

## **Rural Support Programmes as Agent of Change in Pakistan: A Case Study of Punjab and Sindh**

*Economics*

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### **Abstract**

*Rural support programs (RSPs) are essentially NGOs they are outside the government and they are non-profit organizations and have developed substantial capacity to generate funds internally. The aim of this paper is to examine the contribution of Punjab and Sindh rural support programmers to rural livelihood improvement in areas of community participation, community physical infrastructure, health care and education and human resource development. The major findings of this paper was that social mobilization process of Punjab RSP has not fostered or helped community organizations developed institutional capacity to undertake projects on their own as joint entities. The frontline workers especially social organizers of Sindh RSP have not put enough efforts to nurture community organizations and helped expand the program by demonstration.*

*Sustainability remain a challenge particularly as it pertains to community organizations and access to credit despite progress made by PPAF and other credit institutions. However a number of areas such as monitoring and evaluation, human resource development and gender disparity did not receive the attention they deserve. Despite difficulties associated with working in many villages of the target population, the*

*performance of both Punjab and Sindh RSPs have been moderately satisfactory. The future of both the two RSPs deserve serious consideration.*

**Keywords:** Rural support program (RSP), Sindh, Punjab.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Rural support programmes in Pakistan have come a long way since Agha Khan rural support programme AKRSP started operation in Northern areas and Chitral valley towards the end of 1980. In Pakistan, there were by Mid-2007 ten rural support programmes RSPs working in 93 out of 127 districts in the four province (Punjab, Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan) Northern areas, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Islamabad capital territory (ICT). The rural support programmes were working in 2,747 of the 4,627 union councils in 93 districts. They have facilitated about 1.66 million households from 100,678 community organizations of which 1.91 million men and women were members. (Khan, 2009).

The first rural support programme began on a small scale organising poor people in several remote and sparsely populated districts in the mountainous north from these modest beginning the scheme scaled up rapidly country wide led and promoted energetically by Dr. Shuaib Sultan Khan the head of first RSP. (Rasmussen *et al* 2005).

The failure of the first social action programme (SAP) in the early 1990s by and large which excluded community participation led the donors and government to work through RSPs and similar civil society organisations as partners in order to involve the poor (target groups) as active participants. Since the late 1990s several developments have driven the government to take the participatory route to rural development. For one thing the increased outreach of rural support programmes and their demonstrated ability to mobilise people through participatory organisations for development has provided good evidence that this route was worth taking. In addition, the international donor community are in support of the community based approach to foster equitable development. (Khan, 2001).

The RSPs rely on a community driven model of development that seeks to simultaneously empower poor people and improve service delivery. Communities are mobilised with government, civil society and private sector to improve the quality and delivery of social services sometimes by linking people to existing service providers and sometimes by providing services themselves. More importantly however, the RSPs are autonomous government (Rasmuseen, *et al* 2005).

## **1.1 Objectives**

The major objectives of this paper were.

1. To examine the contribution of Punjab and Sindh rural support programmes in areas of Community Participation, Community Physical infrastructure, Health care, Education and Human Resource development.
2. To identify the Challenges, Strength and Weaknesses.
3. To Assess their Progress, Achievements and Future direction
4. To Recommend Strategies for Improving the Operations of RSPs.

## **2.0 Methodology**

The present paper is a descriptive study which will examine Punjab and Sindh rural support programmes aim at improving the living standard of the target communities. Besides assessing their progress achievements strength and weaknesses the authors explores what will be the impact of these rural support programmes to the poor households in the study areas.

## **3.0 Result and Discussion**

### **3.1 Punjab Rural Support Programme**

Punjab rural support programme PRSP was established as a support organization in the same mould as Sindh rural support programme (SRSP) and National Rural Support Programme to foster participatory community organizations COs as the vehicle for rural people to improve their living standard.

The aim was poverty reduction and improvement of rural poor quality of life and its strategy to harness peoples potential to help themselves. PRSP has adopted to its strategy and operations according to the perceptions of its managers available resources and the specific conditions of communities.

The programme is present in the 28 districts of Punjab working in partnership with rural communities in various activities. Its core programme which it operates through community organization COs exist in 20 districts. In the eight districts PRSP work as a contractor for different public sector agencies to deliver services to rural areas in education, health care and building community infrastructure.

### **3.2 Community Participation**

By the end of 2006 rural communities in partnership with PRSP had formed 18, 125 community organizations COs with 301, 756 members in 20

districts of Punjab Table 1 the average size of the men and women COs are 18 and 15 members respectively.

According to the assessment of PRSP staff about 4500 community organizations COs 2,700 men and 1,800 women do not meet the requirements and are not engaged in activities as group with PRSP. In two area development projects funded through government of Punjab PRSP has also established parallel programme of social mobilization in areas where its core programme works through other community organizations.

**Table-1 Community organization members In Punjab 1998-2006**

Period	MEMBERS OF COS				MEMBER OF CO MEMBERS		
	All	Men	Women	Mix	All	Men	Women
1998-99	1241	683	496	62	28,028	18,710	9318
1999-2000	2181	1414	734	33	39,593	31,449	8144
2000-2001	2857	1685	1122	50	47,167	29,296	17,871
1998-2001	6279	3782	2352	145	114,788	79,455	35,333
2001-2002	2289	1289	978	22	33,811	19,890	13,821
2002-2003	1446	795	578	73	31,416	21,593	9823
2003-2004	1726	975	750	1	23,489	13,142	10,347
2005-2005	2049	1116	900	33	30,913	18,320	12593
2006	4336	2460	1839	37	67,339	39,606	27,733

**Source:** Punjab Rural support Programme Annual Report 2007.

### 3.3 Community physical Infrastructure

Initially PRSP offered three options to communities to build the local physical infrastructure that they thought were high on the list of their priorities and for which they were willing to share the cost and participate in the implementation process and take responsibility for operation and maintenance. The second option for schemes that required more financial resources was to take a loan from PRSP and complete the identified project. The third option for large and costly schemes was to link the communities with outside agencies government and donors on a cost sharing basis. As shown in Table 2 in partnership with PRSP COs Community organisation members have completed over 4,000 community physical infrastructure schemes at a cost of Rs. 1.03 m providing benefits to about 784 000 rural households. The beneficiary household include those not necessarily participating in community organizations.

**Table 2 Community physical infrastructure schemes 1998-2006**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Number of scheme</b>	<b>Total cost Rs</b>	<b>Average cost</b>	<b>Beneficiary households</b>
2000-2001	18	3.70	205,556	5,352
2001-2002	728	152.87	209,986	248,430
2002-2003	194	92.59	477,320	55,481
2003-2004	1377	287.26	208,613	216,215
2004-2005	84	29.33	349,167	25,321
2005-2006	634	136.19	214,811	87,336
2006-2007	1056	325.90	308,617	145,778
<b>Total</b>	<b>4091</b>	<b>1,027.84</b>	<b>251,244</b>	<b>783,913</b>

**Source:** Punjab rural support programme Annual report 2007

### **3.4 Health Care and Education**

One of the goals of PRSP is to improve the facilities and service for basic health care and education. In its first four years PRSP organized mainly through linkages with the provincial health departments and other outside agencies medical camps a vaccination and immunization drive for children and family planning workshops for women. It also enabled several thousand women to be trained as traditional birth attendants and lady health workers. PRSP's involvement in basic education can be traced back to its inception. In the first year, it helped rural communities establish ten community primary schools mostly with their own resources. The objective of these schools was to gather out of school children and provide early childhood education to the very young. Besides its involvement in community primary schools, PRSP has worked with the government of Punjab in up-grading seven primary schools to middle level with the community contributing one-fifth of the cost and providing basic facilities to the primary and middle schools for girls.

### **3.5 Human Resource Development**

The PRSP has recognized the crucial role of human capital in enhancing capabilities increasing resource productivity and improving people's lives. It has not developed adequate institutional capacity to meet the diverse needs of its own staff and communities. It has depended largely on outside agencies to provide training.

PRSP records show that the organization conducted or arranged a large number of sessions, events, workshops and courses ranging

from 1 to 10 days which were attended by 239, 030 participants. Table 3 shows details on average 30 percent of the participants were women ranging from around 25 to 39 percent. No follow up seems to have been undertaken to measure the effects of various training programmes on participants in terms of their services, employment status and income levels. (Khan, 2009).

**Table 3 Community Organization Members Trained by PRSP 1998-2006**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
1998-99	30,042	21,861	8181
1999-2000	40,945	32,332	8613
2000-2001	30,432	22,036	8396
1998-2001	101,419	76,229	25,190
2001-2002	35,975	25,397	10,578
2002-2003	40,591	28,371	12,220
2003-2004	20,138	13,154	6984
2004-2005	16,365	9821	6544
2005-2006	24,542	15,013	9529

**Source:** Punjab Rural support programme Annual Report 2007.

### **3.6 Sindh Rural Support Programme**

Sindh rural support programme is the youngest of all rural support programmes in Pakistan. SRSP partnership with rural communities involves delivery of services such as building of physical infrastructure giving small loans and providing training in vocational skills to men women and youth. In the nine districts of upper Sindh SRSP is present in 59 out of 431 union councils.

Generally in all the nine districts, agriculture plays an important role in the rural economy but this role depends on the supply of water, incidence of water logging and salinity and links to market. In 2003 on its own initiative government of Sindh decided to give RS 1000m as an endowment to SRSP as a private non-profit organization. It was in July 2003 that SRSP began its activities in Sukkur where it took over on going work of social mobilization from national rural support programme SRSP.

### **3.7 Community Participation**

SRSP has adopted a well-tested principles underlying COs that communities should be willing to form organizations in which both men and

women jointly can actively participate in building their communities. They should be accountable to each other, maintain transparency in their deliberations, decision making processes and follow the rules of good governance. At the end of 2006 there were 1951 community organizations CO with 36, 898 members Table 4. According to estimates of rural households in the districts only 2 percent of rural households are involved as members in the community organizations COs. The COs formed by women accounted for 27 percent of the total and women constituted one quarter of all members.

**Table 4 Community Organization and Members for Sindh 2003-2006.**

Period	Number of Cos			Number of CO Members		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
2003-04	382	273	109	8125	6040	2085
2004-05	626	485	140	14728	11381	3347
2005-06	1535	1168	367	30701	23903	6798
End of 2006	1951	1432	519	36898	27776	9122

**Source:** Khan M H 2009 Participatory Rural Development in Pakistan Experience of Rural Support Programmes in Pakistan oxford university press page 323.

### 3.8 Community Physical Infrastructure

In view of the fact that the vast majority of rural communities in Sindh are deficient in physical infrastructure which defines people quality of life. The SRSP is working with other organizations such as the PPAF Pakistan poverty alleviations fund. International organizations like UNDP, DFID, and provincial government act as a bridge between communities and the funding agencies.

By the end of 2006 community organizations in the programme area had completed 172 CPI schemes costing Rs. 50.54m Table 5. The community share in the cost of the completed schemes is estimated at 27 percent. These projects have brought benefits to about 6000 households. In the first two years 40 schemes were completed almost entirely with the help of funds from PPAF. Majority of the completed, schemes are related to the supply of drinking water, irrigation water, tube wells, pipe lines and lined water courses.

**Table-5 Community physical infrastructure schemes in Sindh 2003-2006**

Period	Number of CPI schemes completed	Total cost schemes Rs.million	Cost per CPI scheme	Number of beneficiaries households
2003-04	23	5.33	231,696	487
2004-05	17	5.22	306,882	480
2005-06	132	39.99	302,955	5005
End of 2006	172	50.54	293,837	5972

**Source:** Khan MH 2009. Participatory Rural Development in Pakistan Experience of rural Support Programme in Pakistan Oxford University Press Page. 342.

### **3.9 Health Care and Education**

Sindh Rural Support Programme SRSP did very little in the area of basic health care and education it merely arranged training of 62 traditional birth attendants. It established two community schools for primary education. Since then it has taken one major initiative that has the potential for making the basic health care facilities more accessible and effective for rural communities. In the second half of 2006 as part of the president's primary health care initiative SRSP entered into a contract with government of Sindh health department to help restore, renovate and manage over 250 basic health units and other primary health care facilities in five of its programme districts Sukkur, Larkana, Jacobabad, Khairpur and Nausheroferoze. The objective of this project is to improve the basic health services for rural communities which the government is not able to provide.

### **3.10 Human Resource Development**

In the first year of operation SRSP was not able to establish a credible HRD capacity for both its own staff especially social organizers and community members. It had to depend almost entirely on NRSP resource persons.

The HRD section in SRSP is not strong enough to organize training programmes on its own. It has to develop a coherent strategy and draw up a medium term five year plan to meet the growing needs of the organization and community. There are three types of training for communities:

- (1) Includes orientation session for community visits and managers of Cos teaching them management skills



- (2) The second includes specialized training for crop and livestock husbandry
- (3) The third programme includes vocational skills that individual COs members can use to either work for themselves through new trades.

SRSP has trained 8563 COs members, 906 were women and most of them in the second and third years Table 6 most of these trainees were COs activists presidents and managers. (Khan, 2009).

**Table 6 Community members trained by SRSP in Sindh 2003-2004.**

<b>Period</b>	<b>All trainees</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
2003-2004	901	852	49
2004-2005	5837	5513	324
2005-2006	1825	1292	533
End 2006	8563	7657	906

**Source:** Khan MH (2007) participatory Rural Development in Pakistan experience of Rural Support Programme in Pakistan Oxford University press page 324.

#### **4.0 Challenges and Problems**

Participatory development through social mobilization is constantly repeated and has been embraced by donors and government alike. Communities participating in the movement are no longer treated with honour. There is a growing engagement or rural support programems RSPs as partners with all level of government.

The greatest challenge for the RSPS is in facilitating the implementation of nation-wide development projects and the financial support it has been given for scaling up the process of social mobilization. The RSPs have to address the challenge they now face in mainstreaming or scaling up the process of social mobilization in a hurry. The need to increase the density of community organizations COs involving more union councils in district. More villages or communities in each union council and more households in each village. This is the meaning of scaling up in practical terms.

Given this challenge the role of good activist men, women and three Cs character commitment and competence takes the centre stage in meeting the challenges. (Anka *et al*, 2010)

#### **4.1 Linkages and Partnerships**

Punjab rural support programme has strong partnership with government of Punjab. The PRSP has also established and used linkages with government line departments, international donor agencies and NGOs. PRSP has been a partner with or contractor for outside agencies in 18 projects and ventures to give services and build the infrastructure for rural communities of these 13 projects are from government of Punjab, three from PPAF and two from international donor agencies.

Sindh rural support programme has developed linkages with some of the government line departments e.g. health, agriculture, livestock and education particularly for the training of community members. It has also established linkages with the district government in the programme area and has provided training to the members of citizen community Boards (CCBS).

#### **4.2 Progress and Achievements**

Punjab rural support programme PRSP had expanded to eight new district (Toba Tek Sigh, Hafizabad, Mandi Bahauddin, Kasur, Sheikhpura, Okara, Papattan and Sialkot) bringing the total number to 20. The programme adopted a dual approach and core programme based on social mobilization was supplemented by a new procedure from 2006 till date PRSP concentrated its resources on helping people establish participatory organizations providing opportunities for members of COs to acquire skills in a variety of disciplines and vocations they regarded as important giving small loans to COs members for crops, livestock and small enterprise.

The achievements recorded by PRSP were it has helped nearly 305,041 rural households representing 15 percent of all rural households in the union councils and 7 percent in the districts. PRSP helped communities to establish 20, 122 COs with 333,714 men and women members. By the middle of 2007 these members has saved Rs. 148 m and borrowed Rs. 3.456 bn. The COs and PRSP have together completed over 4000 community physical infrastructure schemes at a cost Rs. 1.03 bn.

Sindh rural support programme maintained its basic programme in five districts but expanded its out reach to 17 union councils in these districts during the second year of its operation. In the third year the programme was extended to Larkana and Naushero Feroze bringing the number of districts to seven. The number of union councils in which the programme was present rose from 17 to 42 by early 2006. In the forth year of operation SRSP expanded the programme to nine districts from seven in upper Sindh. The achievements recorded by SRSP were in the nine districts of upper Sindh SRSP is present in 59 out of 431 union councils. In these union councils it has helped 33.166 households out of 172, 607 rural households but only 3

percent of rural households in the districts form 2,425 COs with 40, 879 members. By the middle of 2007, the CO members had saved Rs. 13 m and 12, 460 of them borrowed Rs163.77 m in 16, 532 small loans. The organized communities have completed 177 physical infrastructure schemes at a cost of Rs. 50 m in which nearly one quarter was contributed by CO members.

#### **4.3 Future Direction of RSP**

The future direction for the core programme appears promising provided it continues to have strong support from government. In terms of financial resources RSPs have adequate support from DFID to meet the mandate until the end of 2010. RSPN has set a target of Rs. 33 m as revenue in the year 2011 in which it expects to spend Rs. 20m on its operation. It plans to meet this target through resources which it hopes it can generate in the current period. In addition it has hired a cadre of professionals and has plans to enhance their capacity and quality through training, material incentives, good working environment and recognition of talents and merit. Their future strategy is divided in to three parts.

1. Capacity building RSPs, NGOs and community organizations.
2. Grants for public private partnerships and development of products for the poor.
3. Advocacy and linkages for policies favourable to the poor and participatory organizations.

#### **4.4 Strength and Weakness of RSPs**

##### **a. Strength**

Rural support programmes have special ability to reach the poor and other segments of society overlooked by public and commercial sectors RSPs facilitate local resource mobilizations and have programmes of local participation in development. Service delivery at low cost and innovative service delivery at low cost and innovative solutions to novel problems are their strength.

The most important factor to the success of RSPs is the quality of leadership. Specifically it is the ability to relate with humility and love with the poor. (Anka, 2009).

##### **b. Weaknesses**

The monitoring and evaluation mechanism of many RSPs is weak. When it comes to evaluation of the organization's efficiency and effectiveness in terms of results from its inputs and activities. It was observed

that the M and E professionals in RSPs do not even use the minimum standard practices available for evaluation. The capacity for impact assessment components of the evaluation is almost non-existent. (Anka, 2009).

## **5.0 Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

Rural support programmes RSPs are essentially NGOs they are outside the government and they are non-profit organizations and have developed substantial capacity to generate funds internally.

The major objectives of the paper were to:

1. Examine the contribution of Punjab and Sindh RSPs in areas of community participation, community physical infrastructure, health care and education and human resource development. The paper further identified the challenges, strength and weaknesses and assess progress achievement and future direction. Finally strategies were recommended improving the operations of PSPs.

## **5.1 Conclusion**

The major conclusion drawn from the paper were the Punjab RSP have not made the transition in its role from service provides to facilitator for communities. The social mobilization process has not fostered or helped community organizations developed institutional capacity to undertake projects on their own as autonomous individual and joint entities. It seems the future of PRSP is contingent upon the development of policies pursued by the government, unless it can establish or acquire financial autonomy to play its role as a genuine facilitator for communities.

The front line workers especially social organizers of SRSP have not put enough efforts or resources into identifying, fostering and using community activities to nature COs and help expand the programme by demonstration. Furthermore the credit availability programme if not structured and managed well and has the potential for undermining rather than strengthening the process of social mobilization. SRSP has started addressing the issue of gender imbalance it has put more resources and effort into building strong organizations for women so as to improve their living standards.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Punjab and Sindh RSPs should determine more precisely what results and impacts are to be achieved in each programme area within specific scheme.

- ✓ Punjab and Sindh RSP's monitoring and evaluation system needs to be improved in particular regarding results and definition of indicators.
- ✓ Economic problems have to be addressed more competitively including absolute poverty.
- ✓ Punjab and Sindh RSPs should look into the possibility of establishing a community radio which if established will play it a major role for the development of the two province.
- ✓ Women should be encouraged to go for higher education both in Pakistan and abroad.
- ✓ Workshops should be organized for gender awareness in rural areas.
- ✓ Provide capacity and development support to social mobilization and strengthening of community organizations in general.
- ✓ Strengthening rural support programmes to promote innovations that can be scaled up and replicated by the government and donor organizations merits more attention and resource allocations.
- ✓ Coordination is a critical area where RSPs quickly can establish is added value in providing social services to the community.
- ✓ If coordination is to improve it has to be prioritised by the individual actors who will put coordination capacity at the disposal of the RSPs involved.
- ✓ Punjab and Sindh RSPs needs to prioritize its areas of intervention to provide maximum support. We must try to stay focused on a few probity areas.
- ✓ Punjab and Sindh RSPs should use benchmarking and the identification of best practices as a way to improve performance.

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