

Note for Record
(October 5, 2018)

By: Shoaib Sultan Khan
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Subject: Women Empowerment in the Province of Sindh

My experience implementing the South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) in the Indian State of Andhra Pradesh with the UNDP support, had convinced me that rural women are more dynamic and motivated to espouse the strategy of Social Mobilisation and with the full support of State Government and World Bank, SAPAP inspired through Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) fostering over one million Self Help Groups (SHGs) of rural women comprising 11 million between 1996-2008, federating into Village and Mandal (Tehsil) organisations.

In 2009, when Government of Sindh approved launch of a Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP), I persuaded the government to allow UCBPRP to work only with rural women. Despite initial scepticism, government allowed UCBPRP to do so. That first step in Districts of Shikarpur and Kashmore has today resulted in Government of Sindh approving programmes which in due course, would have mobilised 2.7 million rural women households out of a total of 4.1 million rural households in the province including rural areas of Karachi and Hyderabad urban districts besides 22 rural districts. According to Poverty Score Card 100 % households below poverty line and a substantial % above the line, would be included. Overall 66% of rural household women would be organised. The existing programme funded by Government of Sindh and European Union have already mobilised 1.16 million in 18 districts of the province and by June 2019 would have covered 2 million households with exclusively women members.

Sindh is the only province in Pakistan which has empowered women at this scale.

On October 5, Rashid Bajwa, Dittal Kalhoro and I had the privilege of meeting Syed Murad Ali Shah, Chief Minister of Sindh. Prior to this meeting, we were also given time by Mr. Muhammad Waseem, Chairman, Planning & Development Board of the Government of Sindh, despite his horrendously busy schedule. He was also present in our meeting with the Chief Minister along with the Principal Secretary to the CM.

In our meeting with the Chairman, we pointed out the outputs included in 2009 PC-I of UCBPRP as follows:

- i) Organise households into community organisations (COs), clustered into Village Organisations (VOs) as per their demand;
- ii) Create a delivery mechanism for public sector line departments to develop their regular ADP, by providing an effective and functional conduit (through VOs) for government to deliver services.

We pointed out that RSPs output was delivered but the line departments who were given massive resources compared to SRSO for reducing multidimensional poverty was not addressed. Secretary Planning Shereen Narejo agreed and suggested formalization of the output by line departments through mandatory instructions and creation of formal forums to achieve this objective. The Chairman felt some resistance from line departments to this approach.

In the alternative, Rashid presented his experience of implementing WISE programme which addresses SDGs relating to water, immunization, sanitation and education. WISE is a people centric approach implemented by the three tier structure CO/VO/LSO already fostered or being fostered by RSPs in 18 districts of the province and in due course, it will cover the entire province.

In our meeting with the Chief Minister, we apprised him of the Poverty Score Card which RSPs undertake before implementation of the programme and I presented him the PSC of Jamshoro, his home district. He was surprised and visibly pleased to see the document pertaining to his own district. Rashid explained how this was done and offered to provide the data in a digitalized form for him to access any information he wanted relating to his district.

The Chief Minister expressed his pleasure at the goodwill UCBPRP created for the government especially the meeting of 12000 women at Sukkur. He expressed his desire to cover every nook and corner of the rural areas to banish poverty and approved the extension of the programme in the entire province renamed as Peoples Poverty Reduction Programme (PPRP). I think this was ultimate sign of the ownership of the RSPs approach by Government of Sindh.

We briefed the Chief Minister on reduction of multidimensional poverty through line departments channeling their services and supplies by using the conduit comprising CO/VO/LSO.

In the meanwhile it can immediately be addressed by adopting WISE by approving funds for it. We showed the CM how NRSP has achieved commendable results in Tando Muhammad Khan in a short period by involving CO/VO/LSO. The Chairman, Planning & Development Board fully supported launching of WISE and CM gave his approval.

I also submitted to CM the allocation of increased amount for Community Investment Fund (CIF) for all the eligible households instead of only 30%. The CM looked at the Chairman who consented to do it.

It was a most euphoric meeting for us and the support and commitment of the Chief Minister and his government to rural poverty reduction augurs exceptionally well for the rural poor especially women of the province of Sindh.