Rural Support Programmes Annual Strategy Retreat 2014

25th-26th March, 2014
Pearl Continental Hotel, Bhurban, Murree

Rural Support Programmes Network, RSPN

The RSP Network and the RSPs hold an Annual Strategy Retreat to deliberate over lessons and future direction. The participants of the Retreat are primarily RSP Board members and staff, as well as certain donors, RSP partners and, often, community members who have worked with the RSPs and undertaken exemplary work that the RSPs can collectively learn from. This Report covers the 2014 Annual Strategy Retreat.

The Rural Support Network is the largest, non-government development network of Pakistan, with an outreach to over 35 million rural Pakistanis spread across 114 districts of Pakistan's four provinces, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan as well as five FATA Agencies and two Frontier Regions. It consists of 12 member Rural Support Programmes that espouse a common approach to rural development: social mobilization. Social mobilization centers on the belief that poor people have an innate potential to help themselves, that they can better manage their limited resources if they organize, and are provided technical and financial support. The RSPs provide social guidance and technical and financial assistance to the rural poor. RSPN is the strategic platform for the RSPs: it provides capacity building support to them, and assists them in policy advocacy and development of donor linkages.

RSPN is strategically positioned to work with government, donors and communities. The RSPs have a long standing relationship with the Government of Pakistan. This is highlighted by the fact that five of RSPN's partner RSPs have received substantial support and seed grants from the Government. However they are all registered as not-for-profit organizations and act independently.

RSPN's edge is its vast outreach to rural communities through the RSPs, its strong and influential relationship with government for impacting pro-poor policy, and its central position that brings together over 30 years of knowledge in participatory development work with Pakistan's rural communities.

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Executive Summary

On the 25th-26th of March 2014, the Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) gathered together with the aim of thinking out strategy and discussing the way forward. The retreat provided an opportunity to articulate the RSP mission and discuss the direction the development network was heading in, with the intention of sharing experiences and developing strategy for the future in the context of emerging development challenges in Pakistan.

The two day event was attended by the management of the RSPs, delegates from international and national development agencies and partner organizations, as well as community representatives. The event, which serves as the Annual Strategy Retreat for the RSPs, provided a platform to engage in dialogue, develop a stronger consensus, and cultivate increased engagement among its stakeholders.

A key session of the Annual Strategy Retreat, titled 'People's Institutions and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)', focused on how communities employ informal means of dispensing justice, with particular emphasis on the role of women in ADR. The debate following the session largely revolved around the resourcefulness of LSOs in addressing and resolving disputes. There was also a debate on whether informal means of dispensing justice dilute the authority of the State. It was noted that people have traditionally held dialogues with each other to resolve disputes, considering the high costs and time required to enter into legal dispute resolution. It was also noted that certain crimes, like murder, should ideally fall outside this informal mechanism and be addressed through the formal system. Participants agreed, however, that there is a difference between ideas and reality. In the absence of access to speedy justice, it is not uncommon to find communities (not just LSOs) resolving issues through their own means. Indeed, many formal institutions like the police *Musalihati Committees*, now take assistance from such informal mechanisms. The second session focused on 'People's Institutions and Engagement with Government for Improving Service Delivery'. It gave the members from different LSOs an opportunity to showcase the success they had achieved in addressing issues in the delivery of health and education services, and in building accountability and transparency in the use and management of public resources. The third session highlighted the importance of gender mainstreaming and involved the distribution of Gender Training of Trainers (TOT) Certificates to AKRSP community activists.

The second day began with a session titled 'Working in Challenging and Complex Areas' that presented Sarhad Rural Support Programme's experience of implementing a community-driven approach in the turbulent FATA areas between 2009 and 2013. The session highlighted the innovative and contextualized development practices that had been successfully implemented on ground in a bid to promote learning and effective policy formation. Discussions following the session focused on the need to balance flexibility and upward accountability. This requires

flexible donors who realize the difficult environments in which programmes often operate, for example FATA and other conflict prone zones. The fifth session provided an overview of the European Union supported Balochistan Community Development Programme (BCDP) being implemented by the Balochistan Rural Support Programme. The sixth session presented RSPN's research on 'The Role of Community Spaces and Mechanisms in Health Promotion amongst the Poor Communities in Rural Pakistan', and listed recommendations to support the agenda of health promotion and empowerment of all segments of society. A key lesson from a related study done by RSPN is that health services and service providers often leave out the poorest and most vulnerable. Linking RSPs with public services can ensure that the poorest are provided health facilities. The seventh session included a presentation by the Pakistan Center for Philanthropy (PCP) on the development of an assessment tool for the assessment of LSOs established under the RSP framework. The presentation was followed by intense and lengthy debate, with concerns being expressed by some of the RSP top management about measuring the viability of community-owned institutions with the same yardstick used for assessing NGOs. However, PCP stressed that the exercise was being undertaken in partnership with AKRSP and that RSPN will stay on board throughout the exercise. The PCP also emphasized that this was not a certification process, as some participants understood it to be.

In the concluding session Mr. Benoist Bazin from the European Union spoke of the need for governments to work with communities when managing resources and for LSOs to work as pressure groups that ensure that public resources are used responsibly. Raising the voice of the population, he believed, is the only way to make the government take notice and ensure that the voice of the common man, rather than that of the lobbies, is heard.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Shoaib Sultan congratulated RSPN for arranging what he believed was possibly one of the best Strategy Retreats he had attended. He believed that instead of forming parallel organizations to the government, the RSPs only do what is not and cannot be performed by the government or local departments. He stressed that the unique model of the RSPs, that combine the "resources of the government" and the "flexibility of NGOs", make them indispensable to development work in Pakistan.

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Opening Remarks

Welcome Address

Ms. Shandana Khan, CEO Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN)

In her welcome address, Ms. Shandana Khan thanked the participants, especially the members of the communities, for making the effort to attend the two day retreat. She said the RSPs Annual Strategy Retreat is held every year with the aim of thinking out strategy, deciding on improvements to the RSP approach, and getting feedback from the communities by listening to what the Local Support Organization (LSO) representatives have to say.

Ms. Khan said we wish to hear and learn from the LSOs experience: how they are formed and what new initiatives they are taking. One such area was that of 'dispute resolution', where some LSOs had been part of big changes in the field. These LSOs had evolved a system of informal, alternative dispute resolution and Ms. Khan said it would be very good experience sharing for other LSOs to hear of these interventions.

She however stressed that despite these strides, it is important not to forget our basic *'Tanzeems'* (Community Organizations and Village Organizations) and how the LSOs are accountable to them. A strong monitoring base, she emphasized, must remain an integral component of RSP activities.

Towards the end of the address, Ms. Khan acknowledged and thanked some of the donors that had supported the RSPs in their work and helped them introduce major innovations and improvements in the lives of poor communities across Pakistan.

Rural Support Programmes (RSP) Outreach

Ms. Nida Khan, Programme Officer RKM RSPN

Ms. Nida Khan gave an overview of the RSP outreach in Pakistan. The journey, she said, started in 1982 when the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) was set up at the advice of His Highness the Aga Khan. The central idea of the RSPs is the belief in 'people's potential' and the need to harness this potential by fostering and strengthening participatory, transparent and accountable organisations of the people for poverty alleviation and improvement in quality of life.

Shedding light on the RSP social mobilization process, Ms. Khan explained that building institutions of the people at the grassroots is the cornerstone of the RSP approach. It follows a three-tier strategy of building institutions that are democratic and inclusive in nature. The approach begins with grass root entities called Community Organizations (COs) at household level, followed by Village Organizations (VOs) at village level and finally, Local Support Organizations (LSOs) at Union Council level. The capacity of these organizations is built over time through exposures, interactions and trainings on enhancing leadership, management and vocational skills. These are sustainable institutions that continue to undertake work beyond the life of projects for which they are formed.

LSOs, in particular, provide a platform for communities to address a wider range of socio-economic problems and allow them to engage with a variety of stakeholders. Prior to 2006, only the AKRSP had LSOs. However, inspired by the work of LSOs in Andhra Pradesh (India), the RSP movement in Pakistan began to focus more on federating village level organizations into LSOs. She commended the efforts of the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) and Sindh Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) in mobilizing women and setting up all women programmes in Sindh province and in southern Punjab, respectively. A total of 862 LSOs have been formed across Pakistan to date.

Highlighting the extensive outreach of the RSPs, Ms. Khan explained that they are present in 114 out of 131 districts in Pakistan, 5 out of 7 FATA Agencies and in 2 Frontier Regions. The RSPs have so far organized 5.4 million households into 330,823 Community Organisations, thereby reaching out to a population of over 33 million. Ms. Khan explained that the role of LSOs has expanded over the years from focusing primarily on health issues and agriculture to delving into completely new sectors such as Disaster Management, ADR, Human Rights, and so on.

Given the success of the RSP approach, the movement has now expanded to India, Tajikistan, Myanmar and Afghanistan.

What are People's Institutions?

Mr. Isar Ali, President LSO Ittefaq Welfare Organization, Union Council Sherkot, Kohat (SRSP)

Mr. Isar Ali, President of LSO Ittefaq Welfare Organization (IWO), was next invited to speak. He described his region's fifteen year journey with the Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP). He said his LSO worked in an area situated 14km North-West of District Kohat, surrounded by the Orakzai and Kurram Agencies. Majority of the locals belonged to the Bangash tribe, who were not a very progressive people and there had been severe shortage of basic facilities in the area.

SRSP first came to the area in 1998, but the people were backward and conservative and had allowed little progress to be made. Then in 1999, a dispute arose over the rehabilitation of a tube well (the single source of drinking water in the UC) between the government and locals. SRSP agreed to intervene, however, since it does not work with individuals but with the community at large, SRSP first created community organizations in the area for the sake of rehabilitation of the scheme. When the water project ended people assumed that would be the end of SRSP's interaction with the region. However, they were proven wrong. Even after it ended, SRSP conducted trainings and maintained contact with the people. This slowly changed people's thinking and in 2003 the first Village Organization (VO) was formed in the area. Since then, Mr. Ali said, there has been no looking back.

In 2007 75% of the people were mobilized and the LSO Ittefaq Welfare Organization was formed and then registered in April 2008. Regarding governance and transparency, Mr. Ali said the LSO works according to an approved constitution, by-laws and policies. The LSO also has well established institutional systems in place.

Mr. Ali then described some of the work done by his LSO. It had conducted a Poverty Score Card exercise in UC Sherkot and identified the poorest of the poor. Regarding activism for peace in the region, Mr. Ali said that due to their UC's location next to the tribal belt, it had been affected by terrorism, the IDP crises, suicide bombings, target killings and kidnappings etc. The LSO therefore decided to call a General Body meeting in which it formed an '*Aman Committee*' (Peace Committee) at the UC level. The two adjacent UCs were later also included

in the Committee. During the year 2013, the Aman Committee has its own office in the local Police Station and has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the District Police Department for their support and backing. Mr. Ali said the Peace Committee also has Emergency Response Sub-Committees in all the villages of the three UCs, called '*Chagha Parties*', which act promptly during any untoward situation. The Committee also holds *'Khuli Kachehries*' (Open Courts) every three months to hear from the people about the performance of the Peace Committee and to discuss other matters regarding peace.

Mr. Ali said that the LSO IWO had been able to form linkages with a number of partners, including national and international donor agencies and also with the local government departments. He outlined the role of women and disabled individuals in the organization and described what they were doing for the poor in their region. The LSO had also overseen a number of infrastructure projects and interventions in health and education in the UC. Regarding the sustainability of the LSO, Mr. Ali said that the organization laid great stress on the health of its Community Organizations since these were its basic building blocks and would determine its future. Second, the LSO generates funds from diversified sources, including service charge on CIF, membership fee from COs and donations from local philanthropists and donors to finance its projects and operational cost.

In conclusion Mr. Ali outlined the future plans they had for the LSO and the heights they wished to take it to.

Upon inquiry by Mr. Shoaib Sultan, Mr. Ali said he was doing all this because it brought 'peace to his heart'. He said due to its proximity to the conflict zone, the locals feared that the negative consequences of terrorism, the IDP crises and drugs trade etc. would affect their children's future. For this, they took action and started their mission, and were extremely thankful to SRSP for being there to support and facilitate them throughout.

Ms. Kulsoom Akhtar, Chairperson LSO Jindo Misan, UC Jindo Misan, Bahawalpur (NRSP)

Ms. Kulsoom Akhtar, Chairperson LSO Jindo Misan, was next invited to speak about the work done by their all-women LSO, established with the help of NRSP in Union Council (UC) Jindo Misan of Bahawalpur, southern Punjab.

She began with a quote that met with much applause and summarized the aim of their LSO: "For some people, family is the greatest thing/ For some people, priests and orators are the greatest thing/ For some people the appreciation of a gathering is the greatest thing/ For scientists, invention is the greatest thing/ It is also a fact that '*Jihad*' is a great deed/ But for our LSO helping the poor is the greatest deed"

She said that in January 2009 NRSP initiated its social mobilization programme in UC Jindo Misan. In the beginning, no woman was ready to be the part of this programme but through the consistent efforts and trainings of the social mobilization team a few women became members of Community Organizations (COs). These women supported the NRSP team in the social mobilization process. They even convinced men to allow their wives, sisters and female relatives to join these efforts and provide their support where required to address problems.

Ms. Akhtar then detailed the progress that had been made by their LSO in different areas. She said they now had 227 COs in the UC with a membership of over 4,800. They had carried out a Poverty Score Card exercise in the UC and conducted elections to elect members of the LSO Executive Body. They also gave out loans and conducted training programs to give livelihood support to the poor.

She also presented a case study of a Ms. Sonia Ramzan who belonged to a very poor household that found it difficult to make ends meet. Ms. Sonia had received 18 day livestock training and a tool kit worth Rs 25,000 offered by Hashoo Foundation through her CO. She now serves as a livestock extension worker in her village and earns a monthly average income of Rs. 5,000 to 6,000. She has also purchased a sewing machine for her younger sister, who has also become a helping hand for the family like Sonia herself.

Ms. Akhtar then described the sources of finance for the LSO and explained how they ensured sustainability through an annual membership fee for all COs of Rs. 100. She then detailed the different interventions and projects the LSO had successfully carried out with different partners

in the areas of, for example, health, education, Adult Learning, electricity, social security schemes (BISP), environment, livelihood trainings, civil documentation through NADRA etc.

Ms. Akhtar ended her presentation with another quote that answered Mr. Shoaib Sultan's earlier query of why they were doing this. She said that everybody lives for their own, but one should try and take pains to help others, because living for others is the real way to live.

Mr. Ramesh Kumar, Chairman LSO Sujjag, UC Dhabhro, Tharparkar (TRDP)

Mr. Ramesh Kumar, Chairman LSO Sujjag, from Tharparkar was next invited to give a new perspective on the work of LSOs by describing the role of his LSO in the current drought crises in District Tharparkar.

He began with an LSO profile, where he said they have a total coverage of 2,131 men and women. Mr. Kumar then described the major activities and achievements of the organization in different areas including infrastructure, electricity, income generating opportunities, micro health insurance, education and disaster management.

Describing the actual situation on ground, and the efforts of LSO Sujjag in dealing with the drought, Mr. Kumar said that they believed it was not actually a 'drought' but rather a 'drought-like situation' in the area. Disease had become prevalent in livestock, especially in sheep and goats (Sheep Pox and Foot and Mouth Disease) and this was compounded by the drought. The LSO carried out a survey and found that people were not dying of hunger but malnutrition was common in children between 0 and 5 years and in pregnant and lactating women. This was again compounded by the drought. There were also severe problems with both the quality and the quantity of water in the area. Migration from the area had also increased due to the drought. Whereas before only one community (nomads) used to migrate, now with the drought other communities were migrating as well and this had caused the literacy rate to fall sharply.

In these circumstances, the LSO had stepped up for the local community and taken a number of initiatives on an emergency response basis. It had done free vaccination and drenching for livestock in 22 villages. Medical camps were also organized in 5 villages. The LSO collected information on nutrition levels in 30 Villages. An LSO convention was also held where a number of imminent local personalities including Mr. Taj Haider Relief Advisor, MPAs, MNAs, government officials and representative of PPAF were invited. The LSOs in Tharparkar also provided voluntarily support to the government and Pakistan army teams in establishing static and mobile medical camps and in food distribution. Mr. Kumar described how LSO Sujjag had emptied its office and given it voluntarily to the Pakistan Navy for the established of a medical camp. The chairmen of 28 LSOs and presidents of 16 VOs are also members of Taluka and Union Council Relief Committees announced by district government.

Mr. Kumar ended by outlining a Priority Plan for the government and other partners based on what the people of Tharparkar had identified their most immediate needs at the LSO convention.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

Mr. Khurram Badar Alam, Voter Education Officer

Mr. Alam thanked RSPN for providing the opportunity to introduce the work of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).

IFES is an independent, non-governmental organization providing professional support to electoral democracy. Since 2002, IFES has been working to build Pakistan's democratic institutions through technical assistance and commodity support to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for poll worker training and voter registration, strengthening the capacity of legislators to perform civic functions, and polling voters to assess their opinions of elections. Mr. Alam said the IFES works to educate rural women in particular about voting procedures. He added that the organization strives to promote citizen participation, transparency, and accountability in political life and civil society through fieldwork, applied research and advocacy.

Mr. Alam described how the IFES uses commercials on cable networks and radio, along with print materials to increase awareness amongst masses. The messages are dubbed in regional languages and tailored to meet the cultural sensibilities of different areas by taking into account local knowledge. He added that the Election Commission has formed District Voter Education Committees in all districts and IFES coordinates with these committees to disseminate information.

He concluded by urging the representatives of the RSPs to contribute to the efforts of the IFES as they have extensive outreach within their communities.

Introductory Session Discussions

The discussions following the introductory session focused on a number of themes including the mechanisms used by LSOs to resolve disputes, the role of women in the process and questions of whether informal means of dispensing justice dilute the authority of the State.

In response to queries, Mr. Isar Ali of LSO IWO, explained that that the *Aman Committee* holds dialogues with the conflicting parties and their families to see if grounds for mediation can be identified. He quoted an example from District Kohat where the *Aman Committee* established by the LSO had helped resolve a murder case by using social pressure to force the accused to pay compensation to the injured party. As far as the role of women was concerned, he clarified that although women are made members of the village level *Aman Committee* and they resolve some domestic disputes, their role is restricted to identifying larger issues, leaving decision making entirely to the men.

Ms. Shandana Khan wanted to know how these peace committees could be scaled up, to which Mr. Ali responded by acknowledging the supportive role that local police can play in encouraging the establishment of local dispute resolution bodies. Referring to the *Aman Committee* in Kohat, he explained that it had been set up on an emergency basis when security conditions had deteriorated in the region. The need to engage with and involve local stakeholders, he claimed, was paramount.

Furthermore, to clarify the difference between a traditional *Jirga* and an *Aman Committee*, Mr. Ali explained that the later are more inclusive and reflect the concerns of the common man, as opposed to *Jirgas* which are relatively elitist and may or may not have local roots.

With regards to the extent to which such informal bodies dilute the authority of the State, Ms. Khan conceded that it is an argument which often comes up, however, in absence of law, one has no choice but to compromise. Reflecting upon the words of Mr. Akhtar Hameed Khan, Mr. Shoaib Sultan added that it is often claimed that governments stand on two basic pillars of politics and administration. However, the RSPs are working to present the third pillar of government i.e. the people's pillar.

In relation to the situation in Tharparkar, Mr. Ramesh Kumar, from LSO Sujjag, highlighted the role that good governance can play in reducing the negative impacts of natural calamities. He identified poor planning and distribution as two of the main reasons why the draught like situation in his district had caused such havoc.

In response to a question about the sustainability of community organizations, Mr. Ali explained that any organization that registers with an LSO contributes Rs 500 per year. While these contributions help sustain LSOs, Ms. Khan added that they also play another significant role: that of building ownership within communities.

With regards to voter education, Ms. Khan asked the respective CEOs of the RSPs to suggest ways in which their organizations could work with Voter Committees set up by the Government. Mr. Allah Rakha Asi, CEO of Punjab Rural Support Programme (PRSP) said that the RSPs could help in disseminating forms in rural areas and also help people fill the forms. Dr. Bajwa, CEO NRSP, stressed the need to give priority to the registration of LSO members before reaching out to the general public. Mr. Abdul Malik, CEO of AKRSP, however, was of the opinion that such initiatives could not work without resources as past experience had shown. Ms. Khan concluded by reiterating the need to work systematically and on a scale.

Session 1: Peoples' Institutions and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

Introduction to the Session:

Ms. Shandana Khan then provided a brief background to the first session on 'People's Institutions and Alternative Dispute Resolution'. She said that two years ago the Foundation Open Society Institute – Pakistan (FOSI-P) started working with SRSP on communities and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

A structured programme was implemented in Districts Swat, Nowshera and Chital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province. Paralegals were identified and trained at the community level using the forums of COs, VOs etc. She said this was a completely novel initiative that has not been done by any other RSP. But within the communities LSOs have been taking this initiative and sitting in *Musalihati Committees* on their own for a long time.

Ms. Khan said that there is a gap between the people and the legal system in the country. She said she believed there is room in some cases to bypass tedious laws and come together to decide issues together.

Introducing the next speaker, Ms. Khan said that Dr. Saba Gul Khattak had met with 5-6 LSOs to discuss and talk about ADR. The objective was to see how the system could be promulgated further. This, Ms. Khan said, was the essence of community to community learning.

Documentation of Alternative Dispute Resolution through LSOs: Study and Strategic Planning*A study by Dr. Saba Gul Khattak*

Dr. Saba Gul Khattak shared the findings of a study which she had carried out on the request of RSPN. The study titled 'Documentation of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) through LSOs: Study and Strategic Planning' aimed to gain a better understanding of the involvement of local community organizations and their role in conflict resolution. It served to document LSO interventions for conflict resolution, gauge LSO relations with formal and informal institutions, and shed light on the strategies and mechanisms used by LSOs for ADR.

Explaining the methodology used for the purpose of the study, Dr. Khattak stated that RSPN initially identified 5 LSOs in four districts. Field visits were then arranged to allow meetings with LSO representatives, parties to conflict, ADR committee members, local stakeholders and government representatives where possible. Dr. Khattak explained that she tried to focus on the role of women where possible. Extensive review of LSO/RSP literature was also carried out for the purpose of the study.

The study revealed that the macro-level social change occurring in communities was reflected in the composition and the workings of the LSOs. Out-migration, especially of the landed elites, coupled with the rise of the trading class and the dilution of the old political elite has caused class structures to change and evolve. Thus, the registration of LSOs is part of a long struggle for change, rather than a sudden phenomenon. With regards to LSO relations with traditional and local power structures, the study revealed that they sometimes complement the structures and sometimes work against them. The LSOs in general had complementary relations with *Jirga/Panchiyat* systems and interdependent relations with the police.

With regards to ADR mechanisms used, Dr. Khattak stated even when disputes are settled out of court, formal applications are required from parties to demonstrate their willingness to seek help in dispute resolution. There is a formal understanding that ADR does not require money from parties to ensure the impartiality of decisions. Although parties sometimes refuse to accept the final decisions, social pressure ensures that most decisions are accepted. The study also revealed that ADR bodies help injured bodies through various means, for example by helping them go to court if necessary. With regards to the composition of the bodies, it was

revealed that members change reflecting the nature of the cases and membership is often ad-hoc. The decisions are usually a mix of legal and customary laws.

The study also revealed that ADR bodies are entirely composed of men, thus reflecting local cultural norms. Although female CO, VO and LSO members do convey the complaints of local women to these bodies, decision making is left primarily to men. Women's role in ADR, if any, is restricted to a reactive one. Having said that however, it is noteworthy that cases related to violence against women, property, marriage, dower and divorce are often brought to the notice of the ADR bodies.

On the subject of accountability and funding, the study revealed that most people fear that funding would diminish the credibility of the ADR bodies and reduce local acceptability. Dr. Khattak stressed that the evolution of the ADR bodies should remain organic and that they should be allowed to use local names. Forcing them to use the term 'ADR' might prove to be counterproductive to the expansion of their role. She believed that direct funding of these bodies by donors would be no less than 'suicidal'; however, investing in their capacity building would go a long way towards enhancing the credibility of their decisions. In the end, she stressed on the need to increase the role of women in such bodies to reflect gender equality.

Community Voices

Ms. Shahida Bibi, General Body Member, LSO Mohar Welfare Organization, UC Kamar Mashani, Mianwali (NRSP)

Shahida Bibi belonged to Union Council Kamar Mashani, Mianwali. In her opening remarks, she drew attention to the poverty stricken condition of her people. She said that when NRSP first intervened in their area, people resented its presence. However, with time they began to appreciate the ideology of the organization and the community was organized into COs and VOs.

Women, encouraged by the success of the mobilization process, formed all-women VOs as well. Finally, they were federated into a Local Support Organization (LSO) in 2007 which gave power to the locals by creating a space where their voices could be heard. Today, Shahida Bibi proudly proclaimed, 60% of the members of the General Body of the LSO were women. She stressed that it was a big feat as these women were previously confined to their homes. Shahida Bibi said that 1,082 out of the 2,200 households in her Union Council have now been organized and are working for the benefit of their community.

She spoke of the various interventions of which her LSO had been a part including the imparting of skills and vocational training. She stated that her community helped administer a Poverty Score Card Exercise in the area, which facilitated NRSP in planning further interventions for the locals. She added that Rs. 47,200 had been disbursed under the Small Grants programme while a further 655 women had benefited from Community Investment Funds (CIF). To address the issue of access to education, literacy centers were set up and teacher training provided to female teachers. The LSO also helped administer Hepatitis vaccinations to 297 men, women and children.

Shahida Bibi further stated that an ADR committee had been set up by the LSO to ensure timely delivery of justice through informal mechanisms. The independent LSO ADR committee has one member from each VO and operates freely of political pressures. She added that the committee also has one female member to ensure representation. The committee has so far dealt with disputes over land, water and family disputes of *khula,* violence and harassment against women, trafficking of women etc. To further empower communities and enhance their access to justice, the Executive Body also has a lawyer who gives free legal aid to those in need. In

response to a question from Mr. Shoaib Sultan about her means of earning a living, Shahida Bibi stated that she considers herself a social worker first and foremost. Her family serves as her strength and support, thus allowing her to pursue her social mission.

Mr. Tariq Mehmood, General Secretary, LSO Human Unity Movement (HUM), UC Hattar, Haripur (SRSP)

Mr. Tariq Mehmood, General Secretary of LSO HUM, gave an overview of his journey so far. Reflecting on the past, Mr. Mehmood stated that hearing Mr. Shoaib Sultan speak at a consultative workshop held in Peshawar in 2006 had made him realize that he was destined for something bigger than a quiet provincial life. At that moment, neither he nor the other community members had any idea what an LSO was, yet they knew that there was a dire need for a Union Council level body that would address their collective needs. His dream was realized when in 2010 LSO HUM was formed, the name signifying the precedence of *'Us'* over *'I'.*

Mr. Mehmood proudly outlined some of the major achievements of the LSO including the establishment of a local Post Office with financial support of the Federal government, setting up of free medical camps, provision of free services for running polio campaigns, Omni banking and setting up of free local health centers in two villages, amongst a multitude of other accomplishments. The LSO has also worked in partnership with 16 non-government organizations and public limited companies including Save the Children, Aurat Foundation, Dost Foundation and Pepsi Cola.

Mr. Mehmood further added that two major sects (Shiite and Sunni) have historically resided in UC Hattar. In view of the recent unrest in the country, the locals feared the outbreak of sectarian violence. To counter this, LSO HUM designed and implemented an intersect harmony project with the aim of reducing conflict, and encouraging tolerance and respect for each other. The projects aimed to sensitize communities and advocate for peace and harmony. Religious scholars from both sects were requested to participate in the effort and a declaration of peace was signed in presence of the local police. The youth of the area now provides security to the religious processions of the rival sects during Muharram and Rabi ul Awal.

Speaking about the efforts of the LSO to resolve conflicts, Mr. Mehmood stated that a Peace Committee had been formed with the responsibility of addressing and resolving small disputes in the locality. The committee has, so far, delivered a series of awareness sessions on violence against women in 6 villages with the help of CRPs. It has also helped reduce conflict over issues

of property and water distribution. The resolution of family disputes, in particular, has empowered local women and made them aware of their rights.

Mr. Nadir Khan, General Secretary LSO Cooperative Vision Society (CVS), UC Kuz Abakhel, Swat (SRSP)

Mr. Nadir Khan, General Secretary LSO CVS started his presentation by saying that his LSO had managed to achieve significant results in a very short span of time.

Established in 2012, LSO CVS was still in its early stages of formation, yet it had already worked with a multitude of renowned organizations including UNDP, PPAF, Qatar Charity and so on. It had helped identify 426 ultra poor and vulnerable members of the society so that they could be included in various developmental programmes. Mr. Khan described the LSO's achievements which included the setting up of medical camps, work on legal empowerment with UNDP, establishment of youth and loan centers, installation of hand pumps and so on. The LSO has also organized campaigns on dengue awareness, women's rights and environmental protection.

With specific reference to ADR, Mr. Khan stated that in the period between 2006 and 2009,the Taliban had introduced an informal means of 'dispensing justice'. However, justice cannot be dispensed at gunpoint and most people were afraid to even approach these bodies. Mr. Khan added that once the IDPs returned to Swat, an informal mechanism of accessing justice and resolving disputes was needed.

Some LSO members were already resolving conflicts through the informal *Jirga* system as they were already members of Peace and Defense Committees. After undergoing training on ADR, they became more aware of the different means of Alternative Dispute Resolution and started to actively participate in conflict resolution. After holding discussions with the local government and the *Musalahati Jirga,* a four member LSO ADR body, was formed. Mr. Khan informed the audience that the body had helped resolve a number of cases, ranging from family disputes to accident claims, through negotiation, mediation and arbitration. He further added that trained paralegals had also been included in COs and VOs to facilitate the ADR process.

Ms. Samina LSO Cooperative Vision Society (CVS)

Ms. Samina, who serves as the Coordination Secretary of the Cooperative Vision Society (CVS) next introduced herself and her work. She described how she worked as a community paralegal under SRSP's Strengthening Rule of Law in the Malakand Division (SRLM) project and serves as a liaison between the *Musalahati* Committee and her community.

Ms. Samina informed the participants that she had helped resolve different conflicts in her catchment area and referred many cases to the *Musalahati* Committee for settlement. She also helped train 130 females in different skills and facilitated SRSP in conducting a Poverty Score Card survey in her region.

The list of her accomplishments is highly commendable and in recognition of her work, Ms. Samina has been awarded the Annual Amul Raqeeb Award by the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) and granted Rs. 50,000.

Comments on Session 1

Mr. Kamran Arif, Senior Legal Advisor, FOSI-P

Mr. Kamran Arif began by thanking RSPN for inviting him to the retreat. He said that 2-3 years ago FOSI-P embarked on a Legal Empowerment Project (LEP) with SRSP. Giving a brief preview of the project, he said that one of the reasons for poverty and marginalization is that people have no access to government services and the formal justice system. The LEP aimed at providing a solution to this.

Mr. Arif explained that model of the LEP was slightly different from that used in ADR. He said it uses a community based paralegal model whereby selected people from the community are trained and facilitated in their access to government services and legal aid clinics. They are also given some mediation skills.

Mr. Arif said that ADR looks at only one aspect of dispute resolution i.e. dispute resolution through Jirga. In his opinion the fact that both civil and criminal cases are addressed this way is what creates problems, since we do not know whether *Jirgas* use national, *Shariah* or even customary law. There is also inconsistency in that there are shifts from one legal code to another depending on the nature of the case and surrounding sentiments and conditions. Therefore, Mr. Arif said, LEP paralegals do not take up criminal cases.

He then went to explain in more detail the issues with the *Jirga* system. First he said that *Jirga* members tend to be from the powerful elite of rural societies so that their decisions can be enforced. But this, he said, creates 'armed rule of law gangs' where government control and outreach is limited. Second, the system excludes and suppresses women and the marginalized segments of society. The third issue, Mr. Arif said, was that of the effect of the decisions made by local *Jirgas*. He said we need to be careful of whether we are actually removing or increasing injustices in society through our interventions.

Mr. Arif stated that for him dispute resolution alone was not enough. He said we need to 'resolve disputes that promote the rule of law'. This was the yard stick. As an example, he said that the law allows a murder case to be resolved out of court but it does not specify how this is to be done. Therefore, while going into these interventions paralegals need to be properly

trained. He said that if it is believed that a matter is not being judged properly by a *Jirga*, then people should have the space to access the formal legal system as that would have a sobering effect on *Jirgas*.

Mr. Arif stressed in the end, that these systems we are developing should in no way violate the rule of law; rather they should become an arm for the enforcement of the law.

Mr. Masood Ul Mulk, CEO SRSP

Mr. Masood Ul Mulk started off by contemplating on the role of the state. He described how he used to often get into argument with a colleague over the state's roles and responsibilities till the colleague went to Central Asia. There, he said, the state did everything that is expected of a state: it provided services, security etc. But then, Mr. Masood Ul Mulk said, the Central Asian State disappeared. What does one do in such a situation? Does one organize communities?

Mr. Masood Ul Mulk then reiterated his point that resilience and the initiative for self-help is very important in societies like ours. He quoted an example from Kalam, where he said that for six years people lived without electricity as the State had failed to rehabilitate power generating units in the area. But are people supposed to continue waiting for the State? Or should they organize themselves to address their issues? The people of Kalam, he said, had taken the latter option, thus, demonstrating the power of 'collective action'. It is not simply a question of demand and supply.

Mr. Masood Ul Mulk then put a question to the floor. He said that when we speak of the State we usually imply a 'social contract state'. But does such a State really exist? Or in our case, is it more of a 'parasitic state'?

He stressed that we need to find an alternative solution. One where the State has a role, no doubt, but this needs to be a different role and the community's power and potential must also be tapped in to.

Dr. Saba Gul Khattak

Dr. Saba Gul Khattak held a different opinion on the roles and responsibilities of the State. She said the issue was not of immediate needs, for example, a drought is ultimately the result of larger problems in distribution. Dr. Khattak stressed that instead of trying to plug small holes we should want real and effective change and for this to happen we need to stop acting as apologists for a non-functioning, neoliberal State.

Mr. Ijaz Rahim, Ex-Secretary, Cabinet Division GoP

Mr. Ijaz Rahim, Ex-Secretary Cabinet Division GOP, who was chairing the Discussion Session, was next called to speak. He praised RSPN for strategically designing an agenda around a very socially relevant issue. He said the subject was not an academic discussion on the different varieties of ADR, but rather was that of holistic people's organizations and their ability to face the challenges that arise and work for the good of the country. Mr. Rahim said, we are "looking at ADR in the context of such people organizations". He also congratulated Ms. Shandana Khan on the research she was doing through Dr. Saba Gul Khattak as this allowed the issue to be taken up in the realm of public policy.

Mr. Rahim was generous in his praise for the female speakers and reiterated what Ms. Kulsoom Akhtar had said about greatness coming from having the compassion of the poor in one's heart. He said there were two types of people in the world. There are those who are indifferent to others and live only for themselves, and then there are those who believe there is a greater aim in life and they feel the moral duty to do something for those around them. He said that the members of the community organizations belonged to the latter category; they represented the grassroots and were compassionate towards people. Mr. Rahim stressed that a socioeconomic vision was the basis of people's organizations, and in achieving this mission, "harmony" becomes a guiding principle.

He looked at ADR in the context of the people's organizations that have organized and spoken of sectarian unity even in our divided environment. This, and the speech of Mr. Isar Ali which gave this vision, delighted him. He then spoke of how Ms. Kulsoom Akhtar from Bahawalpur had stressed that though the vision is important, we must not forget the poor, women and the

marginalized amongst us. The presentation from Tharparkar then gave the message that along with the vision of harmony and of tackling poverty, we must also have the skills and the voice to address emergencies and risks.

Reflecting on his past, Mr. Rahim said that when he was Assistant Commissioner, Mr. Shoaib Sultan was Deputy Commissioner. He said a land dispute had arisen in Malakand and the problem arose of whether the State was to impose its own law entirely and completely do away with all tradition. Mr. Rahim said that the community is showing us today that there is a middle way. He said that people tend to quote the most extreme and the worst examples to prove a point, but there is room to integrate the modern and the traditional to get the best of both. If anything had come out of the research presented that day, it was the message of "the pragmatism of the people themselves".

Mr. Rahim commented that the leadership of *Jirgas* is appointed politically but today we see the emerging role of community activists in resolving disputes. The latter, he said, was a set of leaders that were not imposed by history or geography or tradition. Rather, they represent the grassroots communities and they have proven their worth to their own people.

In response to a question that had aroused much debate earlier in the session regarding the need for ADR versus the demand for universal application of the rule of law, state systems and sovereignty; Mr. Rahim said that even in the best judicial systems the jury, that is the public, have a role in decision making. In Pakistan however, the common man's role has been eliminated from the system. Mr. Rahim stressed that the 'jury system is democratic and ADR therefore democratizes the legal system'.

Towards the end, Mr. Rahim gave the RSPs some advice from an outsider's point of view. He said that Dr. Saba Gul Khattak's research was a good beginning. It is a match between the micro and the macro. Mr. Rahim said that there will come a time when even this informal system will be integrated into the formal system. He said that, "If we can't help, we must at least applaud the community for using what they have at hand to move forward and help themselves".

He then congratulated RSPN once again for arranging such an important and informative event in a country where the central problems of the day are those of the breakdown of security and social justice and of distrust of the formal system.

Mr. Rahim ended by highlighting and appreciating the role of the donors and partners working in the country. He said that if donor funds are at hand and can be used skillfully then it will be dogmatism to reject the offer of help. He said Pakistan has friends, and these friends have morals and we must respect them for trying to help us. He believed there was no danger of any sort of contamination from these funds.

Session 2: People's Institutions and Engagement with government for Improving Service Delivery

The second session focused on 'People's Institutions and Engagement with Government for Improving Service Delivery'. It gave the members from different LSOs an opportunity to showcase the success they had achieved in addressing local issues in the delivery of health and education services, and in building accountability and transparency in the use and management of public resources. A documentary on 'Mobilizing Communities to Demand Education and Local Accountability' was shown by RSPN. The session demonstrated citizens' willingness to participate, question and engage in government process, which in itself is a necessary condition for accountability.

Ms.Sameen, Member LSO Pakistan Hoslamand Khawateen Network (PHKN), UC Pind Hashim Khan, Haripur (SRSP)

Ms. Sameen, member of LSO PHKN, then presented the work of her LSO in enhancing people's engagement with the government for improving education services in Haripur.

Speaking about the dismal state of education in Union Council Pind Hashim Khan, she stated that almost 47% of boys and 53% of girls were out of school. Poor teacher attendance and non-functionality of Parent Teacher Councils (PTCs), coupled with a lack of basic facilities in schools meant that most parents were unwilling to send their children to schools.

In view of this, LSO PKHN decided to focus its efforts on improving the state of education services. A baseline survey was carried out to determine the out-of-school children and missing facilities. Community Resource Persons (CRPs) were also identified and trained. The LSO then carried out numerous activities to promote enrollment and held regular meetings with public and private school teachers. Talks were also held with the Education Department and the local political leadership to raise awareness about education related issues.

As a result of the efforts of the LSO, the Education Department endorsed the newly formed and reactivated PTCs and authorized the LSO members to monitor school activities. Ms. Sameen proudly informed the participants that LSO PHKN had enrolled 105 students in schools, ensured the timely provision of text books and provided drinking water facilities to 11 schools. Effective

monitoring had also caused teacher absenteeism rates to fall drastically. In the end, she said that the LSO would continue its efforts by seeking feedback from communities and regularly engaging with the government.

Mr. Nazir Ahmad Bhand, President LSO Khudabad, UC Khudabad, Dadu (TRDP)

Mr. Nazir Ahmad Bhand gave an overview of the efforts of LSO Khudabad in addressing health issues in District Dadu.

He said that the feedback of the community was sought during the routine meetings of the COs and VOs, and this information was then documented and analyzed at Union Council level. By sharing the concerns of the local community with relevant stakeholders, the LSO was able to address some of the most pressing health needs of the locals.

The area's Mother and Child Health Center, which would previously only function from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm, is now functional around the clock. Mr. Bhand added that the LSO had also helped the Primary Public Health Initiative (PPHI) in identifying Lady Health Visitors (LHVs) for night duty. Due to continuous engagement with the local political leadership, the Department of Health and PPHI ambulance services have also been arranged for the Mother and Child Health Center. LSO Khudabad has established a community based transport system to provide free of cost transport for poor families in case of emergencies. Mr. Bhand said that a dispensary has also been established with the support of the Department of Health and the building for the facility has been provided by the LSO.

Ms. Mehnaz Mahar, Treasurer of LSO Sind Sujag, UC Rustam, Shikarpur (SRSO)

Ms. Mehnaz Mahar, Treasurer of LSO Sind Sujag won the crowd over with her riveting speech. She stated that citizens elect their leaders expecting them to represent their constituencies effectively, and to implement and monitor projects that respond to collective needs.

Given that the locals were living in appalling conditions, the LSO decided that the pre-election period was the best time to approach local politicians and directly demand greater accountability from service providers. The members held meetings with the Paramedical Association (PMA) as well as the local Member of Provincial Assembly (MPA). As a direct result of its efforts, the LSO was able to arrange for the provision of emergency transport services as well as medicines at the local Basic Health Unit (BHU). She further added that talks were held with the Deputy Commissioner and the LSO was able to facilitate polio workers in reaching out to places that were previously deemed inaccessible due to resistance from tribal elements.

Ms. Mahar claimed that all their problems had roots in *ignorance* and their future would not change for the better unless the cause for education was taken up. Therefore, she said, the LSO had focused its efforts on improving education services in the locality and worked to reopen 6 schools that been shut for the last 3 years. She added that the LSO and VO members are regularly monitoring the schools to ensure teacher attendance and have started a campaign to get more parents to send their children to schools.

The determination and resolve with which she spoke, earned her an ovation from the audience.

Mr. Muhammad Rasheed, Chairperson LSO Roshni, UC Chak Kamala, Gujrat, (PRSP)

Mr. Muhammad Rasheed, the Chairperson of LSO Roshni, introduced his organization and shed light on the work it had done to address issues in the delivery of education and health facilities in District Gujrat. The LSO had held regular meetings with the EDO Health, representatives of the local government as well as with the staff at the local BHU in a bid to identify and address the health needs of the locals.

Their efforts had culminated in the successful appointment of a doctor at the BHU, and the provision of medicines and emergency transport services. By coordinating with the local government and the Health Department, an ultrasound machine had also been installed at the BHU. Mr. Rasheed further added that the LSO had helped collect donations from the locals to install a generator at the BHU to facilitate service delivery during times of electricity load shedding.

Another significant contribution of the LSO was in reducing the incidence of corporal punishments in local schools. Mr. Rasheed informed the participants that a girl had lost an eye after being beaten by a teacher and it had caused uproar in the local community. The LSO was able to resolve the dispute by bringing it to the notice of the authorities and forcing the teacher to pay compensation. He proudly claimed that no incidences of corporal punishments had occurred since the community had raised its voice and addressed the issue collectively.

Discussions:

The discussions following session 2 focused on the need to strengthen the citizen-state relationship and improve coordination mechanisms with public service delivery departments, with particular emphasis on improving the provision and quality of education.

Mr. Imran Khan, Civil Society Campaign Manager at Alif Ailaan, stated that the achievement of quality education for all depends on the actions of Members of Parliament, provincial members of executive councils, the Education Department, teachers, parents and members of the community. Thus, he called on all individuals and organizations to assume responsibility for performance improvement in the delivery of education services to ensure efficiency, transparency and accountability. He also highlighted the need to set up coordination mechanisms between different NGOs and other welfare organizations working in the education sector so that duplication of work could be minimized.

Mr. Allah Rakha Asi, CEO PRSP, stressed on the need to bring about a change in attitudes as communities have an important role to play with regard to enhancing accountability of public officials, improving governance processes, service delivery outcomes, and resource allocation. He said that as buyers of services, communities need to be made more aware. Stressing on the importance of teacher training, Mr. Allah Rakhi stated that Pakistan should follow the example of Finland which has very high standards that must be met to enter teacher preparation programmes. High quality teachers, he said, should be the hallmark of Pakistan's education system.

Dr. Bajwa, CEO NRSP, said that the Chief Minister of Sindh, in recognition of the work done by the RSPs, had requested NRSP to run 150 primary institutes that had been turned into ghost schools. In conclusion, he reiterated the need to include women in all aspects of development and address the 'psychological barrier' that prevents them from playing a more significant role in the uplift of their communities.

Session 3: Gender TOT Certificate Distribution Ceremony

Briefing on Gender TOT for Community Activists

Ms. Yasmin Karim, Programme Manager GAD AKRSP

The third session involved the distribution of Gender Training of Trainers (TOT) Certificates to AKRSP community activists. Ms. Yasmin Karim, gave a brief introduction of the Gender TOT activities. She explained that in the Gilgit region, AKRSP had engaged young couples (one man and one woman) as gender trainers. (These pairs could be that of husband/wife, father/daughter, brother/sister etc.).

Ms. Karim, explained that the LSO first identifies couples interested in working as trainers for their society. They then receive Gender Sensitization Trainings from the LSO, after which they begin to practice. The fourth and final step in the process was the distribution of certificates, which was to happen that day. Ms. Karim also said that a similar process had been initiated in the Chitral district, which was as yet in the intermediary phases.

Distribution of Gender TOT Certificates

Mr. Shoaib Sultan, Chairman RSPN; Mr. Abdul Malik, CEO AKRSP; and Mr. Benoist Bazin Head of Operations-1, EU, were then called upon to distribute the Gender TOT Certificates to the trainees.

Comments by Community Gender TOT Graduates

Mr. Hassan Baig began with a quote from Iqbal highlighting the fact that good intentions alone are not enough, they need to be converted into action to bring about effective change. He then thanked AKRSP for the opportunity that was given to him and his fellow trainees.

Mr. Baig described the change that the gender training had brought about in his life. He said he belong to a harsh and remote area of Gilgit. In 2013, he had gone to Islamabad with his wife to become a better trainer. Little did he know at the time that one day he would have successfully educated his fellow villagers on issues like gender and women's rights, which were completely novel in his closed and backward society.

Ms. Salma Baig, wife of Mr. Hassan Baig next took the stage. She too, spoke of how the training had changed their lives. They now delivered trainings in their village. She explained how their work on gender equality was supported within the ambit of Islam, and described how she and her husband had become role models in their community because of their work. She concluded by saying that people needed to be courageous in the face of difficulties.

Session 4: Working in Challenging and Conflict Areas

Challenges of Working in Conflict Areas

Mr. Masood UlMulk, CEO SRSP

Mr. Masood ul Mulk, Chief Executive Officer SRSP, gave a detailed account of the Sarhad Rural Support Programme's experience in implementing a community-driven approach in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, focusing primarily on its programme in the volatile FATA areas.

He said that development has, in the past several decades, focused on issues of 'governance' especially in fragile states. Since 2004, 'responsibility and accountability' have become the focal point of most discussions on development. Referring to 'The Africa Power Study', Mr. Masood Ul Mulk stated that many have wondered whether ideas picked up from one area could be applied to another. He said that development, which used to be seen as a technical subject focusing on the use of tools, has now become much more complex with politics and context playing a significant role in the design and implementation of interventions. He believed that the experience of working in difficult environments had shown that development cannot be viewed as a linear phenomenon. History, governance systems and repeated conflicts in FATA have, he said, led to a 'development conundrum'. Yet, departing from the conventional narrative, Mr. Masood Ul Mulk believed that developmental efforts could in fact be realized in the area as long as the right approach was used.

Introducing the RSP approach, Mr. Masood Ul Mulk said that they believed in the inherent potential of communities for self-help and aimed at tapping this social capital for the development of communities. Based on the same principles, SRSP has garnered over two decades of experience in working on grassroots development and community empowerment in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region. Highlighting the outreach of SRSP, Mr. Masood Ul Mulk stated that the organization has a presence in 23 of the 25 districts of KP and has so far organized over 25,000 men and women community institutions covering over 500,000 member households. After the recurrent natural disasters and calamities that have hit the area, SRSP has also expanded its scope of work to include humanitarian efforts in addition to its developmental competencies.

The organization has worked extensively in a region bordering and sharing many cultural and social similarities with FATA. Therefore, in 2006 when the government decided to launch the 'FATA Sustainable Development Plan', SRSP was the ideal civil society partner for promoting development and bringing about social transformation in the region.

Mr. Masood Ul Mulk spoke of how the government had wanted SRSP to start implementing a project with definite time lines, clear inputs, outputs and outcomes and a monitoring system to link the outcomes with project activities, in what it deemed were 'soft' areas. SRSP was adamant, however, that in an uncertain environment like FATA only an 'organizational approach', where both the organization and its programme grew by learning-from-the-field, would be workable. The government accepted this approach and gave SRSP an endowment of Rs. 200 million to set up a FATA Unit within the organization. Mr. Masood Ul Mulk said that this specialized organization was then given the task of learning from the field and developing a programme from it. It was also given the task of leveraging additional resources to scale up the programme. In 2008, this was achieved through CIDA funding of CAD 3 million for a programme in Kurram and FR Peshawar.

Yet, as Mr. Masood Ul Mulk described, it has not always been smooth sailing. As soon as the programme started, the project areas were hit by war, sectarian and communal tensions, breaking down of communication and rapidly changing government policies. The project area that had been initially identified as a 'soft' area was suddenly transformed into a 'hard' area. Despite the complexities, the goals and objectives set out in the project have been successfully delivered and attained given the flexible and adaptive process approach of the SRSP. Mr. Masood Ul Mulk described how SRSP implemented its project in FATA incrementally, using social learning, iteration and emergence for strategy making. Public credulity, he said, was instrumental in working in difficult conflict prone areas. He described the monitoring and evaluation tools that had been employed in the exercise and highlighted the key lessons learnt during the course of the project. He stated that involving the administration in the triangulation process and using double loop learning allowed the organization to adapt to rapid change. Had SRSP gone in with a 'project approach', he added, it would not have been able to remain in the region once problems arose. Thus, synoptic rather than emergent planning was required.

Reflecting on the early days of the RSP movement, Mr. Masood Ul Mulk stated that little had changed over the past decade. The RSPs, he believed, had always been ahead of their time. In the end, he reiterated the need to introduce an element of flexibility in programmes to ensure effective, socially-acceptable and sustainable results on ground.

Discussions

Most of the discussion following Session 4 focused on the concept of flexibility versus accountability.

Mr. Benoist Bazin, representing the EU Delegation to Pakistan opined that the presentation provided valuable insight to donors who had to manage the delicate task of balancing flexibility needs with that of upward accountability. He wanted to know how SRSP used an organizational approach to bring about change in communities that were completely against any form of transformation.

In response to the query, Mr. Masood Ul Mulk explained that as an institution, it is important to have a clear vision and to work towards achieving that vision. However, the means of achieving it need to be adapted to meet the demands of the context. Referring to fragile environments such as that of FATA, he stressed the need for the process of change to be more gradual. He quoted an example of an international organization that had gone into FATA and started advertising for staff recruitment without building trust and credibility. The result was that it was not able to continue its work in the region for long. In contrast to this, SRSP grafted on local knowledge and allowed the process to be more organic. He explained how the organization used the traditional concept of 'burial funds' to introduce the idea of savings into the area.

Mr. Shoaib Sultan added that the RSPs have always believed in bringing about change in a gradual, organic way so it is more acceptable. Mr. Masood Ul Mulk reminded the participants of the immensely diverse environments the RSPs were dealing with which made it necessary for them to adapt their programmes to the local context.

When inquired about managing the tradeoff between flexibility and accountability, Mr. Masood Ul Mulk clarified that he was not proposing that standardization be removed from all aspects of

programmes. The 'flexibility' he was talking about did not negate the need for transparency or having accountability mechanisms. He gave an example of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that are used in implementing Community Physical Infrastructure (CPI) schemes throughout KP and FATA. He stressed the need to balance both upward and downward accountability. NGO's concern for the interests of its large donors should not undermine its attention to the needs of its intended beneficiaries.

Many participants commended SRSP for having worked in such a difficult and conflict prone environment, and hoped that such flexibility could be built into government planning commissions as well. When asked if SRSP had ever faced the breakdown of trust and credibility with local communities during the course of the programme, Mr. Masood Ul Mulk explained that trust is something that is earned over a long period of time and there are occasions when the organization has had to carefully maneuver its way around sensitive issues. He quoted the example of District Upper Dir, which he believed to be one of the most politicized regions in the country. He explained how SRSP had to deal with opposing political parties to earn their trust and allow the Bacha Khan Poverty Alleviation Programme (BKPAP) to unroll smoothly.

Mr. Abdul Malik, CEO of AKRSP, added that despite the need for adaptability and flexibility, there are certain non-negotiables in development, such as the participation of women. However, he believed that even a concept as universally accepted as gender equality needs to be approached with caution as it can be achieved over time, rather than in a single day. Flexibility, he believed, was most important when it came to selecting *'entry points'*.

Mr. Nadir Gul Barech, CEO of Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP), added that the continuity of programmes in difficult areas is of utmost importance. Programmes should focus on systematic change rather than on short term quantifiable outputs.

Mr. Masood Ul Mulk also stated that the concept of flexibility should not be misunderstood to mean the elimination of upward accountability. He explained that enhanced flexibility should ideally translate to the setting of shorter targets, increased learning and regular review meetings. Mr. Shoaib Sultan referred to the Organic Pragmatic Sociological Approach and said

that the conceptual package should remain the same, while the programme package should be altered to meet the needs of the context.

Dr. Bajwa, CEO NRSP, stressed on the need to break 'psychological barriers' and to focus on 'peer learning'. He spoke of how community institutions on both sides of the India-Pakistan border in Sindh had helped resolve a long standing conflict over a piece of no man's land. He also highlighted the importance of hiring local staff as in the end the communities need to be able to rely on themselves for their development.

Session 5: Presentation on European Union Supported Balochistan Community Development Programme of BRSP

Mr. Nadir Gul Barech, CEO BRSP

Mr. Nadir Gul Barech stated that compared to other provinces of Pakistan, Balochistan's economic and social development appears to face particularly daunting challenges despite an abundance of mineral resources. The growth potential of the province is circumscribed by years of regional instability, militancy, poor governance and an inward looking tribal structure. The difficult terrain and sparse spread of the population adds to the difficulty of service delivery. Women, in particular, are subject to discrimination and violence. To add to the gravity of the situation, natural calamities have, in recent years, caused widespread destruction. As a result of the chronic problems, the achievements of the MGDs remain a distant dream.

In such a situation, BRSP, initiated as a German-Pak self-help project and then transformed into a non-profit company in 1991, remains a beacon of hope. It has both a developmental and a humanitarian programme and works in 204 Union Councils of 23 Districts in Balochistan.

Mr. Barech shed light on the various projects initiated by BRSP and said that it had been awarded with the Afro-Asia Rural Development Award in 2012 in recognition of its work. He then focused on the EU funded Balochistan Community Development Programme (BCDP) which aims to support the Government of Pakistan in alleviating the negative impacts of poverty through community driven local development. He stated that the 36 month programme works in 20 Union Councils of 4 districts. The Programme has two expected results which focus on community institution building and improvement of community physical infrastructure. The Programme ultimately aims to empower communities and lead to policy and institutional reforms furthering the agenda of participatory governance and democratization at local levels.

He said that the staff had been recruited and oriented through an exposure visit to the Programme for Economic Advancement and Community Empowerment (PEACE) in Malakand Division. Mr. Barech also gave a statistical overview of the progress of BCDP and stated that over 2,857 community institutions had been organized, 50 VOs rejuvenated and about 20 LSOs had been formed/reactivated under the programmed so far. He was hopeful that, given the encouraging results at such an initial stage, the project would be implemented successfully across all four districts.

Session 6: Research and Knowledge Management

Mr. Bashir Anjum, Specialist Social Sector RSPN

Mr. Bashir Anjum presented RSPN's research in collaboration with the Maternal and Newborn Health Programme–Research and Advocacy Fund (RAF) on 'The Role of Community Spaces and Mechanisms in Health Promotion amongst the Poor Communities in Rural Pakistan'. The study was conducted from April 15, 2013 to March 31st, 2014 in Thatta (Sindh), Rajanpur (South Punjab) and Ghizer (Gilgit Baltistan).

Giving a brief overview of the country's existing standing vis-à-vis MDG 4 and 5, Mr. Anjum described the Health Promotion situation in the country. He defined health promotion as a process of engaging people and the government in fulfilling their responsibilities for the realization of complete physical, mental and social well-being of individuals and groups (Ottawa Charter 1986). According to him, community participation and empowerment lie at the heart of health promotion action, yet, the mainstay of most health promotion programmes has been health education and behaviour change models, as opposed to community empowerment for social justice. Pakistan's health system is curative rather than preventative, and there is a need to revert this.

Defining what *Empowerment through Health Promotion* entailed, and the importance of access to services, Mr. Anjum said that it has been found that generally a selected group of people (gatekeepers) have access to resources, while a larger group of population accesses resources through these gatekeepers. Whether a healthcare system will make people empowered or not, is dependent upon the discourse and negotiations that occur in community spaces where power based relationships between community people and healthcare workers exist. With this basic understanding, their research set out to identify the types and roles of community spaces and the ways of making them more effective for maternal, newborn and child health promotion. Their primary research question explored whether community spaces empowered, or inhibited women, poor persons, and marginalized groups, particularly with respect to maternal and child health issues.

Mr. Anjum explained the research methodology (presentation attached in Annex) and outlined the functions and outcomes of what he classified as 'Formal' and 'Informal' community spaces. He said that their research revealed that for the most part poor, marginalized, low cast people

from far flung areas were not represented or empowered through Formal Spaces. Similarly, it was found that the programmatic approach to health promotion through Formal Spaces was limited to certain types of awareness raising and behaviour change. Rights, accountability mechanisms, and organization for social change were not addressed. Therefore Mr. Anjum concluded that the functionality of Formal Spaces was questionable. On the other hand, Informal Spaces were either private or public and could be male, female or even mixed.

The study found that the 'better-off' people have the most inclusion while nomads have the least. Furthermore, informal spaces were more flexible and inclusive than formal spaces.

In the end, Mr. Anjum outlined a list of recommendations that arose out of their research. Incorporating these suggestions would improve the efficiency and best utilize the strengths of formal and informal spaces, while promoting the agenda of health promotion and empowerment of all segments of society.

Peoples Institutions and Accountability

Mr. Atif Zeeshan, Programme Manage Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Research, SRSP

Presenting on 'Peoples Institutions and Accountability', Mr. Atif Zeeshan urged the audience to ponder over the widespread use of information technology in today's world and how it could be utilized for effective Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Research (PMER).

Highlighting the extensive presence of SRSP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mr. Zeeshan said that the organization covers a wide geographic spread and has over a thousand employees. It also works with a multitude of donors, all with diverse information needs. In such a case, effectively monitoring and evaluating a wide array of programmes becomes a complex and difficult task.

Referring to the period before 2009, Mr. Zeeshan stated that the lack of endowments meant that SRSPs focus was on survival. This further complicated the task for SRSP's PMER section. However, SRSP being a learning organization, allowed its PMER to transform over time to meet new and emerging challenges and to shift focus from *output* to *outcomes*. He acknowledged the contribution of SRSPs top management, RSPN and several sensitized donors, in encouraging the organization in becoming more open. Today, SRSP not only allows communities to play a greater role in ensuing accountability but also develops proposals and village development plans with their active participation.

Mr. Zeeshan referred to a number of third party evaluations carried out over the years that showcased the link between peoples' institutions and accountability, and provided external confirmation of the effectiveness of SRSPs interventions. These, along with a number of internal evaluation studies, can be accessed through SRSPs official website. Internal evaluations, he stressed, have been made an integral part of PMER at SRSP. He also referred to the use of interactive sheets to provide snapshots of programmes/projects on a single page. Mr. Zeeshan informed the audience that the recently concluded third party evaluation of the Chief Ministers Poverty Alleviation Programme had revealed astonishingly positive results.

Referring to social audit programmes like Alif Ailaan, he highlighted the role of peoples' institutions in ensuring transparency and accountability. Mr. Zeeshan said that communities had helped SRSP implement various interventions, including the administering of Poverty Score

Card Surveys, BISP related surveys and so on. During the floods and the IDP crisis in particular, the organization had relied heavily on organized institutions of people to provide data as well as to help monitor progress on ground.

He conceded that the challenges that monitoring and evaluation teams face in complex and uncertain environments are numerous, but they can be overcome if the right approach is followed. He stressed on the need to innovate and improvise while adapting to the environment and highlighted the importance of triangulation. He reiterated the need to develop simple and flexible systems that can easily be adapted to different organizational contexts.

Discussion and Comments:

The two presentations were followed by a lengthy discussion and question answer session by the panelists.

The session was chaired by Dr. Pervaiz Tahir, Advisor to the Board of Directors RSPN, who appreciated the fact that so much knowledge and research had been generated under Mr. Shoaib Sultan that it now needs to be managed. He stressed that nowhere in the world was preventative health delivered without community participation and although this area has traditionally been ignored in the country, the RSP's literature and efforts were slowly bridging the gap.

Mr. Abdul Malik, CEO AKRSP, also commended the research, though he said that given that demand was prerequisite for the improvement of community spaces, a study similar to this supply-side study should be conducted on demand as well.

Mr. Agha Ali Javad GM NRSP, commented on the increasing importance and emerging role of LSOs with respect to monitoring and direct management of resources (Community Investment Funds). He stressed that LSOs and CRPs learn from the RSPs. Therefore, it is not really a matter of technology but of how the RSPs work in the field, and this makes it very important for the RSPs to be careful while interacting with the communities.

Mr. Masood Ul Mulk, CEO SRSP, acknowledged the fact that the demand for evidence had grown in recent years, with increasing need for accountability. He stressed that if the RSPs were to be a leading player in the field of development they needed to recognize this and strengthen their M&E systems accordingly. Mr. Masood Ul Mulk noted that communities were a very important stakeholder in the RSPs work, but there were also others that needed to be

acknowledged. He said the RSPs are huge 'laboratories' yet very little of their efforts actually receive mention.

Afterwards, the floor was opened to questions. The extent to which the RSPs M&E procedures are standardized were debated, and the flexibility of the RSPs vis a vis the strengths and reliability of their monitoring systems lauded. A question was raised on the multiplicity of monitoring techniques used by the RSPs and it was stressed that there is a need to combine and coordinate their results.

Dr. Bajwa, CEO NRSP, also emphasized the need to take a more holistic view of development problems, in the sense that a CPI, for example, should not only be looked at as an engineering solution, but rather by focusing on the quality of water being provided, this could become a health solution as well. This is instrumental given the major grounds that need to be covered in the service delivery sectors of the country.

Mr. Shoaib Sultan picked up on this. He commended the novelty of the work done and said that the real test will be the use that is made of all this research the RSPs were involved in. He asked whether there were plans to sensitize the government of the results. Mr. Shoaib Sultan also stressed that poverty was not the only problem and that there was need for an integrated, comprehensive and contextualized approach to development in the country.

Session 7: Presentation by the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (PCP) on Assessment Tool Evaluation of LSOs

Malik Babur Javed, Programme Manager Certification, PCP

Mr. Malik Babur Javed was next invited to clarify his organizations work and motivation in striving for the development of an assessment tool for the evaluation of LSOs established under the RSP framework.

After giving a brief introduction to the PCP, Mr. Javed explained how the PCP had entered into agreement with AKRSP for the development of the assessment tool. He acknowledged that the PCP was aware that there were concerns about the initiative at the highest level of the RSPs and so it had slowed down the development of the tool to ensure ownership. Mr. Javed described the process the PCP had chalked out to introduce the tool to concerned stakeholders and then made some important clarifications. First he said that this was not going to be 'certification' but rather was meant as an assessment tool for LSOs. Secondly he said that usage of the tool was in no way mandatory; the PCP understood the financial situation of LSOs and did not expect them to pay for the assessment. He stressed that the PCP was in no way attempting to make money off the LSOs. He announced that the PCP was in talks with a donor for the free assessment of 150 LSOs and also mentioned several other innovations like e-philanthropy and District Philanthropy Forums that the PCP was thinking of introducing.

The floor was then opened for questions from the participants regarding the PCPs efforts.

Discussions:

Mr. Javed's presentation was followed by a lengthy and intense debate, with serious concerns being expressed by some of the RSP top management about the nature, motivation and consequences of the PCPs involvement and evaluation of LSOs.

There was apprehension expressed by many in the top management that the LSOs were yet in their formative years and were not ready for subjection to assessment of this sort. Mr. Shoaib Sultan, amongst others, expressed fears that the evaluation may pose hurdles in the future for LSOs in accessing resources and this would shatter the confidence and good work that was presently being done by them. Similarly it was stated that although 150 LSOs were initially being evaluated for free, this facility was not going to be available for other LSOs in the future. This would create problems, especially for those LSOs that either did not wish to or did not have the resources to evaluate themselves. They said the PCP was known as an institute for certification and they feared that the current initiative will weaken the PCPs status.

Dr. Bajwa was also amongst those opposed to the idea and questioned the motivation of the PCP and asked what the benefit of the evaluation would be for LSOs which are fundamentally non-profit, usually unregistered, institutions of the people.

Another concern voiced by the participants was that although LSOs were doing excellent work, most of them did not have defined internal organizational systems in place and hence subjecting them to the tool may be doing an injustice to them. Mr. Masood UlMulk of SRSP added that the existence of rules and regulations on paper did not necessarily mean there were improvements on ground, rather he said we should not jump the gun and at the moment the focus should be on ensuring the sustainability and survival of these LSOs.

Although Mr. Javed conceded that many of the concerns were valid, he said the PCP's mandate was larger than just that of money making or tax purposes. He urged that standardization was necessary given the multiplicity of often substandard organizations working for development and stressed that these systems would ensure that weaknesses were addressed and these small organizations (LSOs) were sustainable in the future. He also proposed the possibility of discussing joint administration of this system if the RSPs wanted.

After much debate, the LSO representatives themselves were asked what they thought of the evaluation exercise. There were mixed responses, with some saying the standardization and streamlining of activities would set bench marks and strengthen LSO functioning, while others believed that it was a hasty step and given that the RSPs were the LSO parent organizations, they trusted and relied on the judgment and support of the RSP top management as it had never let them down in the past.

Finally, Mr. Agha Ali Javad, GM NRSP, concluded the session by saying that "LSOs are independent and self-governed organisations of the people, and PCP is also an independent organisation that wants to work for the institutional stability of these LSOs. RSPs, therefore, should have no objection on their working together for their shared goals".

Ms. Nadia Tahir, University of Central Punjab (UCP)

Ms. Nadia Tahir from the University of Central Punjab (UCP) was then called on stage to discuss the possibility of research opportunities for the students of the University with the RSPs.

Ms. Tahir said the UCP was one of the largest business schools in the country. Students at the University are engaged in different types of voluntary programmes, internships and report writing tasks. Mr. Tahir expressed the desire that instead of placing these students in banks etc., they should be given opportunities to work on ground with LSOs.

This, she stressed, will not only expose the students to work environments very different from those usually found in the corporate world, but there is also the possibility that LSO members may pick up some skills through their interaction with these budding business students.

Session 9: Chairman's Session: Reflections, Comments and Suggestions

Mr.BenoistBazin, Head of Operations-1, EU

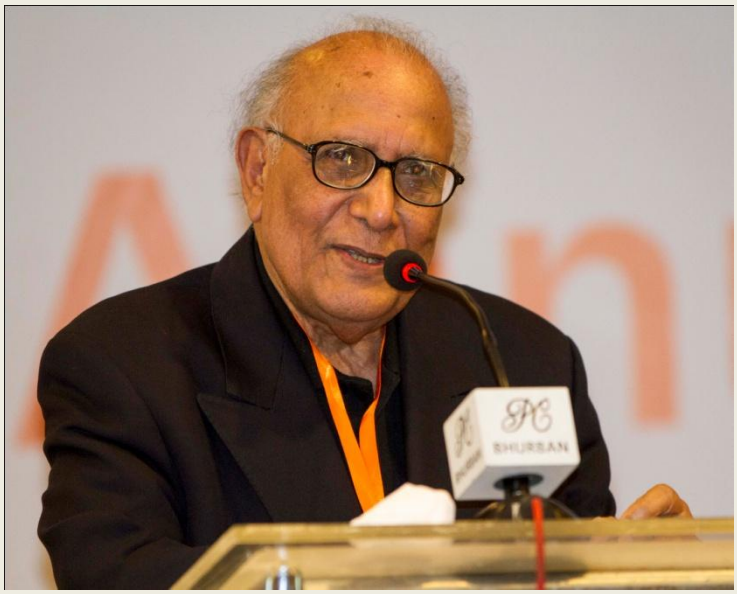
Mr. Benoist Bazin, from the European Union Delegation to Pakistan, stated that for him the retreat had been the culmination of a two week exposure visit to RSP activities. He had started off in the Malakand Division with SRSP and then spent 9 days in Sindh conducting field visits with Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO). The retreat had, therefore, provided him an opportunity to reflect on all that he had experienced over the past weeks. Mr. Bazin added that although he had only spent 6 months in Pakistan, he had already been moved by the strength and the capability of the RSPs.

By referring to his experience of working in Haiti, a country caught in a vicious circle of poverty, bad governance and instability, Mr. Bazin attempted to draw a contrast between the two countries, despite the similarities that they exhibit. He said that it pleased him to see the extent to which the communities in rural Pakistan had been mobilized. Acknowledging that that there can be "no future without the involvement of communities", he reassured the participants that he would inform his colleagues of the effectiveness of a participatory approach to development based on social mobilization.

Mr. Bazin stressed that development is in fact 'change management' and it is important for governments to work with communities when managing resources. LSOs, he added, should also serve as pressure groups that ensure that public resources are used responsibly. Mr. Bazin stated that although democracy might not be the best system, it is in fact the only one we have. Therefore, raising the voice of the population, he believed, was the only way to make the government take notice and ensure that the voice of the common man, rather than that of the lobbies, is heard.

Mr. Bazin further stated that Pakistan as a country is not known for upholding gender equality or for women empowerment, yet he had been encouraged to see rural women participating in development initiatives. He stressed the need to organize more women into LSOs to deal with issues of health, education and so on. He said that contrary to popular belief, he did not doubt the ability of LSOs to become separate NGOs in themselves. In the end, Mr. Bazin urged people to unite and take a stand for their future.

Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan, Chairman RSPN



In the end Mr. Shoaib Sultan was asked to share his views and comments on the two-day proceedings and outline any suggestions he had for the RSPs future strategy.

Mr. Shoaib Sultan began by congratulating Ms. Shandana Khan on what he believed was possibly one of the best retreats he had been to. He said that seeing "the glittering array of CEOs" sitting beside him at the table, had reminded of how all this had begun with a jeep ride to Gilgit in December 1982. At the time, he had not known how all this would develop, even though he had had the utmost confidence in the conceptual package given to him by Mr. Akhtar Hameed Khan. But, Mr. Shoaib Sultan said, one does not replicate concepts, one replicates people, and that he said has been his biggest success. Today, the CEOs sitting beside him know more than even him, his duty, he believed, is only to take them along in the correct direction. He said that he had full confidence that the programme would continue, even if he wasn't there.

Reflecting back on his life, Mr. Shoaib Sultan said that God had been very kind and he had achieved almost everything that he wanted. What was left, he said "the glittering array of CEOs" would no doubt accomplish.

He said that a lot of questions are usually asked about the RSPs and their work. His answer, however, always remains the same; along with the government/administrative pillar and the political pillar, there is a missing third pillar. This is the socioeconomic one and unless the first two are supported by the third, they can achieve little given that none of the earlier pillars do the work required by the third. This is where the RSPs come in, assessing the socioeconomic status of each household, preparing household plans and integrating these into larger village development plans. Therefore, if anyone objects by saying that the RSPs are creating parallel organizations to the government or taking up its functions, it must be stressed that the RSPs only do what is not and cannot be performed by the government or local departments. They require the "resources of the government" and the "flexibility of NGOs" and this makes the RSPs indispensable.

Mr. Shoaib Sultan said that it is his dream that one day there will be 'institutions of the people' throughout the length and breadth of Pakistan. The distinction between LSOs and other civil society organizations or NGOs is the fact that LSOs have their roots right down in the households. He said that we have seen the spread and power of LSOs in India. In the span of ten short years they have reached 10 million and now these 'institutions of the people' have become the channel and the receipts of all government programmes in the country.

It is his dream that this 'socioeconomic pillar' is erected in Pakistan to lift approximately 7.7 million households out of poverty. After describing the poverty profile of the country, Mr. Shoaib Sultan expressed hope that the government would lend its support and financial backing to the project. He told the gathering how the Chief Minister of Sindh had offered PKR 10 billion for implementing the programme in 24 districts of his province. He had even offered additional funds for the remaining district of Sindh. Similarly in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Chairman of the leading political party of the Province had told Mr. Shoaib Sultan that he fully backed the idea and would get it done. These two Provinces gave him hope. Similarly, they were trying their best to persuade the European Union to be as kind to Baluchistan as they have been to Sindh.

This, Mr. Shoaib Sultan said, was his story, the most inspiring bit of which was the progress made by LSOs, especially those that comprise of female members. He went on to describe three things that he believed were essential to the success of any development programme: i) willingness of the community; ii) willingness of the community to identify competent activists or CRPs; iii) a sensitive support organization where development is a "passion" and not a "job".

Referring to what one of the female LSO members had said during her presentation, Mr. Shoaib Sultan quoted from Leo Tolstoy that, "The only certain happiness in life is to live for others". He said he had seen this everywhere in the rural areas. He hoped that whether he was present or not, the CEOs and the community organizations would see to it that one day Pakistan really is saturated with 'institutions of the people', since that is where the future of the country lies. In the end he thanked everyone for the love and support that had kept him going.

Ms. Shandana Khan, CEO RSPN

Ms. Shandana Khan then wound up the proceedings with a vote of thanks. She made special mention of Mr. Khaleel Ahmed Tetlay who she said was not present but had been instrumental in arranging the two day Retreat.