

February 5, 1986

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Seminar on Rural Development in South Asia sponsored by South Asia Partnership of Canadian NGOs (SAP), Holiday Inn Ottawa.

Participants:

- President of CIDA, Members of Canadian Parliament, academics, practitioners, administrators, minister-ambassador of Pakistan.

Richard Harmston, Executive Director of SAP, introducing me observed that even with liberal education (Master's in English Literature as in my case) one could reach the pinnacle of expertise and although everyone cannot aspire the heights Shoaib has attained but his example should give comfort and heart to others with similar academic background.

My presentation comprised a brief recounting of the history of rural development in South Asia, explanation of the principles of agricultural and rural development with the aid of overhead projector transparencies and visual description of the implementation of the aforesaid principles as reflected in the progress made by AKRSP, through slides.

In the historical part I dwelt on the concept of self-help, the limitations of village aid and other community development programmes. On the theory of rural development I brought out the need for integration of social and economic development at the micro level and the fallacy of emphasizing only the social sector interventions, which do not prove a viable entry point for organization and collective management, a sine quo non for small farmer development. bringing out the lessons learnt so far from the AKRSP experience I highlighted the expertise available at local level which only needs a graft of scientific and improved skills, the micro variations from village to village in terms of needs which only respond to a process of diagnostic survey embracing a series of village dialogues and do not lend themselves to a distant planning process, the tremendous response of the small farmers to a partnership involving obligations of organization, collective management, savings, implementation and maintenance of land development projects, upgrading of human skills of village specialists to prevent losses and to introduce innovations.

In the question answer session issues were raised pertaining to training and upgrading of human skills and the role of an expatriate expert; dissemination of knowledge and experience through extension; obstacles and problems in organization of small farmers and the role of influential and elites, women's programmes and their participation in the village development process; the danger of VO being dominated by the influential few in the village; the attitude of government towards this self-governance institution at the grassroots and the danger of the perpetuation of the gulf between the haves and have nots. One of the participants pointed out the similarity between the Comilla model and AKRSP and observed that Comilla was in fact not a model but an approach and AKRSP brings out very clearly how the approach has been developed and adapted to the Northern Areas situation.

Replying to the question raised I explained that training had to be needed specific initially and AKRSP has leaned heavily on government departments for formulation and conduct of such training with AKRSP playing the role of a host. The next stage would be introducing innovations for which we need the best experts in the field to develop relevant packages. It is in this area that expatriate experts can help provided they have the relevant expertise suited to AKRSP needs. For disseminating extension education AKRSP is utilising written material - instruction sheets, case studies, village profiles, inhouse magazine etc., - audio visual aids,

conferences on a monthly basis and seminars on different topics useful to farmers and AKRSP staff. Northern Areas being a post feudal enclave, the abolition of the Mirdom resulted in most of the tenants becoming peasant proprietors, albeit mostly under one hectare farmers, but this has helped in formulation of village organizations; there is not much disparity in land holding and at the two ends of the scale there are not many farmers. The large majority comprises small farmers. This does not employ that the approach would not succeed when there is disparity in land holdings.

Of course it would not work with medium or large farmers, or the landless but wherever there are small farmers and the majority of Pakistani agriculturists fall in this category, the strategy would work. Because the biggest handicap of the small farmer in his subsistence holding and unless he pools his resources, cuts down overheads, achieves economies of scale in cooperation with other small farmers, he cannot be helped to rise above the level of subsistence. The land development component of small farmer development package does benefit the bigger farmers and the landless, along with the small farmers and thus proves a great cementing factor and helps in strengthening the village organization. AKRSP is in the process of evolving a women's development package based on labour saving devices, livestock management and poultry training. In the meanwhile more than 95 villages have already organized women groups comprising over 5000 households with over one million rupees as their equity capital. As soon as the package is perfected the women's development would take a quantum leap. The members of the VO are encouraged to keep their leaders under control and the mechanism is a regular general body meeting unlike traditional cooperatives which abdicate their authority and control in the hands of an executive committee. The general body meeting is also essential for increased savings because it is in these weekly/monthly meetings that each member deposits his savings. Government and more so the elected councillors have looked at VOs with interest and sympathy.

Under the existing local council structure there is no statutory body at the village level. The union council comprises on an average ten villages with the one member from each village. Whereas the council is viable and effective body for inter village planning, for taxation and for political education it is hopelessly inadequate as a vehicle for economic or agricultural development of individual villages. The VOs fill up this vacuum and act as a development out-reach for the union council. The district council of Baltistan has accepted this approach and AKRSP is collaborating with the district council in implementing the programme in the district. Hopefully other councils and the government would emulate this example once it is proved viable. As to the criticism that AKRSP strategy would perpetuate the gulf between the haves and have nots. I explained that what AKRSP is aiming at is to help subsistence farmers rise above the level of subsistence and become commercial farmers. If it succeeds in doing so, it doesn't matter that the well-to-do farmers of today become rich farmers of the future, because this would not be at the cost of the small farmers. AKRSP is an economic programme and not a political one aiming at bringing everyone at the same level. It is in fact an alternative to both the North American Agricultural Development Model based on ownership of large land holdings and the social model which does not admit of private ownership. The VOs are being fostered to develop into mini-entrepreneurs and thereby ensure social justice and equitable distribution of the fruits of development.

Mrs. Margaret Catley Carlson, President of CIDA, who joined the discussion for luncheon session, to especially meet me (according to John Martin), in a brief speech, at the end of the even recounted her association with my work and informed the audience that Shoaib has been functioning from different 'closets' - Government of Pakistan, UNICEF, AKF and the appreciation she had for these attempts to create as many lobbies as possible. She said that she did not come earlier because she had already read my book and observed that we have learnt a great deal from his work and watch with interest the new dimensions he has given to the complex and different field of rural development. After Shoaib's departure from Sri Lanka, people questioned whether the work done by him at Mahaweli will last. Shoaib would have been the first to disagree with this assessment. Time has given the answer and his work and project have survived.

In the conversation at lunch Maggie asked me what new things did I learn at AKRSP and my reply was that it further reinforced my confidence in the rural poor that given responsibility and some resources, they were capable of achieving wonders. She appreciated my approach of the integration of social and economic development and fully agreed that mere opening of schools and immunisation of children would not help in

pulling out the rural poor from the swamp of poverty.

I conveyed AKRSP's appreciation of the support it is receiving from CIDA - NGO and Bilateral Divisions - and more particularly from the beginning when most of the agencies doubted the efficacy of the strategy. She agreed that CIDA was much more supportive of innovative approaches than others in the field, however the Canadian public did not appear to appreciate this and of late was highly critical of CIDA's approach. She stressed the need for education the Canadian public sensitising the public opinion leaders to the Third World needs.

In her speech Maggie eulogized the efforts of SAP and congratulated them for organising the present event and spoke warmly of Nazir.

Dr. Eric Solman, Senior Adviser, Ministry of External Affairs asked for literature and write up on AKRSP to enable him to disseminate it in the relevant quarters, as he was specially charged by the Ministry to give a developmental dimension to its work.

Mr. Tim Broadhead of the North South Institute asked to visit Gilgit in March as a part of his mission to evaluate impact of NGOs in the region which was amongst others also funded by AKFC.

Ms Nalini Perera on the Nepal/India desk at CIDA, enquired if I would be willing to implement a rural support programme of AKRSP type in the Uttar Pardesh of India.

Finally Mr. Paul McCrossen, member of Canadian Parliament asked for a separate meeting after the session and discussed the factors responsible for the success of AKRSP compared to the failure of cooperatives generally in Pakistan. He inquired if I would be willing to receive a group of Canadians MPs to Gilgit. I welcomed the idea wholeheartedly.

It was gratifying to find tremendous interest in Pakistan's development among the intellegentia of Canada and very encouraging to note that without exception every one considered AKRSP's approach very interesting and with great potential for success.