

## NOTE FOR RECORD

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Subject: Visit of Federal Finance Secretary to Talagang NRSP

A chance meeting at a luncheon gave me an opportunity for the first time to describe to Mr. Tanwir Ali Agha (TAA), Federal Secretary Finance what Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) were doing. He spontaneously expressed a desire to visit the field and NRSP arranged a field visit for him to Talagang Tehsil in District Chakwal on February 24, 2007 from 0900 to 1800 hours.

Our first stopover to Thoa Mehram Khan Union Council in Tehsil Talagang was village Chinji where the members of the community organization (CO) showed TAA a link road, a drinking water scheme and described the various trainings they had accessed through NRSP. The link road was given precedence to another community infrastructure project (CPI) because the women organization wanted it and so also the drinking water scheme. In trainings, the most spectacular case was of one member who after getting training in beekeeping left his job in a bank and was now keeping 500 colonies. His last income from the colonies was rupees six lacs.

When TAA asked them how they were able to achieve all this and who is responsible for maintenance of the CPIs they have completed. The spontaneous response was that we got organized at the behest of NRSP and although we used to do some community work previously but on a very ad hoc basis and without the involvement of majority of the households. Through social mobilization process now we have created an institution at village level on a permanent basis and that has been the main reason for all the developments in last four years since inception of NRSP interventions.

The next stop was at a mini-dam where farmers were now irrigating 150 kanals out of 400 kanals with increase in wheat yield from 15 to 40 mds per acre because of irrigation and 100% increase in cropping pattern with income from vegetable cultivation amounting to lacs of rupees. The cost of land has jumped up from Rs. 8-10,000 an acre to Rs. 80,000 after irrigation facilities. The total cost of the mini dam was less than Rs. 4 lacs. The farmers told TAA how self sufficient farmers they have become from the status of deficient farmers in food grains with surpluses to sell.

On TAA's query, the farmers were planning for mechanization but they will only buy a tractor when they would be confident of repaying loan instalment.

From the mini-dam, we proceeded to a dug-well irrigated land area. One of the beneficiaries of the well who had been a driver of generals for 15 years, made an impassioned speech what a change NRSP has been able to bring about in their standard of living and the most notable fact is that this organization is totally devoid of corruption.

It was quite obvious that in Barani areas, water is the most treasured resource and mini-dams, water ponds and dug wells have changed the economy of the area. There is still a great potential to store monsoon rains in many more mini-dams and ponds.

NRSP has accessed resources from Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) and Barani Area Development Project (BADP).

The boundary wall additional rooms and toilets at Government Girls Primary School were done with assistance from Khushhal Pakistan Programme (KPP) under the aegis of the village education council (VEC) formed by the CO.

The teacher, who has been teaching at the school for the last sixteen years, informed TAA of tremendous improvement since the formation of VEC who have now

ensured 100% enrollment of girls and taken keen interest in improvement of the school surroundings and buildings. There was still shortage of furniture. We were most impressed by the dedication of the teacher and the keen interest of the VEC which was formed by CO and accountable to them. Wherever VEC has been formed without CO formation, the VECs have not been very effective.

Our final destination was meeting local support organization (LSO), village development organization (VDO) and CO activists of Thoa Mehram Khan Union Council.

78% of the households comprising 2575 men and women have been organized by NRSP under BADP. There were nearly 700 activists sitting there of which almost half were women.

With over 75% household coverage, the 118 COs have federated in 6 VDOs at village level and formed an LSO at the Union Council level. The Manager of the LSO Khizar Hayat made a presentation of the activities of the COs/VDOs with NRSP facilitation and assistance. These are institutions of the people unlike NGOs which are institutions for the people. The real sustainability will come when these institutions become financially viable. From the activities described by the LSO Manager, it was apparent that the LSO/VDOs/COs are striving to achieve this goal.

The LSO has a cumulative savings of nearly Rupees fourteen million and has an active credit programme with 100% recovery.

Even internal loaning has been initiated by some COs. The Manager of CO Mohalla Thangi, Ms Rehana Yasmeen voicing the feelings of over 300 women activists present at the meeting with great confidence and courage described the obstacles and hurdles their menfolk put in their way to forming their organizations on invitation of NRSP in the Union. But the women remained steadfast and faced all the difficulties and got themselves organized. I was amazed at the courage of Rehana, a delicate slim

appearance, putting a huge throng of menfolk to shame for their unreasonable behaviour. Amongst many things that the women COs did the most innovative, was establishment of their village bank initially from their own savings of Rs. 25,000 with a matching grant from NRSP which in a short period of two years has now risen to Rs. 150,000 as the service charge is now plowed back in their bank instead of taken away by NRSP. TAA was most interested in this initiative.

Khizar Hayat described the activities from Human Resource Development, Social Sector Services, Natural Resource Management, Soil Conservation, Water Management, Agriculture Extension, Livestock Development to community physical infrastructure comprising training of over 1,400 persons in different fields, improvement 25 government primary schools along with training of 48 teachers and 79 VEC members , holding of 57 NRM workshops, construction of CPIs worth Rs. 6.5 million and electrification through CCB formation worth over Rs. 6 million. The Manager spoke of the increased productivity of every crop and large scale cultivation of vegetables which was only made possible through water resource development. Fish is not only locally available now but has become a good source of income as most of the mini-dams are being used for fisheries development also.

With the empowerment of men and women through their COs/VDOs and LSO, instead of waiting for government to come and provide basic infrastructure and services, the organized communities have undertaken many things on self help basis including a Maternity Centre, prevention of animal diseases through vaccination, eye and health camps, health insurance and many other activities.

There has been a tremendous awareness about the activities of the departments and how these can be accessed through linkages.

Toha Mehram Khan Union Council was known for its strifes and mutual hostility amongst different groups. So much so that NRSP came last to this Union Council in the Tehsil. After the formation of the COs/VDOs/LSO even murder cases have been

resolved and the law and order situation has become normal. The Manager informed us that all factions participate in NRSP activities and their representatives were all present in the meeting. Before the meeting commenced according to local tradition both TAA and I were presented with a Dastar. The Manager explained that one Dastar was presented by the Union Nazim and the second one by his opposite group. All factions sink their differences when they participate in the proceedings of COs/VDOs and LSO.

TAA in his speech not only praised and congratulated the COs/VDOs/LSO members on their achievements he held out a promise that he would ensure that there is no dearth of funding for the kind of work they are doing.

All the activists stood up in their seats to bid goodbye to the guests and TAA commented to me the tremendous discipline being observed by the CO members unlike other public gatherings.

I could not have asked a more successful visit than the one arranged for TAA by RGM Rawalpindi Malik Fateh and his team comprising Raja Munir Hussain, Hassan Zafar DPO, Muhammad Anwar Credit Supervisor, Gulnaz Shabnam FSO, Naeem Ahsan Field Engineer, Saadia Naureen Social Organizer and Waqar ISO.

This team has given a practical shape to the vision of LSO and demonstrated effectively the efficacy of social mobilization. This was a very important visit and they have done me proud. I am grateful to Rashid and Javad, CEO and GM NRSP for their leadership and Fateh for translating my vision of RSPs into practical reality.