A look into rural development in Tajikistan...

Visit Report of the Experience Sharing and Learning Visit to AKF/MSDSP Tajikistan

Supported by the European Union funded Balochistan Rural Development and Community Empowerment Programme

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List of Participants

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Sardar Ghulam Mustafa Khan Tareen  Minister Local Government Balochistan
Dr. Umar Baber  Ex- Additional Chief Secretary, Balochistan
Mr. Akbar Hussain Durrani  Secretary Finance, Balochistan
Mr. Hafiz Abdul Majid  Secretary Local Government, Balochistan
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Mr. Mohammad Azeem  Director Local Government, Balochistan (Makran Division)
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Mr. Anwar-ul-Haq  Religious Scholar/Member BACE
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Background

This report documents the proceedings of the regional cooperation visit to the Republic of Tajikistan for experience sharing and learning from the Aga Khan Foundation’s Mountain Societies Development Support Programme under the European Union funded Balochistan Rural Development and Community Empowerment Programme (BRDCEP). The delegation from Pakistan comprised of high officials from the Government of Balochistan and members of BRDCEP team from the implementing organisations- BRSP, NRSP and RSPN. The visit was facilitated by AKF-MSDSP Tajikistan.
Visit Programme Briefing at Chaikhana Rahat

Mr. Khaleel Ahmed Tetlay (Chief Operating Officer RSPN) welcomed the Pakistan delegation’s participants and initiated a round of introductions to break the ice between the delegation members and briefed them about the agenda and schedule of the visit for the following days. He shed light on the critical role played by RSPs in Pakistan to reduce poverty through the Community Driven Development approach and praised the progress made by RSPs by highlighting their history and successful expansion of network from one small village in the mountains of Gilgit to 138 districts across Pakistan. He shared the achievements of the PEACE and SUCCESS programmes being implemented in KP and Sindh, respectively, with the financial support of EU and provincial governments and advocated to the Balochistan Government representatives for their support and cooperation in successfully implementing the BRDCE programme initiated in eight districts of Balochistan. He thanked Dr Abdul Malik Baloch and the Balochistan Government for initiating the programme.
The delegation visited AKF-MSDSP office in Dushanbe Tajikistan where Mr Yodgor Faizov, Chief Executive Officer, AKF Tajikistan, gave them a warm welcome. After a brief round of introduction, he expressed his pleasure in hosting guests from his Muslim neighborhood country – Pakistan and recalled that Pakistan was one of the countries to recognize Tajikistan after its independence in 1991.

Mr. Faizov gave a detailed presentation and informed the participants that Tajikistan is a landlocked country in Central Asia that borders Afghanistan in the South, China in the East, Kyrgyzstan in the North, and Uzbekistan in the West and Northwest.

He highlighted AKF’s historical presence in Pakistan by telling the participants that the AKF started work in 1993 in Tajikistan because after the civil war of 1992 people were suffering from a shortage of food and other critical issues. The Tajikistan Government was very weak and had nothing and it was difficult to serve the country comprising of three provinces, six Republic Subordinated Districts, and 3500 villages. Some areas of the country are well developed but some are least developed. Dushanbe and Khujand, which are very well-developed but the Gorno Badakhshan region remains least developed to date. AKF/MSDSP initiated the Humanitarian Assistance Programme, Agricultural Reform Programme, Engineering Programme and Village Organisation Programme. AKF Tajikistan has also supported the Government in health and education sectors. The Government passed legislations that for all the students education up to ninth grade was mandatory. If parents do not enroll their children in schools, strict actions were taken against them. He informed the participants that the Aga Khan Development Network has set up the University of Central Asia, with three campuses – one each in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. UCA has students from Pakistan and India as well. AKDN has also successfully established one private school in Khorog. In the education sector, AKF is further supporting the government in the following areas: Infrastructure improvement and provision of missing facilities, teachers’ training, curriculum development, and quality Improvement.

Mr Faizov claimed that the organised communities started savings and developed their Village Development Plans and the Government then supported, and continues to support, the communities according to their plans as per available funds. A discussion session was followed where participants eagerly questioned the AKF CEO about their processes, achievements, and limitations.
Dinner by Pakistan’s Ambassador in Tajikistan

The Embassy of Pakistan in Tajikistan honored the delegation by hosting a formal dinner for the participants which was also attended by the representatives of the European Union delegation in Tajikistan.

H.E. Mr. Tariq Soomro, the Ambassador of Pakistan in Tajikistan, welcomed the delegation and expressed his support. Gifts and shields from Pakistan were presented to the Ambassador and his team members by the High Officials of the Pakistan delegation.
Travel to Sughd Region by road
Field visits Aini district
The delegation held a meeting with the District Governor of Aini District. He warmly welcomed the delegation and gave a presentation about his district. He highlighted that Aini is one of the mountainous districts of Tajikistan and it is also the fourth largest district in the country. The population of the district is 80,000 and it has seven sub-districts. It was an agricultural district initially but has now transformed into an industrial district. The Governor claimed that he intends to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and has therefore drafted a district development plan. He shared that the mountains of Aini are abundant with different minerals that could be extracted and it is also popular among tourists for its historical landmarks.

He further highlighted that all the NGOs are registered in Tajikistan and they are supporting the government in the achievement of SDGs. The main goal is to mobilise communities in the development process and the NGOs are trying to improve the skill set of the communities to decrease their dependency on others for support.

The Governor expressed his familiarity with Pakistan by telling the delegation that Allama Mohammad Iqbal, Pakistan’s national poet, is very famous in Tajikistan for his poetry books which are also a part of the school syllabus in Tajikistan.

At the end of the session, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch thanked the Governor for his hospitality and praised the work done by his team. He expressed his admiration regarding the work done by the Aini district especially with respect to cleanliness of the area.
The Pakistani delegation visited the district office of AKF/MSDSP in Istravshan where AKF/MSDP is working since 2010. Currently, they are working on livelihood improvement project and watershed management. The AKF team highlighted that they have adopted an integrated approach with the support of different donors. Their main focus is on the following areas:

- Access to WASH facilities
- Access to energy
- Climate change adaptation
- Natural Resource Management

The AKF team claimed that the Village Organisations (Mohalla Committees) contribute 20-25% in projects in form of cash, labor work and local materials. VDPs are also developed and implemented through self-help and support of AKF, other NGOs and local authorities. Till date 27 projects have been successfully completed in the district.

Visit of AKF Office Istravshan Valley
Travel to Devashtich district
Meeting with Village Organisation in Shohonn Village – Dairy Products

The Rais of Village Organisation (Mohallah Committee) Shohonn Village informed the delegation that they have been operational since 2012. She thanked AKF for fostering their VO and claimed that due to their community institutions the government could easily access them for any development related work owing to their organized structure. The women group of VO is working on Diary Milk Collection and Processing project. The Rais highlighted that they initiated this project towards the end of 2015. They have 100 households and in each one has a cow which gives about 5-liters of milk on daily basis. However, since they could not access the market due to the time-consuming commute therefore the 25 women in their VO decided to prepare milk products from their collective milk produce. AKF supported the development initiative and provided the women group a milk processing unit and a mobile refrigerator. This enabled the women to collect milk from all the houses on daily basis and process it to prepare different dairy items such as cheese, butter, and cream. With the aid of mobile refrigerator, they supply milk and the dairy products to local markets as well as to Khujand.

She claimed that their area is rich with fruits and hence AKF trained them on fruit processing as well. They now make juices and sell it in the markets as well. These development projects have enabled the women to improve their livelihood situation and have control over their income consequently enabling them to fulfill the needs of their family and children.
Meeting with VO in Shohonn Village - Water Supply

The delegation also visited another project in VO Shohon. This was a water supply project. The Rais of VO informed that they were facing a severe issue of drinking water unavailability when AKF provided them with water supply scheme, under the financial support of USAID.

Before this scheme, the community resorted to cumbersome methods of attaining water such as melting snow and collecting water in open ponds which was not safe for drinking, but now they have access to clean drinking water. They have also formed a Water User Committee and contributed towards the water supply scheme.

Travel to Khujand
Meeting in Isfara with Deputy Governor and Village Organisation, Jamoat District Konibodom

The delegation travelled to Isfara district and held a joint meeting with the Deputy District Governor, UC Chairman, and VO President. The Deputy District Governor Ms. Zumera welcomed the delegation. She gave a presentation on her district and shared that they have a very rich culture and history. She highlighted that the population of Isfara district, which is 70% agri-based, is 204,000 and is served by six hospitals, 56 schools, four schools for special children and one private school. She further added that there are 26 active VOs operating in the area and the Government works in close coordination with these VOs.

VO Rais, Ms. Kainat, briefed the delegation about their activities. She informed that in the villages, the community elects VO members who are committed to work and can give time. District Government work with these community institutions, conducts competition among the community institutions and best families. The Rais claimed that last year their VO got first prize. She shared that they save and lend to the poor members and that the community institutions also support poor families and orphan students. Community institutions have the record of all members of a community and if someone migrates then they inform the Jamoat. Community institutions also solve family disputes. Moreover, Government has established a skills center for women and provided machines where women of the village prepare different items in their local embroidery. The expert women train the girls in this center. They also give awareness regarding various health issues. These CIs are registered with the Government and have bank accounts as well.
After the meeting with Deputy District Governor, the delegation attended the Harvest Festival in Konibodom. The community warmly welcomed the Pakistani delegation and presented their national songs, poetry, and performed their traditional Tajiki dance. At the end, the delegation gave prizes to the VO members who organized the colourful festival.
Meeting with Deputy Governor Isfara

The delegation also met with the Deputy District Governor of Isfara district who gave them a warm welcome. He gave highlights of the Isfara district and informed the participants that their district is situated on 8,300 square km in the north of Tajikistan and it has eight sub-districts; three UCs are in town. He informed that the district set up was established in 1927. The Isfara district is rich in natural resources, minerals and has many springs. They also have one sanatorium for heart diseases. He appreciated the social mobilisation process undertaken by AKF and said that the community institutions support in socio-economic development. He claimed that their city government works with INGOs and community institutions to know about the needs. He said that in 2008, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan Honourable Imam Ali Rehman instructed them to work on the people’s demands. Over the years many projects have been completed. Most recently, a water supply scheme was constructed with the support of AKF.

At the end, Mr. Akbar Hussain Durrani, Secretary Finance Balochistan, thanked the Isfara Governor for his time and claimed that it was a very productive day full of meetings with various VOs and women groups who were doing a wonderful job. He appreciated the community’s contribution towards local development.
Sightseeing in Khujand and Travel back to Dushanbe by road

The delegation members went for shopping and sightseeing and in the afternoon the participants traveled back to Dushanbe.
President of SUDVO (LSO) Mr. Yousuf Faizabad welcomed the delegation. Deputy Governor of District Ms Nooria was also present in the meeting. He gave a presentation regarding the sub-district/Jamoat and said it is an old Jamoat and its previous name was Washgeer. He informed the delegation that in the district there is abundance of fruits. When Tajikistan got freedom, the situation of their district was worse. AKF started work in 2000 and mobilised the community and formed Village Organisations at village level and SUDVO (LSO) at Jamoat (Union Council) level. He further claimed that their LSO was working to improve the lives of people in partnership with the government and NGOs. He shared that there are 12 villages in the Jamoat and that their SUDVO was formed in 2006 and registered in 2008. He claimed that their SUDVO gives awareness regarding civic rights and civic management. In 2009, SUDVO became a member of a Micro Lending Organisation (MLO) as VOs and SUDVO could no longer give small loans as per Tajik State Bank directive. MLO was registered and provides small loans to VO members.

He shared that their local VOs have implemented 17 projects so far and have completed one project with women and provided assets to women as well. Women were trained in fruit processing. They have also enrolled 150 children in schools and made a new block for one local school, constructed latrines in 35 HHs, and established a greenhouse for young farmers where they can dry tomatoes.

Deputy Governor further added that they focus on preserving tomatoes and AKF has provided jars with small sealing machines which the women use at household level and sell processed tomatoes. The SUDVO is also working on Disaster Risk Reduction and is trying to minimize the risk of floods as their UC is highly flood prone. To avoid flash floods, they have constructed flood protection walls and have conducted assessment to identify the riskiest areas and protected those areas with the support of FOCUS Humanitarian.
Meeting with Deputy Governor of District Faizobod

The delegation met the Deputy Governor Ms. Nooria in her office who warmly welcomed the participants. After a round of introductions, she gave a detailed presentation about her district. She informed that unfortunately the District Governor was caught up in another meeting therefore he could not meet the participants. She claimed that their district mostly depended on agriculture therefore they wanted to attract more donors to help the district in establishing industries. She praised AKF for being the largest NGO and that the district government was very happy with their work. AKF’s approach is participatory and they involve the community therefore the District Government is working together with them and the community institutions. She said that SUDVOs are very effective and successful. Currently, the district government is working with AKF on provision of drinking water supply scheme. It is a large project and, through this project, drinking water will be provided to three sub-districts. She claimed that it is their strategy that all the partners and stakeholders should perform their role for the development of the district.

Moreover, she highlighted the issue of cold winters in their area and the lack of heating systems in schools which was resolved by provision of heating systems by AKF. The next task, in collaboration with the community and AKF, is monitoring of the schools. She said government has provided latrine blocks in the schools and the community is responsible for maintenance.

She further added that, “after freedom in 1991, we faced many problems, but now in the leadership of our dear President we are developing and we have peace in our country.” She said the government is trying to develop Tajikistan and aims to help other poor countries in the future as well.

She was pleased to claim that the Prime Minister of Pakistan signed an agreement with the Tajikistan government for cooperation. Hence, she was happy to meet the delegation of Balochistan which included the high officials and ministers with whom they could share their experiences. She added, “Such visits should continue in the future as well for cooperation.”
Thank You Dinner hosted by RSPN, NRSP, and BRSP

The formal dinner was attended by high officials in Tajikistan including Pakistan’s Ambassador in Tajikistan, Head of EU Delegation in Tajikistan, Country Representative of AKDN in Tajikistan, and representatives from INGOs.
Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch (MPA/ Ex Chief Minister, Balochistan)

He thanked RSPN, BRSP, and NRSP for organising this highly fruitful visit. He said that it was a very well organized and thought out programme. He claimed that Pakistan needs to implement what was learnt in this visit and that the Government-NGO cooperation is very important. He claimed that, “we can solve many problems at the district level through coordination.” He further added that, “we need to focus on community participation and mobilize community for contribution. In this way we can ensure their ownership. This multi group exposure and learning visit was very beneficial. We need to do a lot of work in Balochistan.”

Mr. Akbar Hussain Durrani (Secretary Finance, Balochistan):

He said,” I am very thankful to you all and especially to BRSP, NRSP, and RSPN for organizing this visit and giving me an opportunity. He said that a country cannot be developed unless it has strong institutions.” He stressed on community participation and said that, “for sustainability of the programme we need community ownership.” He said that in Tajikistan, social mobilisation was very good and community was able to share their achievements rather than problems. He added, “We should guide our community in this way.” He said the Government should keep budget for public private partnership and there is a need to launch awareness projects regarding education, health, and WASH. He advocated that Balochistan, and overall Pakistan, should work to sensitiise community on being good citizens and on civic rights. He said that in Tajikistan women contribution in development of country is amazing but in Pakistan, there is talk about women participation but they are not provided with the right platforms. He proposed that we should work on women livelihood enhancement and create awareness regarding this in community.
Mr. Anwar ul Haq (Religious Scholar/Member BACE)

He said the visit was very well organized and we were engaged all the time therefore we learnt a lot. He admired the exceptional cleanliness maintained by the Tajiks. He said, “As we entered in Tajikistan we came to know that people are very much civilized. Community is very well aware about their responsibilities and they were taking interest in projects of development. They were very well involved.”

Sardar Mustafa Khan Tareen (Minister for Local Government)

Mr. Khan said that it was a very good visit. He praised the Tajikistan community’s awareness level and the participation of women in all development activities. He said that we should increase the work of NGOs in our country and promote Government-NGO partnership. He said, “We should develop such partnership in Balochistan. NGOs should develop coordination with the government. We have local bodies and social welfare offices in Balochistan but they cannot reach every household. Citizens should engage with them through their own organisations.” He said that our MPs and local elected bodies have funds for development and if we all work together we can improve our area. He appreciated the work done by BRSP in district Pishin and said that it was quality work that BRSP undertook on Karezes and water supply schemes. He said that in our delegation we have politicians, Secretaries and NGO representatives, we all should work together and we should encourage NGOs to undertake more development work in Balochistan. He thanked EU for supporting this visit.
Dr. Hamid Khan Achakzai (Minister for Planning and Development)

He said that I am thankful to the organisers for providing us this opportunity to learn from our neighbouring brethren. He said in our country, there is little acceptance for NGOs and people regard it as foreign agenda but in fact they are endeavouring for our betterment. He proposed that we should support NGOs as charity begins from home. He said, “Our religious leaders should condemn terrorism. We should ensure transparency. NGOs should show their work on ground. Democracy is very much important for development, peace and humanity. We should support democracy. We should start work from our home and neighbors. We should work for peace, brotherhood and respect all the religions. We should adopt the good practices of Tajikistan.”

Dr. Shahnawaz Khan (Team Leader BRDCEP - BRSP)

He said that “this visit was a great learning opportunity for the project teams. We got to observe successful project implementation first-hand and have acquired knowledge that can be replicated in BRDCEP and other projects we are implemented. I believe these ten days would prove to be significantly useful for each member of the delegation.”
Ms. Naseema Salam (Gender Coordinator – BRDCEP, BRSP)

“It was heartening to see how the Tajik women have taken lead in almost all fields of life, be it academia, retail and business, agriculture, tailoring and more, and progressed due to their empowerment. As a woman working for gender rights in Pakistan, I feel motivated to help women of my community and province to step forward and become empowered, as this would pave way for their progress.”

Mr. Khaleel Ahmed Tetlay (Chief Operating Officer, RSPN)

“I have worked in Tajikistan on rural development for a significant part of my work-life, and I still feel amazed by their undying devotion towards improving their lives and the lives of those around them. The Tajiks work with honesty, integrity, and passion, and I believe that it is the linkage between the state and the development organisations that has helped them progress. I hope this visit will serve as an eye-opener for the participants of this delegation as their support is much needed to eradicate rural poverty in Pakistan.”
Mr. Ghulam Rasool (Programme Manager BRDCEP – NRSP)

“This positive exposure that we have attained through this visit has given us a good introduction of how collaborative programme strategies can help communities to alleviate poverty.” He said that it was a great opportunity, and expressed his hope for a strong linkage between the government and implementing partners of BRDCEP in order to ensure that the programme is successfully implemented in Balochistan.

Mr. Agha Ali Javad (General Manager, NRSP)

It has been a valuable experience for every participant of the delegation. I thank our hosts – AKF, and all the community members who welcomed us with warmth into their communities and homes. I especially enjoyed to see the well-knit community structure at the Konobodom harvest festival and believe that unity is strength, even in face of hardships, which is the kind of attitude we need to in Balochistan.”
Ahmed Ullah Achakzai (Programme Manager – BRDCEP, RSPN)

I am grateful to my organization and the implementing partners of BRDCEP for this amazing opportunity to meet the Tajik people and learn from them. Over the course of the visit, I was able to spend time with the community people in Tajikistan and observe how their project staff was implementing processes and strategies on ground. I believe it will help us devise better strategies and goals for our project as well. I hope every individual who was a part of this visit will implement what they have learnt in their line of work as well.”
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