

Note for Record

By: Shoaib Sultan Khan
August 12, 2015

Subject: Meeting with Chief Minister (CM) Pervez Khattak, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (KP) at KP House, Islamabad – August 8, 2015

Very late at night, I received an SMS from Dr. Rashid Bajwa saying Mr. Jahangir Khan Tareen (JKT) had been trying to contact me and he had arranged for me to meet Chief Minister (CM), Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (LP) at Islamabad. I sent a message to Chairperson SRSP Mrs. Munawar Humayun (MH) and the CEO Masoodul Mulk requesting them to accompany me. Masood could not make it because of internet failure, as even my phone calls remained unanswered. Fortunately MH came.

JKT had given me a hint that the CM thinks Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) only does infrastructure which even government departments, local government and even other NGOs do, so why should the provincial government give funds to SRSP for which they already have enough funds.

When we were showed in CM's room in the KP House, we found two gentlemen already occupying the sofa on the right side away from the two chairs in the front, one of which seemed to be CM's chair and on left side opposite the sofa were two chairs facing the two chairs in the centre. We sat down on those chairs and after a while when the CM came in, he sat on his chair with an empty chair on his left.

I thanked the CM for sparing time out of his long schedule and as MH and I had discussed, I opened the conversation by trying to rectify the misconception that Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) in the opinion of some people do only infrastructure, some think RSPs are a microcredit programme and some think RSPs are like traditional NGOs concentrating on one sector. I went on to explain that poverty is at the household level and unless a programme interacts with each and every household, the poor cannot be helped. Considering the large number poor of

households, on an average KP in its 25 districts has 2.6 million rural households out of whom 1.2 million are below poverty line and another one million above these need support to prevent them from falling in poverty trap. The only way RSPs can interact with poor households is by organizing them and identifying what each household is capable of doing to improve their economic status. All SRSP interventions are based on this strategy.

At this the CM responded that he had firsthand witnessed the working of SRSP in Nowshera district. SRSP made village roads and drains (sanitation infrastructure) which created problems for the local administration, as villages that were out of the SRSP programme area, made demands for the same infrastructure, which we could not do. This generated enmity, SRSP also made tubewells in Nowshera, which I appreciate. I remember them well because I gave them free electricity.

I explained the holistic approach of RSPs was never implemented in Nowshera district by SRSP because it never got the requisite resources. In KP it was the first time that last government provided funds to implement the holistic approach with nearly 100,000 households comprising 1.2 million population. This was the Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP) known as Bacha Khan Poverty Reduction Programme and I would request MH who is Chairperson of SRSP and has remain associated with the programme for over 19 years, to explain it.

The CM interjected he would only like to know what did the programme do in improving livelihoods of the people.

MH moved to the chair lying vacant next to CM and explained that the UC plan at the end of four years, was evaluated by a credible team of external evaluation consultants, commissioned by the KP government and the consultants observed that the four core interventions of the project namely, social mobilisation, interest free community investment fund (CIF), skills development, health insurance supplemented by interventions in agriculture, horticulture, livestock development etc., produced very positive results. The CIF recipients with an initial support of Rs. 12,000 which they revolved after every full repayment to the Village Organisation (VO), according to the Evolution, have increased a monthly income of Rs. 3,000 on an average and it ranges between 2700-8000. The skills development programme similarly resulted in income earning siblings in those households from where they came. This resulted in putting thousands of households out of poverty.

At this CM interjected where is poverty? I do not see any. People are much better off than what they were 20-30 years ago. Quoting example of his village where he saw rural people without shoes and wearing tattered clothes. There now you can see people decently clothed with no sign of poverty of by gone days. He greatly criticized the International NGOs and foreign consultants who take away bulk of the money in operational cost. I butted in if the CM thinks, there is no poverty why is the KP government giving Rs. 7 billion food subsidy to the poor.

MH mentioned that according to the evaluation report commissioned by KP government, poverty according to Poverty Score Card in the Union Plan project area was 85% and with the project intervention came down to 40%.

She also mentioned the health insurance intervention which saved hundreds of families from poverty and in the Evaluation Report, people expressed a wish that the PTI government will continue this programme. I said that according to World Bank studies, once a poor family has to bear hospitalization expenses, it needs three to four years to recover from the shock. CM said that in KP health insurance is being done in four districts and the government is planning to cover 700,000 poor. MH said that the programme was given to State Life and they have not even started it. I said RSPs started health insurance in 2005 and have the experience of getting million of poor ensured in the last ten years. Doing it with others, has little chance of success. CM said RSPs can also be involved.

MH mentioned about other benefits that accrued from the Union Plan and gave the printed copy of the report, which the CM took. He again demanded to show him how livelihood of the rural people has been improved.

I submitted that you can only see if you come out to visit some of the villages where Union Plan has been implemented. CM expressed his willingness to go anywhere we would like to take him.

I am most grateful to JKT for arranging this meeting. In my experience, this was one of the most animated, at times tense and frank discussion I ever had with a politician holding the position of CM. Sometimes I would rise from seat and show him the three tier Social Mobilisation graph pointing out that this is our core function to economically empower them by unleashing their potential through organised institutions of the people. I questioned him which Village Council member would do this, go to each and every household to prepare their development plan. Only RSPs have been doing it and are capable of doing it. He agreed Village Councils mobilizing communities is beyond them. Sometimes when CM would like to emphasise a point, he would

leave his chair and come and sit on the chair vacated by MH. CM was most frank and gave all the time we needed to hear our side of the story.

In the end I said at my age, I have no ambition except if I can help the rural poor with my experience which over last 42 years interacting with communities I acquired after I left CSP serving after 20 years. My experience of a million people in Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral with AKRSP, which the World Bank acknowledged resulted in doubling the income of the million people and later the eleven million households comprising over 50 million people in Andhra Pradesh has given me the conviction of the effectiveness and success of the approach to eradicate poverty. I submitted to CM that as Chief Minister, out of an average of one lac households in each of the KP 25 districts, the government has to support on an average of 50,000 poor households in each district to support their livelihood to come out of poverty.

The CM took it all in good spirit and promised that after ten days, he would be happy to visit to see for himself how the livelihood of the rural people has been improved.

The CM came to the door to see us off and I apologized if I had caused him any annoyance. He assured me not at all. We took leave and thanked him profusely.