remattullah Balal & Anwer Solangi, Leaders of Forest Protection Committees (Riverine Forests of Matiari)-Basheer Khyber, Ashraf Sangrasi, Ghulam Hussain Khoso and Amir Mohammad Khoso.

All of these participants hold slogans against deforestation and illegal cutting of trees by the influential, they demanded to arrest and lodge cases against the all those culprits who are involved in the heinous crime of land grabbing and encroachment mafia in the forest areas, and introduce new forestry policy with the consultation of local people and civil society representatives.

Speaking on that occasion, all of the civil society representatives, Environment and Agriculture Experts said that the Government’s Agro-forestry Policy 2004 is perceived to be flawed and a poor policy and has been failed regarding the protection of forests in Pakistan. However, the policy was developed for the rehabilitation of forests but unfortunately it is proved as policy for degradation.

The ongoing leases issued through this policy have very negative impacts to the forests in kind of cutting trees for the purpose of land grabbing; these leases will end in January 2010. They demanded from government, to close these leases and to develop another forest policy with the consultation and suggestions of communities, environment/forests experts, local activist and civil society. They also said that the major reason of the failure

of forest policy, on one hand is lack of technical practices by Sindh government and its support to the unlawful land grabbers and on other hand is disengagement of communities.

Speakers said, “The IDO has the mandate to build a model of achievements regarding forest rehabilitation and protection through its participatory approach and have also gain innovative outcomes in the forests of Matiari. One of the most important achievements of the IDO is to reforesting of 3500 acres deforested land and build the Forest Protection Committees of local population and stakeholders in the Khebrani and Raees Mureed forests for its sustainability. It has been seen that these committees have been fighting against all of illegal activities of all land mafias in the forests and have been striving for reforestation since their establishment.

IDO’s program for protection of natural environment and forests is an innovative program and all of environmentalists will support the efforts of IDO. The participant said that we will be with IDO in every task of this environment friendly movement and we wish to establish these kinds of protection committees in all of the forests of Sindh.

At same occasion, IDO unanimously passed resolution in the name of “Save Forests Resolutions” which are as under:

1. Current Agro-forestry Policy of 2004, which was developed for the rehabilitation of forests, has proved as an unsuccessful and unsatisfactory policy, which allows the land grabbers to destroy the forests. We demand from government, not to extend leases which will be end in January 2010 and to close this policy, as it is found opponent to the rehabilitation for forests.
2. Demand to reformulate forest policy with consultation and suggestion/ideas of the different stake holder’s local forest population, civil society, environment, ecology and legal experts and the major share of local communities in its implementation.
3. To enhance environment friendly approach in the Forest Department and to recruit competent people, who would be interested in Environmental Development and can take effort for rehabilitation of forest with coordination of local population
4. To activate/re-establish a separate “Environmental Tribunal” to run cases against the people, who are cutting trees (specially from the forest area)
5. To develop special benches in the all district courts to run environment related cases like developed countries.
6. To realize and declare that in 90s degradation of forests by the then Government of Pakistan in the name of operation against dacoits and deforestation after impose of Agro-forestry policy 2004 by Sindh Government of that time is a National Disaster, to rehabilitate the livelihoods of thousands affected people through some especial socio-economic packages and to find out the leaders of the then governments, which were involved in the degradation of forest and to take strict action against them.

7. To take legal action against those people, which were even still involved in illegal cutting of trees planted by IDO in the Raees Mureed and Khebrani Forest

IDO also made some announcements on same occasion, which are as under:

1. IDO will celebrate year 2010 as the “Year of forests”.
2. IDO will establish Forest Protection Committees, comprising on local people and Forest Dept. Officials in all of forests (kutchra and paka) of Sindh
3. IDO will build special groups of lawyers in all over Sindh to precede against forest destruction cases in Environmental Tribunal.

