

BRITISH PAKISTAN FOUNDATION (BPF) BIRMINGHAM ROADSHOW

I am grateful to BPF, specially to Suniya Qureshi, for inviting me to the Roadshow at Birmingham.

Two days ago, I turned 81 years old and today is the 59th anniversary of my first job after leaving the university in 1953. It was at Jahanzebn College, Swat, which was a paradise at that time. The militants turned it into hell. Fortunately, the situation is getting normal again. After my 25 years with Government of Pakistan as a CSP Officer, I have devoted remaining 34 years of my working life to organizing rural community and forging development partnership with them in South Asia, namely, Pakistan and India. Let me share this experience of over 5,000 villages that I have visited with you, this evening.

I stayed for 12 years in Gilgit helping to mobilize a million people in Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral through Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in December 1982. According to the World Bank, in ten years the income of the people of the area has more than doubled. In 1994, United Nations asked me to take lessons of AKRSP to South Asia. Of all the South Asian countries, I achieved greatest success in India through South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP). In 12 years the State of Andhra Pradesh (AP), 50 million people were mobilized. Last year the one million community organisations accessed over 2 billion dollars from commercial banks. The Indian government has now launched a programme called National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), based on AKRSP/SAPAP principles, to reach 315 million rural poor of India.

In Pakistan, unfortunately I was not able to convince either the Government of Pakistan or the donors, to give the Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) the same level of support as in India, which was initially given by the state of Andhra Pradesh and later by Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Minister Jairam Ramesh with the World Bank assistance.

In Pakistan, despite the demonstration in Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral that poverty can be drastically reduced and with increased incomes, people themselves give top priority to health and education, the mainstreaming of the RSPs strategy has been gradual and ad hoc by the government. AKRSP was initiated by His Highness the Aga Khan and was fully supported by no less than 11 donors including Department for International Development (DfID) which was called ODA at that time. DfID went a step further in year 2000 and financed the setting up of a Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN). Even with this gradual and ad hoc support, RSPs have managed to organize 4.6 million households comprising 39 million people in 110 out of 131 districts of Pakistan. What it has demonstrated is whether it is the mountains of Pakistan or the plain and desert of the country, the rural poor everywhere have the potential to come out of poverty. All that they need, both rural poor men and women, is a sensitive support organization to facilitate unleashing of their potential.

RSPN is concentrating on a single point agenda, namely, fostering institutions of the people. These institutions of the people have demonstrated, they are the key to progress and prosperity of the rural poor of Pakistan, be it peace and security in the area, poverty reduction, social protection measures, health and education, employment and empowerment of vulnerable groups specially women.

I know religion encourages and applauds the spirit of giving and most of you much regularly be adhering to giving of Zakat. I would like to urge you to think why not given to enable the Mustahqeen to graduate to a ladder above the poverty line.

Last March when Mudassar visited Pakistan, I took him to a Union Council based Local Support Organisation (LSO). We have 600 of these in the country. Our objective is ultimately to reach all the 5650 rural union councils in Pakistan. RSPs already have presence in over 3,000 union councils. To become financially viable and be independent of donors or outside assistance, the LSOs need an endowment of ten thousand pounds. Mudassar was so impressed by their achievements and sincerity that he announced a donation of five thousand pounds on the spot

when the LSO would have generated the other half. This would result fostering a permanent institution of the rural people of the union council with regular and direct link with each and every household through their community and village organizations. If you want the people of the union council from where you come to remember you or any member of your family, contribute to the financial viability of the LSO of your union council. The LSO may be even willing to be named after you donate the entire endowment. RSPN would be the guarantee that your donation will not be misappropriated or used for any other purposes.