

## Note for Record

By: Shoaib Sultan Khan  
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Subject: Award of Nishan-e-Imtiaz

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March Pakistan Day, I was awarded the highest civilian award of Pakistan Nishan-e-Imtiaz by the President of Pakistan. I was overwhelmed with humility for the simple reason that this award was given to my Mentor Akhter Hameed Khan posthumously. I know in my heart that compared to him, I am a pygmy as a social scientist as an intellectual and a human being. My Award was a personal decision of the Prime Minister Imran Khan who was a frequent visitor to the Northern Areas when I was implementing the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) and in 2004 when as MNA, he got some funds for development in his constituency, he came to me for advice how to spend the money and on my suggestion, took me to his constituency in Mianwali where I asked CEO National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) to implement the Social Mobilisation strategy in Swans Union Council on the pattern of AKRSP which PM Imran greatly appreciated.

I would have never reached this pinnacle if His Highness the Aga Khan would not have given me the opportunity of a lifetime to initiate and implement Aga Khan Foundation Geneva's initiative the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme.

I am happy that the Award symbolizes the intense dedication and commitment, much beyond the call of duty, of the CEOs of the nine (AKRSP, SRSP, NRSP, GBTI, RSPN, IRM, BRSP, SRSO and TRDP) members of the Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN), all their management professionals, field professionals, the support staff right down to drivers and the guidance given to them by the honorary members of their Board of Directors.

Bill Spoelberch and Bob Shaw of Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) Geneva were the prime movers in enabling me successfully implementing AKRSP followed by AKRSP Board of Directors and I cannot forget the assistance I received from AKF Canada and USA.

Among the international donors AKRSP benefited immensely from Canada, UK, Netherlands, Germany, Norway and many others. USAID offered first replication of AKRSP in the then NWFP called the Sarhad Rural Support Programme. Henning Karcher of UNDP New York asked me to implement the South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP), greatly supported by UNDP Pakistan Resident Representative Von Sponeck and his Deputy Neil Buhne, who is now UN Coordinator in Pakistan and continues to support me. It was Government of Sindh which accepted my proposal to launch a Union Council Based Poverty Reduction Programme (UCBPRP) on the lines of AKRSP in 2009 in two districts. The European Union was so impressed by what they saw as the achievements of the programme

in empowering women that they offered Government of Sindh to expand the programme in eight additional districts. In Ambassador Cautain, Rural Support Programmes Network and its associate Rural Support Programmes found a true champion of Social Mobilisation approach. Government of Sindh provided funds for additional eight districts to implement UCBPRP and now plans to expand it to remaining five districts of the province renaming the programme Peoples Poverty Reduction Programme (PPRP). European Union also initiated Sindh type programme in eight districts of the province of Balochistan being implemented by RSPN, BRSP and NRSP. The World Bank funded Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) has been a source of substantial support to RSPs since 1999.

I am lucky to get the support and encouragement over my 36 years journey in grassroots development from my friends and well-wishers mainly national politicians, officials in federal and provincial governments especially the Northern Areas Administration (now Gilgit-Baltistan) and the Government of Sindh.

The awards conferred on me between 1989-2006 were indeed a great source of encouragement including Magsaysay Award by the President of Philippines, WWF World Conservation Medal by Prince Philip, United Nations Environment Programme Global 500 Award by Prince Philip, Rotary International Pakistan Man of the Year Gold Medal, Sitara-e-Imtiaz, Sitara-e-Esaar and Hilal-e-Imtiaz by the President of Pakistan.

I am also grateful to USA ASHOKA for electing me as their Senior Fellow and Sustainable Development Policy Institute, the Pakistan Society of UK and Akhuwat for honouring me with Lifetime Achievement Awards.

Above all it is the nearly eight million rural poor households from all corners of Pakistan representing approximately 50 million population who accepted the Development Partnership offered by the Rural Support Programmes and implemented it, making us all proud by their achievements.

According to Protocol, I was entitled to invite only one guest to the Award ceremony. I persuaded the Secretary to the President to allow me to invite at least one representative each province, Gilgit-Baltistan and FATA. I was delighted to take with me four women representative each from Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, FATA and two male representatives from GB and KP. We also succeeded in getting entrance to the Award ceremony in the President's House to a chaperon of the women representative from Balochistan and two small children of the women representative from Sindh. The ceremony went on for three hours and was followed by a dinner on grounds of the Presidential House. I was very happy to see how much the women enjoyed and got thrilled beyond words.

Akhter Hameed Khan (AHK) used to quote the Urdu saying "if the peacock dances in the jungle who has seen". Virginia Woolfe said "if it is not written, it has not happened". On CEO SRSP's suggestion, CEO RSPN contacted Noel Cossins, living in the bush country of Australia, who had spent a few years in Chitral with AKRSP, to write my biography. Noel alongwith his wife Felicity came to Pakistan and also travelled to London, Monaco, Indian Hyderabad and on way back stopped over at Bangkok and interviewed all those who knew me and came in contact with me besides my wife, daughters, grandchildren and frightening my great grandchildren with his antics. The title of the book he chose what a villager said to the Director Special Programmes AKF Geneva who on a visit to a village organisation in

Baltistan asked, after hearing what their organisation had done, “how all this happened” and a villager said ‘a man came wearing a hat and did it’. Noel gave the title to the book “Man in the Hat” an over 700 page biography.

On a personal note whatever I am today is due to my wife who inspired me never to give up. Marrying me when I was an undergraduate student (abandoned by my family in anger) ensuring that I completed my education and helping me at every step achieving my goal of getting into the Civil Service of Pakistan and when I decided to change my career path, making all sacrifices to allow me to pursue my career be it in Japan or Sri Lanka or Gilgit where I could not take the family. Cheerfully taking care of the four daughters and bringing them up in a way that I feel the luckiest father. My daughters Roohi, Afshan, Falaknaz and Shelley never begrudged my long absences when they were growing up. I wish both Musarrat who passed away after 62 years of companionship and Falaknaz who left this world at the young age of 30, were with us today to share this moment of glory.