

November 1, 1985

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

The Federal Minister of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Affairs Syed Qasim Shah and the Chief Minister of Punjab Provincial Government, Mr. Mohammad Nawaz Sharif visited AKRSP office on 1.11.1985 at 1630 hours.

The two honourable Ministers were shown 'Valleys in Transition' which they greatly appreciated. Afterwards, the GM apprised them of the programme's progress and the progress achieved during the last 33 months since AKRSP was created in December 1982.

Excerpts:

- Chief Minister: What is your annual budget for running such an interesting programme?
- General Manager: We started with Rs.14 million in 1983 which increased to Rs. 22 million in 1984. The current year's budget stands at Rs.42 million which includes whole of Chitral and selected areas in Baltistan district.
- Chief Minister: And what is your establishment cost?
- General Manager: One seventh of the development cost.
- Chief Minister: Have you done a prior assessment of the felt needs of these people or you have to decide every time when you initiate a new project?
- General Manager: The programme's main thrust is one the creation of self-perpetuating village organisations. The decisions are left for these organised units of small farmers to determine there own priorities. We only ask them to identify a project which would result in immediate returns to all or most of the households in an organised village. I remember when I first opened dialogues ... the villagers demanded schools and dispensaries but we explained that this programme was initially concentrating on the productive sector.
- Chief Minister: Who has the ownership of barren land in the villages, that these VOs are going to reclaim?
- General Manager: Customarily, it belongs to the villagers themselves and the government also recognises villagers collective right to barren land if they are able to reclaim it.
- Chief Minister: What is your procedure for the disbursement of funds?
- General Manager: Once we agree on the terms of partnership with a VO, we immediately release, in public, one-fifth of the total grant for initiating the project and then leave it to the entire VO to work out its allocation. Our field engineers then measure each phase of the physical work and recommend the VO for the subsequent installments which are released on the basis of a written resolution from the general body of the VO.
- Federal Minister: There are elected councilors in the villages; do they participate in your VOs?
- General Manager: All councilors are active members of the VOs and in some cases they are even office bearers. The Chairman, District Council Gilgit himself was the president of his VO.
- Federal Minister: I would like the elected councilors to be more actively involved in this type of

development exercises.

General Manager: We recognise that they can play an activist's role in the village-level activities, therefore, from time to time, we invite them to our Monthly Managers' Conference also.

Federal Minister: How many PPI projects have been completed so far and of what cost?

General Manager: By the end of September, 1985, 213 projects have been initiated in Gilgit district at a total cost of Rs.28.6 million, of which 142 had been fully completed.

Federal Minister: What is the ratio of irrigation channels?

General Manager: Of the total 213 projects, 137 are irrigation projects which will channel more than 581 cusecs of water to roughly 20,630 acres of new land and increase watering frequency to 22,412 acres of existing (developed) land. The most distinguishing feature, however, is the comparative cost of these small projects - i.e. Rs. 27,237 per cusecs as compared to Rs.125,730 in similar irrigation projects undertaken by other agencies through the contractors.

The Federal Minister observed that the government has allocated Rs. 40 million during the current budget for such small projects that will be planned and executed by the elected project committees at grass-root level.

The Minister pointed out that some people were opposed to AKRSP but he said they were wrong and should be discouraged. The Minister further said that the government was appreciative of the private agencies role in the development of these under privileged areas, and called for greater coordination between government, AKRSP and UNICEF in the Northern Areas. In this regard, he proposed a meeting between AKRSP and the Northern Areas Administration.

The Minister described AKRSP as 'a very successful programme for the poor people' and assured the General Manager of the government's continued support to make this programme more effective.

Chief Minister: The VOs seemed to be very effective forums at the grass-root level, why doesn't the government use them for undertaking its own village-level projects instead of creating parallel project committees?

Federal Minister: The government has a wider plan for which it has to have a reasonable administrative structure. Moreover, there are many complexities and interests involved in the present set up which could not be disturbed at this stage. The project committees are made up of the elected representatives and they have been very successful; in my own constituency alone, over 4,000 small projects were implemented during the last few years through these project committees. If the local representative fails to produce good results, the electorate has always a choice to give that mandate to other able people.

General Manager: VOs have a built-in mechanism to check monopoly and abuse of power, which cannot possibly be achieved in project committees. In Baltistan, the local bodies have themselves decided to use the VOs and that is proving to be a very successful model of coordination for other areas.

Lastly, the GM thanked the honourable Ministers for their visit.

The following morning the ministers visited Soust and Shimshal projects and greatly appreciated the people's effort and the Federal Minister was very pleased to know about NA Council's collaboration in the Shimshal link road.