

Note for Record

By: Shoaib Sultan Khan

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Subject: - The Empowered Women of Rural Sindh

In 2009 when Chief Minister of the province Sindh Syed Qaim Ali Shah approved launching of Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP) for the two poorest districts of Sindh, because of my experience in India of mobilising over 10 million rural women in State of Andhra Pradesh through UNDP and World Bank assistance, I submitted to the Chief Minister that UCBPRP will only work with women. He smiled and observed you may try.

The women of Kashmore and Shikarpur responded so enthusiastically and positively that UCBPRP was picked up by European Union in 2015 giving funds to implement empowerment of women in another eight districts, in addition to four districts being funded by the provincial exchequer. This brought the rural women being empowered to over one million.

As EU, while initially UCBPRP, renamed Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support Programme (SUCCESS), conveyed to the Provincial Government a message that EU was not a substitute to government and expect remaining districts to be taken up by the provincial government, in 2017 Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah made funds available to cover another six districts by UCBPRP.

On January 8, 2018 the launch of the UCBPRP in six districts was organised by Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) at Sukkur, which was graced by Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, ex-Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah and a large number of other distinguished guests including Provincial

Ministers, Senators, MNAs, MPAs, Chairman Planning & Development Department, Commissioner Sukkur and provincial and local officials.

But the jewel in the crown were over 11000 empowered women who had come from the districts where UCBPRP had been implemented and where SUCCESS was being implemented by SRSO. The National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) and the Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP) are also implementing SUCCESS in six districts.

In my welcome address, I retraced the background of the UCBPRP and SUCCESS as follows:

I am most grateful to Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah for arranging visit of the Chairman.

I have always said that my life is full of coincidences. This moment is another happy coincidence that I am meeting the third generation of the illustrious Bhutto family. I will never forget how when I took over as Commissioner Karachi in 1971, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto welcomed me on phone to Karachi and assured me of any help I might need from his party. Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir during her first Prime Ministership after hearing my presentation on Aga Khan Rural Support Programme observed that it was a revolutionary programme but very difficult to implement. However, on her direction her Secretary Salman Faruqi wrote to her party Chief Ministers in Sindh and NWFP (now KP) commending RSP model to them. I was pleasantly surprised when in 2003 Government of Sindh wrote to me about approval of a Sindh RSP and asking me to accept its Chairmanship. It is now over 14 years that I have remained associated with Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO). I wish Shaheed Benazir would have been alive to see for herself how the poor rural Sindhi women responded to UCBPRP and they always admit inspired by Bibi.

Being resident in Islamabad, I knew the organisation needed a man to manage and implement the programme. I was happy when Dr. Sulaiman Shaikh accepted my request to become the Chief Executive Officer of SRSO but he only accepted it on an honorary capacity

and laid a solid foundation of SRSO. Because of his multifarious responsibilities, I persuaded Nazar Memon to relocate himself in Sukkur from Islamabad. Amongst his many achievements, the most lasting has been an SRSO state of the art complex in Sukkur.

It was only in 2008 that SRSO got the resources in the shape of Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP) thanks to the then Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah. When I presented the UCBPRP plan, he commented “you seem to have the prescription for rural poverty”. On my response, I don’t have the resources, he asked his Chief Secretary Fazlur Rahman to provide resources for the two poorest districts Shikarpur and Kashmore-Kandhkot, who enthusiastically supported the decision. On my submission to the Chief Minister that SRSO in UCBPRP districts will only work with women, he laughed and said you can try.

As Nazar Memon due to health and domestic reasons requested to return to Islamabad, I persuaded Sono Khangharani to become CEO of SRSO. Sono with full support of Additional Chief Secretaries Development Khero and Nazar Mahar, Finance Secretary Malik and Secretary Naheed Shah Durrani and SRSO Board of Directors Fazlullah Qureshi, Dr. Rashid Bajwa, Shirin Narejo, Commissioners of Sukkur & Larkana (I am glad that Dr Usman Chachar is here) and others mobilised over 200,000 women in the two districts in a little over two years. When Qaim Ali Shah Sahib was greeted by thousands of organised women in Shikarpur in 2010, he praised them in his budget speech on the floor of Provincial Assembly and also RSPs, which RSPs cherish and have it on RSPN website.

Luckily for us an EU group visited Badin, Tharparkar and Sukkur in 2015 and their leader Development Counsellor Brand de Groot contacted me in Islamabad on return and offered to provide funding for implementing UCBPRP in eight more districts of Sindh in addition to the four districts Government of Sindh was doing, provided Sindh Government would be agreeable. We arranged a meeting of the Counsellor with Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah who not only accepted the offer with thanks but also promised to implement an additional six districts with provincial resources.

Due to official procedural requirements, the programme for six districts, although approved and included in Annual Development Plans could not be released funds till I met Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah who directed Chairman P&D Muhammad Wasim to get the funds released and give requisite exemptions to overcome official hurdles. But for Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah's interventions, there would not have been the launch today, facilitated at every step by Minister Mir Hazar Khan Bijarani, Chairman P&D Muhammad Wasim and Chief Secretary Rizwan Memon.

With your indulgence Mr. Chairman, I would like to make a submission to the Government of Sindh not to treat SRSO and National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) as NGOs, as these were set up by Provincial and Federal Governments respectively with endowments and have officials, as ex-officio Directors on their Boards. In 2008, when I had made a presentation before President Zardari, he had approved a countrywide UCBPRP type of programme for the entire country to be implemented by NRSP in collaboration with Provincial RSPs. Unfortunately, Salman Faruqui's transfer from Planning Commission to the Presidency and change of Finance Minister Shaukat Tareen the plan got consigned to limbo. Later but for Sindh Government initiative, with the approval of President of Pakistan, there would have been no UCBPRP, as despite my presentations to all the Chief Ministers of the Provinces, none acted upon it. With the EU support, Sindh is the only province in the country with a realistic and proven track record of poverty reduction programme. Baluchistan Province has benefitted from the experience of Sindh, as EU has given resources to the Baluchistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP) and NRSP to implement UCBPRP in eight districts of Baluchistan.

Mr. Chairman, my contributions in achievements of SRSO are minimal. It really has happened because of the tremendous support of the Government of Sindh, the committed and dedicated work done by professionals of SRSO both in the field and the headquarters, currently led by Dittal Kalhoro as CEO.

Above all the entire credit is due to rural women of Sindh and their leadership. My mentor Akhter Hameed Khan used to say these rural leaders are diamonds of the community and

today Mr. Chairman you will see for yourself how these leaders, even poorest of the poor, glitter in making UCBPRP a shining example of helping the rural populace.

These community women you see Mr. Chairman are only a representative sample of women organised and to be organised once UCBPRP and EU supported SUCCESS programmes are completed in 18 districts of the province. These would number 2 Million comprising 11.8 Million population out of 3 Million rural households in these districts. According to poverty score card these programmes would help 100% households below poverty line to graduate above their existing band and 40% beyond poverty line. According to recent evaluation carried out by Sukkur IBA by taking a random sample from 50,000 beneficiaries of UCBPRP in Shikarpur, Kashmore and Jacobabad districts 90% of the beneficiaries in bottom band of PSC graduated to higher bands and 68% above poverty line.

Only Sukkur, Ghotki, Naoshahro Feroze and Shaheed Benazirabad remains to be covered by UCBPRP and 40 UCs of the six districts which have been approved by the Government of Sindh this year. Once we cover the entire province, Sindh will be a demonstration for other provinces of Pakistan, how rural poverty can be reduced.

On behalf of rural women of Sindh, SRSO staff and Board of Directors and on my own personal behalf, we are most honoured by your kind visit to SRSO.

Many women spoke about their journey from abject poverty to empowerment. They spoke with such confidence and passion that everyone in the audience was spellbound.

After my address, the Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah announced expansion of the UCBPRP in four remaining districts and forty remaining union councils of the current UCBPRP districts.

Chairman Bilawal promised to expand poverty reduction programme to all the districts to rid Province of Sindh of rural poverty.
