

Speech at National Convention of LSOs 2017

By Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan

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Hon'ble Mr. Sartaj Aziz
Chairperson BISP MNA Marvi Memon
Ambassador Jean-Francois Cautain
UN SDG Head Mr. Paul Dudley
Excellencies
Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen
LSO Representatives from all over Pakistan

This is 65th year of my working life, of which 38 years I have spent on implementing the Social Mobilisation strategy which the World Bank has dubbed as Community Driven Development. In the first assessment of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) by the Operations Evaluation Division of the World Bank in 1987, the evaluators observed that the first four years of AKRSP were the missed four years of all rural development programmes in the world because a blueprint approach was followed instead of the process approach adopted by AKRSP.

I learnt the process approach from my mentor Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan since 1959, while serving in the then East Pakistan now Bangladesh. Akhter Hameed Khan used to declare publicly these were principles of subsistence holders development enunciated by Raiffeisen in 1849 in Germany. Akhter Hameed Khan used to emphasise these principles are as precise as the law of gravity and going against these principles is like building crooked walls. I have religiously followed these principles in all the programmes I have been associated with these four decades be it Daudzai Project in Peshawar in 1972, Mahaweli Ganga Project in Sri Lanka in 1979, AKRSP in 1982, South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme in 1994 and Rural Support Programmes in Pakistan as replication of AKRSP from 1989 to date.

Currently, this approach touches the livelihood of approximately 200 million rural people in Pakistan and India. After reaching 45 million rural poor in the State of Andhra Pradesh in 2011, India launched National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) on the lines of Andhra Pradesh in 14 other States at a capital outlay of US\$ 5.1 billion of which one billion has been obtained from the World Bank, to reach 350 million rural poor.

In Pakistan, in 1972 I made an abortive attempt by remaining in government as Director, Pakistan Academy for Rural Development Peshawar and even Akhter Hameed Khan offered to help me and left professorship at Michigan State University, but government structure proved futile to implement Raiffeisen's principles of development. It was His Highness the Aga Khan, who got my services seconded from UNICEF through Executive Director James Grant to initiate AKRSP in December 1982.

Aga Khan Foundation Geneva especially Bob Shaw and AKF Pakistan's Ramzan Merchant and Hakim Feerasta facilitated visits of many donors to AKRSP. The first donor impressed by AKRSP development approach were Canadian CIDA who supported Gilgit district followed by ODA in Chitral district (now UKAID/DFID) when I took Sir Nicholas Barrington to AKRSP, followed by Netherlands when Ambassador Von Geen visited Baltistan district and German Ambassador Alfred Vestring's visit resulted in GTZ support to Astore district. In addition, there were many other donors who funded different components of the interventions. The first replication of AKRSP was funded by USAID Director Rocky Staples when he visited AKRSP and Sarhad Rural Support Programme was established by the then NWFP government under Chief Minister Aftab Sherpao in 1989. The South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) was initiated by Henning Karcher of UNDP New York in 1994 fully supported by Pakistan Country Representative Von Sponeck and his Deputy Neil Buhne. Vice President World Bank Meiko Nishimizu took the programme in India to new heights.

However, till 1992 neither Federal nor Provincial Governments took much interest in what AKRSP was doing except Mr. Sartaj Aziz as Federal

Minister in Mr. Junejo's government along with Minister Chaudhry Anwar Aziz. It was only in 1992 as Finance Minister Mr. Sartaj Aziz fully supported Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who after a visit to Gilgit desired to replicate AKRSP countrywide and persuaded PM not to make it a government programme but give the resources to National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) which had been set up by Secretary Naseem of Ministry of Rural Development on the pattern of AKRSP with the approval of the PM and of which I was honorary Chief Executive Officer. With the change in government after the initial Rs. 500 million, NRSP did not get the future six monthly instalments of the same amount as agreed to by the Finance Minister. However, when Mr. Sartaj Aziz again became Federal Minister, he supported setting up of the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund with World Bank support in 1998 so that NRSP and other RSPs did not suffer with change in government and at least some funding was available to them to keep afloat.

Despite lack of direct continuous support, RSPs were endorsed by political leadership. Prime Minister Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, during her first tenure after a presentation on AKRSP, commended it to her party Chief Ministers in Sindh and NWFP (now Khyber Pukhtunkhwa [KP]. When a Federal Cabinet decision was going to adversely affect NRSP, Federal Minister Shafqat Mahmood at the behest of President Leghari got the decision reversed by the Cabinet. Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif funded with Rs. 500 million setting up of Punjab Rural Support Programme in 1998. Imran Khan pooled his MNA funds in 2005 to initiate similar programme in his constituency. PM Shaukat Aziz approved 70 million dollars World Bank soft loan for Social Mobilisation with full support of John Wall of the World Bank. Chief Minister Amir Haider Khan Hoti funded 40 Union Councils in 2009 along with Rs. 500 million endowment for SRSP. Governments of Sindh and Balochistan gave an endowment of Rs. 1000 million and 500 million to Sindh Rural Support Organisation and Balochistan Rural Support Programme respectively.

My erstwhile colleagues in the Civil Service of Pakistan went out of their way to help and facilitate RSPs.

Since 2009 it is the Provincial Government of Sindh led by Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah with approval of President Asif Zardari which provided full funding for four districts followed by his successor Syed Murad Ali Shah who sanctioned funding for six additional districts to augment the 8 districts being funded by European Union.

I have great hopes that Federal Government through Planning Commission will take notice of the examples set up by Province of Sindh and India, who publically acknowledge that their programme was inspired by Rural Support Programmes in Pakistan. I am grateful to MNA Marvi Memon who has promised to collaborate with RSPs, in graduating BISP beneficiaries out of poverty.

I also hope that Donors, who used to support RSPs, will come back to see what RSPs have achieved and how much more remains to be accomplished if Pakistan has to rid itself of poverty. Currently, but for European Union's support, RSPs would not have been where they are today in KP, Sindh and Balochistan.

There is a great deal of misconception as to what RSPs do. Some think it is a microcredit programme, some dub it as only doing infrastructure, some question why don't RSPs do health and education. Let me take a couple of minutes of your time to explain the core mandate of RSPs. The RSP approach is based on the assumption that even the poorest of the poor has the potential to do something to improve their livelihood. As Michael Angelo used to say when his David was praised that he had done nothing. David was already hidden in the marble, he just removed the superfluous material covering it. RSPs are also only helping the rural poor to unleash the potential hidden in them.

The success of RSPs depends on willingness of the rural poor to get organised; the presence of an honest and sincere activist amongst them to lead the organisation and thirdly a Support Organisation of dedicated, honest and competent professionals guided by honorary Boards of

Directors with unimpeachable integrity for Social Guidance of the communities endowed with resources from Government or Donors.

This morning there are over 200 activist leaders from all over Pakistan who are attending the convention. Akhter Hameed Khan used to call them Diamonds of the Community without them RSPs would not have achieved much.
