

Note for Record

By: **Shoaib Sultan Khan**
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Subject: **Historic Day in the Progress of Rural Support Programmes (RSPs)**

I have always lamented lack of political commitment to poverty reduction through Social Mobilisation in Pakistan compared to India which also gets reflected in Donor attitude towards RSPs and Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN). When I recall progress of AKRSP since December 1982 and remember how Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) came to support Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) in the very beginning and have stayed with it till now, DFID funded the Chitral Region in AKRSP, Netherlands picked up the Baltistan Region and the GTZ (German Development Agency) initiated the Astore Sub-division in Diamer district. NORAD, IUCN, Ford Foundation, Konard Adenauer Foundation, OXFAM and many others helped AKRSP to achieve its objective of doubling the income of the million of people living in Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral, in real terms within ten years, according to the second evaluation by the World Bank.

In 1992, the President of Philippines conferred the Magsaysay Award on me which attracted the attention of the then Prime Minister (Mr. Nawaz Sharif) and as desired by him, with full support of the Finance Minister (Mr. Sartaj Aziz), a proposal for countrywide replication of AKRSP was approved and National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) was entrusted the task with the first instalment of Rs. 500 million and the promise of equivalent six monthly instalments for next 7 to 10 years. The government was removed even before the second instalment became due and my dream was shattered. The Board of NRSP had converted the first instalment into an endowment and initiated social mobilisation activities in 8 districts of the country with the interest income generated on the endowment. Thus NRSP survived.

In Andhra Pradesh, the UNDP financed South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) under my stewardship as Senior Adviser, adapted the lessons learnt at AKRSP and demonstrated the efficacy of the conceptual package, namely, poverty reduction through Social Mobilisation. Meiko Nishimizo, the Vice President of the World Bank after a visit to Andhra, on my invitation, told the Andhra government that she had seen “UNDP’s Miracle” and if the State Government requested, the Bank would be willing to support the replication of SAPAP Statewide. By 2000, when UNDP SAPAP came to an end, the World Bank stepped in through creation of a new entity Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) staffed by all SAPAP professionals especially the CEO K. Raju. When SERP organized ten million rural households by 2008, the Union Government took note of what was happening in Andhra Pradesh and by 2011, the Indian Planning Commission approved launch of a countrywide programme called National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and allocated US\$ 5.1 billion in the 12th Five Year Plan. The World Bank supported them with US\$ one billion. The second CEO of SERP Vijay Kumar was made Director of NRLM by the Indian Ministry of Rural Development.

In Pakistan, after 1992, the support from government to the concept of Social Mobilisation for Poverty Reduction came in disjointed, ad hoc and sectoral manner and so also from the Donors, although the first replication of AKRSP was initiated by USAID in the then NWFP in 1989 with a grant of US\$ 5 million which after the establishment of Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) dried up in less than two years because of Pressler Amendment. In 1995, Chairman WAPDA Shamsul Mulk approached me to set up an AKRSP type Project NGO for Ghazi Brtotha Hydropower Project to support the affectees. In 1998, the then Chief Minister Mr. Shahbaz Sharif sent me a message in Kathmandu, which was my headquarters for SAPAP, to meet him on my next visit to Pakistan and the meeting resulted in setting up of the Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP). But the holistic package of development interventions envisaged under AKRSP’s

social mobilisation strategy could never be implemented by PRSP because of Punjab Government's lack of interest in PRSP after Mr. Shahbaz Sharif left the Province in less than two years of PRSP existence. The only money PRSP was left with was the endowment of Rs. 500 million, the Chief Minister had given at the start up.

In October 2013, I got another opportunity to put the case of Social Mobilisation for Poverty Reduction by PRSP before the Chief Minister Mr. Shahbaz Sharif. I was thrilled by his response and he promised action within a week, after he had consulted a few people. Minutes of the meeting, to my great pleasure, was also sent to me.

I was summoned to a meeting by the Chairman, Planning & Development (P&D) after a month and I again presented the proposal what the Chief Minister had got so excited about. In P&D a few questions were asked but I came away with the impression that they seemed as convinced of the proposal as the Chief Minister. In fact the Deputy Secretary to CM, who recorded minutes of my meeting with CM, also came to attend the meeting at the P&D and seemed to carry the same impression. However, P&D had another internal meeting a few days later because the DS to CM requested for finalization of P&D recommendations, before I left the country a fortnight later for a few weeks, so that the proposal could be put before the Provincial Cabinet, as desired by CM for a decision, before I went abroad.

The minutes of the P&D internal meeting which was attended by Dr. Rashid Bajwa, stated that the number of households which will receive support, according to the proposal I had submitted to CM, is only 0.3% of the population of Union Council. Despite Rashid's protest and clarification that the programme proposal aims at supporting 100% households in bottom poverty bands according to poverty score card, which are 40% of the total number of households in a Union Council and also indirectly support to improve their

livelihood of another 30% of the households, thus improving the standard of living of over 70% of the households in a UC. It baffles me how P&D came to the figure of 0.3%.

Anyway that was it. I have not heard from CM's office again except once I accidentally met the CM and I reminded him of his promise of the meeting to approve the proposal I had submitted to him. He assured me the meeting will be held. I am great optimist and I am confident someday, the CM would fulfill his promise.

In 2003 out of the blue, I received a notification from the Government of Sindh, appointing me as Chairman of the newly set up Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) with an endowment of Rs. 500 million, approved by Finance Minister Hafeez Shaikh and the Governor Mohammad Mian Soomro. In 2008, I made a presentation of the proposal envisaging a Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UBPRP) before the Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah. He heard me patiently and observed "you seem to have the prescription for poverty reduction". I submitted Chief Minister you have the resources to implement it. I was fully supported by the Chief Secretary Fazlur Rahman. The Additional Chief Secretaries Khero and Memon and Finance Secretary Wajid fully supported the proposal for districts of Shikarpur and Khandkot-Kashmore. Although the funding given was only for three years, the results achieved, according to Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) whom SRSO had engaged to do process monitoring from the time of initiation of UCBPRP in 2009 and who carried out an Impact Study in 2012, the key findings suggested that 76.38% beneficiaries came out of the poverty bands and moved to higher categories and 55% came out of poverty bands and moved to non-poor category.

The UCBPRP was waiting for a "Messiah" to resurrect it after its first phase of three years was over in the province of Sindh. The Messiah came in the shape of Berend de Groot, the Development Counsellor of European Union. After a 7-day

sojourn in the Coastal, Desert and Plains of upper Sindh looking at the work done by NRSP. Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP) and SRSO, Berend demanded a meeting with Shandana (CEO RSPN) and myself. We were free only on a Saturday afternoon that week. It was no problem for Berend, if it was a holiday. He drove to RSPN office and met us and expressed his desire to do a rural development programme in Sindh. He fully endorsed the UCBPRP proposal and expressed his plan to visit Additional Chief Secretary (Development) but he did not know him. The previous one whom he had met had fully supported his suggestion to undertake rural development programme through RSPs. Berend accepted my offer to arrange his meetings with Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), the Chief Secretary and possibly with the Chief Minister on coming Friday.

The meeting with ACS took a most positive turn when the Chief Secretary Saleem Sajjad also appeared at the meeting, apologizing the time he had given to us was hijacked by the CM for a meeting. The ACS and CS both supported and gratefully accepted Berend's offer of Rs. Ten billion in the next five years to undertake UCBPRP in one third districts of the Province through NRSP, TRDP and SRSO.

In the meeting with the Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah which was joined by the ACS Waseem and also the Finance Secretary Rajput besides Senator Taj Haider and Principal Secretary to CM Rai Sikandar. I was supported by NRSP/SRSO Directors Fazlullah Qureshi and Shereen Narejo and Rashid Bajwa.

I reminded the Chief Minister of our meeting in 2008, his observations and the SDPI Impact Assessment conclusions. The Sindh Province wise UCBPRP is projected to cost a little over Rs. 27 billion covering all the 921 UCs in the districts with the offer of ten billion by EU, the Provincial Government need to put up Rs. 17 billion in next five years which is 1.57% of the Annual Development

Plan of Sindh Government for the next five years. I emphasized that the EU money will only come if the Provincial Government puts in its share. I thanked the CM for his support of Social Mobilisation for Poverty Reduction. Despite achievements in Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral and in India, in Pakistan, there has not been political commitment to the strategy. The CM is the only politician who supported the holistic social mobilization districtwide. Other in the words of Akhter Hameed Khan, only support the dome not the foundation or the walls to support the structure. The support in Pakistan has been sectoral and ad hoc. It is for this reason that I am confident the CM with EU support would enable RSPs to demonstrate like Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral, how this can be done province wide in Pakistan.

Berend smilingly observed that EU would very much like Provincial Government sharing and participating in implementing Province-wide UCBPRP, but the EU grant of Rs. Ten billion has no strings attached. Berend recounted how in his sojourn in Sindh, he detected an amazing unanimity of the understanding of the social mobilisation strategy amongst all he met from RSPs and he saw its impact on the rural people especially the women. Once organized, how these institutions of the people CO/VO/LSO have forged linkages and have been helped in improving social sector interventions. He specially mentioned the clustering of schools approach and many other such interventions that he saw in the field in coastal, desert and plains of the Province.

The Chief Minister welcomed EU's generous offer and commended the work of the RSPs in the Province and mentioned about competing demands from different sectors but promised to match as far as possible EU's grant and turned to the ACS and the Finance Secretary. I butted in that the CS and ACS in our meeting in the morning have promised to support if the CM approved. I am grateful to ACS Waseem that he did not contradict me. The ball landed in Finance Secretary Rajput's court. He explained how the Provincial Government is planning to support another 6 districts under UCBPRP and that he has already

funding for maintenance of the existing UCBPRP districts and he would look at the possibilities of accommodating the Province-wide UCBPRP of which one third is already taken up by EU grant.

As a final word, I submitted to CM that I completed 60 years of my working life last July and next July I will be 83 years old. I have no other ambition in life except to benefit with my experience, which I attained from Akhter Hameed Khan over 40 years, to help the poor of my country to come out of the swamp of poverty.

Senator Taj Haider and Rai Sikandar appeared very sympathetic to my plea, so did Waseem and Rajput. Berend and I thanked the CM for his time and took leave. I am grateful to Nafisa Shah, Riaz Memon, Nazar Memon and Shandana for getting the appointment with CM and to Naheed Shah for speaking to ACS. I am most grateful to CS whom I called and he so willingly came to meet us even when he had to inconvenience himself to come to the office of the ACS from his camp office on Club Road.

The RSPN has no words to thank Berend and Imran Ashraf, who accompanied him, in advocating the strategy of Social Mobilisation for Poverty Reduction with such commitment and conviction.