

Note for Record

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Subject: - A Visit to FATA

You hear the word FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) and all kinds of imageries flash before your eyes these days. I had served as Political Agent for a part of FATA comprising Tribal Orakzai and Darra Adam Khal fifty five years ago. So, when CEO Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) Masoodul Mulk invited me to visit Khyber and Kurram Agencies of the area, I had no idea what I will see and what will be in STORE FOR ME.

Accompanied with Chairperson SRSP Munawar Humayun, Masood and his team comprising Aftab, Nadia, Awlad and SRSP Khyber Agency Coordinator, when we entered Bara Tehsil of Khyber Agency, my heart sank seeing the destruction and devastation in the area. Bara, few decades ago, was the biggest market for all kinds of imported goods replacing Landi Kotal, near Pak-Afghan border which initially was the shopping centre. The town with rows and rows of shops all closed and shut. The mind boggles to imagine how much the Afridis of Bara suffered at the hands of militants. A peaceful and prosperous area presented a tragic phenomenon, not even half an hour away from the bustling and busy city of Peshawar and Hayatabad.

As we proceeded further towards Akakhel Union Council, the surroundings became less depressing with greenery in the fields and only few signs of destruction. Finally we reached Akakhel Sports Stadium where over 300 people had assembled with a large number of children sitting on the adjoining steps around the playing field. The Assistant Political Agent Asmatullah Wazir also joined us.

Akakhel UC has 3000 households comprising 24,000 population. The proceedings started with recitation followed by a poem by a school boy. Mohammad Riaz Afridi briefly described what they went through during militancy. They were living peacefully doing farming and their own business and abiding by the Pakhtun code settling every dispute through Jirga, when they had all to migrate to Peshawar, other places and many to Jallozai IDP (internally displaced persons) camps. They had to suffer terrible hardships besides extreme hot weather. Finally their ordeal ended with registration of IDPs by SRSP numbering 95,000 families. With FAO assistance, SRSP provided them cash for work from March 20, 2015 mainly clearance of 4,000 irrigation channels. Nearly 2500 projects were implemented helping 40,000 families. Medical camps were also organised. With EU and UNDP help, 2325 schools were rehabilitated by December 2017. SRSP was also supported by UNICEF in implementing WASH programme. KFW also supported SRSP.

After registration of IDPs, on their return, SRSP commenced its activities by motivating them to organise and start discipline of savings and by now had organised 23 village organisations each comprising currently 20 households which they call village committees (avoiding word organization (Tanzeem) smacking of militants terminology) and federating the 23 VCs into a Network having 2 representatives from each VC forming a General Body (GB) of 46 members which has elected an executive body of 9 members from amongst the GB. A swearing in ceremony of the 9 office bearers was held in front of all the members of VCs and an oath was administered swearing to serve the people. I was happy to note that these were all young people and had the approval of elders who were all present in the gathering.

When asked to speak, I reminisced my interaction with tribals of yester years and emphasized that the principles of social mobilisation of unity are really a resurrection of the principles of unity the tribals have always followed. After Masood thanked them for their cooperation with SRSP and also leadership of the Political Administration and the Army, we proceeded to the Mehsud Scouts Unit camp.

Meeting Col. Imran Khattak, Commandant of the Scouts was seeing army in the development garb Col. Imran spoke of nothing but how his Unit can improve the welfare of the people, who

had suffered so much and make their lives as comfortable as possible. His priorities were how to make schools and health facilities functional and accessible to people. He is ensuring the staff of health facilities attends to their duties and the teachers don't absent themselves from schools. He has introduced a system whereby at all the nearby army check posts, the staff of health and educational facilities have to mark their attendance in a register maintained at the check post showing the arrival and departure times. This simple device has taken care of the absenteeism of the government servants. He also lamented waste of money by departments when a 50-bed hospital has been built in a Nullah and an irrigation canal at considerable cost has been constructed by the contractor above the dam from where it is supposed to be fed. The Colonel was a bundle of limitless energy. The whole previous night he spent in rounding up young boys being used as carriers by smugglers carrying not only drugs but also IUDs and hand grenades. A large cache was exhibited on the lawn for us to see. He made himself accessible to one and sundry who wanted to see him and gained their confidence. So much so that when they threw at him Pakhtun Code to justify their actions, he snubbed them not to try to hoodwink him by these tactics.

The Colonel gave us a sumptuous lunch followed by a PowerPoint presentation of the situation in his command area and the development initiatives in progress and planned. Col. Imran was indeed a most adorable specimen of army in its development role. I was delighted to see that he was very positive and supportive of SRSP activities in the area.

Our last visit in Bara Tehsil of Khyber Agency was to Said Noor Killay in Shalobar tribe to visit a KFW funded drinking water scheme at a cost of Rs. 2.2 million benefiting 90 households comprising 600 people. The main feature of this drinking water scheme is the power being provided by solar panels, which is a most impressive sight in this age old surroundings. The VC of 24 members has saved Rs. 100,000 and holds monthly meetings. The VC has financially supported 6 orphans for education, has held free medical camp and has also undertaken self-help works costing Rs. 500 to 15,000. Syed Shah and Ahmad Noor the office bearers of the VC seemed most dedicated and sincere in helping everyone in the village especially the poor.

The next day we left for Kurram Agency headquarters Parachinar. It was a journey down memory lane. 53 years ago I had gone to Parachinar from Kohat with family along with my friends Air Commodore Allahdad, President ISSB and Commander Arif, SP Kohat along with their families. At Parachinar our group stayed in the same compound which has now been renamed as Governor's Cottage. In 1890 this Cottage was built for the Divisional Superintendent of Railways when British were planning to extend the rail track from Kohat to Parachinar. The plan never materialized but the Cottage is till today in pristine condition being maintained by the Political Administration.

SRSP's advent in Kurram Agency happened in 2007 when Governor Orakzai at the behest of Additional Chief Secretary FATA Secretariat Javed Iqbal asked SRSP to commence a rural support programme in FATA area and agreed to our request to give an endowment of Rs. 200 million to give sustainability to the venture. To facilitate SRSP in its work, the Governor and ACS suggested initiating activities in peaceful areas to begin with they identified Kurram Agency and Peshawar FR area. SRSP was able to mobilise resources for projects in the area through Canadian CIDA assistance, as the income from the endowment could only meet operational cost.

As luck would have it by November 2007, the Kohat-Kurram Road was closed because of the militancy in the area. Fortunately, SRSP was able to identify a local educated person Dr. Awlad Hussain as the FATA Programme Coordinator. According to Awlad, people of Upper Kurram were comparatively more educated, Lower Kurram had extremist elements and Central Kurram was in-between with maximum education from 8th to 10th classes.

Initially Awlad built on the existing institutions such as Jirgas which met only on ad hoc basis to solve situations as they arose. To convert this ad hoc practice into an institutional form, he persuaded communities to form committees of all households to meet regularly thus approaching the first principle of Social Mobilisation of organizing them. Similarly he persuaded them to convert their Funeral Fund into a discipline of regular savings in committee meetings. Gradually a Central Kurram Committee Network also came into existence along with some women committees.

However, all this slowed down with the closure of the road and shifting of SRSP Kurram Office to Hayatabad. When the situation improved by April 2008, SRSP office came back. At one of the LSO meetings in Islamabad, Kirman Network was awarded Rs. 100,000 by RSPN for their outstanding Social Mobilisation. This was publicized widely and proved a great impetus for other Networks to improve their achievements. However, the SRSP staff had still to go to Peshawar via Afghanistan because of the trouble on the Kohat road off and on. But the SRSP activities continued, albeit, at a slow pace. Even villages with only Sunni population approached SRSP and got mobilised. In Kurram, there were not only militant affectees but also sectarian affectees who became IDPs. The rehabilitation of both kind of IDPs was a challenge. But SRSP's work in places such as Kharooti tribe on the border of Afghanistan with completion of micro hydel won over the Syeds of the area who were Sunnis. The Peace Festival Programme by SRSP in 2013 where 3000 men from all parts of Kurram came and participated in sports, did a great deal in acceptance of SRSP amongst the inhabitants of different areas, as these efforts brought different sects together, they even went to each other for Fateha of each other's dead.

Awlad's strategy of grafting on existing traditional practices instead of top down imposition of the principles of Social Mobilisation was indeed a great success. He has the added advantage of belonging to highly revered religious family. His father Syed Mahmood Shah welcomed us at his residence on arrival and extended a most heartwarming hospitality.

At night we were welcomed at dinner by the Political Agent Wazir which was attended by the Brigade Commander Akhtar and Militia Commandant Rashid. Brig. Akhtar again invited us to lunch the next day. The support of the Army and the Political Administration SRSP has generated, is its greatest asset without which it would have been impossible for SRSP to work. I was greatly touched by their kindness and hospitality extended to us. I was delighted to know that the Political Agent was nephew of one of the officers who used to work with me when I was DC Kohat. To my great joy, I found that Brig. Akhtar was a resident of Swat, which gave me my first job in 1953 along with the domicile, enabling me to compete in the CSP competitive examination, thus getting into the civil service in 1955.

March 3rd was the high watermark of our visit to FATA commencing with meeting over 500 tribals representing all parts of Kurram Agency mobilised in 5 Networks representing nearly 7000 households. The meeting was at a school, an hour's distance from Parachinar, built in 1902. The 5 Networks namely Kirman, Chinar, Zeran, Pekar and Speenghar were sitting in five separate groups.

After recitation and address of welcome, Malik Mohammad Khan of the border Sunni village spoke in glowing terms of Awlad of SRSP who was the first to visit their village. Not even the English ever visited them, SRSP has done excellent work and is for poor and the needy and there is no sectarianism. He expressed his sincere gratitude to SRSP.

Ikram Hussain, Chairman of Kirman Network describing activities of the organisation formed by SRSP in 2012, got registered in 2014 and comprises 984 households with 141 women members in four women committees and has a total savings of Rs. 572,600. The Network not only helped the poor providing monetary assistance to 5 persons for medical treatment, it also resolved an outstanding dispute with Central Kurram. The Network also encouraged education by responding to demand of children to "give us education" and encouraging enrolment. The Network forged linkages with Forest Department in getting plants, with Irrigation for schemes and secured projects worth 12 to 15 million from different departments. It also pays female teachers to teach girls where Agency facility was not available. With SRSP support, it got Community Management and Leadership Management training for VC office bearers, dairy farming training for 80 women and tomato ketchup processing for 36 women besides giving sewing machines to needy women. To achieve financial viability, the 28 VCs donate Rs. 1000 each as annual subscription and Rs. 100 pm and also in kind donation at harvest of Rabi and Kharif crops.

Pekar Network of 28 VCs including 3 women committees was also formed in 2012 and is situated in Pak-Afghan isolated border area. The Network building was constructed on donated land. A drinking water pipeline costing Rs. 115,000 was self-financed, so also an access link road costing Rs. 300,000 on which people worked free connecting villages. A water tank costing Rs. 150,000 constructing with expatriate support. Poor children in 9th and

10th classes were given tuition fees. As PHE water scheme was not enough with increase in population, 300 households got mobilised and pipeline was extended. With forging linkages, the Network secured PHC from Political Administration, SRSP built an off-grid Micro Hydel Power Station. FDA provided two MHP worth Rs. 3 million, facilitated 15 eligibles to obtain Rs. 880,000 from Baitul Mal fund as Zakat. Future plans included unorganized households to be organised, savings mobilisation, women education and linkages with departments.

Chinar Network was also formed in 2012 comprising 28 VCs including 1 women committee and registered with Social Welfare Department. The Chairman of the Network Intizar Hussain who is Principal of the College in Lower Kurram, gives free education to 60 poor students. Through linkages, an irrigation channel worth more than Rs. 10 million and drinking water scheme of Rs. 1.5 million were secured. Polio Centre was activated and all children vaccinated. Network is determined to get all households organised. He expressed his personal gratitude to Network which solved a 25-year old dispute resolved of which he was personally a victim of enmity. SRSP has done projects worth Rs. 7 million. SRSP has taught us how to fish. Poverty is main cause as capital is power.

Chairman Latif Hussain of Zeran Network informed the formation of the Network in 2012 comprising 22 VCs including 4 WCs with savings of Rs. 445,000. The villagers used to get disconnected now the Network ensured access through cleanliness of roads and lanes. On 31st March Network is going to celebrate Jashn-e-Nauroz and will ensure cleanliness. Being a teacher, he knows how poor live and the Network ensures clothes and reading material for the poor students. The Network helps the Forest Department for protection of forest and have kept two forest guards for the purpose and the Network is paid Rs. 6,000 pm by the Department. Girls' school and many other miscellaneous projects have been obtained through linkages with PA and others. Government has spent 6 crore on education in the area on buildings etc. Through SRSP introduction, the Network has demonstrated how it is helping the poor by not depending all the time on outsiders. However, this has built confidence and many people give donations to Network to help the poor. The Network has also replaced dependency syndrome by doing things themselves within Network's capacity. The Network

also preaches peace to everyone as without it the people will never develop and get out of poverty.

Lal Zamin of Speenghar Network of Central Kurram, being initially sceptical of SRSP objectives organised in 2013, federating 24 VCs. Initially people used to run away from SRSP, now seeing the work done by Network in polio eradication and the Community Leadership Management training imparted by SRSP has greatly motivated people to collaborate with SRSP through the Network.

A swearing in ceremony of all the office bearers of five Networks was held solemnly affirming promotion of education, youth and other development activities, helping widows, orphans and disabled, proper use of local resources, attaining financial sustainability and forging linkages with Departments and Development Organisations.

Additional Political Agent Nasrullah Khan who had been accompanying us to all our meetings throughout and to me appeared one of those rare civil servants who have a very soft corner for the poor and strive to do every possible thing to improve the livelihood and welfare of the people in their charge. In his speech, he greatly lauded the work of SRSP especially community involvement through organisation and imparting management and leadership skills to the rural people. He reiterated the message of peace and the principles of social mobilisation being imparted by SRSP.

In my address I recounted my experience of interaction with the tribals more than half a century ago and made them laugh how on my taking charge as PA Orakzai, they fooled me by staging a fake battle between two tribes by firing cannons at each other. The experienced political staff advised me not to worry because this was simply to panic me to intervene in their dispute to resolve it and thereby extort some concessions for both sides from the Political Administration. True enough the cannons were fired at empty places in the mountains on both sides with no intention causing damage to either side. After a couple of weeks, the cannons got silenced by themselves. But later on when I came to know them I admired their honesty and immense politeness if you meet them as equals. They were so

well organised and disciplined and adhered to Pakhtun Code that during my nearly two years stay, there never was any murder or trouble in the area although Kohat district though very peaceful such incidents took place off and on. I had a whole police force and Frontier Constabulary to keep law and order but for Tribal Orakzai and Darra Adam Khel, I had one APA and a Political Tehsildar and law and order was maintained with the help of Levies. In fact they were mostly for show with whom I sometimes used to do target shooting, the Tribes maintained law and order themselves.

I told them I was delighted to see that despite such traumatic experience, their resilience was amazing and admirable. Their response to a holistic community driven development programme is a great encouragement for SRSP because without your willingness to fulfill your obligations of organisation, savings and human skills development, SRSP would not have been able to achieve much. You have responded much beyond my expectations and it is my conviction if you keep on this track and get all households part of VCs and Network, you will enable SRSP to focus on each and every household and also enable each family to identify its potential to improve its livelihood and enable government services and supplies to reach you and enable you to access them. I see future prosperity of FATA in this approach which depends totally on you for success, as you have already demonstrated despite insurmountable hardships and obstacles. After my speech, the person sitting next to me identified himself as Agency Additional Education Officer and thanked me for mentioning Darra Adam Khel to which he belongs.

Dr. Awlad thanked the Political Administration and all the Network members for coming to the meeting.

From Kirman, we proceeded to Angori in Central Kurram, an area affected by sectarian strife also besides militancy on way we visited a school rehabilitated with UNDP assistance. Along with SRSP, Agency Coordinator Mohammad Asad, we visited a couple of Middle Schools till we reached Angori where were welcomed by Talimi Islahi Jirga, a group of local volunteers who increased enrolment. Recounting what they have been through, being the most undeveloped area of the Agency, they were struck by trouble in 2007 forcing to become

IDPs. In 2008, SRSP formed a village committee of 18 households leading to community unity and peace which enabled SRSP to get aid from UNDP, UNICEF and EU to help solve many problems. They also set up a fund to help the poor.

Ahmad Khan, Agency Additional Education Officer, Central Kurram stated the special problems in the field of education the area suffers and made an impassioned request for special attention to the area. I was greatly impressed by his passion to help the people of the area to get educated. He pleaded as if it was his own personal problem, such officers are indeed a real asset to society.

In my speech I also emphasized the importance of education and urged people to make full use of the facilities being provided by Political Administration as apparent from the number of school buildings I had seen on the way. The meeting was being held in the compound of a newly built Girls Hostel. If the hostel is not used or children especially girls don't go to school, then all this investment will go waste. I do hope that TIJ's efforts bear fruits.

Lastly Rs. 9.2 million were distributed to the Talimi Islahi Jirgas of the area by cheque for undertaking essential work at the schools in different dozen places.

We returned to Parachinar late in the evening and thereafter had a meeting with the SRSP staff and discussed the ways and means to achieve the ultimate objective of mobilizing the rural households out of the total 118,000 households residing in Kurram Agency. The main incentive SRSP can offer is improving livelihoods of each household as it is the only organisation which focuses on by motivating and mobilizing rural households to form village committees and federating them in Networks. The beginning should be persuading VCs to make micro investment plans (MIPs) for each household by the family itself keeping in view their own capacity to improve their livelihood and identifying the obstacles and constraints why they are not able to do it. Once SRSP has such MIPs, it will get an idea what kind of resources are needed to help households to overcome the obstacles which deter them from unleashing their own potential to help themselves. Thus the MIP will become the incentive for rural households to form committees.

On our final day of the visit, on the way back to Islamabad and Peshawar, we visited KFW-funded project in Larzar village where 2000 households have been provided with a drinking water scheme at a cost of Rs. 3.5 million comprising a storage tank and 27 water outlets of clean spring water installed all over the village.

I am most grateful to Masood for exposing me to this indescribable experience. What SRSP has achieved is incredible and shown the way what the people of FATA need, if a serious attempt is intended to rehabilitate these unfortunate tribals who have suffered hardships much beyond human endurance. My heartfelt deep appreciation to Chief Operating Officer Aftab, FATA SRSP Coordinator Dr. Awlad and all those SRSP Management and other staff who are working with such dedication and passion to help the people of FATA and above all to Masood for his leadership and inspiring guidance.

Link to Coverage of the visit in a National English Daily: The News

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/289343-resilience-of-tribal-people-admirable-says-shoaib-sultan>