

## NOTE FOR RECORD

July 3-5, 2010

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Gilgit, July 5, 2010

**Subject: ATTABAD TRAGEDY**

Having spent twelve years in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral while implementing the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) I have developed an empathy with the people of the area. My heart, therefore, went out to the people of Attabad, when I read on the internet the catastrophe that had to befallen them. On return to Pakistan I was yearning to commiserate with the people of Attabad in their grief and trauma. I soon found out that the land slide and flooding had not only affected Attabad but also directly affected Sarrat, Ayeenabad-Shishkat, Gulmit, Lower Ghulkin, Hussaini and even far off Passu encompassing 381 houses including 147 houses of Attabad and Sarrat. In fact all the 19 deaths occurred in Attabad Payeen.

Directly around 1000 households, 10,000 individuals are affected. Indirectly the submerging of KKH had broken link between Upper Hunza (whole of Gojal Tehsil comprising 25,211 population) and Central Hunza. The China trade has come to a standstill affecting direct and indirect employment of 6000 individuals. 7 school buildings, 130 hotels, shops and businesses, 3 community centers are all under water. Millions of rupees worth of potato cash crop on 400 ha has submerged and what has not submerged there are no buyers for lack of means of transportation. The fruit and forest trees planted and nurtured over last 27 years have been lost in the affected area . In the small village of Ayeenabad alone 39,000 fruit trees are submerged.

The economy of the area has been shattered. In fact the impact has been felt even down stream. When I visited an old employee of AKRSP Tawallud Shah's orchard at Gilgit Sultanabad found tons of apples lying on the ground rotting. No buyers from down country come to Gilgit to buy fruits fearing the much dreaded bursting of the Attabad landslide.

In this tragic and heart wrenching scenario I was expecting the AKF helicopters to be full time engaged in helping the unfortunate affectees of the Attabad landslide. I was shocked to see no sign of them when I made a request to take me on their next sortie to the area. Fortunately, the PIA flights operated and I reached Gilgit. The KKH from Raikot to beyond Hunza (over 600 km) has been dug up by the Chinese and instead of 12 hours now it takes 20 hours by jeep from Islamabad to Gilgit. From Gilgit to Hunza which used to take no more than

one and half hour took me four hours. The main challenge was how to get to Gulmit. In between was the lake with a depth of 136 feet at Gulmit to 376 feet at Sarrat. There were small country boats taking one to one a half hour from the landslide to Gulmit. The AKRSP RPM Muzaffaruddin and Dr. Shahida Jaffrey who had joined me at Karimabad Hunza debated different options. Muzaffar tried to frighten us by explaining the hazards of the boat journey. Shahida and I took solace in Ghalib's couplet "Why did not I drown to escape notoriety after death: Neither there would have been ever a funeral nor a grave anywhere." Fortunately Col. Niaz of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) took pity on us and at Muzaffar's request gave us a lift both ways in the NDMA helicopter. On each sortie it can hardly take a few people and the affectees are crying for AKF assistance. I was reminded of His Highness's first visit to Gilgit in May 1983 when he expressed his great concern at the helicopter not being used in Northern Areas and sitting in Islamabad. He vehemently urged the use of the machine as he was losing money if it sits on the ground. I think this directive of His Highness needs to be reiterated to the people managing the Helicopter wing of AKF. The entire conversation of HH relating to the helicopter use is included in my book. I would earnestly urge the AKDN Pakistan to read it. The affectees of Attabad landslide are in dire need of the helicopter services.

At a Altit School, to which Dr. Shahida Jaffrey had made substantial donations, the affectees of Attabad-Sarrat living under canvas pitched on the playground, met us. I could not control my emotions and shamelessly burst into tears. I was reminded of 1983 when I first went to Attabad and Sarrat. AKRSP had helped the Attabad Village Organisation (VO) to build a link road to KKH. The road was so steep that I got down from the jeep and walked upto Attabad finding a most enchanting village nestling like an eagle's nest on top. At Sarrat down below the VO Sarrat had been helped by AKRSP to construct one of the first micro-hydel projects. The VO members with great pride showed me by starting it during daylight. Their happiness and joy was fathomless.

Today I found them along with women cooped up feeling like prisoners. Their paradise was lost. Their hearth and houses, their land with crops and orchards, their livestock, everything was gone. They were like fish out of water. On top of that to add insult to injury, a day earlier authorities had told them after a six months wait during which all kinds of promises were made that they would be given a princely amount of Rupees six lacs each family, as this was much more than what was given as compensation to earthquake affectees or is given to families in Punjab and other parts of Pakistan. The people were stunned and deep in grief. How could they be compared to affectees who at least did not lose their land and had some place to build their shelter and to rebuild their lives by re-ploughing their lands. The cost of a kanal of land in the area would be many times the amount they are being given as compensation. The women were totally

lost. For months they were sitting idle doing nothing. They were yearning to get back to the land to tend the crops and the livestock. They were frustrated and disheartened to the extent that they were threatening to refuse to accept the compensation being offered and to pitch themselves in tents opposite Attabad-Sarrat disappeared site and to suffer whatever God had destined for them. I could only promise them to take their voice and concern to the highest quarter I have access to. The only solace I could offer was the shelter Boxes donated by Rotary International at the request of Dr. Rashid Bajwa CEO NRSP. The Pakistan Branch had arranged through their London Branch shipment by air of 1000 shelter boxes costing US\$ 1000 each.

The helicopter flew over Attabad and Sarrat which had disappeared leaving traces of a massive landslide. Next to Sarrat along the river used to be the Lord Kitchener's wedding cake type memorial commemorating his visit to the silk route in 1903 on the footsteps of Lord Curzon. There was no sign of it. The blue azure lake stretching below us had devoured the whole of Ayeenabad with a few tree tops visible and inundated the entire Shishkat Payeen and some portion of Bala. We landed at Gulmit School. I was heartened to see KKH reemerging from the lake beyond Shishkat Bridge which was no where visible - one of the longest bridges on KKH. Strangely enough in 1974 when Tariq Siddiqi and I had come on sojourn of the area the first friendship bridge built on KKH at Shishkat had also been devoured by the avalanche and we crossed the river on the temporary boat bridge. However, my joy was short lived. The little car which picked us up at the helipad soon came to a stop at the Silk route Hotel, where I had many a time stayed and had broken journey for lunches and tea. Water had swallowed the dining hall and beyond the hotel the KKH had again disappeared devouring hundreds of houses, hotel and shops even Gooz Women Organisation's Orchard. My two friends Mutabiat Shah and Qurban Jan also lost their houses. I could not believe my eyes. I had seen these areas transformed from 1983. The people had worked so hard and achieved so much and all was lost in not time.

I was greatly touched by the assembly of over 100 men and women representing LSOs Gulmit, Gojal and Chapurson. The last two had come by boat. Secretary Ismaili Regional Council Tikka Khan had also accompanied us. The LSO representatives briefly recounted their achievements through AKRSP and narrated the challenges facing them in the wake of the land slide:

- Severe shock to the agro-based economy
- Loss of tourism
- Loss of trade
- Loss of access to pastures
- Loss of forest and fruit trees
- Disruption of telecommunication

- Shortages of fuel
- Loss of cultivable land
- Adverse affect on education of boys and girls especially girls
- Disruption of communications
- To quote a few.

They demanded speedy release of water from the lake saving them from further losses.

However, despite the catastrophe and the trauma their spirits were high and they were confident of turning their adversity into an opportunity.

On the return flight by helicopter from Gulmit, Deputy Commissioner Hunza-Nagar Mr. Zafar Waqar Taj also joined us. I beseeched him to impress upon the authorities the special circumstances of the situation and not to compare the plight of the affectees with the earthquake or down-country affectees. I was impressed by the NDMA operations, who have set up a helicopter operation base at the Aliabad Boys High School and four Army captains were supervising the operations living twenty-four hours in the school building.

At Gilgit I was informed by GM AKRSP Mr. Izhar Hunzai that Chief Secretary Babar Yaqoob Fateh Muhammad had reassured him of mobilizing additional funds over and above the federal grant from local and donor resources. Mr. Nawaz Sharif had pledged Rs. 100 million. NDMA, I was told by DC Hunza, has already made an appeal for international aid. I would request Mr. Tom Kessinger, GM AKF Geneva to use his good offices to mobilize donor support for the unfortunate affectees of the Attabad landslide and flooding. The affectees of Attabad-Sarrat have been displaced since January 4, 2010, it is high time that they should be informed in specific terms, what is proposed to rehabilitate them.