

NOTE FOR RECORD

By: Shoaib Sultan Khan
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Subject: Launching of Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO)

At the behest of the Government of Sindh, with an allocation of Rs. 500 million as an endowment, the Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) was incorporated as a not-for-profit joint stock company under Section 42 of the Companies Ordinance 1984 in the month of June 2003 and the Board of Directors in its second meeting on June 27 decided to launch the SRSO in July. The Board also decided to establish the headquarters of SRSO at Sukkar being most appropriate to launch the operations of the organisation in the initial five districts of its coverage namely, Sukkar, Khairpur, Jaccobabad, Ghotki and Shikarpur.

As Chairman of the Board of Directors of SRSO, I took upon myself the responsibility to introduce the organisation in one union council of each of the five districts on 19th and 20th of July, 2003. Dr. Suleman Sheikh (SS), the CEO of SRSO and Dr. Rashid Bajwa (RB), Director of SRSO also kindly agreed to accompany me. Mr. Aazar Ayaz of Researchers, Mr. Feroz Shah of RSPN, Ms Zarmeena Aziz of SASMoN, Mr. Darjat Consultant RSPN and Mr. Soomro, RPM Hyderabad Region of NRSP also joined the group on the dialogues. Mr. Umar Kazi who had been processing SRSO proposal in provincial government and was General Manager (Admn & Finance) designate of SRSO joined us in Karachi to travel by road to Sukkar.

Prof. Ejaz Qureshi, General Manager (Programmes) SRSO along with team of four social organizers and an engineer made the initial arrangements for holding the dialogues in the union councils of each district.

Sukkar is well connected by air both from Karachi and Islamabad besides a good road connection on which I traversed over 500 km via Hyderabad.

The first dialogue was held at Union Council Hamayoon in Taluka and District Shikarpur which took us an hour and fifteen minutes to reach from our hotel Forum Inn in Sukkar (a two-star hotel). We were met by over 50 villagers including some women. The Taluka Nazim (Mr. Ejaz Ali Shah), the Union Council

Nazims and Naib Nazims (M/S Mukhtar Ali Shah and Younus) and the district administration was represented by EDO (Finance) Mr. Mughal.

I explained the raison detre of SRSO and clarified that SRSO was not there to listen to their demands and solve their problems nor was it there to do the work of the departments which were many and charged with responsibilities and endowed with resources in different aspects of development. SRSO's niche I emphasized on them was to unleash the potential which was hidden in each man and women and to facilitate through their potential to overcome their problems. SRSO was based on the assumption that each person even the poorest is willing to exploit the opportunities which can help them to get out of poverty. All that they need is social guidance to harness their potential, to identify the obstacles and constraints in their way of unleashing their potential and help and facilitate both through technical and social support in exploiting their opportunities.

There was a unanimous positive response to the question if it was true that each one of them was willing to exploit the opportunities they saw instead of making demands and asking for outsiders to come and do everything for them.

I reinforced their confidence by recounting my experience of last fifty years of working life and especially of last twenty years of interacting and dialoguing with over 5,000 communities in South Asia including Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka besides the million people I worked with for 12 years in Northern Areas of Pakistan and thousands of communities in various parts of Pakistan.

I reiterated the reason for setting up of SRSO by Government of Sindh was not to do the same things which government departments were doing but to forge a partnership with people to help them, do what they are willing to do and are unable to do so because of the obstacles in their way. This is something which no department does because the departments are charged to deliver services they are not mandated to organise communities to involve them in their activities. However, the Government of Sindh realizes that without involving communities, without listening to them, without helping the communities to help themselves through unleashing their potential, poverty cannot be reduced.

Thus the objective of Government of Sindh in setting up SRSO is involving grassroots in their development and this is in one word the niche of SRSO and its objective.

Explaining the methodology of SRSO of identifying potential of each individual household, of group of men and poor women, of communities at community or village level because without this identification, poor cannot be helped to get out of poverty. I asked if they would be willing to organise themselves in groups of 15 households both of men and women, separately if they so desire, to enable SRSO to interact with them because it is physically

impossible for SRSO to interact with households individually unless they agree to organise in groups of 15.

There was a positive response to this requirement. I made them understand that SRSO is trying to forge a partnership with the grassroots and in a partnership both sides have obligations if one partner is reluctant to fulfil his or her obligation, then there cannot be a partnership.

Thus in the SRSO and villagers partnership, the villagers will have to take the first step in establishing partnership and that is to organise themselves in groups of 15. If they were unwilling or unable to do, SRSO would be unable to enter into a partnership with them. The groups thus formed in a Goth, mouza or village would form the village support organisation (VSO) and ultimately when a whole union is organised, a community support organisation (CSO) will emerge at the union level. I exhorted the audience that organisation was the key to their poverty reduction.

Another obligation besides organisation of group of 15 households that they have to fulfil is to identify a genuine, competent and efficient local leader or activist to lead the group. Without such leaders, I have not seen any community progressing and this is my experience of working with nearly 100,000 communities in South Asia encompassing over three million households with a population of nearly 15 to 20 million.

The response from the audience was that the 1,000 households of Hamayoon Union Council would organise to fulfil their obligation for partnership with SRSO and they were also confident that honest leadership of these groups will be found.

I said that once they were organised and SRSO staff will help them in doing so by visiting each and every Goth and village and explaining the requirements of a meaningful and sustainable organisation, the organisations will have to engage themselves in preparing an Investment Plan at three levels namely, household, group and community. The details will be explained by SRSO. The household level plan will be a portfolio of opportunities not demands. The Investment Plan will not include anything which the household, group or the community is not capable of implementing itself with technical and resource support from SRSO.

I emphasized that planning has to begin from the household level. Planning is not the preserve of Planning Commission or Planning Department. For poverty reduction, poor have to plan at grassroots level. The Investment Plan prepared by them would be the basis for SRSO and their partnership.

I gave the example of successful communities in South Asia which came out of poverty by doing three things:

- (i) willing to organise to identify their potential and exploit opportunities;
- (ii) identifying honest and competent community leaders and activists to lead them ; and
- (iii) forging strong development partnership with support organisations like SRSO.

I concluded that this is what SRSO has come to offer and not to make false and hollow promises to solve all their problems. However, if they follow the SRSO methodology, I have no doubt they would overcome their problems and come out of poverty.

RB explained to them NRSP's vocational training programme which has resulted in 80% trainees getting gainful employment and offered each organisation one seat for training provided it establishes a genuine partnership with SRSO.

During road journeys from Sukkar to Shikarpur and other districts, the UNDP assisted Bio-saline Project under implementation in Pindi Bhattian, Sargodha-Sahiwal and Shorkot appeared to be the crying need for northern Sindh also. This would perhaps be the speediest and most effective intervention in reducing poverty for the water-logged and saline areas.

Compared to Northern Areas of Pakistan where AKRSP operated, the northern districts of Sindh appeared to be endowed with plentiful resources including land and water.

In Ghotki district, the dialogue was arranged at Adilpur Union Council which again took us an hour and fifteen minutes to reach from Forum Inn, Sukkar.

The 150 persons assembled in the village setting on charpoys under the shade of trees when asked why they had come to listen to me, they answered to honour you. I said are you not expecting anything from SRSO? They said well may be SRSO might help us in some ways, I asked them do they know why Government of Sindh has created SRSO despite so many other government departments almost for every aspect of development and why should Government of Sindh ask me to come from Islamabad to be the Chairman of SRSO? They answered may be you are honest that is why government has asked you to head SRSO. I further asked would they like to know why it is so and I certainly would very much like to clarify right at the start what our obligations are going to be if this is going to be a partnership between them and SRSO?

They all listened to me, RB and SS and felt no difficulty in fulfilling the obligations of organisation, identifying honest and competent leaders and activists and preparing Investment Plans. They invited us to send SRSO team to begin the process. Prof. Ejaz had already agreed to visit Hamayoon next week and he offered them a visit after next week.

The methodology of this team visit would be to camp in the Union Council till all the villages and Goths have been visited and full details explained and willing households formed in organisations of 15 households each of men and women.

The dialogue in Baberloi Union Council in Khairpur district attracted not only the District Nazim Ms Nafisa Shah and all the district heads of departments but also the Additional Chief Secretary (Development) Mr. Ghulam Sarwar Khero who especially came from Karachi to participate in the dialogue.

Such strong support from the provincial and district administration was most welcome to SRSO but some people in the audience felt quite sceptical and narrated their past experience. They even felt I might have a hidden agenda of misappropriating the SRSO funds because this has been their experience with past projects and programmes. I asked them to give us a year and if they find SRSO to be what they are apprehensive, I would willingly accept guilty as charged. At this the critic agreed to give us a chance. Ms Nafisa Shah whispered he is an ex-police officer.

This is a date growing area and it was fascinating to see the processing of dates but there clearly seemed great scope for improvement of this process. SS agreed to find a Food Technologist to look in to this and come up with recommendations how to improve on the current practice. Nearly 75% of the population of the Union, I was told is involved in production and growing of dates.

RB and SS spoke here also. SS reminded them that even God does not help those who do not want to help themselves. Earlier the Nazima welcomed SRSO and made a earnest appeal for taking up the adjoining Union Council also. I explained that ultimately and hopefully SRSO expects to cover the entire district. However, it is important to learn all our lessons by covering one entire Union Council fully so that in replication we do not commit mistakes and fail to achieve our objective.

The Additional Chief Secretary spoke about the provincial development plans and the funding of SRSO and expressed the hope that people will take full advantage of SRSO which provincial government has particularly established to help the rural poor. He assured his full support to the venture.

The General Manager (Programmes) promised to come to the Union with his team to undertake detailed diagnostic survey through dialogues to help households to organise and to guide organisations to prepare Investment Plans the basis of SRSO and people's partnership.

In Sukkar we visited the Unions where NRSP has been working for the last one and a half years and the dialogue at Ali Baksh Sarohi women

organisation was indeed a most heartening and uplifting experience. The manager of the WO Najmabibi was a true honest and competent activist. Each member of her organisation had a story of success to tell in improving her situation. The President's house in which the meeting was being held with mud plaster covered with coloured rallies was more pleasing to the eyes than the best decorated halls.

On being asked if Najmabibi would take the responsibility of finding some more activists like her and training them to organise the entire village of 150 households. Her response was most enthusiastic. She was willing to convert her house into camp training center and not only train the activists but ensure that they succeed in organising groups of 15 households in less than three months. SO Ambreen Ansari should feel proud of her achievement and should now actively use activists like Najmabibi to organise unorganized households in the villages.

The male activists meeting at Lal Baksh Chanjan was also attended by the District Nazim Sukkar Syed Nasir Ali Shah and the Naib Nazim. He even promised to subsidise the vocational training programme from district funds and offered all help to SRSO.

At the end of the dialogues and field visits, there was consensus that there is tremendous potential in SRSO districts for launching an effective programme. What is needed is total commitment on part of the SRSO team to follow the methodology in letter and spirit.

Personally for me it was most gratifying to find people of yet another area, in the eyes of some very difficult for implementing RSP approach, responding to the terms of partnership with SRSO in no different manner than I experienced in Northern Areas of Pakistan or rural areas of South Asia and rest of Pakistan.

I am most grateful to the Government of Sindh for reposing the confidence in me to oversee implementation of SRSO and especially thankful Mr. Ghulam Sarwar Khero for his support and the trouble he took to come from Karachi to participate in the first dialogues of SRSO.

I was also very encouraged at the support and help received from district administration of the districts I visited and the interest taken by District, Taluqa and Union Nazims, Naib Nazims and Councillors and especially the District Nazima Khairpur and District Nazim Sukkar who participated in the dialogues also. It was very heartening to find the district officials very supportive of SRSO especially in Khairpur.

These dialogues could not have been arranged without the hard work put in by Prof. Ejaz Qureshi and his team. Their work has just begun and I hope they

will be as committed and dedicated as they were in organising the initial dialogues.

I am grateful to all who accompanied me on the dialogues and especially to Mr. Aazar Ayaz of Researchers who on his own expressed the interest and desire to learn about RSPs.

I am also grateful to Mr. Husain Tejani, Director AKRSP BoD who gave some very useful advice for investment of SRSO endowment money.

The two architects of SRSO are Dr. Suleman Sheikh and Dr. Rashid Bajwa. Without their untiring efforts, SRSO could not have been launched so expeditiously. The Board of Directors of SRSO and especially the Chairman are indebted to them beyond measure.

c.c. Members, Board of Directors SRSO

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