

Speech at Climate Change Conference, Lahore

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My apologies for gate crashing in this panel from the civil society panel because I could not afford to miss the 6.00 pm flight to Karachi. Please do bear with me if I talk about the role of the people at the grassroots, especially of the rural poor, in climate change.

I remember when I was implementing the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) between the years 1982-1994, the Director General IUCN came on a visit to Gilgit and expressed dismay at the destruction of the environment by denuding the area of the tree cover. Suggesting the AKRSP methodology of holding dialogues with the community to resolve issue, AKRSP posed the problem before the people who by now had got organised as Village Organisations. They countered AKRSP by asking if they stop cutting trees where from are they going to get fuel wood not only for cooking but keeping themselves warm in winters, timber for building houses and fodder for their animals. On our warning, at the rate they were denuding the trees, they might have to migrate. Do they have a solution to this problem? They responded in the affirmative and asked for help to tap water from glaciers to bring vast tracts of land under irrigation range. Only 1% of land was being irrigated as being in rain shadow the monsoon never visited them. AKRSP helped them to bring water through local channels called Khuls and in due course of time, they brought one hundred thousand hectares of new land under irrigation range and taking advantage of the terrain planted 50 million forest trees and ten million fruit trees.

Another example that comes to my mind is when on one of my village dialogues in a valley, a request was made that AKRSP should help them in protecting their wildlife wealth and when I asked how they propose doing it, they replied by providing ten professional hunters of the valley alternative means of livelihood and I asked what did that involve. They asked for a grant of Rs. 250,000 per year to employ these hunters as

wildlife guards. I promised to consider their proposal provided they agreed to scientific counting of ibex in the valley and annual count to ascertain if what they said is working. I requested Syed Babar Ali, President WWF Pakistan who readily agreed to make Rs. 250,000 available and Wildlife Department agreed to make services of their expert Mr. Ashiq to do the counting. At the end of first year in Bar Valley, the number of ibex had tripled. Ashiq explained because the valley is becoming a safe haven, the ibex from the adjoining valleys also migrated to Bar Valley. Soon the valley Village Organisations and the Wildlife Department drew up plans for trophy hunting promising 75% of the income as share of the communities. Today every valley in Gilgit, Baltistan and Chitral through their organisations, are participating in conservation of wildlife.

People at the grassroots in rural areas can play an effective role in adopting measures in the realm of Climate Change. The need is for a package of measures doable by the villagers. The Rural Support Programmes since 1982 are fostering a framework of grassroots institutions through a 3-tier Social Mobilisation model. The objective is poverty reduction by first harnessing the potential of the rural poor and more importantly for sustainability empowering them as the Socio-economic Pillar or Social Pillar, as Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan used to call it to interact with the existing Administrative and Political Pillars.

One of the important outcomes of mobilised communities in Andhra has been the adoption of Community Managed Sustainable Agriculture (CMSA) to date adopted by over 2 million farmers. It has enabled the poor to break out of the exploitative relations with the money lenders, fertilizer and pesticides traders. By 2014, Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) of Andhra Pradesh had taken it to 12 million acres covering 60% of the cultivable area of the State. The environmental benefits of CMSA are enormous. It will convert the State into a “green State” with impact on climate change and global warming. However, the main motivation for the poor for adopting these practices is the quantum jump in their net incomes. The lesson is that however good the technology may be, without peoples involvement through their strong

grassroots institutions, it will remain in the laboratories and universities. We need a people centred solution to food security and climate change.

(Followed by PowerPoint presentation)