

Note for Record

**By: Shoaib Sultan Khan
December 13, 2014**

**Subject: Livelihoods Asia Summit (India)
December 10-11,2014**

I received the invitation to the Summit from Access Development Services. I had never heard of the organisation but the First Plenary Session on Policy Innovations for Poverty Reduction to which I was invited as a Resource Person on the panel was being coordinated by Vijay Mahajan. I had come across his paper, via Google, Tracing the History of Social Mobilisation for poverty reduction since ancient times in India. While commenting on the current initiatives, he singled out Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) as by far the largest poverty reduction programme influenced by UNDP's South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) inspired by me. Since then I had wanted to meet him and Access had provided me the opportunity. I accepted the invitation little realizing that I would be having any problem in getting Indian visa. The office of Pakistan Foreign Secretary facilitated submission of my visa application. I did not get a response from the Indian High Commission till Thursday December 4th when I sent an email to the High Commissioner who knew me personally and the visa was delivered by the evening of the day.

While the inaugural session of the Summit was going on, Vijay Mahajan decided to have a meeting with the panelists of the First Plenary and asked me to make the first presentation. Before the commencement of the Plenary, I was able to hear the inaugural speech of the Union Minister for Rural Development Chaudhry Birendra Singh.

The Union Minister made a detailed reference to National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and how the programme is aiming to reach each and every poor household numbering 100 million rural poor families and bring them out of poverty and according to Prime Minister Modi make them part of the middle class. This is the reason, Union Minister emphasized, NRLM is not going to leave the poor once they have risen above the level of subsistence, it will hold their hand and continue to be with them next 7 to 10 years till there is no likelihood of their ever falling below the poverty line. This is what the

poor need and this is the mission of NRLM. It was all music my ears. SERP is the precursor of NRLM and being guided by an old SERP hand Vijay Kumar, IAS. Introducing me Vijay Mahajan again reiterated that in his experience SERP was the first successful large scale poverty reduction programme implemented by Government and he has the first hand knowledge because he is the resident of Hyderabad Deccan in Andhra Pradesh.

My speech and powerpoint presentation are attached. I underscored the importance of the institutions of the rural poor and how for fostering countrywide framework of grassroots institution we need to persuade governments to act like NGOs. There were nearly 600 delegates from NGOs all over India and also participants from SAARC which included Afghanistan and special invitees from Myanmar and Cambodia. A strong plea was made by other panelists on the First Plenary for South South Cooperation and networking.

I was overwhelmed by the response of the delegates to my presentation who kept on coming to me with their compliments and queries. The CEO of Access Vipin Sharma immediately at the end of the First Plenary came to me and said we are inviting you to the next year's Summit.

One of which took me by surprise when one NGO delegate came to me and asked me in all seriousness if you succeed in your mission what are the NGOs going to do. I assured him there would be enough for NGOs to do. It is NGO innovations both in policy and programmes that government as implementers are going to take to scale and there would always be need for new technological packages for the institutions of the people to enable them to go higher and higher.

The Summit was attended by almost all the major donors and also supported by them with UNDP taking the lead. The delegates from Afghanistan and Meghalaya (State of India), IFAD, Oxfam, AKDN came up for detailed discussion. Many delegates who had either worked in AKRSP India or in Afghanistan, apprised how they had heard about me and delighted to meet me including Oxfam representative from Pakistan. One of the delegates came up to me with the suggestion that there should be a bonfire we setting around it and will never tire hearing your stories.

However, the cream on the cake of the Summit for me was the final concluding session when Vijay Kumar in his excellent speech on empowering women acknowledged my presence in the hall as one of his mentors. But the speech by the Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, LC Goyal was music to my ears and the guarantee for current government's full commitment and support to the implementation of NRLM.

Secretary Goyal said it is for the first time in India that the potential of the people is being unleashed through NRLM and that too through women empowerment. NRLM is gaining momentum and the criticism that it is only in few areas has been brought to rest by government's determination to take NRLM to all the States and reach each and every poor household. Besides empowering women by fostering their institutions, NRLM also promotes sustainable agriculture, skill development and a policy is on the anvil to meet the challenge of surplus workforce which estimates pitch at 47 million by 2020. Through NRLM and other programmes, government aims at putting interventions in place to meet risks faced by poor, such as, health, sanitation, basic social and physical infrastructure.

NRLM is championing identification of the poor through a participatory mode; i) identifying and building capacity of the champions amongst the poor as community resource persons and giving them a role essential in any poverty reduction programme; and ii) setting up a sensitive professional support organisation of motivated and dedicated persons to create social capital and mechanisms to foster institutions of the poor. Institutions which create demand side accountability for government service providers. There is enough empirical evidence in India showing that nurturing, building, sustaining institutions of the poor is doable and possible.

Secretary Goyal concluded that poverty contributes to instability. 70 years ago, ILO charter declared that poverty alleviation contributes to prosperity. How much longer are we going to wait and waste the productive energy of the poor without utilizing it. There is tremendous potential in poor people waiting to be channelized. Poverty eradication should be centerpiece of national policies and there should be continuous dialogue for South South cooperation.

Secretary Goyal after the concluding session asked me personally to initiate the process of South South dialogue and networking and assured all his support.