

Note for Record

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Subject: Meeting with the Prime Minister

True to his words given to me at the dinner hosted in honour of His Highness the Aga Khan, Secretary to PM Fawad Hassan Fawad arranged the presentation to PM on graduation of Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) beneficiaries, on January 17, 2018. As I had always attended earlier meetings at Prime Minister's House, I along with 6 CEOs of RSPN/RSPs headed to PM House but were redirected to the Mughal Style grand PM Office building.

The PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi put us all at ease when I introduced Masoodul Mulk to him by saying he was our senior at College (where PM was Masood's younger brother's class fellow) and used to boss us. He recognised Shandana as he was very friendly with her uncle and reminded Shandana of a past incident. I introduced Rashid, Dittal, Nadir and Muzaffar saying that how long an association I have had with them spanning from a decade to over three decades and they have come from all corners of Pakistan Quetta, Gilgit, Sukkur, Peshawar and Islamabad for this meeting.

Introducing myself I said this is 65th year of my working life, of which in the 20th year in 1972 when I was Commissioner Karachi and the post of Divisional Commissioner was abolished in Sindh (revived after 3 years), I sought my posting to Pakistan Academy for Rural Development at Peshawar. My main attraction was to develop a model of poverty reduction of rural poor on the lines of what I had seen and experienced in 1959-60 while posted in the then East Pakistan district of Comilla where Akhter Hameed Khan (AHK) was the Director of the Rural Academy at Comilla.

AHK emphasised the theory of development of rural poor distilled from successful models of the world over five decades beginning with Raiffeisen in 1849. AHK used

to emphasise that these principles are as precise as the law of gravity and going against these principles of development is like building crooked walls.

AHK visited me in Peshawar on his way to Michigan and a year later leaving professorship at Michigan State University joined me at Peshawar as Adviser to the Academy and also invited a Harvard professor John Thomas who came and spent a few months with us.

What I wish to present before you is my 45 years of experience of implementing the theory of Development I learnt from AHK, the greatest Social Scientist I have ever come across.

It was my misconception that I will be able to implement those principles of rural development by remaining in government where rigid rules and procedures stragulate you and the postings are governed by tenure. However, the Daudzai Model with AHK advice that I developed got international acclamation and when government decided that I had wasted enough of my time and made me OSD, I decided to seek pasture new and left Pakistan to seek my fortune in United Nations.

Strange are the ways and snares of fortune, while working for UNICEF in Sri Lanka in 1982, Aga Khan Foundation Geneva asked me to initiate their Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral.

This was my first opportunity to put AHK's mentored principles of development into practice. His Highness the Aga Khan assured me of his support to the programme for 25 years if rural poor of Northern Areas wanted it. AHK had returned to Karachi from Michigan and willingly made 12 visits to AKRSP during my stay at AKRSP for 12 years in Gilgit.

AKF Geneva persuaded the World Bank to assess AKRSP. On their first evaluation after 5 years, the evaluators stated that the first four years of AKRSP are the missed years of all rural development programmes in the world because unlike the process approach of AKRSP they follow a blue print approach.

In their second evaluation after ten years, the World Bank evaluators observed that the income of the million people of Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral had in real terms more than doubled.

In 1992 as the President of Philippines gave me the Magsaysay Award known as the Asian Nobel Prize, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif sent for me from Gilgit and asked me if AKRSP could be expanded countrywide. I submitted it can be replicated by setting up an organisation like AKRSP which was not for profit joint stock company. Fully supported by the Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz, National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) was sanctioned six monthly instalment of Rs. 500 million and the Board of Directors decided to convert the first instalment into an endowment. Unfortunately future instalments never came because of change in government but that endowment enabled NRSP to become the largest RSP today.

PM said that we made sure before relinquishing that NRSP gets the first instalment.

I sought Prime Minister's permission to present as to what RSPs have achieved with the help of PowerPoint slides before we present the BISP beneficiaries graduation plan.

I said this is to convince PM that we need not look to Latin America and Mexico to learn lessons for graduation, South Asia have a proven track record of successfully graduating even the poorest of the poor out of poverty. I also gave the title page of the Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust where it is acknowledged that India's largest poverty reduction programme in Andhra and National Rural Livelihoods Mission were inspired by the strategy advocated by RSPs.

After listening to the BISP beneficiaries graduation plan presented by Rashid, the PM observed the plans so far presented to him were unconvincing as they targeted a much small number compared to 2.6 million in RSP plan and suggested three different options unlike a holistic approach adopted by RSP. The PM also expressed surprise at poverty figures of different provinces according to the surveys carried out by BISP. Shandana explained that RSPs revalidate the poverty score card by getting their figures vetted by relevant community organisation. Dittal also clarified

that in Sindh according to PSC questionnaire, a large number of rural poor fall below poverty category.

Nadir Gul spoke about the special characteristics of Baluchistan province due to large area and sparsely spread out households and this may require higher operational cost than the 7% operational cost. On a query from the Additional Secretary to PM, Rashid clarified that the per beneficiary cost of approximately Rs. 38,000 included the holistic interventions as well as the operational cost.

Overall the PM seemed satisfied with the graduation proposal presented by RSPs and observed that we both will try to convince relevant quarters to adopt RSP plan. I submitted to the PM it is only he who can do it because I have done my best to convince them but as the Bible says “It is not that they cannot see, they do not want to see”.

We took leave of the PM, profusely thanking him for his time out of his horrendously busy schedule. This was the most relaxed meeting I ever had compared to other Prime Ministers. While taking leave, I introduced Muzaffaruddin as the Shepherd boy from Shimshal Valley of Gilgit, which is so remote that it used to take four days from KKH to go there and even Edmund Hillary after conquering Everest came to trek to Shimshal over horrendously difficult terrain littered with glaciers and deep crevices.

Associated Press of Pakistan reported our meeting with the PM as follows:

<http://www.app.com.pk/govt-committed-assist-poor-skill-development-capacity-building-pm/>