

Note for Record
September 7-14, 2011

By: Shoaib Sultan Khan
October 10, 2011

Subject: Visit to Capitol Hill, State Department, White House and others in Washington DC

On the invitation of the American Pakistan Foundation (APF), the CEO RSPN Shandana Khan and I visited Washington DC from September 7 to 14, 2011. Our hosts Kashif Zafar ,Director APF and his friend Clare Lockhart, had drawn up a fully packed programme. No sooner we landed at Dulles Airport, after an over eight hours flight from London, we were whisked away to Mandarin Hotel in DC to have dinner meeting with Kashif. That set the pace for the next few days encompassing four more dinners, at two of which I had to make a speech and at one explain to two Congressmen what RSPN is all about. We had attended twenty-two meetings at the Capitol Hill with Congressmen and Senators or their staffers; at the White House with National Security Council staffers; at the State Department with Ambassador Marc Grossman, Ambassador Robin Rafel and staffers; USAID Alex Their and his staffers and two at DC-based Think Tanks. In my over 58 years of working career, I had never had so many engagements at such high level in a so few days. None of the engagements were less than an hour. I made no less than 22 presentations on RSPN/RSPs and four full length speeches.

After our first meeting, with both staffers of Republican and Democrat Congressmen and Senators, Kashif remarked if I could repeat the presentations I made fifteen times more, RSPN would have won. Clare dubbed my performance as “awesome” and said that she was highly impressed and inspired. This was the kind of encouragement I was looking for, it inspired me to no measure. It was like the elixir and kept me going for the next few days without the slightest fatigue. And when it was all done Kashif’s comment that normally he used to get totally off colour after hearing the same presentation two or three times but in RSPN case even after the last presentation and speeches, I kept them interested. We were very happy that invariably the reaction of all those whom we met or spoke to, was very positive and helpful.

The Republicans were interested and impressed but they were highly critical of Kerry Lugar Bill (KLB), although it was a done deal but measures were afoot to cut down the allocation. The 2012 allocation had already been whittled down by US\$ 300 million ,at the behest of a Congresswoman, who strongly opposed cash grant to flood victims given under BISP out of KLB, when she got nothing for the flood victims of her state Texas. They advised us, to persuade the Administration to allocate resources for RSPN because they were the decision makers. While leaving ,the Republican staffer especially thanked me and said he was most impressed.

Kashif ,strongly pleaded in our meeting with Senator John Kerry’s staffer, as she was drafting the submission for Senate approval, to mention RSPN in the draft submission. She suggested a generic approach and asked for an appropriate draft spelling out all the activities for which RSPN is requesting funds without mentioning RSPN by name.

Senator Gillibrand’s staffer was very positive and endorsed the idea of a letter to State Department from Senators and Congressmen ,commending RSPN for support by USAID.

Kashif’s great friend Congresswoman Nita Lowey, warmly welcomed us. She has been to Pakistan and is a great advocate of assistance to Pakistan. However, she wants branding USAID assistance. Shandana showed her the logo of USAID on flood shelters.

The Republican Foreign Ops Appropriations staffer, evinced keen interest in RSPN and was also aware of the reluctance of Punjab to USAID. Even after we vacated the Committee Room because of another scheduled meeting there, she kept on talking to us in the corridor, demonstrating tremendous interest ,otherwise ,our hosts said normally in such meetings if they are not interested, they keep on sending messages and paying more attention there.

Senator Levin’s staffer, who is Chairman Armed Forces Committee, was very supportive and positive.

Clare Lockhart, hosted a dinner for us in her spacious apartment and invited Amb. Robin Rafel, who had just returned from Pakistan, Stan Byers of White House NSC, Lenderking of State Department and at my request Zeba and Steve Rasmussen. On Clare’s request, I spoke on RSPN. Robin suggested to Shandana that RSPN should come through the army and enlist their support for the work they are doing. Shandana informed her ,what SRSP is doing in Swat which is being greatly appreciated by the army and they have now even asked SRSP to come and work in South Waziristan. However, they want RSPN/RSP to mobilize resources themselves.

[Dr. Azad Ejaz,my cousin, waiting late at nights to open the door,often wondered if we have been kidnapped and used to call our hosts to find our whereabouts.

Republican Senator Luger’s staffer was most understanding and attentive to what we had to say about RSPN. He had recently met Asad Umar of Engro and was greatly impressed by him. He suggested to us to muster the support of the Pakistan Corporate Sector for the RSPN approach. We followed up his advice by meeting Syed Babar Ali who happened to be in DC, in connection with medical treatment. He promised all support. The Republican Staffer, expressed dismay at so little USAID assistance to RSPN and strongly advised convincing them to fund the Union Council Poverty Reduction Programme. He was most positive and supportive.

Kashif, as in earlier meetings, made a strong case why RSPN’s proposal for funding should be supported instead of wasting American tax payer’s money, on ineffective programmes. To soften his criticism, as an American tax payer of Government of Pakistan, I would try to disassociate

myself with his stance by pleading that once we had decided to reside in the river, we cannot afford to pick up a quarrel with the crocodile. Kashif also repeatedly pointed out the scale at which RSPN was operating compared to sixteen other major NGOs in Pakistan. He used to quote a comparative figure, picked up from 2009 PCP report, showing RSPN/RSPs financial outlay three times higher than all the sixteen NGOs outlay put together. Kashif was indeed a most passionate and convincing advocate of our cause stoutly supported by Clare.

Congressman Steve Israel, an impressive handsome person, met us warmly.

Kashif's introduction to RSPN, has been through National Solidarity Programme(NSP) of Afghanistan, which was formulated by Samantha, an ex-intern of AKRSP, in collaboration with Clare Hart, both of whom were working in Afghanistan. NSP was piloted in the Capitol Hill ensuring an annual funding of US\$ 300 million. NSP became a darling of Capitol Hill, as it was through their insistence ,that Administration agreed to fund NSP.

We were most pleased ,when Senator Israel straightaway offered, to initiate a letter for RSPN support by USAID, to Hilary Clinton, jointly by Congressmen and Senators. When Kashif submitted that some might like to do separately, he saw no problem with that. Thereafter, he briefly listened to me and then excused himself, as he had to rush to an emergency Senate meeting seized with discussing terrorist threat to New York on 9/11 anniversary. Anyway, we didn't want more of his time. He was already converted to RSPN cause, thanks to our friends.

Shandana had received a message ,from David Altman of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) of USAID, asking her to see him, as somehow he had come to know that we were in town. Later ,in the meeting when I asked him how did he know about our presence in DC, he responded he was keeping a tab on all our activities and when we met Alex Their in USAID, Altman had fully briefed him of the SRSO affair. Altman was most upset how SRSO had dealt with complaints relating to SRSO, which keeps in piling up and the latest being SRSO staff and Allied Bank being in cohort to deprive the beneficiaries of grant money. Besides, according to Altman, complaints were also coming about distribution of food during floods for which funds were given by USAID to WFP, who had outsourced it to SRSO. He said he was suggesting an external audit but cast aspersions on SRSO staff and Sono's ability to check them or take action against them. He further added that in the meantime he is submitting an interim report about irregularities in implementation of SARP since RSPN was given the responsibility for monitoring and supervision, he has to say that RSPN lacks the capacity to monitor and supervise.

I supported his suggestion for an independent audit and urged it to be done ,as early as possible, to ascertain the actual facts. In mitigation, I requested him to consider the circumstances under which SARP was implemented. Within six months, 100,000 ac had to be planted with a new crop, sunflowers, by 50,000 farmers, requiring distribution of inputs, followed by cash grants, by cheques, in two instalments. Of the US 15 million dollars, complaints have been referred to RSPN relating to 287 persons involving an amount of less than US\$ 30,000. I tried to sensitise

Altman to what was at stake, if his report deprives 90 million people for whose support we were in DC. He said he was well aware of the good work RSPN was doing but the way SRSO management dealt with the complaints, casts doubts on the integrity of those involved including CEO and he will have to say so because this is his job.

Senator Sheldon Whitehouse's staffer listened to Kashif and myself with great interest and promised support. Similarly, Senator Tim Johnson's staffer reacted.

My friends thought that my presentation was most effective, as time was short and Karen Kunze was looking at the top page of the RSPN presentation with the First Dialogue at Sherqilla and Kashif was referring to my funny hat (despite my protests that the hat was to protect me from minus 10c weather), I began the presentation by telling them how I began the First Dialogue with the villagers in clear terms that AKRSP had not come to listen to their demands or solve their problems. It is the time tested principles of development partnership which we had come to offer, by adopting those principles, the poor of many countries had come out of poverty. Once villagers showed their willingness to fulfill their obligations of the terms of partnership, AKRSP moved forward.

The dinner hosted by Ray (Rafat) and Shaista, American Pakistanis, was indeed a grand affair. Their house is situated on the Potomac with a stunning view. Their house boasts of originals from Gainsborough and Michael Angelo and Gandhara pieces. Their neighbours include ex-Governors and Secretaries of State. A number of Pakistani families had come including some of my old friends from the World Bank including Musarrat's cousin and her husband Aftab. Ray told me, Hilary Clinton had sent her representative, a high official of the State Department and there were also officials from the White House. The dinner was served in beautifully laid out tables in the basement and I had to make an after dinner speech which everyone seemed to like especially the White House NSC staffer who came to offer her appreciation and promised Kashif to arrange meetings with relevant and important people, who can muster support for RSPN.

Ray and Shaista Mahmood invited us again, on Saturday night, to dine with Congressman Howard Berman and Congressman Jim Moran and Joe Reeder, who had served as Under Secretary of Defence Department. It was a small group and Shandana and I had a long conversation with Congressman Berman, one of the sponsors of Kerry Lugar Bill, who seemed most supportive of the community initiatives and investment in people. At dinner, I was sitting next to Joe and explained to him in detail what RSPN was all about.

Kashif explained to the guests on the table how Pressler Amendment stopped training of army officers in US, with the result that the current crop of officers at the threshold of being promoted as generals and above are steeped in Ziaul Haq's Islamic fundamentalism and when they come at the helm of affairs in Pakistan Army, one shudders to think which way they will take the country.

Next morning, I was pleasantly surprised to see Joe's email connecting RSPN team to high officials in USAID and a Congressman which Joe thought, would be most supportive of our cause.

I have nothing but the highest feelings of gratitude for Kashif, who out of the blue has put in RSPN centrestage which I could not have even dreamt of. His mastercard ,has been enlisting support of his friends. It amazes me how committed and passionate his friends are to our cause. Clare Hart is another jewel of RSPN support. I am speechless seeing how they have mobilised support for the cause. In Ray and Shaista, Kashif has really found for RSPN, a genuine and selfless supporters.

Senator Coons, Foreign Policy Adviser, seemed disinterested and Senator Blumenthol's Legislative Assistant, who had been to Pakistan expressed special interest while both promising support .

At the Think Tank Centre for American Progress, about 20 key policy makers came to the closed session, which was coordinated by Caroline Wadham, Senior Fellow of the Centre. Amongst the audience was ex-congressman Jim Moody, who as a Peace Corps Volunteer had met Akhter Hameed Khan and was instrumental in getting volunteers trained at the Comilla Academy. Mitul Desai of the State Department expressed keen interest in meeting Raju and others in India, who are involved in implementing the NRLM.

After the presentation which seemed to have been well received ,in the Q&A session,questions were asked about giving voice to the poor, peoples institutions constituting a threat to the current political structure, monitoring mechanism for KLB, linkages with local government and comparison with NSP of Afghanistan. The policy makers seemed satisfied with our response and I was pleased at the reception and importance the Centre had given to RSPN.

The Chief of Staff of Congressman Adam Schiff ,ushered us in the Congressman's room, who evinced keen interest in what RSPN was doing asking about the various steps involved in mobilizing communities. He also enquired about the reasons and general nonchallance pertaining to incidents like Salman Taseer's murder. He expressed a very positive stance towards RSPN work. The Congressman impressed me with his interest in the details.

By now it was quite obvious to me that each Senator and Congressman was a mini White House, complete with professional staffers and an army of interns, helping in dealing with the constituents of the representatives and Senators. It was indeed real democracy at work.

At the Eisenhower Executive Block of the White House, we met National Security Director for Afghanistan and Pakistan, who fortunately for us was very familiar with the work of SRSO and TRDP, during her stay at Karachi as a USAID official. She had very positive things to say what she saw in the field especially meeting women groups. She was enthusiastic about supporting

RSPN. She explained that NSC has a Development and Democratic Group which is looking for RSPN type initiatives.

At the Centre for New American Security, we met President Dr. John Nagl and Senior Fellow Richard Fontaine. Both took immense interest in understanding what RSPN was doing. Dr. Nagl suggested presenting RSPN proposal in a modular form, spelling out requirement of resources US\$ 500 million per annum for five years, to cover the entire country, along with block of districts for funding, in case the entire country is not taken up. I explained the non-negotiable five components of the proposal and minimum entire funding for a district for five years upfront, depending on whatever number of districts out of 144, including FATA, the donors are willing to fund.

We were told that the Centre played an important role in the last Presidential elections and nearly 15 of the staff of the Centre are in government now.

September 13 began with an unscheduled meeting with Republican Senior staffer of Rep. Ros-Lichtentzen, chair of Foreign Relations, who gave some very useful advice how to steer the RSPN proposal through the maze of Capitol Hill and the Establishment.

The staffers for Senator Mary Landrieu, listened to us with great interest and underscored the importance of auditing and bookkeeping, in implementation of a programme of the size RSPN was proposing, with which we fully concurred.

We got some spare time to walk through the Capitol Hill and savour the grandeur, elegance and beauty of the building and had our photographs taken. Kashif very kindly presented me with a exquisite set of cuff links with the building embossed on it. Kashif's hospitality is simply overwhelming.

At last our hosts, succeeded in getting us to meet in the Hillaryland, her Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Marc Grossman, the successor of the late Holbrooke. Amb. Grossman on meeting us remarked that Congressman Berman had spoken to him. He listened to my presentation with great interest and agreed that people should be allowed to make decisions about their own development. I explained to him the non-negotiables in the RSPN proposal and the holistic nature of the social mobilization approach. We also touched on the 46 high risk districts which were included in the proposal sent to USAID in 2008 by Economic Affairs Division of the Government of Pakistan after approval of President of Pakistan. Ambassador Grossman expressed the desire to understand the approach in detail and I invited him to visit the field area incognito like Amb. Robin Rafel (who was also present) to avoid rigours of the security. Robin chided me for letting out her secrets.

Amb. Grossman was extremely kind and courteous and came to see us off right up to the entrance of the State Department Building.

At the USAID Building, Alex Their along with his Deputy David McDonald and other members of the staff, greeted us. Alex had visited AKRSP and knew the RSPN approach. In regard to KLB funding, the framework finalized by USAID, comprised five major sectors and any proposal seeking funding from KLB had to fall within the parameters of those sectors. RSPN proposal, being holistic in approach, needs to be revamped to fall within the approved categories.

Alex also touched on the OIG's concern relating to SRSO's implementation of the SARP and suggested earliest resolution of the issues raised by OIG.

Alex thought we had a creative conversation and fully agreed with Kashif that USAID should fund projects and programmes which meet KLB objectives. Kashif made a strong plea that RSPN proposal does exactly that and that is where, as an American tax payer, he would like his money to be invested.

We reached Congressman Mike Honda, a few minutes behind schedule, but fortunately Kashif's friends using hard copy of the RSPN presentation, had fully briefed the Congressman. Congressman Honda listened to me and observed peoples institutions which RSPN is fostering, are building blocks of a sustainable, transparent and accountable democracy. We could not have asked for more as an endorsement for RSPN approach. Subsequently, Congressman Honda wrote an article in the Washington Times (copy attached) Rural Aid, Not Guns, Key to Pakistan's Progress and by name urged US funding for RSPN.

After meeting Congressman Honda, we all felt like celebrating and Kashif entertained us to a most enjoyable dinner. Every morning I had been getting up at 5 a.m. and finishing past mid night and was looking forward to sleeping late on the last day of the visit, which had only one engagement at 1 p.m. before leaving for Dulles Airport to board the plane for London. But Kashif had other ideas and courtesy Aakif Ahmad had fixed a meeting at the State Department at 9 a.m. I rebelled saying I have met the top man at the Department, why you want me to see anyone else. Kashif retorted just to make sure that we have no regrets later that why we did not meet these persons. This brought me down from my high horse and reluctantly I gave in.

Meeting Joe Zilligren and Tom Miller at the State Department next morning proved how right Kashif was. The two were from the Pakistan Desk and Tom was going to be based in Islamabad. It was a most productive and fruitful meeting. I thanked Kashif and felt sheepish at my naivety.

The last meeting with the staffers of Congressman Casey was equally interesting. This brought me to the end of my odyssey and I headed towards Dulles, not before, a group photo with inimitable driver of the SUV Mr. Abdul of Morocco. Without Kashif putting the SUV at my disposal, I don't think I could have been able to be on time for my engagements. Abdul was better than Jeeves. Always on time and most cheerful, even when he dropped me at 1 a.m. to pick me up again at 7 a.m.

Kashif and Shandana did all the hard work. Writing and rewriting the proposal, collecting data, getting copies of presentations printed from time to time as they seem to be going like hot cakes. Shandana had all the information at her finger tips or got it in no time from back home. She proved of immense support and help to me. Of course Kashif was the star who made all this happen.