

Speech at EU SUCCESS

By: Shoaib Sultan Khan

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His Excellency Ambassador of European Union
Additional Chief Secretary Ajaz Ali Khan
Distinguished Guests

I have always believed that life is a bundle of coincidences. Having got into the premier administrative service of Pakistan, the CSP, I was content that I had achieved my goal in life. But God destined it otherwise and I came under the influence of Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan, as a young field officer in the then East Pakistan now Bangladesh. Although I remained in CSP for another twenty years but his teachings always haunted me, but I had a family to support which took precedence over everything else.

In 1971 I got one of the most coveted posts in the Civil Service and was posted as Commissioner Karachi but within a few months, the country went through a trauma losing the Eastern Wing and a new political government was inducted in what remained of Pakistan. It was another coincidence that out of the blue the provincial government of Sindh decided to abolish the post of Commissioners in the province. As Commissioner Karachi not only I was administrative head of the Division with a Deputy Commissioner who happened to be Kunwar Idris but also Chairman of Karachi Development Authority of which Ilahi Bakhsh Soomro was Director General and also controlling authority of the Karachi Municipal Corporation besides ex-officio President of the Karachi Race Club. No wonder politicians thought this was too powerful a post and when Governor Mumtaz Bhutto offered me an alternative post in the Province, I requested him to get me posted as Director, Pakistan Academy for Rural Development (PARAD) Peshawar. I handed over Commissioner's house and the car KAF-I to none else but the Senior Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah. The post of Commissioners, watered down, was revived after three years.

Anyway this lucky break set me on the course which persuaded me to say adieu to the civil service and again when I thought I would never be able to practice the principles of rural poverty reduction learned from Akhter Hameed Khan and was roaming around in the elephant infested jungles of Mahaweli of Sri Lanka as UNICEF Social Development Consultant, another coincidence happened and the Aga Khan Foundation Geneva offered me to initiate Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in 1982. AKRSP gained much notoriety in my 12 years stay at Gilgit and World Bank's declaration that incomes of the million people of Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral had in real terms more than doubled in ten years.

Fortune again smiled on me and Government of Pakistan took notice of what AKRSP was doing. An MNA took me to Prime Minister Shaheed Benazir Bhutto for a presentation in 1989. As a consequence she wrote letters to two of her Chief Ministers commending the programme and I was asked to make presentations to Chief Ministers Syed Qaim Ali Shah and Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao. Sindh was too much embroiled in local politics with MQM and nothing came out of the meeting. In the then NWFP, Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) was set up with a five million dollars support from USAID.

To my pleasant surprise in 2003, Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) was set up by Government of Sindh and I received a letter to accept the honorary Chairmanship of the new RSP. Of course as an absentee Chairman, my contribution was minimal but Sindh stalwarts like Suleman Shaikh, Fazlullah Qureshi, Nazar Memon, Tasneem Siddiqi, Rashid Bajwa, Aazar Ayaz and many others helped me in a way that I can never pay back the debt I owe to them. Sono Khangharani proved a very effective CEO. Hopefully Dittal Kalhoru would equally excel himself.

In 1994, I was invited to take lessons from AKRSP to South Asia and it was such a success that the Minister of Rural Development, Government of India, Mr. Jairam Ramesh wrote in 2012:

“Shoaib Khan pioneered the concept through his landmark Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in Pakistan..... With the support of UNDP, he introduced the concept of poverty reduction through community organisation through South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) in India and other South Asian countries. The pilot initiative of SAPAP led to a full-fledged programme based on the principle of development through community organisation under the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) in Andhra Pradesh with the support of World Bank. The project has seen the journey of over ten million organised households from despair to hope, from diffidence to confidence, from subjugation to empowerment in the last decade. The spirit of community empowerment has continued to thrive in India since then”.

In Pakistan for the last 33 years, I am hoping for the Andhra miracle to happen in my country. The closest I came to achieving this dream was in 1992 when the World Bank Second Evaluation Report came out about AKRSP and I was also given the Magsaysay Award by the President of Philippines. I was summoned from Gilgit to Islamabad by the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and asked to formulate a countrywide AKRSP replication programme. With full support of the Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz, a ten billion rupee programme was approved and National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) was set up with Rs. 500 million endowment with the assurance of six monthly instalments of the same amount for next ten years. Unfortunately the government changed and the dream remained unfulfilled but Rashid Bajwa as CEO took NRSP to dazzling heights in terms of financial viability.

Sporadic and ad hoc grants to RSPs continued and setting up of Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund in 2000 continued the expansion and replication of RSPs covering nearly 25% of rural households in the country but none of the RSPs got resources for a holistic programme like AKRSP or SERP in Andhra Pradesh.

However, in 2008 after a presentation before Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah, resources for a holistic programme in two districts of Sindh Province, namely Shikarpur and Kashmore-Kandhkot were sanctioned through Union Council based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP). On the basis of my experience in India, I submitted to the Chief Minister that UCBPRP will work with women only. It took him by surprise but he did allow me to go ahead.

UCBPRP was given resources for four years only and a maintenance grant, when suddenly out of the blue in 2015, I got a call that the EU Development Counsellor wanted to see me. Mr. Brend de Groot asked me if I could arrange for him to meet the officials of the Sindh Government. We were lucky that even the Chief Minister agreed to see him. In the meeting, an offer was made by the Counsellor to replicate UCBPRP in eight more districts of Sindh only if the government wishes so and would consider covering the remaining districts in the Province under the ADP funding. The Chief Minister appreciated the offer and accepted it. The result is SUCCESS which is being launched this evening.

I am grateful to the Government of Sindh officials past and present, namely Fazlur Rahman, Ghulam Sarwar Khero, Nazar Hussain Mahar, Naheed Shah Durrani, Shereen Narejo, Malik Israr for their immense support to SRSO in bringing UCBPRP to the current level. In Additional Chief Secretary Ajaz Ali Khan, I see another strong supporter of the approach with his team of Chief Economist Dr. Marri and Programme Coordinator Dr. Meo. Above all it is the Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah, who made it happen and I shall ever remain indebted to him. What he said on the floor of the Provincial Assembly about RSPs in 2014, no other politician in Pakistan has ever encouraged us in this way.

The EU team which is piloting the SUCCESS programme is a dream team in our eyes. RSPs could not have asked for a more supportive, understanding and committed persons. We are also greatly indebted to Economic Affairs Division for facilitating approval of SUCCESS and the presence of Kulsume Hai from EAD is a demonstration of that support.