

NOTE FOR RECORD

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Subject: VISIT TO LSOs: SRSP ABBOTABAD/MANSEHRA REGIONS

Abbottabad Region of Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) has minimal staff and has been heavily dependent on community activists for social mobilisation. This has indeed proved a blessing in disguise. In my last visit a year ago to Haripur, I had projected that 44 Union Councils of the district endowed with LSO structure, would cost SRSP no more than seven million rupees a year.

On the invitation of Chairperson of SRSP alongwith Deputy General Manager SRSP Ikramullah Jan and the newly inducted RGM Abbottabad Region Zubair, we visited Union Council Chamad to meet LSO Green Valley of the UC, where community resource persons (CRPs) and Executive Body members of ten newly formed LSOs of Abbottabad and Haripur districts greeted us. I was delighted to see after a long time Shah Nawaz Khan of Bajeda. He was the one whose presentations on field visits by the then Finance Minister later Prime Minister and the Chairman and CEO Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) resulted in substantial grants to SRSP, when it was near collapse, and the MDTF grant for social mobilisation to all the RSPs. I was happy that Shah Nawaz was active again.

The LSO representatives clearly articulated the main objectives of LSOs of 80% participation of households with 100% coverage of the bottom poor alongwith increased participation of women to achieve productive and gainful employment leading to poverty reduction.

In the backdrop of the abovementioned objectives each LSO described their progress since its formation in February 2010. In a short period of less than six months, the LSOs had achieved 100% participation of the bottom three bands of the poverty score card (PSC) and near 50%

membership of women in COs and VOs. Some LSOs had undertaken sensitization about participation of women, religious coordination, political cooperation and the importance of LSO as an organization of the poor instead for the poor. Emphasis was also given to gender training and girls education. Some lauded the concept of LSO as a long term vision of a participatory structure.

The General Body of LSOs gave representation of all participating VOs and the criteria for election to Executive Body was the basis of performance, namely role model VO representative. There is conscious effort to encourage women to fully participate and to dissuade men from dominating discussion and decision making. In Hattar UC, the women through the LSO got land classification changed.

We could not but feel most impressed and highly appreciative of the RGM Zubair's achievement in fostering ten LSOs but more so of their understanding the vision of the approach.

I had desired to visit LSO of UC Garhi Phulgran which I had visited last year. Chairman Abbasi, Vice Chairperson Saima and General Secretary Gul Nawaz Khan greeted us and gave a presentation on the progress since October 2009. The LSO has not only propagated the core objectives, it has formed a number of committees entrusting each with a specific function. The LSO undertook issuance of 353 NICs to women, voter registration and training of LSO members from Kohistan and the earnings they put in LSO savings. They have also training modules for CIF, CRP, SMT and preparation of annual work plan. Their monitoring of COs in terms of meetings, members attendance, savings and member participation in decision making has also being actively done.

Some outsiders claimed that the General Body of the LSO did not meet for the last three years and no elections were held. To put a stop to this kind of criticism and propaganda, now that the LSO has been registered under Section 42 of the company's ordinance, which requires that within 18 months of the formation of the company, a meeting of the General

Body should be convened to elect directors. Since the LSO as under Section 42 company has been sponsored by 30 members representing 15 VOs, it would be desirable to hold a meeting of the AGM as stipulated under law and directors elected,, who in turn can elect the office bearers in the first meeting of the Board. This will put a stop to all kinds of criticism and propaganda against the office bearers of the LSO.

We reached Sum Ellahi Mang UC in Siran Valley of the SRSP Mansehra Region, accompanied with RGM Shakeel and were greeted by a large number of the representatives of Siran Valley Development Organization (SVDO) LSO of the UC alongwith LSOs of Kunnar, Karwai Bana, Garhi Habibullah and Gammat.

UC Sum Ellahi Mang had suffered 22 deaths and 140 injured with 2030 houses fully destroyed and 666 partially. The resilience of the people was amazing. There were hardly any physical signs of the earthquake visible and the spirit of the people assembled reflected their determination and potential to overcome the greatest of hardships. We were welcomed warmly by the Chairman SVDO Syed Abdullah Shah and I was invited to administer oath to the recently elected Executive Committee of the LSO which comprises 19 VOs and 27 WOs and 66 MCOs. The Executive of 11 also included 2 women who elected President and Secretary besides the Chairman as Patron who is also Vice Chairman of the UC. Of the 3236 households, 67% have been organized with a savings of Rs. 389,000. The LSO has undertaken poverty score card.

Muhammad Javed Secretary of the LSO gave a description of the activities since its formation in March 2010. This was the first LSO of Mansehra Region which has now been followed by formation of 9 other LSOs. The LSO had won two best activists award for the earthquake rehabilitation work from the PPAF/World Bank. The LSO has forged linkages for CIF through SRSP and with Baitul Maal. The LSO plans solution of UC level issues, poverty reduction by inclusion of the poor, revival of WOs, MCOs through CRPs, increased women participation and

record keeping, vocational training through linkages besides development projects.

Ali Asghar of Rural Development Organization LSO of UC Kunnar informed that 64% of the 5182 households have been organized in 17 VOs comprising 89 community organizations including 25 WOs. The General Body of the LSO includes two representatives from each VO.

Irshad of Al-Khidmat Support Organization of UC Karwai comprises 12 VDOs and has 71% of the households organized with a General Body of 30 members. 2005 houses were destroyed in the UC.

Shahid Abdullah described the activities of his LSO named RAAHAT with 25 VOs including a female. The LSO has forged linkages with UNDP, Relief International, Barani Project and accessed a water management project of 2 million rupees. They also organized a demonstration plot of seed potato.

Muhammad Ashraf Qureshi of UC from Balakot area described formation of a cluster under Sungi in 2003 now converted in an LSO with 70% organized households comprising 107 COs including 32 WOs federated in 10 VOs. The LSO is running two vocational training centres of women.

Muhammad Shabbir of KDAF ;from Balakot, Azam Khan from LSO Sarnali and Abid Shah who had organized the disabled also spoke describing their activities. The vote of thanks was given by Fida (an invalid himself) judged as the best activist.

It was a most heartwarming and uplifting experience for me. Shakeel deserves all praise for fostering such dynamic LSOs in a short period. He has proved himself to be fully conversant with the vision of LSOs. Given the opportunity I am confident Shakeel would succeed in fostering LSOs in the entire Region. I do hope Masood will keep this in mind.

Another trail blazing Shakeel has done is the fostering of Balakot Women LSO whose office bearers came to meet us at the Regional Office in Mansehra. UC Balakot with 3224 households has 55 WOs comprising 2234 women from 7 VOs. The General Body comprises 28 members who have elected 7 member Executive Committee. One of the executive members Qudsia performs the functions of monitoring VOs. She gave an impressive account of her work. For Balakot women to rising from the debris of the earthquake is worthy of the highest praise and support.

Our final engagement was meeting Farmers Enterprise Groups (FEG) fostered under aegis of the Agribusiness Support Group (ASF) by their LSO called Bedar Organisation. The vision of the organisation is encouraging small enterprise. It has a General Body with 160 members who elected an Executive of 7. Bedar has given training to 300 in business planning, accessed 4.5 million rupees for 27 FEG from ASG. Has organized exposure visits resulting in FEG linkages with Metro and Lahore Sabzi Mandi. Bedar has also explored off season vegetable market. Some case studies were presented like the tomato grown FEG of Chattar Plain who made a profit of Rs. 200,000 from ten kanals. Muhammad Dedar who now employees ten persons on his nursery whose FEG made Rs. 445,000 with ASF assistance of Rs. 125,000 on an 8 kanal area. A Peas Group has also been formed so also a culiflowers group ECI is the support organization for Bedar and is currently engaged in developing an approach to replicate FEGs to scale.

The LSOs of Abbottabad and Mansehra Regions of SRSP clearly brought out the potential of LSOs in the Regions if given right kind of guidance. I was most impressed and happy to see how Zubair and Shakeel have imparted the vision of LSOs to the activists, CRPs and office bearers of LSOs. Chairperson SRSP, Masood and Ikram should feel happy and satisfied at the excellent progress made in the Regions at fostering LSOs.