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Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support (SUCCESS) Programme



SUCCESS

Exposure and Learning Visit to AKRSP Gilgit-Baltistan



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INTRODUCTION

As part of the European Union funded Sindh Union Council and Community Economic Strengthening Support (SUCCESS) Programme's Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) component, representatives of the National Rural Support Programme, Thardeep Rural Support Programme, Sindh Rural Support Organisation, Rural Support Programme Network, and Government of Sindh (GoS) officials from districts Sajawal, Khambher Shahdadkot and Dadu undertook an exposure and learning visit to Skardu and Gilgit from 22 April to 30 April 2019.

The objective of the exposure and learning visit was to observe and understand the ways in which the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), mother organisation of all RSPs in Pakistan, is contributing towards improving the lives of rural communities in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral through a well-planned out Community Driven Development (CDD) approach. The delegation interacted with the beneficiaries of the AKRSP at grassroots and gained insight into how Community Institutions (CIs) work synergistically to trigger change at various levels. Particular attention was given to interaction with community members and their success through adoption and implementation of CDD approach. This report provides an overview of the visit, interventions visited and lessons learnt.

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Overview

On April 22, 2019, a delegation of representatives from community institutions, Government of Sindh officials from districts Dadu, Sujawal and Qambar Shahdadkot, staff members of the National Rural Support Programme, Sindh Rural Support Organisation, Thardeep Rural Support Programme, and Rural Support Programmes Network started their journey towards Gilgit-Baltistan with expectations to learn in depth about community driven development and women empowerment in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral fostered by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme since 1982.

Day one of the visit started with visit to AKRSP regional office at Skardu and briefing by Mr. Sadaqat Hussain, AKRSP Regional Programme Manager. After a detailed briefing on the interventions and success of AKRSP in the region and then its replication in the other parts of the country, delegation interacted with office bearers of various departments and asked questions about the secret behind the success of poverty reduction and women empowerment in the region.

Later on, delegation traveled to various villages in Skardu to learn and participate in various interventions undertaken by AKRSP since its start in the region. The delegation first visited Women Village Organisation managed Community Based Saving Group at Astana where the delegation interacted with community members and asked questions about their methods of community mobilisation, savings and its use for the development of community members. Later on, some women from the community shared their success stories of empowerment.

The second stop of the visit was Zaiban's Green House built under partnership of community members and AKRSP Satpara Development Programme funded by USAID. The basic idea behind building community greenhouses is to meet the demand of fresh vegetables during winters in Skardu, Miss Zaiban, owner of the green house, told to the delegation. The third stop of the visit was Akbar's Food Shop built through partnership of community and Satpara Development Programme. Later on during the day, delegation visited Demo Site WUA Kashora at Hussainabad, Water Supply Scheme at Sarfranga, LSO Markunja and Shigar Fort at Shigar Valley.

On day two, delegation visited Support and Development Association (SADA) LSO at Hussainabad where its President Shabir Hussain welcomed and briefed the delegation about the self-help initiatives of the LSO and its impact on improving the lives of the LSO member communities. He specially highlighted and thanked the role of RSPN for providing Community

Investment Fund to the LSO which has been used for helping community members since 2008. RSPN provided (CIF) of one million in 2008 which has now revolved up to 6.6 million by benefiting 145 poor households.

After a while, the delegation visited Sawera Training Center in which a number of women from poor families are working to earn some income to support their families, Shazday Fruit, self-initiative and providing linkages and access to local farmers to large markets in the country, and lastly, Farmers' Cooperative Society formed in 2017 for providing a robust and sustainable platform to the local farmers for collective benefit.

After successful completion of two days' field visit at Skardu, delegation traveled to Gilgit and attended two days AKRSP Local Support Organisations Convention 2019 conducted under the theme of "Organisation, Skill and Capital" at Karakorum International University, Gilgit.

LSO Convention was attended by Mr. Hafeez Ur Rehman, Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan, Ms Wendy Gilmour Canadian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan, Chairman RSPN, Mr. Qazi Azamat Essa CEO PPAF and around 300 LSO representative across Gilgit-Baltistan and Chital, representatives of government line departments and civil society organisations working in the GB.

Some promising lessons were learnt from the visit which include (1) Mobilisation of poor households into community institutions have led to poverty reduction and increase in households' income, (2) Community Driven Development (CDD) is the best approach to poverty reduction and socioeconomic development, and populations of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral have proved the impact of this approach by transforming their lives. (3) Household members of the community institutions in Gilgit-Baltistan have accumulated millions of rupees as savings started from single penny in 1982 which indeed is a great achievement, (4) Development of human capital is the biggest success of AKRSP in the region. The development of social and financial capitals has provided impetus for investment in human development, (5) Women Organizations (WOs) have provided a collective platform for women to prioritize, plan, and undertake self-managed development initiatives in social as well as economic sectors, (6) Development of social, human and financial capitals through community institutions have led to peace and reception for national and international tourists creating economic opportunities in the region.



Visit to Aga Rural Support Programme (AKRSP): A Successful Model of Community Driven Development (CDD) in Gilgit-Baltistan

SUCCESS Programme's exposure and learning visit started with a comprehensive and thought provoking presentation by AKRSP officials in AKRSP Regional Office at Skardu, Gilgit-Baltistan. Briefing to the delegation of the visit, Mr. Sadaqat Hussain, Regional Programme Manager, AKRSP Skardu welcomed the delegation to Gilgit-Baltistan with purpose to see the success of AKRSP implemented community driven development interventions.



Delegation of SUCCESS Programme Exposure and Learning Visit in AKRSP Regional Office at Skardu. Photo Credit: AKRSP

The AKRSP was formed in 1982, with a mandate of poverty reduction and improving living standards of the rural communities of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral. Since its formation, it has contributed immensely to significant social and economic changes in these remote and isolated regions of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral. Although Gilgit-Baltistan had a rich institutional tradition of community participation, it did not survive the vagaries of time, especially with the abolition of traditional structure of governance in 1974. As a corollary, the local communities left with no viable alternative and the old participatory structure failed to tackle challenges and demands of the

new age. Coupled with this, the construction of Karakorum Highway (KKH) exposed local communities to exogenous influences of the organised market forces. Though the opening of KKH had provided an opportunity to reap the benefit, the indigenous communities could not avail it to a maximum extent because they did not have any institutional mechanism in place for collective actions to deal with the larger than life challenges and opportunities of modern times which were way beyond the individual capacities of the rural communities.

AKRSP was established in such a situation of institutional crisis in the society of the Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral. In order to uplift social and economic conditions of the indigenous communities, AKRSP has promoted sustainable economic development by helping communities to develop institutions at the village level. The process of institutional development was essentially aimed at enabling the communities to develop local resources and expertise to address the socioeconomic issues of the modern age.

Endeavors to achieve these objectives led to formation of collective platforms of communities in the shape of Village Organisations (VOs) and Women Organisations (WOs) on the one hand, and introduction of new activities that are in consonant with local needs of the communities on the other. These activities range from participation, capital generation, training of specialists in different fields, management of activities and resources to linkages and partnerships with government and private sector. The AKRSP fostered organisations proved instrumental in bringing dissimilar expertise and experiences of local communities under their umbrella. On the other hand, they helped connect the receiving mechanism at the village level with delivery mechanism which hitherto failed to deliver services to different communities. Till now, AKRSP have supported formation and capacity building of 4,295 village and women organisations (2481 VOs and 1814 WOs) over the four decades' period since its formation.

AKRSP has, over the past four decades, made enormous efforts to empower the marginalized community members especially poor and women through its participatory approach and multi-dimensional programming, which have broadened the asset base of women and enhanced their social capital. With an overarching goal of improving the living standards of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral people, women received considerable attention from the outset to enhance their social status within the household, community and the society at large. Economic empowerment of women, therefore, remained a dominant theme through the decades long programming of AKRSP in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral. Women Organizations (WOs) have provided a collective platform

for women to prioritize, plan, and undertake self-managed development initiatives in social as well as economic sectors.

Given AKRSP's decades long involvement in women's economic empowerment and the need to learn lessons from these successful interventions SUCCESS Programme delegation conducted visits to multiple women owned and women led activities:

Visit to Women Organisation- Community Based Saving Group (CBSG) Astana

On the first day of the visit, delegation visited Women Organisation Community Based Saving Group at Astana. CBSG Astana was formed in 2014 and till now it has total 35 households' members and total 85300 PKR savings. Delegation interacted with the members of the CBSG and asked questions about the propose of formation of such groups and their benefits of the members. Responding to delegation' questions, Zaiban, President of WVO told that the basic purpose of forming CBSG is that formal financial institutions are not always able to address the financial service needs of the very poor, particularly those living in remote areas. Small transaction sizes, sparse populations and poor infrastructure limit the ability of commercial banks and microfinance institutions to reach rural areas where many of the world's poorest and most marginalised populations live.



Poor women and men need access to small amounts of savings and credit to help smooth incomes, meet predictable expenses and better cope with emergencies. Quick and convenient access to accumulated savings or a small amount of credit to pay school fees, for example, can enable a farmer to defer pre-selling the harvest or postpone selling to a time when prices are higher, often resulting in substantially increased incomes. With more stability in their cash flow, people can make better choices around health, education and nutrition, and as well, invest in income generating activities.

Community-Based Savings Groups (CBSGs) aim to increase household financial assets and decrease household vulnerability to financial and other shocks. They respond directly to the financial service needs of the remote and rural poor by providing: a secure place to save; the opportunity to borrow in small amounts and on flexible terms; and affordable basic insurance services. CBSGs are simple, transparent, cost-effective and sustainable.

Many women cited improved health and education of their children, contributing to overall improved quality of life, as one of the clear benefits of belonging to a community based savings group.

Visit to Zaiban Green House, Astana Skardu

The second stop of the field was Zaiban's Green House at Astana where Miss Zaiban, owner of the Green House welcomed the delegation to her green house and briefed about the intervention. She told the delegation that the greenhouse has been built with the support of AKRSP-SDP funding with purpose to promote climate resilient vegetation in the region particularly during winters when there is no availability of fresh vegetables in the market. Later on, Miss Zaiban narrated her success story to the delegation:



ZAIBAN BRINGS GREEN REVOLUTION IN HER LIFE

Zaiban is a housewife and looks after her family. She lives in Astana village situated at the suburbs of Skardu city and, thanks to the USAID-funded Satpara Development Project (SDP), is a proud greenhouse owner and farmer. AKRSP-SDP gave Zaiban professional training and enabled her to establish a greenhouse and a farm. Prior to the SDP training, Zaiban's family owned a large piece of land. She did have the interest and determination to cultivate the crops that she wanted, but her farm's production wasn't up to the mark due to the traditional ways, low quality seeds and poorly prepared land. She also could not cultivate offseason crops as the region has extreme and harsh weather conditions. In 2013, Zaiban came to know about the greenhouse project of SDP through some relatives who had seen an advertisement in a local newspaper. She applied for support and was very excited to be selected. Zaiban invested 30% of the total expenditure for her greenhouse, including local construction materials and labour. SDP provided the remaining 70% of the cost of building the greenhouse, including bricks, aluminium frame, glass, paint and skilled labour. SDP has also provided her technical assistance in land selection, land preparation, temperature maintenance of the greenhouse and marketing her produce.

"Financial and technical assistance provided by SDP has not only raised my interest in farming but also aided to fulfil my basic needs making my family life prosperous. My skills have greatly improved and there is an increase in my produce and income," said Zaiban.

The time-to time supervision of the AKRSP-SDP technical team is helping raise her income even further. She now grows a vast variety of vegetables in her greenhouse, including spinach, coriander and root plants. And she is sharing her knowledge by providing training to her fellow community members, especially women farmers.



Visit to Sawera Sewing Centre Hussain Abad

Delegation then visited Sawera Sewing Center at Hussainabad where manager of the center briefed delegation about the purpose and contribution of the center towards improving livelihoods of the women working there. She told the delegation that in the recent past, a number of women from poor families have received tailoring training to earn some income to support their families. However, due to fierce competition from professional tailoring houses in the area, the majority of them failed to earn any income from tailoring. The LSO, therefore, initiated the Sawera Sewing Centre in February 2011 as a social enterprise.

Under this project, a production center has been established where initially 10 women from as many poor families have been employed. The center takes orders from wholesalers of school uniforms from the main Skardu market, buys raw material from Faisalabad and produces finished products for garment houses at wholesale rates. The total investment in the center is Rs. 600,000, out of which 50% has been invested by the LSO while the remaining 50% has been provided by two private investors.

One of the partners is a professional tailor, and has been appointed as the supervisor of the production center, while the other partner specializes in marketing and has been made responsible



for procurement of raw material from down country and the marketing of finished products. The LSO receives 30% of net profit while the partners receive 35% of the net profit. The women tailors earn Rs. 4,000 to 5,000 per month, a reasonable regular income to support their families. The LSO and its partners expect to earn 15% to 20% on their investments on an annual basis. In other words, the LSO earns around Rs. 50,000 annually from this social enterprise.

Visit to Support and Development Association (SADA) LSO Hussainabad

One day two of the visit, the delegation visited SADA LSO at Hussainabad where Mr. Shabir Hussain, President of the LSO, welcomed and briefed the participants about his LSO. Taking to the participants he said that SADA LSO is the umbrella organization of V/WOs of Union Council Hussainabad of District Skardu. It was formed on 5th December 2004 and formerly registered under company's ordinance on 26th March 2007. The focus area of SADA is UC Hussainabad with 100% household coverage. SADA has 26 member organisations, which includes 14 VOs, 9 WVOs and 3 CSOs. There are 15 BOD, 36 AGM member and 3 paid staff in its management structure.

Thematic focus of LSO is community mobilization, capacity building, resource mobilization, poverty alleviation, information and communication technology and vocational training. The LSO



has been able to complete projects of information and resource center, Zehra Hunar Center, fruit processing plant and water management schemes.

He thanked particularly RSPN for providing Community Investment Fund (CIF) of one million in 2008 which has now revolved up to 6.6 million by benefiting 145 poor households. He further said that CIF is a community-based finance mechanism, designed to benefit the poor and marginalized families who are unable to access the micro credit services offered by Micro Finance Banks (MFB) in rural areas of Gilgit-Baltistan.

CIF is an effective and flexible financial instrument that enables local communities to make their own rules about local lending, including loan approval, loan size and term and period of repayment. The purpose of CIF is to alleviate poverty through sustainable and affordable financial services at the community level by empowering LSO and V/WOs. CIF is managed and used by these organizations with minimum cost of operations to make it a cost effective tool to strengthen livelihoods of marginalized groups in the region of Gilgit -Baltistan



Visit to Akbar Foods, Newranga Skardu

Mr. Akbar, owner of the shop welcomed the delegation to his shop at Newranga Skardu and briefed the participants about the purpose and success of the shop towards local economic development. He said that Akbar's Food is a small fruit processing facility established in Skardu, Baltistan, with the support of the AKRSP-SDP on 50-50 partnership. It is the only facility in Baltistan equipped with high standard fruit processing equipment and trained fruit processing staff who select, process and pack the fruits of GB under strict hygienic conditions and bring them to the doorsteps of its valued customers. He further said that how this shop is giving access to local farmers' products to national and international markets which is not only contributing to their income but improving their overall standard of life. Currently, there are nine staff including five women and four men working in the shop.



Delegation at Akbar's Dry fruits shop

Visit to Hawa Market for Females

As a tradition, women in the district of Skardu have not been accustomed to visiting the regular markets. As the demand grew for women to access these areas, it was conceived that separate ‘women-only’ markets can serve the need while remaining in the cultural boundaries set by the tradition. ‘Hawa Market’ is the name of that groundbreaking initiative that has not just provided the women a safe space to shop but also for social interaction. Following its lead, now there are at least 11 such ‘women-only’ markets set up and running across different areas of the district.

Hawa market is a two-level small business gated complex with several shops within its premises. Majority of these shops sell items catering to the specific needs of the women, including beauty products, jewelry, sanitary napkins and undergarments. Other shops sell clothes and shoes depending on the weather for both women and kids. A fully operational beauty parlor was also situated within the Hawa Market which was the first of its kind in the area. Initially, when the market was set up there were only 4 to 5 women entrepreneurs who were ready to start their businesses. However, as the acceptance for women mobility increased, more shops began to be occupied giving birth to a city-wide concept of women-only markets. Today, there are almost 25 shops and businesses running in this one particular market.

Across the road from the Hawa Market is the relatively new, ‘women-only’ market, called the Kehkashan market. It was set up in the year 2015 and has more than 8 types of businesses run by more than 20 women. These women mostly sell garments, crockery, bedsheets, decoration items and women products. A beauty parlor is also running in this market. In addition to this, young girls are also taught sewing, cutting and Balti dressmaking in this market.

A very social aspect of both these markets is the presence of a small canteen. Due to the limited sources of entertainment for women in the district overall, these markets provide a good platform for women of all walks to socially interact with each other in a safe and culturally acceptable space. The markets are usually guarded by an elderly man during the off hours. The women feel no reluctance in leaving their businesses and shops unmanned if they step out because of the high level of trust and security prevalent in the area overall. Furthermore, a sense of unity can be observed among the shop owners as they avidly support each other and take care of each other’s businesses in case of emergencies. The women-only markets usually operate in the mornings and late afternoons as the women sometimes go home to cook and care for the family when their children get back from school.

All in all, the passion observed among the women was exemplary. They told us with great pride that due to these businesses, their families (especially the men) are now more open to them traveling not just within Skardu but beyond as well. These markets have played a huge role in the increased women mobility and accessibility. One of these shop owners gleefully said, *“My husband happily arranges for my travel to Lahore every quarter. He books me a ticket on a plane so that I can go, visit the market to see the trends, purchase a stock from the whole-sale market to bring here and sell.”* It was also encouraging to see that women had ideas on how to expand their businesses by reinvesting the profit that they make.



Hawa Market at Skardu

Visit to Satpara Lake

Delegation also visited Satpara Lake (Dam) built with support of USAID. The dam provides efficient irrigation to more than 15,000 acres of land benefiting 12,000 households in Skardu. Beneficiary farmers of the dam have been organised into 137 Water User's Association for efficient management of newly developed irrigation system. 18 main channels and 150 tertiary channels have been constructed to provide water to agricultural lands.



Participants at Satpara Dam

Visit to Demo Site WUA Kashofra Bain Hussainabad

Delegation was showed Demo Site Water User Association at Kashofra Bain Hussain. The site was built under AKRSP-SDP to irrigate barren land. The site four schemes including Solar Powered Lift Irrigation Scheme for irrigation of 15-acre land, Establishment of Commercial Vegetable Farm, Establishment of Commercial Fruit Orchard on 80-kanals and Establishment of Passive Solar Green House. These all schemes have been completed through 50-50 partnership with community members and contributing to their income and overall positively affecting the environment and climate.



Participants being briefed about demo site

Visit to Water Supply Scheme, Sarfranga Cold Desert Village

Sarfranga is small village located in between the cold desert and the Indus river in Skardu. Delegation visited and welcomed by the members of the community who later on briefed them about various interventions carried out through support of AKRSP. There are total 70 households in the village and 200 kanals agricultural land which has been irrigated through AKRSP-Durrain Kasim and community partnership project by building Solar Lift Irrigation System. Till now 5000 trees have been planted for improving households' income. Besides, AKRSP has also provided loans to poor households for animal rearing for increasing their livelihood.



Delegation being briefed by the community members at Sarfranga village

Visit to Shazday at Hussainabad

Delegation then visited Shazday Fruits owned by four young people of two belong to Skardu. While briefing the participants about the business enterprise, owner of the shop told that Shazday Fruits is a new venture in Gilgit-Baltistan's age old culture and heritage. From the lush green valleys of the Karakoram, we are bringing purely organic and wild fruit and fruit derivatives to the world. The area of Gilgit Baltistan is the birthplace of the apricot tree.

Shazday's products are very unique. We have been able to fuse latest fruit processing technology and time tested natural way of growing fruits. Our produce is grown in the wild instead of orchards, and is not exposed to any pesticides or fertilizers produced inorganically.

“Just one year back, I got in touch with four about-to-graduate individuals who were taking part in FICS (Finding Innovative and Creative Solutions) a startup contest started by NUST (National University of Sciences and Technology). We had made a machine that could efficiently dry apricots (something found in abundance in the northern areas of Pakistan) using solar energy. The group was an ideal mix: Two engineers, one business graduate and one horticulturalist; two girls and two boys; and two of them native to Skardu a place that probably has more apricot trees than people. AKRSP has helped by connecting us with local communities and farmers for getting to access to their agricultural products.”





Meeting with LSO Markunja, Shigar

The next stop for the delegation was meeting with LSO Markunja at Shigar. Upon arrival, members of the LSO welcomed the participants to LSO Office at Union Council Markunja. President of the LSO gave a detailed presentation on the aims, activities and success of the LSO for improving poor households lives in the UC. LSO Markunja was formed in 2014 with mix representation both male and men members in the general and executive bodies. There are total 25 WVOs and 25 MWOs with 145 members in the general body. The main aims of the body are to organise households into community institutions, nudge members for savings and give awareness on various issues. While interacting with the participants, the President told that since there are no local governments from the last ten years so LSO is working as an alternative system for solving local problems.



Delegation at LSO Markunja at Shigar Shigar

Visit to Shigar Fort-Promotion of Cultural Tourism for Economic Development

At the end of the meeting with LSO Markunja delegation visited the historical Shigar Fort at Shigar Valley where a Guide from Aga Khan Cultural Services Pakistan (AKCSP) briefed the participants about the Fort.

With support of AKCSP project for conservation and promotion of indigenous culture and heritage, the Fort has been converted into a small residence with guest rooms, presents a new model for the restoration of endangered cultural monuments in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Featuring guest rooms that highlight the heritage of the region, the project is meant to bring cultural and economic objectives together in a way that sustains the operations and maintenance of the Fort while providing a catalyst for economic improvement in the area. The project is also part of the infrastructure for a new form of cultural tourism that combines accommodation at an international standard with intimate, first-hand experience of the unique natural and cultural heritage of the area. Approximately 51% of the revenue generated is spent on the welfare of the community while the remaining is used for operational cost of the hotel.





AKRSP LSO Convention 2019

The fourth day of the visit started with delegation's participation in AKRSP Local Support Organisations Convention 2019 organised at the Karakorum International University, Gilgit. LSO Convention was attended by Mr. Hafeez Ur Rehman, Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan, Ms. Wendy Gilmour Canadian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan, Chairman RSPN Mr. Qazi Azamat Essa CEO PPAF, and around 300 LSO representative across Gilgit- Baltistan and Chital, representatives of government line departments and civil society organisations working in the GB.

The convention started with welcome and introduction to objectives organising LSO convention by Muzafar Ud Din, CEO AKRSP.

Addressing to the participants of the convention, he said that over the past four decades AKRSP has been a major catalyst for rural development through community driven development approach in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral. It has mobilised a vast number of



local communities to form their own institutions and worked with them to broaden the base of local financial, physical and human capitals. The community led and AKRSP supported effort, along with companion investments from the public sector and other development partners, have contributed to remarkable social and economic development in the region. Focusing on the key principles of “Organisation, Skills and Capital” which not only promoted values of self-reliance, participation, hard work, unity, partnership, trust, accountability, transparency and equity but enabled the rural poor to generate surplus food, create skilled labor, educate their children, get access to basic healthcare and improved their living conditions.

Since 2008, the AKRSP has been organising LSO conventions to foster the development dialogue among major development stakeholders such that public sector, non-profit sector, business community and civil society organisations.

Based on the past learnings and to share the success and failures while improving the quality of life of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral, the opportunities, challenges and way forward with its stakeholders AKRSP has organised LSO Convention 2019. In this convention community based organisations are sharing their experiences, achievements, learnings and challenges and ways forward with other civil society organisations, Rural Support Programmes from Pakistan, donors and development practitioners.

The convention intends to provide a permanent platform for civil society and grassroots institutions to interact and exchange learning and experience, and thus creating a base upon which to create knowledge related to indigenous practices that remain in limbo owing to absence of such platforms. This view of creating knowledge base in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral aims at transforming society towards a knowledge economy wherein local communities will be purveyor instead of remaining consumer of knowledge. Such a transformation can be brought about by focusing praxis with development philosophy of AKRSP that puts aspirations, emerging needs, views of local communities in at the center practices in social development.

While sharing AKRSP main achievements since its inception he said that households' income has been doubled, with a corresponding decline in poverty levels. The success of community driven development in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral has inspired the formation of 10 AKRSP modeled organisations in Pakistan and other countries. The formation of 5306 Village/Women Organisations and their representative LSOs in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral has indeed created a critical mass of social capital at the village and Union Council levels, which has largely instrumental in rapidly transforming the life and livelihoods of the rural households.

During the conventions LSOs members shared countless stories of their success and shared their thoughts on the benefits of community institutions since 1982 for their respective communities by reducing poverty, increasing their means of livelihoods, empowering women, and improving their standard of life. Some of these success stories are given:

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“Local Support Organisations are big source of our support during complex emergencies in Gilgit-Baltistan. I have seen transformation of my people just because of their participation in community institutions and accumulating huge savings for meeting their needs related to education, health and business. Today my LSO has more than 30 million savings. In 1990s I remember I saw a huge change in our lives just because of VOs and AKRSP support for developing our linkages with government for improving services delivery in our areas. In 2002, I myself elected member of the District Council which helped us provision of funds to grassroots level, and we utilised and spend funds through VOs.” **Mr. Ali Gohar, Chairman LSO Chatorkhand-Ishkoman, Ghizar**

“Our village has a huge potential for hydel power generation because of abundance of streams. With self-support, our LSO initiated and completed two 50 KW Power Houses in 1990, and 1994. In 2009, our power generation reached to 350 KW and we registered it as a utility company. Today, it provides electricity to three villages, fifteen hotels, twenty guest houses, and 1328 households. We provide subsidized electricity to our own village and sell the remaining to other villages and hotels. There was a time when there was shortage of electricity in District Hunza but now there is sufficient electricity due to which it is not only households needs but also saving our natural resources such as forests as fuel consumption. I think this success is all because of our organisation into community institutions and generating financial capital through savings and then spending it wisely for our collective benefit. Now after these initiatives, thousands of tourists visit our villages and stay in our hotels and guests’ houses contributing to our local economy.” **Mr. Habib Ullah, Chairman LSO Ahmedabad, District Hunza.**

Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan, Chairman RSPN addressed the convention on the importance of organising households into community institutions, developing skilled human capital, and saving financial capital for improving and transforming living conditions free of poverty.



He said, *“Development will come once people organise themselves into community institutions. The reality is that projects will do nothing for the people until they organise themselves. You must organise, find an honest leader, start savings. You have the potential to change yourselves.”*

He then said *“When I came here, people had the habit of demanding us to do something for them but AKRSP changed their that habit of taking to a habit of giving. In 1994, when I left AKRSP, 90% households were organised. The only factor behind our success was the support of then government. Without the support of political and administrative pillars, social pillar remains in trouble. If government adopt and implement this three tier social pillar, then there will be tremendous prosperity. Poverty will not reduce unless government starts pro-poor programmes and ensure their participation in development which is always undermined. We can see success of such initiatives in developed countries like in Canada mentioned by David Brooks in his column ‘Winning War on Poverty’ in the New York Times in these words:*

“Paul Born emphasizes that the crucial thing these communitywide collective impact structures do is change attitudes. In the beginning it’s as if everybody is swimming in polluted water. People are sluggish, fearful, isolated, looking out only for themselves. But when people start working together across sectors around a common agenda, it’s like cleaning the water. Communities realize they can do more for the poor. The poor realize they can do more for themselves. New power has been created, a new sense of agency.”

In the end he thanked the Governments of Canada and Gilgit-Baltistan for supporting AKRSP for improving peoples’ lives.

Qazi Azmat Essa, CEO PPAF, addressing to the convention said that conventions are significant for giving voice to grassroots community institutions to interact with government and donor agencies. AKRSP has contributed to each and every aspect of life and the change we see is because of AKRSP and his Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan vision for socioeconomic development of underprivileged populations.



“Shoaib Sultan Khan as our Ustad (teacher) taught us models of rural development, poverty reduction and socioeconomic development. It is because of his influence that PPAF is one of the biggest supporters and donors of rural development and poverty reduction in Gilgit-Baltistan”

He then advised five values instrumental for success of community institutions given below:

1. Inclusion and participation of marginalised and poor people in community institutions
2. Creating partnerships with other civil society organisations/government for development
3. Transparency in dealings and records
4. Accountability
5. Trust and value for resources

From our visit to LSO Ishkoman, we have found all five values in it when we participated in their activities. These things are not part of projects actually they have made them part of their vision.

“People in Balochistan province are not benefiting from huge infrastructures just because they are not well organised into their own community organisations. Change comes from within. We need to first change hearts and minds then change our living conditions. You are role models for all Pakistan”

Ms. Wendy Gilmour, Canadian High Commissioner to Pakistan, addressing to the convention said that it is an honor for the Government of Canada for working with people of Gilgit-Baltistan. Government of Canada is a proud supporter of AKRSP since 1982 supporting community driven development for socioeconomic development.



“You are setting an example of successful community driven development for the rest of Pakistan and other countries. Our current government’s development agenda is feminist centered and supporting and investing in girls’/women entrepreneurship.”

She then said “Pakistan is one of the top ten countries with reference to climate change and it is critical not only for Pakistan but for us too. In this regard building resilience of communities is very important to mitigate the hazards of climate change. Community institutions can play very important role in this regard. Recent ban of plastic use in Hunza is absolutely fantastic and essential. You have the ability to change yourselves through tourism centric economic opportunities”

Mr. Hafeez Ur Rehman, Chief Minister Gilgit Baltistan while addressing the convention said that under the umbrella of AKRSP there is no one in Gilgit-Baltistan who does not know about the great of contributions of Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan towards development and prosperity of people of Gilgit Baltistan. Today all people of Gilgit-Baltistan



congratulate him for receiving Nishan-e-Imtiaz from Government of Pakistan. He also thanked Government of Canada for support to the people of Gilgit-Baltistan since 1982.

Pointing towards members of LSOs, he said “You are doing a very difficult work but very effective and sustainable for the region. Government of Gilgit-Baltistan has formed Gilgit Baltistan Rural Support Programme for this purpose to extend this remarkable approach of social mobilisation and community driven development to other areas of the region. Currently we are focusing on Diamer and human development there is our top priority. This is possibly only through social mobilisation. We have seen that trickle-down effect of Shoaib Sultan Khan’s work has transformed Gilgit Baltistan over the span of four decades. Gilgit-Baltistan government is using the same model for communities’ development.”

He then said that in partnership with AKRSP, Government of Gilgit-Baltistan is implementing agriculture development project and have been successful in irrigation of thousands of barren land through it. Eight lac acre land will be brought under cultivation over five years.

“LSOs are easing our work implementation of development programmes. We are facing difficulties in those areas where there are no LSOs. With support of LSOs we are going to ban plastic in Gilgit-Baltistan next year to promote tourism”

“It is our dream and vision to organise communities into VOs in those areas where there are no structures. Government cannot do everything. Its work is to do legislation, policy making and regulations. We need partnerships for development in the region and your LSOs are the best partners.”

Lessons Learnt

The success of community driven development approach in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral draws important lessons for the newly organised communities in Sindh and other parts of Pakistan who are facing multiple challenges of chronic poverty, lack of financial and human capitals, barriers to women development, and lack of pro-poor policies and budget allocations for improving services delivery particularly in rural areas.

1. Social Capital

Mobilisation of poor households into community institutions have led to poverty reduction and increase in households' income. The formation of 5306 Village/Women Organisations and their representative LSOs in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral has indeed created a critical mass of social capital at the village and Union Council levels, which has largely instrumental in rapidly transforming the life and livelihoods of the rural households.

2. Community Driven Development

Community Driven Development (CDD) is the best approach to poverty reduction and socioeconomic development and populations of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral have proved the impact of this approach by changing their lives. Today's their transformation and prosperity

through CDD approach is an example and role model for those who are living in chronic poverty to take themselves out of it.

3. Financial Capital

Campbell McConnell rightly says “Savings, remember, is the prerequisite of investment”. Household members of community institutions in Gilgit-Baltistan have accumulated millions of rupees as savings started from single penny in 1982. Some of the LSOs with whom I interacted have generated more than 50 million rupees as savings each which is a huge achievement and spent their it on education, health and business development of their member households.

4. Human Capital

Development of human capital is the biggest success of AKRSP in the region. The development of social and financial capitals has provided impetus for investment in human development. Today, the region has the highest literacy rates in the country for both male and female populations. As a result of it, employment and business opportunities have been increased for them which has led to improved living style.

5. Women Empowerment

AKRSP has, over the past four decades, made enormous efforts to empower the marginalized community members especially poor and women through its participatory approach and multi-dimensional programming, which have broadened the asset base of women and enhanced their social capital. With an overarching goal of improving the living standards of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral people, women received considerable attention from the outset to enhance their social status within the household, community and the society at large. Economic empowerment of women, therefore, remained a dominant theme through the decades long programming of AKRSP. Women Organizations (WOs) have provided a collective platform for women to prioritize, plan, and undertake self-managed development initiatives in social as well as economic sectors.

6. Institutional Development

Development of communities owned robust institutions have broadened the base of local financial, physical and human capitals contributing to regions overall prosperity.

7. Business Enterprise Development

The region has huge business potential particularly with reference to tourism, dry fruits and gemstones. AKRSP supported technical, vocational, and educational, and business enterprise trainings have enabled hundreds of men and women by starting their own business enterprises. Akbar's Food and Silsala are just two examples of such successful development of businesses in the region.

8. Energy Generation

Likewise, the region because of abundance of streams and waterfalls and rivers has huge potential for hydropower generation. Some of the community institutions initiated and managed projects are successful examples in this regard. These community institutions managed hydro projects are not providing electricity for households' consumption but also for commercial use particularly to guest houses and restaurants during summers when tourism on peak.

9. Tourism Centered Economic Development

Development of social, human and financial capitals through community institutions have led to peace and reception for national and international tourists creating economic opportunities in the region. Last more than two million tourists visited Gilgit-Baltistan which contributed to local economy.

10.Preservation of Arts and Culture

Preservation of local arts and culture by AKDN and AKRSP has led to increased and sustained tourism in the region and a great source of income generation and welfare for the communities.

Participants Feedback

“Sindh Rural Support Organization, under Success Programme organized a learning and exposure visit to Northern areas of Gilgit Baltistan and my self was nominated by the District Administration of district Kamber-Shahdadkot with some objectives, among these objectives were some important objectives were to learn from successful implementation of CDD approach in Gilgit-Baltistan and upon return provide support to to RSPN policy response in developing of poor rural communities. I learnt about CIF programme, client targeting, how different client responsive products offered for poor rural communities, operational strategies as well as challenge faced by organisations who are offering programme.



During course of exposure visits a powerful and proven tool of capacity development and an ideal way to learn about diversified CIF in both theory and practice observed. Field visits provided an interactive learning environment that allows participants to review strategic planning issues, as well as operational issues related to governance and management of the visited institutions, sites. Considering these multi-dimensional benefits, SRSO has therefore designated exposure visits as the centre piece of its programming on help your self-Learning Programme.”

Ameer Ali Mirani, Assistant Commissioner, District Kamber-Shahdadkot Sindh.

“Before visiting Gilgit-Baltistan, I was very nervous because of traveling for the first time out of my district. But, I am very happy to see the change particularly in the lives of women in Gilgit-Baltistan. Community institutions’ huge savings is a notable achievement which I think we should learn from them. All such achievements have changed my thinking and how traveling to other places can motivate us to do similar things for our communities. I will encourage my LSO members to do savings like people in Skardu have done”



Ms. Kainat Solangi, President LSO Bhitai, Taluka Mehar District Dadu

“It was a memorable visit for me. I learnt a lot about the culture, traditions, living style of people of Gilgit-Baltistan, and more about their transformation through organisation into community institution and then building so much social, human and financial capitals. I would try to convince my people to do similar things like savings, organisation and getting skills for changing their lives”



Ms. Zahida Parveen, CRP VO Gabar, Taluka Ratodero, District Larkana

“While traveling to Gilgit-Baltistan I saw something written on the wall like ‘give education to girls not dowry’. It has inspired me to encourage people in my village to send their girls to school rather than marrying them in early age. When I saw the impact of education on girls and women in Gilgit-Baltistan through their participation in business enterprises was something which I want to see in our women too if we act on the principles of social mobilisation approach”.



Ms. Zareena Parveen, CRP, District Sujawal



SUCCESS Programme is based on the Rural Support Programmes' (RSPs) social mobilisation approach to Community-Driven Development (CDD). Social Mobilisation centers around the belief that poor people have an innate potential to help themselves; that they can better manage their limited resources if they organise and are provided technical and financial support. The RSPs under the SUCCESS Programme provide social guidance, as well as technical and financial assistance to the rural poor in Sindh.

SUCCESS is a six-year long (2015-2021) programme funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN), National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO), and Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP) in eight districts of Sindh, namely: Kambar Shahdadkot, Larkana, Dadu, Jamshoro, Matiari, Sujawal, Tando Allahyar, and Tando Muhammad Khan.



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