

PAKISTAN

Strategy Support Program



SOCIAL MOBILIZATION: A KEY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - SOUTH ASIA EXPERIENCE

ADDRESS BY SHOAB SULTAN KHAN, AT IFPRI WASHINGTON ON MAY 6, 2014

When I look back on over 60 years of my working life in Government, United Nations, Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and Rural Support Programmes (RSPs), my greatest successes and satisfaction were when I succeeded in forging genuine and meaningful partnerships with communities. Over fifty years ago my mentor Akhter Hameed Khan, about whom Nobel laureate Prof. Yunus wrote: "It is not enough to say that he was a great man. He was one of the great human beings of the past century. He was so much ahead of everybody else that he was seen more as a "misfit" than appreciated for his greatness. We have a lot to discover and a whole lot to learn from him"

Akhter Hameed Khan gave me my first lessons in forging partnerships with communities. But it is only during the last 35 years that I got the opportunity, thanks to His Highness the Aga Khan, to fully and exclusively devote myself interacting with the communities in Pakistan, It was United Nations Development Program (UNDP) which brought me in contact with the communities in Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Over this period I have personally held dialogues with over 5,000 communities and this evening I intend to share this experience with you.

I still vividly remember the bitterly cold December in 1982 when I drove 600 kilometers from Islamabad to Gilgit on a borrowed jeep. This was the beginning of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) and forging of partnerships over the next twelve years with a million people in one of the most inhospitable and harshest terrain anywhere in the world.



First Dialogue – Sherqilla, Gilgit (Pakistan) - 1982
Shoaib Sultan Khan –April 2014

I brought them a simple but time tested message from the days of Raiffeisen in Germany and nineteenth century Europe followed in Japan, Taiwan, the then East Pakistan and South Korea. This was a message of partnership in development.

AKRSP was not there to merely listen to their demands, needs

Conceptual Package Of Social Mobilization

- **SOCIAL ORGANIZATION:** Bringing the poor into an organized fold
- **HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT:** Upgrading of human skills of the poor, such as managerial, productive and cooperative skills to enable them to make the best of available resources
- **CAPITAL FORMATION:** Generation of capital through the discipline of savings – as capital power, without which the poor can never hope to be self-reliant.

and supply top down, prepackaged solutions. AKRSP offered them only a methodology, an approach and social guidance to overcome their constraints themselves. The villagers used to look at me with disbelief. A programme bearing the name of one of the richest persons in the world, not willing to solve their problems, and asking them to do things first. I explained this was a partnership which entailed obligations on both sides and unless, they, the community, was prepared to fulfil its obligations how can the partnership be formed? Many were impatient and would pester me to tell them what was the limit to which the programme would help them if they accepted the terms of partnership, and my simple response used to be, your limit is our limit.

I was very happy when the approach was reinforced by the first World Bank Assessment of AKRSP in 1987 saying that the first four years of AKRSP are the missed four years of most rural development projects in the world where blueprint took precedence over a process approach. AKRSP did not go to the communities with a pre-conceived package and left it to each community to identify their potential not only as community but also at household level.

In 2011, in London, in my meeting with Lord Black, Executive Director of the Daily Telegraph, I explained the strategy of social mobilization. He observed, "you succeeded because you did not plan". I clarified Yes, I did not plan - I allowed the communities to plan.

It was putting the poor in the driving seat to propose their own solutions. I have seen people coming out of poverty with my own eyes and smiles on their faces instead of abstruse statistics.

The one million people I worked with for 12 years in Northern Areas of Pakistan reinforced my conviction of the tremendous potential and willingness in people to do many things themselves to come out of poverty. All that they needed was a support organization to help them unleash their own creative energies and realize their potential. Once organized the men and women took their destiny in their own hands. They knew what would bring them out of poverty. It reminded me what Michelangelo used to say, on being praised “I have done nothing David was hidden in the marble. I only removed the superfluous material covering it”.

They planted 50 million trees on land brought under irrigation range, generated about six megawatts of electricity through villages built and managed mini-hydels acknowledged as the biggest concentration of community managed micro hydro projects anywhere in the world.

In agriculture, horticulture and livestock, the organized communities made quantum jump in introducing and later marketing apple varieties from California and cherries from France. Their apricot is picked up by a London buyer from the farm gate at Gilgit.

potable drinking water and no electricity. Today it has all of these and more. Any growth strategy or macro planning would never have touched these people. They needed a development strategy which involved every household in the development process itself. Unfortunately this is what our macro planners fail to comprehend. When I asked the villagers what was the secret of their success, their spontaneous response was “we got organized.”

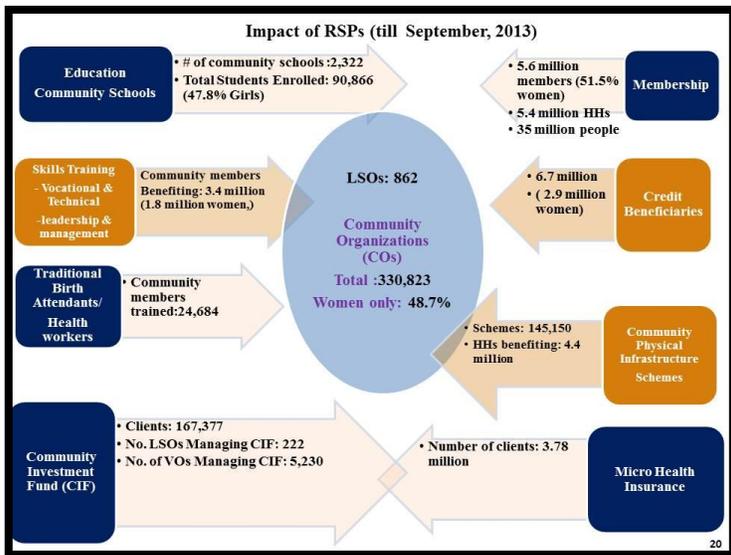


According to second World Bank evaluation of AKRSP, in ten years the income of the people of Northern Areas had in real terms more than doubled.

In 1994, when UNDP asked me to take lessons learnt in Northern Areas of Pakistan to South Asia, India being the largest country in the region it was the greatest challenge to South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) and to me personally as a Pakistani to make a difference to the lives of women and their households there. As it turned out, my apprehensions were unfounded. People of Andhra Pradesh and the State Government welcomed me with open arms and treated me with unforgettable kindness, hospitality and affection and continue to do so.

In Andhra Pradesh, I was told that after 7 years almost 75% of the organized households had risen above the subsistence level. When I doubted this statement, the women insisted on taking me to their homes. I visited a number of houses which I had visited on my first visit in 1995 which had barely any amenities of life available. I was awestruck to find modern amenities such as TVs, telephone, toilets etc., in the houses. In one house, I did not see TV and I asked the lady if she had been left behind others. She asked me to visit her backyard where more than 35 goats were standing. She explained her children are young and unlike other children, do not insist on going to neighbors to see the TV. Hence she made her choice of preferring goats to TV. This reminded me of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen’s book “Development as Freedom.”

One of the important outcomes of mobilized communities in Andhra has been the adoption of Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture (CMSA) to date adopted by over 300,000 farmers. It has enabled the poor to break out of the exploitative relationships with money lenders, fertilizer and pesticides traders. In the



Their initiative in protecting wildlife in collaboration with International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has given rich dividends sharing 25% of the proceeds of trophy hunting with the Government Wildlife Department. The tourists can now watch ibex, markhor and sometimes even the snow leopard from the roadside.

On one of my visits to Northern Areas I went to a village Ahmedabad where 22 years ago I had gone sitting in a basket pulled across the river, as there was no bridge on the river. The village with 110 households was totally isolated although the Karakorum Highway from Islamabad to Kashghar in China, passed by it. The village had no access, no road, no school, no health facility, no

next 5 years, Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) of Andhra Pradesh plans to take it to 10-12 million acres covering up to 60% of the cultivable area of the state. The environmental benefits of CMSA are enormous. It will convert the state into a “green state” with impact on climate change and global warming. However, the primary motivation of the poor for adopting these practices is the quantum jump in their net incomes. The lesson is that however good the technology may be, without people’s involvement through strong grassroots institutions, it will remain in the laboratories and universities. We need a people centered solution to food security and climate change.

Micro-Investment Plans		
Levels	Plans Identified	Interventions
Household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Income Generation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training Line of credit
Group Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land Development Enterprises Input Supply and Marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Line of Credit Training Technical Assistance
Village Level	Social Sector Services, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DWSS and Sanitation Education Infrastructure Needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Productive Infrastructure Linkages with Government Agencies, Donors and NGOs

Despite phasing out of UNDP financed SAPAP in 2000, Government of Andhra Pradesh keeps on inviting me. During one of these visits in 2008, I also met with Mr. Rahul Gandhi. I was most impressed by his perception and understanding of the process of social mobilization harnessing potential of the people and his empathy and compassion for the poor and the down trodden. The village I visited with Mr. Gandhi, the women described the changes and transformation in their lives as follows: The SHGs (Self Help Groups) members of Teri who had now federated in Cluster Level Association (CLA) at village level narrated their experiences since getting organized.

The women claimed to have been empowered since they got organized in SHGs and formed the CLA. One of their members complained against her husband for maltreatment and beatings. The SHG/CLA decided to act and confronted the man against his cruel behavior towards his wife. The man threatened to beat the SHG women and shouted at them saying it was a domestic matter and none of their business. A group of thirty women went to local police station and complained against the culprit. The Police Officer came immediately and took the man away and locked him up. The next day the women asked the Police Officer to release him without registering a case against him because they only wanted to teach him a lesson. The man has been on his best behavior since then towards his wife and towards all the women of the village. The women stated that if it wasn’t for their SHG/CLA,

they would have suffered in silence. Now even the Pradhan (Chairman) of the Panchayat takes them seriously if they go with any request.

In 2011 when I met Rahul Gandhi, he wanted development as a right, just as right to information and right to employment have been enacted, and envisioned grassroots institutions playing an important and vital role in rural-urban migration.

In 1982 when I had initiated the AKRSP under the tutelage of Akhter Hameed Khan, it was not in my wildest dreams that the efficacy, universality and applicability of these principles would be proven from Gilgit-Baltistan to Gwadar, from Peshawar to Tharparkar, from Andhra Pradesh to Uttar Pradesh. In a nutshell, Raiffeisen had advocated organization, capital generation and human skills development i.e. social mobilization.

The fundamental objective of a rigorous process of social mobilization is to foster institutions of the poor; this is its real niche and every activity undertaken is a means to this end; it should be aimed as an investment in institution building.

LESSONS

Let me now turn to a few lessons from this most inspiring visit we made to India in October 2013. I will frame the lessons in terms of the comparison with the Pakistan programme.

Recall that the Pakistan rural support programmes are older than the Indian programmes by at least a decade. These programmes are widely acknowledged to be highly successful, and in fact provided the model and inspiration for the Indian programme. Yet, it must be admitted that the Indian programme, especially the one in Andhra Pradesh has been able to go beyond its source of inspiration in terms of coverage as well as achievements. Why has this been the case?



First, it is clear that long-term political commitment and support for the strategy of social mobilization in India has helped achieve results. The fact that this support was able to transcend a major political transition is most exemplary. Poverty reduction is a common political agenda and should unite rather than divide political protagonists.

Second, because of the political ownership, India has been able to build a pool of professionals largely from government, whose commitment, and sensitivity towards the plight of the poor made a success of the pro-

grammes. As Akhter Hameed Khan used to say you don't replicate programmes, you replicate people.

Third, the sustained governmental support has also translated into a cascading of institutional development. National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) is a mainstream programme of the Government, which can nurture and invest in state programmes. This provides it both legitimacy and viability. In a mature democracy, governments and leaders can change, but if the example of Andhra Pradesh has something to teach us, it is that the commitment to poverty eradication will survive all such transitions.

Fourth, the innovative element that has evolved from SAPAP through SERP, and now NRLM, namely the Community Resource Person (CRP)-based model of saturation and cloning, is itself worthy of emulation and cloning.

Finally, and above all, the programme owes its success in working only with women. Above all it is the women of Andhra

who not only blazed the trail in their own state but also in other states and did it with extraordinary success and dynamism. I was gratified to note that the women of Bihar are equally vibrant, dynamic and resourceful as are in Uttar Pradesh.

The women of Pakistan have no less potential but they have not received support on the scale they deserve. Last month I visited a remote rural area in Southern Punjab of Pakistan where National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) of Pakistan has been implementing a social mobilization programme since 2009. NRSP organized only women and by now had 350,000 women households organized in COs/VOs/LSOs. In the LSO (Local Support Organization), I was visiting when at the end of her presentation, I asked the lady why are you doing all this without any monetary benefit, in reply she recited the verse of a Sufi Poet of the area which exactly meant what I had read written by Tolstoy "The only certain happiness in life is when you live for others."

Thank you

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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This publication has been prepared as an output of the PAKISTAN STRATEGY SUPPORT PROGRAM, which is funded by UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. It has not been peer reviewed. Any opinions stated herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the policies of the International Food Policy Research Institute (www.ifpri.org), its partners, or its collaborators.

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