

NOTE FOR RECORD

**By: Shoaib Sultan Khan
February 23, 2019**

Subject: Visit to Baluchistan

On February 6th straight from the Quetta airport, we drove to Baluchistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP) office to attend the Board of Directors meeting. The highlight of the meeting was the German Ambassador's joining us and asking what is government doing since the Commander Southern Command told him when he visited him earlier about a number of projects in the field of education and allied subjects to which the army is engaged in implementing. BRSP seems to be doing a lot of things which government is supposed to do. I tried to clarify that BRSP is not substituting what government should do but facilitating the Administrative and Political pillars to have their outreach to rural poor. RSPs organise communities and thus enable government departments, if they are willing, to deliver their services and supplies even reaching households through their organisations.

The meeting was followed by a sumptuous dinner hosted in honour of the Ambassador and the guests included a number of elected MNAs and MPAs besides local leaders and government officials. A whole cooked lamb was a centre of attention for many including the Ambassador.

Next morning CEO Nadir Gul took us on a field visit to Pishin district where European Union (EU) funded Baluchistan Rural Development and Community Empowerment (BRACE) programme is being implemented. BRACE aims at reaching 9 districts, 249 Union Councils, 300,000 households comprising nearly 2 million population and the programme is being implemented by BRSP (8 districts) and National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) the Kech area including Turbat/Gwadar.

The night temperature had fallen down to minus 4 and barren mountains were covered with white snow giving us an impression as if we were in some surreal world but the beauty of the surroundings was breath taking. When we reached the Union Council, a large number of people had gathered in a hall. This was an introductory meeting which in RSP parlance is called the First Dialogue. RSPs attempt at forging a Development Partnership with the rural communities, it is

imperative that the terms of partnership should be clearly explained and consensus arrived at before initiating the programme. This prevents any future misunderstanding between the community and the RSP about fulfilment of their respective obligations.

I was asked by BRSP to hold the First Dialogue spelling out the Terms of Partnership. The most significant feature of RSP approach or Social Mobilisation strategy is that the community has to fulfill its obligations of getting organised, identifying an honest and competent leader, accepting discipline of saving to generate their own capital and identifying each and every household's potential to improve their individual livelihood called the micro investment plan (MIP). To seek assembled gathering consensus on these obligations first and foremost, they have to individually endorse the assumption on which Social Mobilisation strategy is based that each one of them has the potential to improve their current livelihood status but is not able to do it because of obstacles enabling them to unleash their individual potential at household level.

The acceptance of this assumption translates into their willingness to get organised. Because RSPs cannot reach them individually to help them overcome the obstacles preventing them to harness their potential to improve their economic situation. Thus if they want RSP to help them, they have to get organised, meet and save regularly and help each other to prepare their individual MIP and also vet it about the efficacy of the MIP being doable and not a pipedream resulting in a failure.

Before putting these terms of partnership and getting their consent of each term by show of hands, I also explained the genesis of both BRSP and NRSP as both were set up by the Provincial and Federal governments respectively. Explaining the rationale and reasons why governments did so despite having their own federal and provincial ministries and departments, addressing needs of the population in every field be it social or productive sector, the government realized that poverty is at the household level and without meeting each and every rural poor household, poverty cannot be eradicated. RSPs do that, thus enabling government departmental services and supplies to reach each and every household through their three tier institutions of the rural poor namely Community Organisation (CO), federated at village level Village Organisation (VO) and clustered at Local Support Organisation (LSO). I clarified to them that they

should not expect BRSP to provide them services and supplies which government departments are obligated to provide. RSPs will only partner with communities which the communities can do, sustain and maintain.

A sudden diversion from the dialogue was the appearance of a drone hovering over the gathering. It was a Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) high-tech initiative. Anyway having successfully held the dialogue and leaving it to BRSP field staff to explain in details how to put Social Mobilisation in practice, we took leave of the gathering.

Our next stoppage was at Pishin District Headquarters where we were welcomed by a large number of people including local MNA, MPAs, the Deputy Commissioner and other officials and local gentry. We were most impressed by their promise of full support to BRACE being implemented by BRSP. Nadir has to be congratulated for forging such enthusiastic support from both political and administrative leadership.

A diversion was a visit to the newly renovated a century old Rest House by the Deputy Commissioner as a recreation centre. It was indeed a state of the art centre. I was invited to try my hand at the billiards table. Fortunately, while hitting the ball, I did not rip the cloth. I used to play billiards in 1947 at the district club where my grandfather was Deputy Commissioner. It did bring me back the memories of yester years when I was a high school student.

Next day was spent at BRSP office reviewing the progress of BRACE which was gradually overcoming the initial hurdles especially of registration of VOs/LSOs and opening their bank accounts because EU grant money could not be transferred to the community institutions without registration as a legal entity and opening of bank accounts in their name. Hopefully the Social Welfare Department has agreed to lower the higher fee being charged by it for registration. Unfortunately, because of their presence in Islamabad, we could not meet the Chief Secretary and others I wanted to meet.

However, the Commander, Southern Command Lt. Gen. Asim Saleem Bajwa very kindly met us and also gave us time to make a presentation on the Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) in Pakistan including BRSP/NRSP given by CEO NRSP Dr. Rashid Bajwa. Nadir briefed him in detail about BRSP activities which he found of

great interest and asked his Staff Officer to sit down with Nadir and identify where the Command could help. The General heard us in a most receptive mood and I thanked him profusely for his kindness and courtesy. Baluchistan being a restive province, it was most comforting for RSPs to have briefed the General of what RSPs do.

We took flight back to Islamabad on the morning of February 9th.