

**Note for Record**  
**May 31, 2007**

**By: Shoaib Sultan Khan**  
**June 4, 2007**

**Subject: Visit to AKDN's Multi-inputs Earthquake Reconstruction Programme (MERP)**

On his first visit to Pakistan after the 2005 October earthquake, His Highness desired to see me and discussed AKDN's plans of relief and reconstruction work in the earthquake affected areas of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK). I assured him of all possible cooperation and support from National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) which had been operating in AJK for the last many years.

I was, therefore, very pleased to get a chance to visit MERP arranged by Miraj (Project Director) and Yasmeen (Manager Social Mobilization), old AKRSP hands.

The MERP base of operation for Chakhma Union Council, in the adjoining Union Council, at Kathai was a most impressive collection of human and physical resources with excellent most functional housing. It was unbelievable that this was all achieved in such a short time. Looking at the resources provided by AKDN for one Union Council, I teased Miraj that he was in possession of resources on the same scale as General Montgomery was for launching the African assault. I was happy to see judicious use of resources.

Chakhma UC comprises 14 revenue villages with 5,000 plus households with a population of over 25,000. The earthquake resulted in death of 1,730 men, women and children, 1500 injured, 75% of houses destroyed, rest extensively damaged and about 50% of the livestock perished. All schools and health units were destroyed and extensive damage was done to irrigation canals, sources of

drinking water supply, link roads and the main Chinari-Chham Valley road. Livelihood avenues and businesses were destroyed.

In this backdrop with trauma stricken people, I was amazed at the response of the people to social mobilization, resulting in formation of 32 village organizations (VOs) and 43 village women organizations (VWOs) encompassing the entire households of the Union living in revenue villages including 30 sub villages.

We visited village Garthama with 925 households. The entire village was organized in 3 VOs and 2 VWOs who had federated in a cluster. Raja Farid Akhtar, the Cluster President, described the activities undertaken with the help and support of MERP in the presence of over 150 men and women. I was happy to see equal number of women participating in the decision making process.

Raja Farid described the status of the village before the earthquake which had electricity, drinking water supply in every house, sanitation facilities, 10,000 acres of irrigated land, 7 schools, 2 middle schools, 18 mosques and a large wealth of livestock. Everything was destroyed or extensively damaged.

In less than a year, according to Cluster President, MERP had helped them in reconstructing 379 houses according to ERRRA guideline, given a subsidy of Rs. 25,000 where needed, constructed 3 model houses and helped 53 vulnerable families to construct their houses to get on their feet. 3 water supply schemes have been initiated and two completed. Irrigation canal which benefits all the VOs and affects 80% households has been reconstructed with 1/3 work completed.

In agriculture, help has been given by MERP in provision of seed, inputs and tractors which enabled them to harvest a good wheat crop. Most of the

households have also taken up vegetable cultivation. Nurseries have also been established for plants.

In education, teachers have been provided training and primary schools in shelters have started functioning including a centre for 3-5 years old children.

In health, medical camps were held and hygiene kits provided and toilet use imparted.

In human resource development (HRD), community leaders management, project construction, housing reconstruction, health and hygiene, vocational training, livestock and poultry trainings have been imparted.

The First Micro Finance Bank has also opened a branch and extended loans to 80 loanees through ten groups.

One of the VWO representatives, Naheed Irfan also spoke and praised MERP's earthquake efforts.

Abdul Waheed, Vice President of his VO spoke of the ways of God when He sends adversity, He also sends support. In our case, it was AKDN. He recited a most moving poem composed by him in praise of MERP.

Nasrullah Abbasi made an impassioned appeal for AKDN to stay for ten years like AKRSP.

Ali Asghar Kazmi made an appeal for help in reconstruction of the destroyed mosques.

There was also a proposal for material and technical support in construction of shelters for livestock.

I was happy to hear one of the villagers exhorting his co-villagers to give equal rights to women and take care of their needs on priority basis without which real development cannot happen.

A village which had gone through such trauma, showed remarkable resilience and determination. They were all praise for His Highness (HH) for sending MERP with whose support they were confident they will become self sufficient, now that they had got united and organized in VOs and VWOs. This was indeed a most remarkable achievement of Miraj and his team in such a short time in circumstances most difficult for social mobilization.

The problems identified by the Cluster related to (i) provision of housing plots for those whose land sites have been washed away; (ii) compensation money for reconstruction by ERRA and (iii) highhandedness and unreasonable attitude of lower ERRA staff in enforcing ERRA reconstruction guidelines.

On way back, we stopped at Muzaffarabad and called on the Chief Secretary Mr. Javed Majid who promised to look into these complaints and asked Miraj to provide him with a list of the specific cases village wise to enable him to take immediate action.

MERP has indeed won the hearts of everyone that I met and they made fervent appeals to me to convey their request to His Highness, not to phase out MERP in 2009.

I am grateful to Al-Nashir for making the visit possible and sending Ujjala from AKF to accompany us and was glad to see one of the old pilots Bokhari, who all contributed so much to the success of AKRSP and was sad to learn that only one of the two helicopters was operational due to shortage of pilots. I remembered His Highness' concern on his first visit to AKRSP Gilgit about lack

of use of helicopter. His Highness said he was losing money if the machine was sitting idle on the tarmac. No one can match His Highness' foresight and wisdom. In the beginning everyone, including myself, had felt uncomfortable about the provision of helicopter for a rural development programme. HH even described it as "helicopter in his bonnet" in the opinion of some people. In my twelve years stay with AKRSP, I realized how right His Highness was.