

**Note for Record**  
**May 18-21, 2015**

**By: Shoaib Sultan Khan**  
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**Subject: European Union PEACE Programme Revisited**

The raison de tre of Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) over the last three decades in Pakistan, has been harnessing the potential of the rural subsistence holders to enable them to rise above the level of subsistence. My mentor Akhter Hameed Khan emphasised the need for fostering a socio-economic infrastructure, namely, a framework of grassroots institutions of the rural poor to achieve the above cited objective. Unlike the Political and Administrative infrastructures, the socio-economic infrastructure focuses on the households, for the simple reason that the potential is at the household level. The organisations of the rural poor namely, community organisation (CO), federated at village level as Village Organisation (VO) leading to formation of Local Support Organisation (LSO) at the Union Council level or in case of KP at a conglomerate of proposed Village Councils, when they come into existence.

Thus RSPs are not meant to deliver services, instead their objective is to foster a framework of receiving mechanism to enable Political (Elected National Assembly to Union or Village Councils) and Administrative (From President down to Patwari and civil society, commercial and other organisations) infrastructures to provide and deliver services and supplies to the rural poor. Any services that the RSPs deliver, these are with the sole objective of investment in making institutions of the rural poor sustainable.

With the exception of AKRSP, all other RSPs never got adequate resources for investments in achieving sustainable organisations with few sporadic instances like Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme in a few districts of the province of Sindh or a few Union Councils of KP or Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund's Social Mobilisation project in a few districts for a short period. Many a time RSPs also lost sight of their main objective of fostering socio-economic infrastructure on a sustainable basis and mostly remained contented with organizing communities for implementation of projects with the result the community organisations were left to fend for themselves to sustain themselves, when projects came to an end.

It was, therefore, a pleasant surprise for me to find on my visit last September to the Programme for Economic Advancement and Community Empowerment (PEACE) in Swat funded by European Union (EU) challenging Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) to make Socio-economic Infrastructure as the basis for implementation. EU required near impossible targets to be achieved in a four year timeframe. However, CEO SRSP Masoodul Mulk accepted the challenge and selected a dynamic and totally committed professional to the mission of fostering sustainable institutions of the rural poor, as Project Director. Masood could not have chosen a more suitable person for the job than Zahid Khan.

The challenge before Zahid was how to organise 12,000 community organisations by holding 24,000 Community Management Skills Training (CMST) and 12,000 Leadership Management Skills Training (LMST) and identifying and training a cadre 1,200 master trainers or in RSP parlance Community Resource Persons (CRPs). In each of the 7 districts of Malakand Division, no more than one Senior Social Organiser assisted by 2 Social Organisers (SOs) and 2 Junior SOs alongwith a Human Resource Development, a woman Community Livelihood Resource and an MER person constituted the District Support Team.

This was a deviation from the traditional RSP Social Mobilisation approach which comprised Social Organisation Units in the field with a District Management Group at the district level.

Zahid took up the challenge by adopting a Hybrid Fast Forward Model of CRPs. In less than two years, 457 CRPs were identified and trained. To have found such a large number of volunteer CRPs many with the university degrees, in districts of KP which are in a corner of the province, was an eye opener for me. With these extended hands, the capacity of district team was multiplied many times and they were not on SRSP's payroll.

On my last visit, I met a large group of CRPs and was most impressed by their dedication and achievements, however, they seemed to have lost sight of their core function of fostering sustainable COs in their enthusiasm to undertake a plethora of activities. Obviously, many of them had not made their own COs viable. I, therefore, urged them to focus on CRPs primary function of ensuring viability of the COs, because if COs sustain the entire edifice of CO/VO/LSO, would remain intact. If the foundation is weak, the superstructure will crumble . I urged them to make their own COs model organisations otherwise they will have no legitimacy to tell others what would make their COs viable and sustainable. Their real success would be in how many more CRPs they are able to clone.

I had a lurking apprehension that under the pressure of the tyranny of the targets, Zahid had achieved the quantity but quality of CRPs left much to be desired.

When Chairperson SRSP Munawar Humayun suggested another visit to PEACE to see what improvements Zahid had brought about in the quality of CRPs output, I was excited to revisit Swat. Zahid had drawn up a programme comprising an initial meeting with PEACE Headquarters, Regional and District professionals. The meeting was also attended by SRSP Management Group and Professionals from Peshawar. It was followed by visit to Malam Jaba Valley UC Kishora and the following day to Shangla UC Alpuri, Village Chakri UC Fatehpur Women Business Group , Noorabad UC Miandam, with 100 CRPs workshop on the third day.

The transformation Zahid had brought about in the attitude, understanding and working of the CRPs was incredible and most heartening.

We reached VO Ganajeer (UC Kishore) negotiating hairpin bends link roads but hearing Manager-cum-CRP Muhammad Rasool left me speechless. I found a fully accomplished CRP. Later meeting a group of CRPs who had gathered from adjoining areas to meet us, I found each one of them equally accomplished, I experienced the same at other places on the field visit and had nothing but amazement and pleasure that all the weaknesses in CRPs I had pointed out on my last visit, had been taken care of and fully rectified.

The characteristics of an honest and competent CRP seem to be as follows:

- CRP is a permanent local resident in the area with adequate livelihood and has no monetary expectations from being CRP;
- Considers his real remuneration helping others and thereby gaining respect, influence and affection in the eyes of the community.

We had a discussion with the group of CRPs how to make CRPs cadre sustainable, so as to ensure sustainability of COs/VOs/LSOs even after the phasing out of the PEACE. Initially, opinions were expressed the voluntary spirit of CRPs should not be compromised by offering any kind of remuneration. We assured them that was not at all the intention but in a real world for a long term arrangement, it has to be ensured that there is a built in permanent incentive which sustains the arrangement. For example, the time CRPs devote and the expenditure (if any) they incur in discharge of their work. There was consensus that this can be worked out and monetized and would prove to be an incentive for sustainability of the CRP scheme.

I advised them that the monetisation of the incentives should be such that LSOs could afford to pay because after PEACE, LSOs will have to bear the cost of CRPs. I cautioned them to bear this in mind especially when monetizing the time the CRPs devote. The expenditure on travel, if any, incurred by a CRP, should be reimbursed on actual basis.

I have been advocating CRP centric approach, especially after my experience in India. Zahid has demonstrated how CRP cadre can be initiated in any project which RSPs undertake. The approach Zahid has adopted in PEACE, is low cost social mobilisation with the great advantage of being sustainable. I trust SRSP will take full advantage from lessons learnt at PEACE in fostering sustainable institutions. I understand SRSP is launching a new programme Community Driven Local Development (CDLD) covering about 213 Union Councils in Malakand. I hope Masood will make sure that the CDLD takes full advantage of PEACE experience towards fostering community organisations follows CRP centric approach.

I suggest that at the start of ALL new projects, ALL the staff should have a basic orientation/training in OTW, conducted by the HRD. Followed by a field training of the DPMS and Social Organizers on CRPs, and HOW TO IDENTIFY THEM AND TRAIN THEM IN DOING SOCIAL MOBILISATION`. Having seen the level of education in Malakand Division, I don't see any reason why this model cannot be replicated in other parts of KP. DPMS and Social Organisers should restrict their roles to trainers and monitors and actual delivery of programmes should be done by the CRPs.

In the concluding session of the last OTW at Peshawar, which I attended, many participants commented that this training should have been done at the start of the programme.

As often mentioned THERE SEEMS TO BE DONOR FATIGUE REGARDING SOCIAL MOBILISATION. We may not get an opportunity to mobilize people again and again, Therefore every opportunity should be utilized to the fullest. It is evident that SRSP is now fully mature to emphasize on the 3 tier structure using the model of the CRPs, as in PEACE. I would again, as I did in my NFR of last visit, impress upon EU for sustainability of CO/VO/LSO provision of Community Investment Fund (CIF) is essential. A few million Euros for 213 LSOs constituting

no more than 3% of the total programme cost, will ensure sustainability of PEACE and CDLD for decades.

SRSP is the first RSP in Pakistan which has demonstrated operationalization of the CRP centric approach. I would urge Masood to consider setting up a CRP Training Centre in Swat under the Directorship of Zahid, where all RSPs could learn from the PEACE experience. I would be happy to ask RSPN to collaborate with SRSP in this initiative.

Finally, a word about women empowerment as seen on our visit to village Chakri in UC Fatehpur. We were led to the place of meeting, after getting down from the vehicle, through a most tortuous path involving climbing and coming down on a slippery slope. Fortunately, no limbs were broken. However, on way back, we were led on a cemented path hardly 100 yards from the road. But we could only use the public path because at the end, there was a locked door which was especially opened for us. The women of the village, we were told, were condemned to use only the tortuous path.

At Chakri, we were in a group of women PEACE had organised as Business Investment Group (BIG). Each member of the group, we were told, was making good money from doing local embroidery. They had been trained by Lasoona (Hands) NGO and ECI and were now being supported by PEACE. Their leader Talat Bibi was earning Rs. 30,000 per month. The CRP Tavish was looking after 2 VOs with 18 COs. More than 100 women were benefitting through BIG. Despite this monetary empowerment, the women were not emancipated. They were not allowed out by their husbands. One woman who was earning nearly Rs. 8,000 a month as against Rs. 500 per month (he was a Qari) earning of her husband yet she could not take a step without his permission.

I asked whether a gender training for their husbands would be desirable, some were reluctant for fear of their husbands refusal, but Talat Bibi promised to persuade 25 of the husbands to attend such a training. Zahid, who was not allowed to come to the meeting by the men, I was the only one in whose case an exception was made, has promised to arrange gender training for the husbands.