

## THE GENERAL MANAGER'S INTERVIEW WITH BBC

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- Waqar Ahmad: Last week we reviewed an urban development programme in Pakistan ... the Orangi Pilot Project. Today we will tell you about rural development programme in Gilgit and the Northern Areas of Pakistan. It is called the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP). This programme was started in December 1982. Its management and initiation was entrusted to Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan who was formerly a CSP officer and is presently working with UNICEF. Before Gilgit, Shoaib Sultan Khan was sent on an UNICEF assignment to Sri Lanka to work on the famous Mahaweli Irrigation and hydro-electric Project. In a recent conversation, I had with him in London, he told me a very interesting thing, as the head of the non-profit organisation, he is called the General Manager. Although, AKRSP is helping the villages of the Northern Areas, it also asks them to contribute to their development. About the beginning of AKRSP, Shoaib Sultan Khan told us this:
- Shoaib Sultan Khan (SSK) His Highness the Aga Khan is the founder of this programme. He has been visiting the Northern Areas since 1958. He is acutely aware of the poverty of this area. Although, he has numerous other programmes in the area, like Health and Education, he wanted a programme which could help increase the income level of the farm households. This he conceived the idea of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme.
- Waqar Ahmad Gilgit or the Northern Areas was chosen because of the large following of His Highness the Aga Khan in these areas.
- SSK Yes, this is one reason but this programme is totally non-communal. It is not restricted to his followers but is meant for the entire area. At present, the programme is being implemented in the Gilgit and Chitral districts which have an area of 18,000 sq. miles and have a population of 500,000 people.
- Waqar Ahmad What is the conception ..., the vision on which the programme is based?
- SSK: When I met the Aga Khan, I gather that his vision was that in 15/20 years, these 500 small and isolated villages of Chitral and Gilgit should somehow become more self-sufficient ... if they could somehow depend less on outside institutions. The work has been started on the basis of this conceptual - vision that each village should, in time, be able to meet its own needs and in case a village is unable to meet all its requirements, the possibility of linking it with adjoining villages will be explored. This will decrease its dependency on outside agencies.
- Waqar Ahmad I was studying your report. The various VOs have a central role in the development process. Would you like to expand on this?
- SSK I would like to say that the conceptual basis of a programme is very important. Without a sound foundation, it is not possible to achieve the objective of the programme. In Gilgit, there are 25,000 households with a population of 220,000. There are 8 to 9 members in each household. Out of these 25,000 people, 95% are engaged in agriculture. On an average they have 1-1/2 to 2 acres of land. The experience of development planners has shown that only a special strategy can succeed with these small holders. The most important thing for a small holder is the creation of an institution with the help of which, he can overcome the handicaps of his subsistence holding. The VO, in our view, can play the part of this institution and help the people to collectively overcome their problem.
- Waqar Ahmad As you have said, a basic problem is that they have very little land. Do they pool their land and collectively cultivate it and benefit from it?
- SSK No, there are two types of models in this connection. You can either have

collectives of the type in the Communist or Socialist countries. The other method is that without relinquishing the ownership of land as was done in Japan. In this method, they do not give up ownership but in order to derive economies of scale, they do a lot of things collectively, which reduces the overheads. In Japan, by this way, the owner of 1 hectare or 2-1/2 acres prospered and brought prosperity to his nation.

Waqar Ahmad

... By increasing his productivity.

SSK

Yes, by increasing his productivity, by marketing his produce and by securing better prices.

Waqar Ahmad

Even then, due to the nature of human beings, and human society, it is not that easy to persuade people towards collective effort. So what was the experience of Shoaib Sultan Khan?

SSK

Yes, it is very easy to say to the people that they should form an organization but the implementation of this is very difficult. In the past, the experience of the people indicates that the shrewd will benefit. One has to proceed with caution and insight. We try and find out from the people, through a series of dialogues, about the project which they would like to undertake and which will benefit a majority of them. If such a project can be identified, then human nature is such that there is no reason for those who will benefit to exclude themselves from the organisation. If this is done, then people do organise and start work. However, this is only the beginning. Once they organise, their other needs, the future vision of development has to be explained. If they can understand this, then they can be persuaded on the path to development.

Waqar Ahmad

In the implementation of such projects, it is imperative to change the attitudes and behaviour of the people. Shoaib Sultan Khan agreed with this and said that he was not discouraged by this as he had been given ample time for the programme.

SSK

It is the first time that I have had the opportunity of working in a programme in which the founder of the programme has a period of 10/15/20 years in mind. His vision is that this involves a behavioural change in which you have to affect the attitudes of the people. This is not an easy task but this is exactly what has happened. In Gilgit, we have held 131 dialogues. Work has started in 82 villages. Certain villages were better than others. There is also a demonstration effect and people are slowly learning the benefits of organising and that they can collectively solve a lot of common problems.

Waqar Ahmad

I have assessed from what you have said that resources are being used as efficiently as possible and no complex programming is being undertaken. Is this correct?

SSK

Yes it is. Three things are required for development. One is manpower, the other is skills, because manpower without skills is not very useful. The third thing is capital.

In order to obtain these three things the first step is organisation which enables them to divert collective efforts for development. In order to improve the level of skills, we have a training programme which reaches all the villages. The content of the training programme is left upto the villagers to decide. For instance, we were told that the animals were dying. We organised an animal husbandry course in collaboration with the government departments and village representatives were chosen for participation in this 3-4 weeks training course. The village will sustain him in future by making payments for treatment rendered by him. Similarly, we can arrange training in other subjects. So this is how we are helping to develop village skills. As regards savings, our term of partnership dictate that we will provide the funds for the first investment in the village. Subsequent projects will be undertaken by the use of their equity capital. You will be happy to learn that in less than one year, less than 100 VOs of Gilgit have saved 3-1/2 to 400,000 rupees. I would like to clarify that we have modified the concept of self help....

Waqar Ahmad

Shoaib Sultan Khan told me that several foreign agencies were associated with this programme. The Canadian CIDA, the American Ford Foundation, the British OXFAM and the Overseas Development Administration. He said that their financial support was unconditional. Finally, I asked Shoaib Sultan Khan whether it was possible to extend this innovative programme to other parts of Pakistan?

SSK

I will say, with reference to my experience, that I learnt this work from my teacher Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan and implemented it in Daudzai in Peshawar. For five years in Sri Lanka, I did the same work and now am doing the same thing in Gilgit. I thing that wherever there are small holders, there with the help of the same principles, a basis of development can be laid. It is my experience that if you go to the people and can convince them that your programme is something which can benefit them, then there is no reason for them to reject it.