

Ilisu Trip Report from May 18 to 24, 2009

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The aim of our field trip was to assess to what extent the conditions (ToR = Terms of Reference) attached to the German, Austrian and Swiss export credit guarantees for the Ilisu dam project have been fulfilled, six weeks prior to the end of the six months suspension period of the export credit guarantees. The focus of our research was on resettlement issues. We talked to persons in charge of the resettlement planning either within the Turkish Water Authority DSI or as consultants in Ankara. Afterwards, we visited the Ilisu region and talked with affected villagers in Ilisu, Hasankeyf and several other places.

At our meetings in Ankara we were informed about the new resettlement policy and the state of the new resettlement plans. It seems that some important improvements have been made. Most notably, resettlers are now offered free houses and the plans foresee to provide everyone with 2 ha of land and to support people to reach a minimum income of 12,000 lira. As there is no arable land available in the region where the re-settlers could move, the Turkish authorities now intend to terrace the hills surrounding the planned reservoir and to move the fertile land from the river bed up to the terraces. The planting of various nut trees, the establishment of dairy production with cold storage houses and other measures are envisaged for income restoration. Also the volume of the new studies and documents is certainly impressive, given the short amount of time. However, a couple of critical issues remain:

Resettlement Policy

We kindly received a copy of the new resettlement policy. While this is a step forward compared to Turkish current legislation, the above mentioned features (2 ha of land, minimum income of 12,000 TL) do not appear in the policy. Therefore, a legal basis for the affected people to enforce what has been promised to them is still missing. Also a phrase formerly in the text, promising houses to families now renting houses and to homeless people, was erased. This raises doubts on how sincere the government takes the policy and urgently needs clarification.

The new policy lowered the time frame during which people cannot sell or mortgage or rent their house from 20 years to 10 years. However, there should be no deadline at all and the fact that they still cannot even sell or rent for 10 years is not in line with

World Bank standards according to Robert Goodland (ex World Bank staff in charge of environmental and resettlement standards).

Our talks revealed that the Turkish Government does not seem to be ready to implement the new policy and international standards within the government institutions, including DSI. Staff trainings for example are still no issue. Overall, the great concerns over DSI's willingness to actually implement international standards remain and could not be cleared by the fact that the consultant company formulated new income restoration plans.

Income restoration

We were told that detailed plans for income restoration exist only for the first 6 villages near Ilisu. Apparently for 20 other villages there are plans, but not up to appraisal level. What will happen to the other 180 villages has not even been discussed. We asked villagers in several villages of phases 2 and 3, but all they could tell us is that people from Encon stopped by to do a baseline study and informed them in general about the new policy but not about possible resettlement sites or income restoration measures. According to the ToR and the reports by the committee of experts, resettlement issues and income restoration measures must be ready up to appraisal level before the start of the project, hence before the decision on July 6, which will not be the case.

We also have some doubts regarding the income restoration programme for the villages around Ilisu. The terracing of the hills and the forced conversion of subsistence farmers into market farmers has never been tested in the region. Thus, the new plans are a bare trial and error approach, possibly resulting in a disaster.

People are subsistence farmers and our talks to agricultural experts but also experiences with World Bank projects show that it will take at least one generation to convert subsistence farmers to market farmers. There is a high likelihood that the villagers will continue to grow a mix of vegetables for their own needs instead of the crops foreseen in the income restoration plans. However in this case, they would never make the income to buy the necessary fertilizer or ever be able to earn the promised 12'000 Lira per year, also given that many farmers' size of land will considerably be reduced to only 2 hectares. Many villagers considered the designated area of 2 hectares too small to survive. Also, many villagers told us they don't want to be market farmers, which increases doubts over the feasibility of the new plans.

Another critical issue is the idea to plant 200'000 almond trees for income restoration. If these trees shall be ready to make a living in 7 years they need to be planted now. However, there is no indication by the Turkish government to buy these trees and plant them. The villagers in Ilisu even told us that almond trees don't grow well in this climate. Thus there is a high likelihood this base of income will not be available.

The same goes for the cattle and dairy production. Several villagers told us their cows don't give a lot of milk in this hot climate and they need to give the cows to herders, who are moving with them in the wider area. We sincerely doubt the dairy milk project including cold storage houses will work, if each family is given 2 ha land. The area is arid and not suited for larger herds of cows or cattle to provide income.

Another issue of concern is the limitation of land replacement to 2 ha. Large landowners will also receive only 2 ha and are free to use their expropriation money to buy land elsewhere. While this may be an option for landowners who rent their land to landless farmers, this is completely impossible for farmers who farm their land themselves, as there is no suitable farmland available in the area. We learnt from farmers outside of Hasankeyf that they were told they could buy additional land in the area of Diyarbakir. This would imply driving an hour or more to reach their fields, which would obviously make the cultivation of their fields non-practicable.

The implementation of this new resettlement trial will take at least until fall of the following year, when one harvest has been collected. Before, no comment can be made whether it will really work. Realistically, at least three to five years would be necessary to test the market based income approach and to assure the plans work and the villagers will not impoverish. Therefore there may by no means be a decision to go ahead with the project as long as the success of the new income restoration measures has not been demonstrated. However, as there is no time for this, the plans remain a trial and error concept which should not be imposed on the poorest and non-literate people of the region without any proof of success. On top of this, DSI has no experience with implementing a resettlement project in line with international standards and does not yet show any willingness to learn how to do so.

Still confusion on number of affected people: Refugees and nomads not counted

The new resettlement plans estimate the figure of 35,000 affected people, stating that many families already emigrated due to lack of jobs. However, we were told that refugees are entitled to resettlement if they can prove that a family member is still living on the property or the land is being used. Many refugee families might show up and claim their rights. They have not been counted though in the scope of the latest baseline studies. Thus the need for land and income restoration measures may drastically increase compared to current planning.

The same applies for nomadic families, who we talked to in the Botan River Valley. They informed us that there are approximately **3,000 nomadic families** which depend on the Tigris valley to move between their summer and winter pastures. Counting about 10 family members, this adds up to an estimated number of 30,000 people that have been totally neglected. They have neither been contacted by the consultants or the government, nor integrated into compensation plans and only heard of the dam by rumours. For thousands of years they have been driving their livestock along the fertile banks of the Tigris and Botan rivers between Van and Hasankeyf. A dam would stop their moving, their source of income and they would not know where to go or what to live of.

No concept for Hasankeyf

Our talks in Ankara confirmed that a viable concept for the creation of an archaeological park in Hasankeyf is crucial to generate new income for the population of Hasankeyf, as most people now live of tourism and it is assumed they shall do so in the future. The consultants in charge of the resettlement planning who we talked to made it very clear that without the tourist park it will not be possible to provide the

people with a new perspective. However, when we had the chance to speak to archaeologists on the site in Hasankeyf, we learned that obviously there still is no proof that even a single monument can be moved. We were told that the most important monuments are made out of sand and unique plastering which will crumble when moved. However, if the moving of important monuments will not be possible, the archaeological park will not be worth the visit. No tourists will come and thus, the 3,000 or more people of Hasankeyf will not be able to make a living. This is a problem which obviously cannot be solved, no matter how many more studies will be promised.

This also means that also the ToR regarding cultural goods and the promises by the Turkish government to “save” Hasankeyf will not be met. In addition, we were confirmed that the excavations will only start in June and that in the entire province of Batman works are only underway on nine sites. Thus the plans to at least document what will be inundated are also a mockery.

We further discussed the issue of the missing bridge in Hasankeyf with the resettlement consultant as well as archaeologists in Hasankeyf and several villagers. All agreed that without a bridge new Hasankeyf will not be able to exist. Adding to that (as pointed out in a report by the independent experts on cultural heritage commissioned by the ECAs) the water level will raise and drop often by more than 40 meters. This will put the use of a ferry boat transfer to the fortress part of Hasankeyf into question. Local representatives of the AK Party pointed out that it will be unlikely tourists will make the effort to drive 25 km down to the bridge and up again just to see the fortress and a door inlay in a museum. They rather assume that the constant stream of tourists visiting Hasankeyf (2,000 per day in the nineties and about 1,000 or more these days) will cease.

Given the complete lack of a resettlement plan for more than 3,000 people in Hasankeyf, we consider the new plans not ready to receive a go ahead by the three European governments. Even more, considering the fact that even archaeologists on site believe that it is impossible to create the envisaged archaeological park, we believe that a go ahead of construction work would be the informed and willing consent to surrender Hasankeyf and its inhabitants to expulsion.

Budget

World Bank standards clearly state that a detailed budget must be in place before a decision can be taken. It is obvious that resettlement costs will be far higher than envisaged in the original planning. However, due to the lack of planning and the still missing concept for resettlement, expropriation and income restoration of large parts of the affected population, yet no clear account of the required funds and budget exists. This makes it impossible to conduct a cost-benefit-analysis as stipulated by World Bank standards. Incidentally, it is also not in line with World Bank standards that this has never been done and does not seem to be planned.

Creation of committees to inform villagers

The resettlement consultants plan to create a committee in each village which will be responsible for transferring the information between the villagers and the DSI or the

consultants. At first sight this seems like a good idea, contributing to less work by the consultants. However, in practice it will not work well and should be replaced by a true consultative process. We asked villagers in several villages whether this committee had been formed and others whether they received the necessary information. In all villages (except Hasankeyf and Ilisu), the imam, the mukhtar or the school principal had been called to Batman to attend the creation of the committee. All complained that they were not given the right of a proper consultation process to voice their disapproval of the dam or their needs. All felt they were forced to create these committees and thus made confidants of their opponents (DSI), by having to inform their next of kins of the detailed plans for resettlement. Further, in most villages (except Ilisu and Karabayir) information was not passed on to the other affected people.

We visited one quite far away village which was abandoned in 1994. The consultants had randomly called land owners now living in Batman and told them they were now members of the committee. One person we spoke to and who actually testified on film, informed us he was asked to sign the commitment letter to be part of the committee. However he does not have any contacts with his former neighbours who fled to Istanbul or other regions and of course he does not want to be responsible for not finding them or not being able to inform them. He was also informed this dam will be built in any case if the villagers like it or not. Other families said they don't want to be informed by a former neighbour about their fate. If the government plans this dam in an authoritarian way at least the government should inform them personally.

In Hasankeyf, people involved in forming the committee informed us that at first there was a misunderstanding as they thought this was a consultation and they disapproved the way this consultation was held. When they were told it was to form a committee and that there would not be discussions about the dam, many people left the meeting. They protested for their right to be heard and properly consulted. The committee was apparently formed afterwards, but it is unclear who actually agreed to be part of the committee. People were angry that the government is not willing to spend time for a proper consultation. Participants felt used for the purpose of the consultants and did not establish a mechanism to pass on the information.

Security issues in the region

Our effort to obtain a permit for the Ilisu region seemed to fail at first, when we learned in Ankara that the procedure implies the approval of at least four ministries and the local governor which would take several weeks. Nonetheless we were able to visit the village of Ilisu for one day. The entire area is now under strict military control, most mountain tops have been chopped off and replaced by military surveillance instruments. Several military check-points had to be passed on the way to Ilisu and taking pictures was not allowed. In the village of Karabayir we were all of a sudden surrounded by heavily armed military officers who checked our permit and passports. The villagers in both villages reported that they now live under constant military and government control which creates a constant feeling of anxiety. One farmer explicitly mentioned that he would like to talk to us, but did not want to be seen with us in the village. And even people in Dargecit and the Ilisu region who spoke to us openly declined to give written statements or write letters on their concerns fearing later threats or prosecution by the government.

Even beyond the security zone around Ilisu, the military and gendarma are very present, for example controlling access to villages where access should not be restricted. People who openly criticize the project are under surveillance: e.g. while a villager was in Ankara to apply for his visa to speak at a conference on Ilisu in Berlin, his parents were questioned by security forces. The visa however was never issued for unspecified reasons.

No up-to-date information offices

In Dargecit, the town closest to the construction site, we visited the information office by DSI. The officer was not up-to-date regarding new plans at all and the available information material was from 3 years ago. There were no plans on resettlement sites, no information about the new policy or plans about the project.

We did receive the new brochure on the new resettlement policy in a village near Hasankeyf.

Most people are against the dam

We visited many villages and spoke to the imam or mukhtar and villagers. No one was for the dam. They were furious they had never been properly consulted and could not voice their fears and opinions.

We come to the conclusion that despite some good intentions, the new plans of the Ilisu dam project still disrespect the World Bank standards: They are still a top-down approach, forced upon the affected people and they represent a trial and error approach with a high likelihood of failed implementation due to a severe lack of commitment from the Turkish side. As still no concrete plans are set up for the majority of the affected people, one cannot assume that the resettlement of 40,000 to 60,000 people or more will be successful. The danger of a failure is too high and we have no proof at all it will ever work.

Therefore we urgently demand that the German, Austrian and Swiss governments stop their involvement in the Ilisu project on July 6th.

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