

Event in Parliament(12.11.2012)

Hon'ble Chairman!Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am most grateful to APPG Pakistan and specially to Mudassar for organizing this event,who over the last few months through Unitas has given worldwide publicity to RSPN and greatly indebted to Peter Osborne and Con Coughlin of the Daily Telegraph and Brooks Newmark, MP for visiting the Rural Support Programmes with me in Pakistan last September.

When I look back over 59 years of my working life, the one person whom I met 54 years ago in the lush green countryside of the then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, I owe my later life exploits as a development practitioner to him. He was an old colonial administrator belonging to the steel framework of British India, the Indian Civil Service. In 1955, I had opted to join the successor to that service called the Civil Service of Pakistan, after a couple of years stint ,as a lecturer in a college in Swat, now made famous by Mallala Yousufzai ,whom the Taliban tried to eliminate because of her bravery. My mentor, Akhter Hameed Khan advised me not to reinvent the wheel. If as a field officer, I wished to discharge my duties honestly and sincerely, I should learn from the world experience.He was a voracious reader and spent most of his three years at Cambridge in the library. He specifically pointed out to what happened in 19th Century Europe led by Raiffeisen in Germany and Roshdale Pioneers in England. The secret of reducing poverty and helping the subsistence holders was embedded by these thinkers and practitioners in a theory of development comprising three simple principles, i)unleashing the potential of the poor by organizing them,ii) persuading them to acquire the power of capital through initiation of a savings discipline and iii)acquiring managerial and productive skills to build up a pool of social capital amongst themselves.

Fortified with this theory of development partnership, I got my first opportunity to put it in practice when His Highness the Aga Khan asked me in 1982 to initiate the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral districts of mountainous Pakistan, covering an area of over eighty thousand sq. kms with a population of one million people ,living

in one of the harshest terrain anywhere in the world. AKRSP's objective was firstly to double the income of the people of the area in ten years and secondly attempt to develop a replicable model of rural development for the South Asian region. The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) persuaded the World Bank to assess the achievements of the programme every five years. In their first assessment the World Bank Operations Evaluation Division observed that the first four years of AKRSP are the missed four years of most rural development programmes, including World Bank, being implemented in the world. They specially pointed to AKRSP's process approach instead of the blue print methodology adopted by others and secondly AKRSP's acceptance of the primacy of the views of the rural poor instead of dictating prescriptions for reduction of their poverty prescribed by outsiders. In the second assessment after ten years, the World Bank team concluded that in real terms the income of the people of the area had more than doubled. I was greatly impressed by Lord Black, Executive Director of the Telegraph, when after hearing me, he observed, "you succeeded because you did not do planning". I agreed saying, I allowed the rural poor to plan.

This stamp of success by the World Bank on the theory of development implemented by AKRSP learnt by me from Akhter Hameed Khan, resulted in replication of these principles of development in South Asia, especially in India where in 15 years, over 70 million poor, specially women, have benefitted and Government of India now plans to implement this programme to cover 315 million rural poor. In Pakistan, it has touched the livelihood of over 30 million people.

Besides the core support of AKF and personally of His Highness the Aga Khan, AKRSP got support of no less than 11 donor countries and organisations from all over the world. One of the biggest donors was ODA/DFID. In fact it was all triggered by Oxfam, who came to the Aga Khan in 1983 to seek funds and ended up giving 30,000 pounds to AKRSP, after hearing me what the programme was doing. This attracted the attention of ODA/DFID and with support of well wishers like Sir Nicholas Barrington, UK High Commissioner in Pakistan, Lady Thatcher's government gave five million pounds to AKRSP for Chitral in the 1980s. The Permanent

Secretary Tim Lancaster told me that the grant could only be released once Douglas Hurd had personally certified that the grant will not be diverted to Pakistan's nuclear programme. We were also lucky and honoured to get the support of the British Royalty. Both the Duke of Edinburgh and Princess Diana visited the programme. Prince Charles sent his Assistant Private Secretary Guy Salter to visit the programme and later granted me an audience at St. James Palace. His Royal Highness (HRH) Prince Phillip, as International President of WWF, awarded me the World Conservation Medal in 1994.

In 2001 on the advice of their consultant Steve Jones, DFID financed setting up of a Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) to influence government policy in mainstreaming social mobilization strategy espoused by Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) for poverty reduction. This strategic support helped RSPN/RSPs to reach one third of the country but two third nearly sixty million rural poor still remain to be helped. Despite positive evaluation, commissioned by DFID by a UK-based firm and positive recommendations by the Evaluators for continuing support to RSPN, DFID decided to discontinue support. May be it was due to donor fatigue or change of the old team who knew RSPs well ,replaced by a new team which desired to do new things.I often tease my friend Moazzam Malik of DFID that he is always chasing new brides.

At this juncture, to our good fortune, the British Pakistan Foundation took up RSPN's cause and in Kashif Zafar, we found a great champion who amongst other things also introduced me to the distinguished speakers in this event, besides publicizing the achievements of RSPN in international press and media at his own expense. I have no words to thank him for his generosity. Perhaps, he is a believer in what Tolstoy said "The only certain happiness in life is when you live for others". Kashif has decided to live for the poor of Pakistan.

My achievements are in reality the achievements of the nearly 100 million rural poor of Pakistan and India who accepted the development partnership offered by RSPN and similar

programmes, I have been associated with. How true was Micheal Angelo when he used to brush aside all praise about his sculptors saying David was already in the marble, he only removed the superfluous material. The rural poor men and women RSPN worked with had tremendous potential, all they needed was support to help them unleash this potential. They were capable of moving mountains, as my friends saw in Gilgit. The professionals of the support programmes in the two countries who through their sheer dedication and commitment, made it happen and of course the resources and funds provided by the donors, United Nations and the governments of the two countries.

Finally on a personal note, it was my family which made the biggest sacrifice. For last 34 years, my wife has allowed me to roam around in the villages of Pakistan, India and South Asia, while she took care of the family, including finding a home for them in London. It has taken a heavy toll on her health. She has been ably supported by my eldest daughter Roohi, who though a grandmother still appears to me a teenager and behaves so, much to the chargin of her daughter but to my great delight. My absence was most acutely felt by my youngest daughter Shelley. I do hope she realized I missed her even more. As I do my third daughter Falaknaz, who along with her two children left this world in 1988 in a tragic accident. Our world was shattered but the million people I was working with in the words of the Aga Khan became my family, as my daughter would have wished and true enough they became my greatest source of strength and sustenance. It always reminds me what Keats wrote "I marvel at the capacity of the human heart to suffer misery".

My family never complained. In fact they all feel very proud of the work I am doing. My artist daughter Afshan made my work as a medium for some of her paintings. When they heard of today's event, they insisted on coming here and my daughters Roohi and Shelley, grand daughter Sarah and Shelley's husband Tim Le Breton and his brother Matthew, they are all here along with their friends. I am dreading about the postmortem of my speech when we return home.

It indeed has been a great honour and privilege for me to have been invited to speak in the Grand Committee Room of the Mother of Parliaments.