

May 10, 1985

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Visit of Syed Qasim Shah, Minister of State for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Affairs to AKRSP.

Syed Qasim Shah, Minister of State for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Affairs accompanied with Mr. Z.A. Temuri, Secretary Incharge of the Ministry, the Administrator Northern Areas and other officials paid a visit to the office of the AKRSP on 10.5.1985 at 1900 hours.

The Minister's entourage was joined by the members of the Northern Areas Council for a briefing given by the GM AKRSP which also included showing of the video film on AKRSP 'Valleys in Transition'. The GM describing the progress and response of the villagers of Gilgit to the programme, stated that in less than 29 months, 87% of the rural households in Gilgit district had positively responded to AKRSP's terms of partnership by organising themselves in 302 VOs and by accumulating savings of over Rs. 6 millions that is, an average of Rs.18,700 per VO compared to Rs.3,870 per agricultural village cooperative in Punjab after 78 years. In addition, the villagers of Gilgit district have embarked on 207 village-level projects at a total cost of Rs.25 million, of which 112 projects have already been completed and are being fully maintained by the VOs. Pointing out the cost-benefit ratio of small projects, the GM cited the example of 107 irrigation channels costing Rs. 13 million, benefitting 12,000 families by bringing more than 34,000 acres of land under irrigation range. In Gilgit district where the average holding under crops is only one and half acres per family, the addition of more than 2 acres to the land holding of each family is a significant measure towards achieving increased incomes.

Summing up the GM informed the Minister that the villagers of Gilgit have responded marvelously to the AKRSP package of organisation and collective management, land development, increased productivity and generation of their own capital. He also made an impassioned appeal to the Councilors to allocate at least 15-20% of the ADP for village level projects to be identified, implemented and maintained by the VOs. AKRSP's two years experience has shown that given the resources and responsibility, the villagers can achieve wonders and participate in the development process fully.

The Minister in his observations commended the AKRSP strategy of involving people in development process and under-scored the need for coordination of such interventions with other development programmes like that of UNICEF, government and other agencies. He also queried the reasons for exclusion of social sector projectors such as health, education, sanitation etc., from the portfolio of AKRSP projects. He also enquired about the involvement of local councilors in the development process initiated by AKRSP. The GM AKRSP explained that the VOs fostered by AKRSP were indeed serving as an outreach for the local councils at the village level because all by himself the local councillor is unable to achieve economic development of the village. The VO in which he is invariably included serves as his development arm. The GM further elaborated that since the focus of AkRSP is on income generation, it was not, therefore, included social sector needs in its portfolio but the main objective of AKRSP is to create a development forum at the village level in the guise of the VO which all the development agencies should be able to use as the vehicle of development for the village. In this regard he fully agreed with the Minister's suggestion to coordinate activities of all the development agencies and suggested VO as a means to achieving this objective.

In his concluding remarks, the Minister appreciated AKRSP's role in the economic development of the Northern Areas and described its approach as "very good" The Minister said that the sole aim of all private, public and international agencies was to improve the living conditions of these poor and isolated people whether they live in Azad Kashmir, Northern Areas, Kohistan areas or Chitral. Reflecting on the need for greater coordination between development agencies, the Minister said that one should always keep this singleness of purpose in mind without being covetous to each other's performance and approach. Showing his concern over the ineffective use of resources, the Minister referred to Rs. 200 million ADP for the

Northern Areas in 1984 and said that these heavy spending had failed to produce the desirable results.

The Minister said that the present government and the councilors were determined to do something more meaningful than it has been done in the past. In this regard, the Minister emphasised the creation of a model for coordination between all the development agencies working in the Northern Areas.

Commenting on the development approach, the Minister said that he found striking similarities between AKRSP method of organising small units of people and the successful models in China, South Korea and Thailand. The Minister observed that development was unthinkable without people's participation even if one brings all the available resources of the world. The Minister further said that the main purpose of his visit to the Northern Areas was to explore effective ways of coordination between various development agencies and their resources.

The Minister concluded by thanking His Highness the Aga Khan on behalf of the people that he represented and on behalf of the Government of Pakistan for his valuable contribution to the development of northern Pakistan. He said that experience of Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan, the Commissioner Northern Areas, Mr. Hussain Wali Khan and other experts would serve as a beacon's light for the progress and prosperity of this region.

The Minister indicated that his meeting with the Councilors which is scheduled for tomorrow (May 12th) was expected to bring important decisions on the question of coordination between AKRSP and the elected bodies for rural development.

Lastly, the GM thanked the Minister for his visit.