

NOTE FOR RECORD
February 15-20, 2019

By: Shoaib Sultan Khan
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Subject: The Sindh Odyssey

Travelling from Islamabad to Sukkur on February 15th, I found Provincial Minister Nasir Shah on the same flight. A year ago, the Minister had persuaded Chairman Bilawal Bhutto to visit Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) who came alongwith Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, the ex-Chief Minister Qaim Ali Shah, the Leader of Opposition Syed Khurshid Shah and many other MNAs, MPAs, Chairman P&D Muhammad Waseem, Secretary P&D Ms Shereen Narejo, Commissioner Sukkur Mr. Abbas, the Deputy Commissioner and many others. The Chief Minister was so impressed listening to the women empowered through Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP) that he announced on the spot that the remaining five districts of the province including rural union councils of Karachi and Hyderabad districts will also be included for implementation of UCBPRP. In October 2018 when I met the Chief Minister at Karachi in which Chairman Waseem was also present, Rs. 4.6 billion were approved for the expanded programme and next day it was flashed all over newspapers. It was also included in 2018-2019 ADP in the budget speech.

When Minister Nasir Shah asked me the progress of the programme which had been renamed from UCBPRP to Peoples Poverty Reduction Programme (PPRP), I expressed my dismay at lack of progress in preparing PC-I to channel funds for implementation of PPRP and told him I have a meeting with Chairman Waseem on February 18 and I want to ask him about the progress of the programme. He said he will also come. True to his words Minister Nasir Shah also appeared when I was meeting Chairman Waseem alongwith CEOs NRSP and SRSO Rashid and Dittal. Chairman Also sent for Secretary Planning Shereen Narejo. The Chairman instructed to prepare the PC-I and arrange release of first tranche in the next fortnight or so. We were also joined by Provincial Minister Shehla Raza who is looking after Women Affairs and was asked by Chairman Bilawal to visit the women organised by RSPs. We invited her to join us next day at Tando Allah Yar where under EU funded SUCCESS programme, on the lines of UCBPRP, is being implemented.

After the meeting with Chairman Waseem and the Ministers, we spent some time with Secretary Shereen whom Rashid offered to help in preparing PC-I as was done last time also. She requested also for help in preparing information through a dedicated website containing full details of the location of COs/VOs/LSOs to enable her to direct departments to use them as conduit for delivery of their services and supplies instead of they coming up in their proposals to do Social Mobilisation for their project when such an infrastructure already exists.

I would urge RSPN to coordinate with NRSP/SRSO/TRDP to provide this information to Secretary Planning.

In Sukkur I had promised to visit the newly established Research and Training Wing under Dr. Rafiq Chandio. We were delighted to visit Dr. Chandio who introduced us (Rashid & Dittal accompanied me) to his team of researchers. I came away with the impression that this Wing will be of immense support to us in critically analyzing what the programme is doing and also provide course corrections where necessary. I urged them not to do research for the sake of research but their research should be focused on government policies and programmes and provide inputs to them. A spectator always sees more of the game than the players. Dr. Chandio and his team will have that advantage when looking at PPRP or SUCCESS. I assured him of our full cooperation on behalf of the two programmes being implemented by SRSO, NRSP and TRDP.

Our meeting with the Chief Secretary Mr. Mumtaz Shah was most cordial and positive. We briefed him about the progress of PPRP and SUCCESS and described the potential of organised communities through their three tier institutions of the rural poor to also address multi-dimensional poverty. Rashid briefed him about experience of SUCCESS in the district of Tando Muhammad Khan where NRSP has taken the whole district to demonstrate what communities can do in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as demonstrated by implementing of an initiative called Water, Immunization, Sanitation and Education (WISE). The Chief Secretary promised to visit the district and make WISE an integral component of PPRP and SUCCESS.

After meeting the Chief Secretary, we left for Hyderabad and reached there in a couple of hours as the Super Highway has become close to a motorway.

Prior to the visit to Karachi, I had flown to Sukkur from Islamabad. I was very happy to receive Commissioner, Sukkur Division (comprising districts of Sukkur, Khairpur and Gothki) Mr. Rafiq Buriro who came to meet me at the SRSO complex. We spent a couple of hours to understand what SRSO is doing and on my request to direct district administration to use the three tier institutions of the rural poor CO/VO/LSO as a conduit for delivery of their services and supplies meant for rural households, agreed to do so for Khairpur district where PPRP is being implemented and asked us to send him a draft directive addressed to Deputy Commissioner, Khairpur. I found the Commissioner most positive towards SRSO work.

Next day we went on a field visit first to Qambar Shahdadkot where SUCCESS is being implemented for the last two years followed by a visit to Shikarpur where UCBPRP was implemented between 2009-2013. Dr. Rafiq Chandio, Director General of the newly set up Research & Training Wing of the provincial P&D Department also joined us. We heard the presentation of three LSOs, by their office bearers which were most impressive in terms of the understanding of the approach and its implementation. The confidence with which the presentations were made, was most encouraging. It showed very good quality of Social Capital. The success of the approach depends not only on willingness of the community to get organised but equally on the identification of honest and competent activists to lead the organisation of the members. On our request the members who had been given income generating grant (IGG) also came forward and described its utilization. We also interacted with the Community Resource Persons (CRPs) who are selected by LSOs to ensure that COs remain active and viable. Their understanding of their duties seemed most satisfactory. For Dr. Chandio, according to him, meeting the communities was most useful and educative. Without this exposure, it is difficult to comprehend what communities are capable of doing and have done. The most heartening thing was the activists doing all the work for their organisations were most happy at the goodwill they were earning of the community. That according to them, was their most valuable remuneration and encouraged them to continue serving their organisation without any monetary remuneration.

The visit to the three LSOs of Taluka Lakhi, district Shikarpur, Union Councils Tail, Rustam and Bhirkhan was to review the progress and utilization of community investment fund (CIF). These three LSOs were handed over Rs. 35.98 million

between October 2017 and July 2018 and had revolved on an average 55% of the amount and the highest 72% in Tail the first LSO recipient of CIF.

The LSO of UC Sherkot where the meeting was being held, who had built their LSO office, which was ceremonially opened today, made their presentation comprising 32 villages having 3436 households of which 2955 were organised. They had received Rs. 13.88 million CIF and had revolved it three times disbursing Rs. 39.69 million with 1618 beneficiaries out of 1646 eligible households. The LSO has also installed 234 hand pumps receiving a grant of Rs. 1.9 million and constructed 99 low cost houses with a grant of Rs. 5.94 million. The LSO has got 104 boys and 196 girls trained for different vocations besides forging linkages with Health Department for polio campaign, with BISP for getting cards for eligible members, with Hidayat Trust for food items for vulnerable families and other departments.

The whole environment of the meeting got emotionally charged when Mehnaz of LSO Rustam started weeping describing how poorest of the poor she was and only entitled to IGG and with that Rs. 15,000 grant where she is now having a handsome income and a job and assets worth two lacs. She made us all cry. Seeing her, many others also came forward telling their stories.

The following day, the SRSO Board meeting was held in which we were honoured by Minister Nasir Shah also joining us for some time.

Reverting to our arrival at Hyderabad from Karachi by road, I was told that Mr. Abbas who used to be Commissioner Sukkur has now been posted to Hyderabad. I rang him up and he insisted on my having dinner with him. Rashid joined me and the Commissioner suggested that RSPs working in his Division, should keep him posted of what they are doing as SRSO used to do in Sukkur. Both Rashid and I thought it was a good idea as NRSP, TRDP and SRSP through SUCCESS and PPRP are working in eleven districts of Hyderabad Division.

I would suggest to RSPN to take a lead role as SUCCESS has the experience of forming Joint District Committees. The Divisional support would help in persuading district departments for linkages with CO/VO/LSOs.

The visit to Tando Mohammad Khan where EU funded SUCCESS is being implemented by NRSP. We were met by the members of Lakhat Union Council

LSO formed in 2017 with 2517 households of which 1509 had been organised in COs 78, VOs 9 and one LSO, which have generated savings of Rs. 391,000. Of the CIF of Rs. 4 million, Rs. 3.49 million has been disbursed to 236 households and of Rs. 1.52 million IGG Rs. 0.63 million has been given to 41 households.

On enquiry from IGG recipients, they described how they have utilized the money, similarly the CIF recipients told their stories. All had gainfully used the money except in one case where the kid given birth died because it drank excessive milk from the goat but the goat is in healthy condition and likely to conceive again. Since livestock is the favoured investment because women feel most confident in rearing them without loss, it might be worthwhile to give the livestock recipients a basic training in livestock care.

The flagship programme of the LSO was WISE (Water, Immunisation, Sanitation and Education) which has actually been implemented in the entire district including Tando Muhammad Khan Tehsil as a demonstration by NRSP with its own resources how SDGs can be achieved by making it people centric including CO/VO/LSO. Water is aimed at potable drinking water; Immunization objective is preventive health care; Sanitation stands for solid and liquid waste management and Education refers to enrolment for primary education.

WISE is initiated once communities are organised in the three tier structure targeting SDGs 3,4 & 6. Social Mobilisation targets SDG 1 i.e. Poverty. It begins with doing census baseline digitalization using technology platform for comparison of results on regular basis.

The area surveyed in TMK Tehsil comprised 7 LSOs,, 28 villages, 20624 households comprising 135,413 population with 6.6 household size. In less than a year by December 2018, water consumption of potable type increased from 11% to 50%; Immunization of children from 60% to 93%; Sanitation in 204 villages in terms of throwing solid waste outside house reduced from 26% to 14% and household and flush latrines increased from 21% to 59% besides 87 sweepers hired, 149 mud dustbins and 23 concrete dustbins were constructed in coordination with Director, Local Government & Rural Development Department and Union Council Chairman. Enrolment of 4-12 years children increased from 31% to 62% by holding awareness sessions, follow-up visits to out of school children and newly enrolled children, coordination with Education Department, supporting 24

schools in terms of provision of furniture, boundary wall, drinking water facilities, provision of stationary and uniforms to 600 children, thus achieving enrolment of 10,244 children and making non-functional government schools functional by hiring teachers.

The prime movers of WISE programme are the women Community Resource Persons (CRPs) who are selected from amongst the CO members. We met a group of them. When I asked Allahdini why she was doing this job she answered God created concern for poor in my heart and went to describe the obstacles she had to overcome from some people. She seemed very confident and extremely committed. When I asked how many others are like her, all CRPs present claimed, they were as good if not better as Allahdini. I had no doubt in my mind that these will take WISE to new heights.

I was happy to see officials from Health, Education and Livestock Departments present in LSO meeting. In fact Assistant Director Health Dr. Hafizur Rehman Pasha proudly declared how the Department had achieved its targets and thanked the LSO and CRPs for their support to the Department without which they were never able to achieve their targets in the past and acknowledged the support received from the Assistant Commissioner.

As we had promised Minister Shehla Raza, who was driving from Karachi to Tando Allahyar to meet her at mid-day, we wanted to hurry departure as it was already getting late but the President of the LSO where we were holding the LSO meeting and her husband insisted on visiting their village to see what they had achieved in terms of sanitation. The husband said his name was Sultan Ahmad and he wanted another Sultan to see his village. There was no way I could refuse him and all of us took a round of the village and true to their claim, found the village free of litter and solid waste properly stored in bins and the village indeed giving a very clean look.

We were almost an hour late to reach Tando Allahyar but fortunately the proceedings of the meeting being attended by nearly 500 women, had been started as soon as the Minister arrived earlier than the mid-day. She had already heard the women and greatly praised them in her speech which she delivered soon after I had spoken. She was happy that Sindh was the only province which had such a large women's programme thanks to UCBPRP and SUCCESS funded by

EU and now the PPRP. She explained what her department is doing and urged them to make use of the District level Complaint Centres the Department had set up against abuse and other activities. The Department is mandated to prevent abuses against women and is empowered to take action against the culprits. She described different laws enacted in Sindh such as prevention of girls marriage below 18 years of age, setting up of Family Courts to deal with household abuse and other offences against women. She also mentioned the interest free loan scheme for women and her plan to revamp it to enable each and every poor household to access it.

On our way back to Hyderabad, we visited an IRM Field Training Centre where 18 women were being trained in Applique. This is a 30-day training. One of the pieces that they made, bore my name with the idea of presenting it to me. I suggested them to auction the piece with NRSP and SRSO bidding as both CEOs were present. The piece had been made by four girls and their teacher strongly protested against my proposal saying “We can never even imagine selling your name considering what you are doing for us”. I pacified her saying you are not selling my name. Dittal offered Rs. 10,000 and on my comment “Is that all I am worth?” Rashid stepped in and offered a sewing machine to each four of them worth Rs. 10,000 each. I was delighted at the outcome. Since this was NRSP area, I allowed the piece to remain where it was hanging.

On the last day on February 20th, RSPN had organised an Experience Sharing and Learning Workshop for NRSP/TRDP/SRSO the implementers of SUCCESS, The participants, besides RSPN/RSPs staff included Ms Ennis, EUTA, Director General Dr. Rafiq Chandio P&D, Additional Deputy Commissioner Tando Muhammad Khan, Director General Livestock and many other officials. A large number of women activists had also come and their presentations were applauded by everyone. The Programme Managers of TRDP, SRSO, NRSP and PPRP presented progress of their respective segments. Ms Ennis presented the highlights of the government approved Poverty Reduction strategy.

The Additional Deputy Commissioner, DG Chandio, DG Livestock lauded the programme and offered all support and help.

CEO NRSP had given the welcome address and I gave the concluding remarks. Detailed proceedings of the workshop will be issued by RSPN in due course.

Soon after the Workshop, Rashid Hyderabad and I left by road for Karachi airport and arrived Islamabad at night. This was my longest and most extensive trip in the Province of Sindh.