

Note for Record.

By: Shoaib Sultan Khan
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Subject: **International Conference on Community-Driven
Development (CDD) at Beijing**

While in London, I received an email from General Manager, Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) Tom Kessinger if I would be available to participate in the International Conference on CDD at Beijing from October 15 to 19 including a field visit, being organized by the Government of China (GoC) in collaboration with the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Canadian International Development Agency (CID). My predicament was that at Tom's behest, the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) located in London had already taken my consent to make a presentation to their graduates at Dhaka on October 16. To make matters still more complicated, the Oxford University Press (OUP) had arranged for my Book Launch at Islamabad on October 14 where Mr. Shaukat Tareen and Mr. Sartaj Aziz had accepted to be the Chief Guest and Guest of Honour respectively and Ghazi Salahuddin of the NEWS and Dr. Amjad Saqib had consented to review the book. I toyed with the idea of going to Dhaka on October 15, making the presentation the following day and the next day flying off from Dhaka to Beijing, to be in time for opening session of the Conference on October 18 in which I had to give a keynote speech. I had decided to miss the field visit which GoC had organized much to my regret. However, when I was told that the flight connections from Dhaka to Beijing on October 17 would involve 16 hours duration, I asked Tom to decide where he would like me to go. He opted for CDD and asked me to put all the blame on him when conveying my regrets to IIS.

The direct flight to Beijing by PIA from Islamabad was a blessing and a warm welcome at the airport by officials of the State Council's Leading Group on Poverty Alleviation and Development (LGOP) was most comforting after a night flight in economy class, as the World Bank rules in the wake of global recession forbid business class luxury.

It being Friday, I had agreed to CIDA Development Counsellor Tarik Khan's invitation to make a presentation at the Canadian Embassy for a select gathering prior to the Conference despite my night flight. It was Tarik Khan who was in contact with Tom regarding my participation in the Conference. Prior to the presentation, I was happy to call on the Canadian Ambassador His Excellency Mr. David Mulroney and to renew my contacts with CIDA which had been in a limbo

since my departure in 1994 from Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP). CIDA was not only the first donor to support AKRSP it had also supported my work in Sri Lanka. Thus I had an over 30 years association with CIDA including many officials who were extremely sympathetic and supportive of the development approach I was pursuing. Even Catley-Carlson who became President of CIDA knew me when she was in UNICEF and later on as member of the steering committee of the Global Water Partnership (GWP) I again came in contact with her when she took over as Chairperson of the GWP. The Ambassador was most supportive of CDD and in his inaugural speech at the Conference, the next day he specially mentioned the contribution of AKRSP to the development of the concept of CDD.

The presentation at the Embassy was well attended despite the eve of weekend and I had an invigorating session with the participants belonging to different agencies besides CIDA professionals.

As Saturday was free, I took a guided tour which took me to Ming Tombs and the Great Wall. I wanted to make an emotional visit to the Great Wall where my daughter Falaknaz had gone over twenty one years ago and I had a photograph of her sitting in the arch window of one of the towers of the Great Wall. She is no

more in this world. This was my first visit to Beijing. It is a shimmering brand new city dotted with high rise block of all kinds of shapes and designs. The only eyesore I saw was a tower block which had been destroyed by fire. Next to it another more spectacular tower had risen like sphinx from fire. The transformation in China is incredible not only in city planning but also in the dress code and mannerisms of the people. The urban areas are completely westernized in dress code



but the politeness of the people has not been affected at all. Though language is the biggest barrier for foreigners. Even in the hotel for foreigners only a few of the staff spoke English. The Ming Tombs over six hundred years old were impressive and the great thing was that the government and the people of China are extremely proud of their heritage. They have preserved and made these monuments highly attractive to the tourists. It was the Great Wall which took me by complete surprise. It seemed the whole of China had descended on the Great Wall. The miles and miles of line of cars and coaches on the road and the crowd on the Wall seemed as if

we were walking through Anarkali Bazar or Oxford Street. The local tourism in China is highly developed.

The International Conference on CDD had 60 foreign delegates from all corners of the world and nearly 100 local participants. As many as 25 presentations were made on the experience of CDD throughout the world. The documentation which contained these presentations with a Chinese translation is perhaps the best compendium of the world experience of Social Mobilisation. It is all on website www.cdd.org.cn However, I could not resist picking up a few hard copies of this compendium. All the speakers respected the time limit and the whole programme was organized most smoothly. The logistics, hotel accommodation, the food, everything was superb. The Chinese are just amazing in organization and management. There were very polite and courteous girls who guided the participants from the lifts to the Conference Hall. You had to ask for nothing, everything was taken care of. You hardly felt inconvenienced due to lack of understanding of the language.

There was such a rich array of experiences of CDD described that the Conference was like an intellectual feast. There was excellent blend of academics, experts, administrators and practitioners. I was happy at the response my presentation got. Many participants including from the World Bank and ADB appreciated the presentation. I was pleased Tom say that he had heard me many times but I always come up with some new dimensions keeping the occasion in view. The delegate from Ghana wanted me to come to his country to make a similar presentation to the politicians and policymakers. The delegate from Ethiopia spoke in similar terms. The delegate from Morocco called me “Ustad Shoab” and I was reminded of Ustad Khaleel of Tajikistan. Tarik had asked me to bring a few copies of my book. These went like hot cakes. Everyone wanted to pay as I had announced that Tarik had agreed to be my agent for the book in China. I had to promise quite a few to send them the books. Tarik had already bought one by ordering it. Due to floods in Andhra Pradesh, Rajsekhar (Vijay’s deputy) could not come to present his paper on SERP. Tarik asked me to present it which I did but after clarification that I did not offer to come to the podium and speak again, it was a deal which Tarik did with me if I stand in place of Rajsekhar, he would agree to be my agent for the book. I was happy that I did not let down Tarik and Tom, both of whom were responsible for my participation in the Conference.

I came away from the Conference with a tremendous feeling of elation and confidence. In this Conference literally the whole world was represented who are engaged in poverty reduction programmes and there was complete unanimity on the critical role social mobilisation, which we have been advocating for the last twenty five years through AKRSP, SERP and RSPs, plays in poverty reduction.

On arrival at Islamabad, I found an email awaiting me from Dr. Hans P. Binswanger, a World Bank Lead Specialist on Poverty Reduction with 35 years experience in Brazil, Mexico and Latin America saying:

“It was a delight to get to know you during the Conference in China, I thought I knew a lot about CDD, but you still taught a number of lessons, especially on mobilisation. Thank you for giving me your book that will complete my lessons”

I was greatly touched by Hans’ words which are a true reflection of his greatness, not so much my expertise.



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