

Speech at Farewell Dinner in honour of Mr. Berend de Groot, EU Development Counsellor

July 12, 2014

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My association with Donors dates back to 1972 when as Director, Pakistan Academy for Rural Development at Peshawar, I came in contact with USAID, Ford Foundation and GTZ, while implementing the first programme Daudzai Project based on the principles of Social Mobilisation. Ted Owens of USAID, the ideologue of the Organisation, wrote to me from Washington DC after a visit to Peshawar 'how do we persuade Presidents and Prime Ministers to make Daudzai as the basis for rural development in the developing countries'. When in 1975 I was thrown out of the Academy on horrendous charges of subversion, Frank Miller, the Ford Foundation Representative wrote to Federal Establishment Secretary a letter of protest asking for reversal of the unjust order based on trumped up charges. The GTZ came and saw Daudzai and sanctioned funds to replicate Daudzai in eight other Thanas of Peshawar Tehsil.

Having left the country disappointed and sad, I sought shelter under UN umbrella and found incredible support from no less a person than the legendary Executive Director of UNICEF Mr. James Grant who flew all the way from New York, on a two day visit to Gilgit to find out why I had resigned from UNICEF and seeing the work I was doing in Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral, while departing confided why he had come and observed if he was in my place, he would have done the same.

In Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) from 1982 to 1994, I thrived on donor support including amongst others Canadian CIDA, British ODA, Netherlands, Germans, Norwegians and many others. The Aga Khan Foundation catalyzed many of these initiatives but many happened through local initiative. The Netherlands Ambassador at a reception asked me to take him to Northern Areas. Next morning I was leaving for Baltistan by AKF helicopter. I offered would he like to come and he did. The visit resulted in approval of a million dollars for AKRSP Baltistan programme through bilateral window. The first time that Government of Pakistan agreed to such a large grant to an NGO from bilateral window. Sir Nicholas Barrington would often

visit Northern Areas and persuaded his government to fund the Chitral AKRSP and the initial grant of GBP 5 million, I was told, AKRSP only got after Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd had certified that this grant will not be used for Pakistan's Nuclear Programme. When a national newspaper published decrying activities of AKRSP in Chitral, Sir Nicholas came to our defence rebutted the charges in a letter to the newspaper and also wrote a letter to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in defence of AKRSP. Sir Nicholas remains a steadfast friend even now and on my request wrote a Preface for Man in the Hat.

Ambassador Vestring of Germany after a visit to Northern Areas persuaded GTZ to fund the AKRSP initiative in Astore district of Gilgit Baltistan. He became such a good friend that when I was looking for a suitable place to hold wedding reception of my youngest daughter in 1993, Ambassador Vestring offered his house in diplomatic enclave. Perhaps it was the only Pakistani wedding reception held in the enclave.

There used to be a stream of visitors to AKRSP, donors and non-donors alike. One of the visitors happened to be the Director USAID Rocky Staples. After his visit he offered US\$ 5 million if any of the Provinces would like to replicate AKRSP. Sarhad Rural Support Programme came into existence because of that offer.

In 1994, I got involved in South Asia, although UNDP Resident Representative Von Sponeck got it in my contract that I will spend 40% of my time in Pakistan nurturing NRSP, which had come into existence in 1992 funded by Federal Government and other RSPs which kept on happening like BRSP in 1991 revived in 2001, GBTI in 1995, Punjab Rural Support Programme in 1998, TRDP in 1997 and SRSO in 2003.

With so many replications of AKRSP, the challenge was how to bring about a uniformity amongst RSPs and ensure the integrity of the social mobilisation approach intact. After consultations with the stakeholders, the embryo network which initially was housed in NRSP and greatly helped in formulation of PRSP became a full-fledged not for profit joint stock company and in 2001 was registered as Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) with Shandana as CEO and she has now spent more than 24 years with RSPs.

In DFID I had found a great supporter of social mobilisation approach Steve Jones and after a midnight tryst with him in the Taj Hotel, New Delhi on my way to Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, DFID gave funding for RSPN and continued it till 2010.

The events of 9/11 as they impacted the world so also affected the attitude of Donors towards community empowerment through Social Mobilisation. The main reason, to my mind was the reluctance of donors to visit the field and interact with the communities, due to security concerns.

Being rebuffed by most of the donors for funding for social mobilisation, although they were quite willing to support sectoral interventions little realizing that success of such interventions depended on active community involvement and their ownership.

The only champion of Social Mobilisation during this period was John Wall of the World Bank who publically offered to the Government of Pakistan in Pakistan Forum Meeting of Donors in 2004 that if government was prepared to implement Social Mobilisation Programme of the type developed by Shoaib Sultan Khan, the Bank would be willing to provide IDA credit and ultimately he did persuade government to take \$ 75 million for Social Mobilisation channeled through PPAF.

Suddenly four years ago in this environment of gloom for social mobilisation, I saw a ray of light when on his own, Development Counsellor of the European Union Mr. Berend de Groot came to attend a meeting of the RSPN Board of Directors. His ideas and thoughts that he shared with us, were music to our ears. He fully supported the poverty reduction approach being espoused by RSPN. He promised to do his utmost in getting us support of EU to take RSPN agenda forward. He didn't tell me but I heard through the grapevine that his efforts in getting funding for social mobilisation and empowerment of poor rural communities were thwarted by the authorities in government. Berend did not give up and Masood has already informed you what EU through Berend's efforts achieved in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa through SRSP.

A few months ago I was surprised to get a telephone call from Shandana that Berend had called her and wanted to have a meeting with us regarding his recent visit to Sindh. The only time we could meet was Saturday afternoon, as Shandana was tied

up in Peshawar and I had prior commitments out of Islamabad. It did not deter Berend to take time out on a weekend holiday to come to see us at RSPN. What he said I could not believe my ears. He was so pleased with what he saw in his seven days sojourn in the interior of Sindh, done by NRSP, TRDP and SRSO that EU would be willing to take one third of the 24 districts in the province to replicate social mobilisation approach. He would like Government of Sindh's commitment to support the initiative by agreeing to take up the remaining districts with the provincial ADP funds. To ascertain the attitude of the Provincial Government, Berend desired to meet the officials of the province.

By tapping different sources including the two daughters of the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary of the Province, Shandana, Nazar Memon and I were able to arrange meetings for Berend with the Chief Minister, Chief Secretary and Additional Chief Secretary (Development) which ultimately has resulted in formulation of the SUCCESS programme for the province of Sindh with substantial contribution by the EU colleagues of Berend led by Benoist and Pakistani counterparts led by Rashid Bajwa.

In Berend I have found a very unusual Donor Professional. His commitment to empowering rural communities, especially women is unmatched by any of the current Donor Professionals in Pakistan that I have come across. I am amazed at the emphasis with which he puts across to government officials the importance of mobilising communities before undertaking any sectoral programme. I had not seen this commitment or heard this language from the Donors for a long time. For us it is sad Berend! that you are going away. I am confident Benoist will carry the torch you have lighted but we are going to miss you.

We are all most grateful to Mrs. de Groot for honouring us with her presence today. We fully realize without your unstinted support and sacrifices, Berend would not be able to do what he is doing.

I am grateful to all the guests who have honoured us by joining us in saying farewell to Berend and Mrs. de Groot.

