

SOCIAL MOBILIZATION – A MEANS FOR REDUCTION OF POVERTY

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Poverty and Its Causes

Rural areas in Pakistan are reservoir of poverty. Low production, low prices, low incomes, low wages, little savings and unemployment has plunged the rural population deeper into debt and destitution. Small farmer, in particular, is handicapped in the exploiting environment. He is constrained by the scale of his operations from acquiring resources and marketing outputs. Small landholding also handicaps rapid improvements in technology and income. The landless tenants and the non-farm labor are caught in a swamp of poverty, marginalized from the mainstream and often hidden from the public eye.

An objective analysis of the rural poor would indicate that they are differentiated with respect to socio-economic conditions, agro-ecological situations and religio-cultural patterns. However, they also have certain commonalities like landlessness or small subsistence holding, isolation from the main economy, unorganized and leaderless. They lack capital and have no access to credit and marketable skills. These elements essentially translate into lack of capacity of the rural poor to change their own lot. Over the past decade, governments have taken various initiatives to ameliorate this situation. However, despite allocation of large sums of capital and organizational efforts little has been achieved on the ground. This failure can be attributed to adaptation of the development paradigm alien to the region, utilitarianism, sectoral imbalance, conventional top-down strategies, adhocism, inequitable distribution of assets, inaccessibility to technological innovations, lack of rural productive infrastructure, over exploitation of natural resources, inadequate development of the social sector, the use of development resources as political patronage and viewing the poor as a liability to be shunned, ignored and disregarded.

An Acceptable Solution

What is the solution then to reduce poverty? Should these million of people continue to groan under poverty for all times to come? Of course not. One solution, held for many decades, to the problem of small scales of operation was collectivization of the kind implemented in China and the former Soviet Union. The other one practiced in the capitalist world envisages rapid transformation of agriculture into a corporate system. People, however, fear that neither suits the rural poor of the third world, especially South Asia. A solution is needed that preserves the private ownership of land and at the same time calls for the pooling of resources and their cooperative management at the village level. This is neither a new proposal, nor a revolutionary one. But it does address itself to the needs of the small farmers in ways that lead to the permanent improvements in the small landholders' position in society. In simple words, this idea underscores the need for a combination of principles and implementation methods, which have been

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employed successfully to organize the rural poor around their interests and service these rural organizations in a permanent and profitable manner. This theoretical framework is extracted from the experience of countries with flourishing smallholder agricultural sector. These are the principles of Raiffeissen used with success in the institutionally based development of German agriculture. The same principles were pursued by the Japanese. In the period after the Second World War, these principles of village organization have been adopted with encouraging results both in Taiwan and Korea. In Pakistan, these ideas were first made the basis of rural development effort by Dr. Akhter Hameed Khan, when he initiated the Comilla Project in 1959.

Social Mobilization – A New Paradigm

This new paradigm, which envisages integrated rural development and poverty alleviation through participatory approach, is centered around the concept of social mobilization. This entails that the first step for poverty alleviation has to be mobilization of the poor in order to enable them to participate directly and efficiently in the decisions that affect their lives and prospects. Social mobilization means social organization, capacity building, capital formation and linking the rural community with service delivery institutions. Experience of the past has led to the conclusion that this conceptual package must be related to the reality on the ground, if capacity of the poor to be created for fulfilling their potential. Following four elements provide foundations to the concept of social mobilization:

Social Organization

First element of the conceptual package relates to the need to bring the rural poor into an organized fold. This is the key, if the rural poor's capacity for improvement is to be created and nurtured.

Human Resource Development

Upgrading of the human skills of the poor such as managerial productive and cooperative skills is essential to enable them to make the best use of available resources. The traditional knowledge of the poor needs to be built so that new profitable opportunities can be realized. The focus of Human Resource Development (HRD) initiatives has to encompass both human and technical skills, with emphasis on the former.

Capital Formation

Generation of the capital by the poor, through the discipline of savings, is the third important element of the conceptual package. Capital is power. Without it, the poor can never hope to be self-reliant.

Development of the Linkages

Once the people are organized, their capacity is built and capital base is expanded, they need to be linked with public and private sector to have improved access to all kinds of services. This constitutes fourth pillar of conceptual package of social mobilization.

This conceptual package though has been built on the foundations of time-tested principles, yet it requires an environment conducive enough to materialize this package into reality. The basic pre-requisite for such an environment include:

1. Willingness of the people
2. Availability of leadership at the grass root level
3. Presence of a support organization

Importance of a Support Organization

There is no denying that willingness and sincere leadership are essential requirements for participatory development. However, the need of a support organization for implementing the conceptual package is central. The participation development program can only be effectively implemented, if these are led by an autonomous support structure, committed to the creation of a participatory village level institutional framework. The traditional approach of establishing a large number of specialized agencies (for training, credit, input supplies and extension) for reaching the poor has failed because they were hampered in their effectiveness by the absence of strong and broad institutional base at the village level. Unfortunately, creation of a village level institutional framework does not fall in the purview of any government agencies. Therefore, the proposed Rural Support Program (RSP) has to take the lead in the creation, promotion and support of effective and disciplined community organizations to manage rural development. Wherever possible, existing or proposed organizations of the communities should be used or incorporated into this effort provided they are willing to operate in accordance with the principles and terms of partnership offered by the Rural Support Program (RSP).

Pro-poor Interventions – What Do RSPs Do?

Against this backdrop and in order to achieve overall objectives of rural development, the RSPs have to respond for a wide range of activities, which include:

1. Create, promote and support effective and disciplined community organizations to manage rural development, incorporating existing organizations at the village level wherever possible.
2. Serve as a flexible catalyst to assist in the identification of opportunities to promote equitable and sustainable development patterns and drawing in the resources (technical assistance, training financial and so on) to enable local people to make full use of these opportunities.
3. Act as a training organization to provide a wide range of local skills to villagers in managerial and practical subjects. The purpose of this training is to increase the capacity of local people to manage more effectively their resources for sustainable and productive development.
4. Work to link community organizations with government agencies, NGOs, donors and private businesses that can provide services (extension, training, marketing, finance and so on) to support rural development.
5. Give special emphasis to the evolution of responsible credit behaviour through the encouragement of the regular savings, group management and repayment of loans.
6. Work with community organizations and relevant government agencies to create plans and programs for the sustainable management of natural resources in the area in which it operates.

7. Whenever necessary to the above functions, undertake limited technical and socio-economic research to support and assess its programs. The RSPs would seek to develop a network of collaborating institutions, both national and international, to participate in this research effort.
8. Pay particular attention, consistent with prevailing cultural and socio-economic factors, to the opportunities and needs for involving women in rural development.
9. Serve as a catalyst to community organizations with those agencies that provide social services parallel to the major emphasis on income generating activities.
10. Eventually aim to replace itself and its functions with entirely local institutions.

RSPs in Pakistan

Presently, there are seven RSPs working in the country. These include Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP), the pioneer in this field; Surhad Rural Support Program (SRSP); National Rural Support Program (NRSP); Ghazi Barotha Tariaqiati Idara (GBTI); Punjab Rural Support Program (PRSP); and Balochistan Rural Support Program (BRSP). Success of social mobilization as a new paradigm in community development can be assessed from the fact that such programs are in vogue in every province of the country. Table 1 enlists various RSPs in Pakistan.

Table 1: Rural support programme in Pakistan.

Name of RSP	Presence in	Date of start-up
AKRSP	NWFP/NAC	1983
SRRSP	NWFP	1989
NRSP	National, AJK	1992
GBTI	NWFP, Punjab	1995
LPRP	NWFP	1997
PRSP	Punjab	1998
BRSP	Balochistan	2001

Program Package

The program package offered by RSPs is a portfolio of needs and development priorities of any given community. RSPs believe that it is the people who should decide what kind of services or interventions they require. RSPs do not go to the community with any preconceived agenda. However, in general, usual interventions include micro finance, skill enhancement, building physical infrastructure, improving natural resource management with special emphasis on agriculture and providing social services like education, health, population welfare and sanitation.

Cumulative achievements of all RSPs as of December 2002 provide a credible evidence for the success of this approach:

Activity	Progress
Community Organizations Formed (Broad-based, decentralized and homogenous group of men & women)	38,559
Membership	904,801
Savings (Rs. in million)	903.294
Activists trained	385,243
Credit disbursed (Rs. in million)	7,046.022
Credit beneficiaries	12,279
Productive Physical Infrastructure (PPI) Schemes	38,410
PPI beneficiary households	744,823
Cost of PPI Schemes (Rs. in million)	2,833.452
Share of local community (minimum)	20%
Community schools established	371
Students enrolled	19,735

Conclusion

Poverty is a multi-dimensional concept, hence its solution needs a diverse and multi-pronged approach. Economic development, social uplift, and good governance are few of the plausible strategies. This, however, is not sufficient if not accompanied by equity and participation of the poorest of the poor. The process of social mobilization as adopted by RSPs ensure that the poorest of the poor and those who are marginalized and live below poverty line are brought to an organized fold to have an improved access to all the above mentioned efforts. This, as mentioned earlier, can only be achieved by fostering a framework of grass root institutions in the villages and harnessing potential of the poor.