

**Speech at the
Annual Speech Day & Prize Distribution of Karachi Grammar School
August 17, 2013**

Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen

I am most grateful to Principal Wrigley for giving me the honour and privilege of speaking at the prestigious Karachi Grammar School.

In fact I have nothing but praise for the students of today. I remember when at a good ripe age of 7, I was admitted in a school I literally cried myself out of the class convincing my grandfather that I was too young to go to school but on admission next year, my uncle advanced my date of birth by two years giving me cushion of two years to fail examinations. I used to hate going to school praying for rainy days and school holidays. I give full credit to lady teachers of today who have made schools such a likeable place for students. I am amazed how happily the children of today go to school and I simply hold the students who make to institutions like KGS in awe at their brilliance and academic achievements. Later in life I did manage to overcome my abhorrence of school, especially when once I was reported by my maths teacher to the headmaster recommending rustication for lack of interest in studies I was only saved because I was the grandson of the City Magistrate of Dehra Doon and the Principal Dr. Ewing did not take any action. I realized that there was no substitute to hard work. I made up for my recalcitrance and not only got distinction in Arithmetic in high school exam but finished my Masters in English Literature obtaining a first division with a gold medal at the official young age of 20 years at the University of Lucknow.

On 11th July 2013, I attained the real age of 82 and two days later, 60 years of my working life which began in 1953 as a Lecturer in Jahanzeb College, Swat.

I have served 25 years in the now defunct premier civil service of Pakistan CSP, 14 years in UNICEF and UNDP, 12 years in Geneva based Aga Khan Foundation and since retirement as a labour of love nurturing Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) in Pakistan on honorary basis. One of the dubious honours I enjoyed was as Commissioner of Karachi. On my arrival in Karachi in 1971, I had soon to face the Indo-Pakistan war and found Karachi at the mercy

of the Indian airforce. It all ended in two weeks with the tragic fall of East Pakistan. For me personally, another disaster was waiting with the installation of the political government. The new government considered Commissioner's post repository of all administrative powers, patronage and favours. Governor Mumtaz Bhutto's government decided to abolish the post in which I actively collaborated because my heart was in rural development, under the tutelage of the legendary visionary Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan. I got myself posted as Director, Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, Peshawar. Of course, the Commissioner Karachi post was revived three years later, a pale shadow of its past.

I intend drawing lessons from my own experience of life, hoping it might be of some value and use to you, who are at the threshold of embarking on a new phase of life after completing your schooling in different disciplines.

When I look back on over 60 years of my working life in Government, United Nations, Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and Rural Support Programmes (RSPs), my greatest successes and satisfaction were when I succeeded in forging genuine and meaningful partnerships with communities.

Akhter Hameed Khan gave me my first lessons in forging partnerships with communities. But it is only during the last 34 years that I got the opportunity, thanks to UNICEF and later to UNDP but mainly due to His Highness the Aga Khan to fully and exclusively devote myself interacting with the communities in Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. However, it was the World Bank which took Social Mobilisation to scale in the State of Andhra Pradesh in India. Over this period I have personally held dialogues with over 5,000 communities and this evening I intend to share this experience with you.

I still vividly remember the bitterly cold December in 1982 when I drove 600 kilometers from Islamabad to Gilgit on a borrowed jeep. This was the beginning of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) and forging of partnerships over the next twelve years with a million people in one of the most inhospitable and harshest terrain anywhere in the world. I brought them a simple message but time tested from the days of Raifessen in Nineteenth

Century Europe followed by Japan, Taiwan, Comilla (Bangladesh) and South Korea's Samuel Undong. This was a message of Partnership in Development. AKRSP was not there to listen to their demands, needs and problems and offer solutions. AKRSP offered them only a methodology, an approach and social guidance to overcome their handicaps themselves. The villagers used to look at me with disbelief. A programme bearing the name of one of the richest person in the world not willing to solve their problems and asking them to do things first. I explained this is a partnership which entails obligations on both sides and unless the community was prepared to fulfil its obligations how can the partnership be formed? Many were impatient and would pester me to tell them what was the limit to which the Programme would help them if they accepted the terms of partnership and my simple response used to be your limit is our limit. Whatever the community can do or was willing to do was the programme limit.

I have seen people coming out of poverty with my own eyes and smiles on their faces instead of abstruse statistics.

The one million people I worked with for 12 years in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral areas of Pakistan through the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme reinforced my conviction of the tremendous potential and willingness in people to do many things themselves to come out of poverty. All that they needed was a support organisation to help them unleash their potential. Once organised the men and women took their destiny in their own hands. They knew what would bring them out of poverty. They got thousands of villagers trained as service providers in agriculture, horticulture, livestock, forestry etc. and as managers of their organisations, identified constructed and maintained thousands of physical infrastructure works – irrigation channels, link roads, sprinkler irrigation, flood protection works, school buildings etc., increased their productive capacity, planted 50 million trees on land brought under irrigation range, generated about six megawatts of electricity through village built and managed mini-hydel acknowledged as the biggest concentration of community managed micro hydro projects anywhere in the world and accumulated over Rupees four hundred million as their savings resulting in setting up of the First Micro Finance Bank.

In agriculture, horticulture and livestock, the organized communities made quantum jump in introducing and later marketing varieties of apples from California and cherries from France. Their apricot is picked up by a London buyer from the farm gate at Gilgit.

Last time on my visit to Northern Areas I went to a village Ahmedabad where 28 years ago I had gone sitting in a basket pulled across the river as there was no bridge on the river. The village with 110 households was totally isolated although the Karakorum Highway passed by it. The village had no access, no road, no school, no health facility, no potable drinking water and no electricity. Today it has everything including two micro-hydels supplying electricity 24 hours and savings and credit fund of over millions of rupees. These people would never have been touched by any growth strategy or macro planning. They needed a development strategy which involved each and every household in the development process. Unfortunately this is what our macro planners fail to comprehend. When I asked them what was the secret of their success, their spontaneous response was “we got organised”. The village roads were marked with dust bins and environment was litter free.

According to second World Bank evaluation of AKRSP, in ten years the income of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral Areas had in real terms more than doubled.

In 1994, when UNDP asked me to take lessons learnt in Northern Areas of Pakistan to South Asia, India being the largest country in the region it was the greatest challenge to South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) and to me personally as a Pakistani to make a difference to the lives of women and their households there. My apprehensions were baseless. The people of Andhra Pradesh and the State Government welcomed me with open arms and treated me with unforgettable kindness, hospitality and affection and continues to do so.

In Andhra Pradesh, I was told that after 7 years almost 75% of the organised households had risen above the subsistence level. When I doubted this statement, the women insisted on taking me to their homes. I visited a number of houses which I had visited on my first visit in

1995 which had barely any amenities of life available. I was wonderstruck to find modern amenities like TV, telephone, toilets etc., in the houses. In one house, I did not see TV and I asked the lady if she had been left behind others. She asked me to visit her backyard where more than 35 goats were standing. She explained her children are young and unlike other children, do not insist on going to neighbours to see the TV. Hence she made her choice of preferring goats to TV. This reminded me of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's book "Development as Freedom."

The Andhra Government keeps on inviting me despite phasing out of UNDP SAPAP in 2000 every year. In July 2008, Mr. Rahul Gandhi invited me to his constituency to advise him on starting a similar programme as Andhra.

Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan used to say that in Pakistan, development will not come from the top. It will come from the bottom and it shall happen in pockets – one island formed here and one island there. AKRSP and its replication has shown how true it is. He also used to say that the problem of South Asia is not economic but moral. The organized communities at the grassroots in South Asia have shown there is both honesty and spirit of selflessness in rural areas of South Asia.

CONCLUSION

Probably, the only career planning I did was to join the civil service of Pakistan (CSP). Thereafter, it were coincidences and opportunities that moulded my life. If I would not have met Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan in 1959, I would not have spent the last 37 years out of 60 years of my working life in rural development. If I would not have been made an OSD in 1975 and charged with subversion for implementing the Daudzai Project under the guidance of Akhter Hameed Khan, I would have never left CSP. If I would not have taken to heart Director Geoffrey Burgess's golden advice at the Civil Service Academy that your integrity would be put to test only once in thousands of situations which will be routine. If you give in and succumb, don't justify yourself that on 999 occasions, you did the right thing. You will be finished and you would have failed. On many an occasion following this advice, I only got

transferred in the civil service sometimes to a better post and escaped imprisonment in the wake of East Pakistan debacle. In the end I found I was always rewarded by following Burgess's advice. I would commend this advice to you with all the vehemence at my command. I assure you this will always hold you in good stead. Mr. Jinnah's quality of integrity made the whole nation follow him.

In present day Pakistan when there is doom and gloom everywhere, I find solace and peace in the islands that have come about not only in Pakistan but in India's Andhra Pradesh. Building the first island in village Japuka of Gilgit on December 12, 1982 has now multiplied in millions of islands across South Asia benefiting over 80 million people comprising over 15 million households.

You are a fortunate group of people in Pakistan but you had to work hard and often in trying conditions to achieve your goals. Education in KGS assures you of a bright future in monetary terms. Once you are settled and you are reasonably financially independent, think of what you can contribute to make the lives of those countrymen and women of yours who are not as fortunate as you are. Think of doing something which would help the impoverished to better their lot. Even within the constraints and parameters of what you are doing to earn a livelihood, you can build islands which may help others. Tolstoy says "the only certain happiness in life is when you live for others". Those of you who wish to do a summer internship at Rural Support Programmes, are most welcome. If you want a strong recommendation, please make it through Headmistress, Kindergarten and Junior School Naheed Siddiqi, I have known her when she was younger than you.

I wish you all a very happy, bright and prosperous future.

August 17, 2013

Shoaib Sultan Khan