

Note for Record
March 1-3, 2012

By: Shoaib Sultan Khan
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Subject: **Visit to Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO)**

The Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP) was initiated at the beginning of 2009, as a result of a presentation I had made before the Chief Minister of Sindh Syed Qaim Ali Shah, who had observed after hearing the presentation “you seem to have the prescription for poverty reduction”.

The SRSO management agreed to a process review of UCBPRP by Pakistan’s leading policy and research institute, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) from the beginning of the programme, in the districts of Shikarpur and Kashmore-Kandhkot. By the beginning of 2012, SDPI had undertaken five such reviews and assessed changes in the status of the beneficiary households, on the basis of the poverty score card (PSC), administered at the initiation of UCBPRP.

The SDPI main findings relating to the changes in the status of the households, according to their latest review, in less than three years is as follows:

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| Extremely Poor | 83% moved out of their category to Chronically poor, Transitory poor and Non-poor categories |
| Chronically Poor | 38% moved in this category from Extremely poor category |
| Transitory Poor | 19% moved in this category from Extremely & Chronically |

Poor categories, because none of the simple households were in this category at the start of UCBPRP.

Non-Poor 59% moved in this category from Extremely poor and Transitory poor categories, as none of the 617 sample households were in this category at the initiation of UCBPRP.

On the basis of these findings, UCBPRP is not claiming that poverty has been eliminated from Shikarpur and Kashmor-Kandhkot districts. These findings only indicate an indisputable trend of the effectiveness of UCBPRP strategy and approach to banish poverty from the rural areas of Sindh if a 7-10 year programme based on UCBPRP principles of development is implemented.

On my three days visit to UCBPRP areas in the districts of Shikarpur, Kashmore-Kandhkot and Jacobabad, I experienced first hand the achievements of UCBPRP.

The first and foremost was the empowerment of women. Their level of confidence and dynamism in terms of leadership and involvement in self and community development and improvement is to be seen to be believed. At the newly opened outlet in Sukkar Bazaar of the products of community organisations, when someone asked the women present there, who is your manager, the response was 'what manager? We are the managers. We will manage our shop'.

I saw similar upbeat attitude in the villages I visited. Their presentations focused on poverty profile reflected through the PSC and many women in the bottom category recounted how they improved their status and ones who were better off how pleased they seemed at the achievements of their CO and VO in improving the lot of the unfortunate households which according to PSC, were in the extremely poor category. How proudly they described the benefits they accessed through their CO/VO be it in income generating grant (IGG), community investment fund (CIF), vocational training, health insurance or the physical infrastructure works especially housing. How they have accumulated savings and are determined to increase them more. Under the human resource development, every CO/VO trainings have been accessed in the fields of management, internal loaning, book keeping, vocational training and other areas.

Those accessing IGG and CIF described what a transformation it brought to their status graduating from 0-18 to even above 40. Similar stories were told by many who got trained under the vocational training for employment package. The stories of those getting facilitation through micro insurance was most touching, many would have been dead but for this social protection plan.

The VOs have not confined themselves to UCBPRP interventions only. Once organised, they have ensured access to government programmes of eligible households be it BISP, Watan Cards or NADRA Cards. Some have also facilitated entry of the entitled members of COs in Voters List. Some have taken initiative in preparation of birth and death registers, weekly cleanliness of village campaign, periodic health seminars, exhibitions, tubeligations for family planning, marriage of poor girls, prevention of child marriage, helping the destitutes due to physical infirmity.

Education seems to becoming a high priority. Many schools which had remained closed are either being made functional by pressurising the Education Department or in some case the VO itself managing it. Where SRSO has made a school functional, the VO is fully involved in ensuring its smooth functioning through a VO Committee. There are thousands of schools which are not functioning. The VOs are showing a way how these schools can be made functional on a sustainable basis if adequate resources are allocated for the purpose. Similarly enrollment of children especially girls is becoming a matter of pride for the VOs.

In health, besides making use of the micro health insurance being offered by SRSO through Adamjee Insurance which is ensuring commendable health facilities to insured clients as we witnessed at a Sukkur hospital being run by Blood Bank of Fatimid Group, the VOs are also participating in polio campaign and in getting traditional birth attendants well trained.

The visit to one of the 42 flood affected villages rehabilitated by SRSO, under the GoS Village Rehabilitation Project, conceived by Dr. Kaiser Bengali and Ms Naheed Shah Durrani was indeed a heartwarming sight. A neat and clean village with every house having their own toilet, handpumps and water tank on top of the toilet (Dr. Rahid Bajwa's patent). My only concern was the open drains which should either be covered with slabs or a drain cleanliness sustainable system to be paid by the village inhabitants, should be instituted by the VO. Rehabilitating 42 villages in a span of 18 months covering thousands of houses is indeed an incredible achievement by Sono and his staff.

SRSO has by now imparted vocational training to thousands of males and females by outsourcing it to NRSP Institute of Rural Management (N-IRM). One of the steps N-IRM took to meet the challenge of training such a large number of rural women was to establish Vocational Field Training Centres and we visited one of those at Thull. Such Centres greatly facilitated training of rural women, who according to tracer studies, carried out by Institute of Business

Management Sukkur, engaged a very large proportion of such women in gainful employment. All these factors contributed to the Extremely Poor and Poor families improving their economic status.

At Chaho Labano in Union Council Wazirabad of District Shikarpur, we met the jewel of an activist in the person Zohra Bibi. Absolutely illiterate but a dynamic leader. With 323 households organised in 22 community organisations (COs), Zohra was chosen as the chairperson of the VO. Her village was wedged in between villages of Mahars and Jatois, who look down upon Labanos. She ensured full participation of the VO with SRSO in the UCBPRP and facilitated COs taking full advantage of all the packages being offered by the programme.

Once when one of their village youths got killed in a robbery of their buffaloes by adjoining village robbers, she persuaded the VO to set up six posts around their village each manned by 3 males, who do a weekly shift, to prevent such happenings in the future.

RSPN invited Zohra to the LSO Convention in Islamabad a few months back along with hundred other activists from all over Pakistan. In the aeroplane, Zohra happened to sit next to the wife of a Mahar leader, who expressed great surprise at seeing her there. After hearing her, why she was going to Islamabad and what she is doing in Chaho Labano, she invited her to see her in her village on return and with her support now she has organised Mahar and Jatoi villages also and also made a school functional in Chaho Labano where the children from Mahar and Jatoi villages also come to study. The Mahars and Jatoi attitude and behaviour has now changed towards her tribe.

Nearly 75 women activists came to meet us at Sukkur representing over 30 LSOs. Ghulam Fatima, Khalida, Heerzadi, Rasheeda, Jania, Meerzadi, Shagufta Solangi, Syedzadi, Waheeda, Bakhtawar, Nadia, Aliya, Zulekha, Nagina and others from Shikarpur, Ghotki, Kashmore, Khairpur, Kandhkot spoke of their achievements and how they have tried to improve governance by collaborating and forging linkages with Education, Health and other departments and organisations.

Nasim's efforts from village Mudd of district Shikarpur in solving the long standing dispute with her neighbouring village which had claimed 38 lives from both sides in the last four years, is the

acme of what institutions of the people and its activists can achieve in the present turbulent Pakistan.

The women of LSOs gave a most impressive demonstration of their qualities of leadership and the activities they had undertaken in a short period of less than two years which reflected what institutions of people are capable of achieving including good governance by persuading government departments to deliver services effectively and be accountable to people and forging linkages with outside agencies.

The achievements of UCBPRP in a short period of three years were mainly due to (i) the willingness of the communities to fulfill the obligations of development partnerships, (ii) the honest and competent leadership chosen by the communities to lead their organisations, (iii) the dedicated and committed leaderships and field staff of the support organisation i.e. SRSO and above all (iv) the ownership and support by Government of Sindh (GoS).

The willingness of the communities was reflected in over 182,651 women getting organised in 10,556 COs and getting a large cadre of service providers of men and women trained. These were the social capital of the UCBPRP and the mainstay of the programme.

Sono Khangharani, CEO SRSO and UCBPRP field staff, despite the area affected by floods in 2010 and 2011, worked with tremendous dedication and commitment meeting most of the targets of the programme.

However, the coordination, cooperation and support provided by GoS proved critical in achievements of UCBPRP. I was most happy to meet DCO Kashmore-Kandhkot and DCO Jacobabad who came to join me in the field visits. On instructions of the provincial government, DCOs hold a Monthly Coordination meeting to review the progress of UCBPRP. At the provincial level, successive Chief Secretaries, Additional Chief Secretaries (Development), Finance Secretaries have fully supported UCBPRP. When I called on the current Chief Secretary Raja Muhammad Abbas at Karachi, he assured me of his full support to SRSO. Of course, the Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah, since the initiation of UCBPRP in 2009, has been the champion of UCBPRP.

This is the 9th year of my chairmanship of SRSO and I often gave the example, like an absentee landlord I make an appearance once in a quarter to preside over the meeting of the Board and do a field visits in the programme area districts. But for the full support and keen interest of the honorary Directors of the Board, I would never have been able to discharge the responsibilities of the chairmanship. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Dr. Suleman Shaikh who accepted my request to be the first CEO of SRSO and laid the foundation of the programme from a scratch, without accepting any remuneration. Nazar Memon followed him on my persuasion and consolidated the programme by living in Sukkur giving up comforts of home and family at Islamabad. The Executive Committee of the Board under the chairmanship of Fazlullah Qureshi with Dr. Rashid Bajwa and Nazar Memon as members, took the entire load of the chairmanship for which I have no words to thank them. In the background Naheed Shah ably supported by Shereen, contributed immensely to the making and sustainability of SRSO.