

The Appropriateness of a Community-based Programme: A Case-study of the AKRSP in Two Villages of Gilgit District

DURR-E-NAYAB and SABIHA IBRAHIM

1. INTRODUCTION

With the abolition of *Mirdom* in 1972, social and economic change picked up in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Apart from the government, the other significant agent of change has been the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP).

For any such programme to be successful it is important that the programme is designed, implemented and managed, keeping in view the local socio-economic conditions, ecology and, most importantly, characteristics of the poor.

This paper is based on a study conducted in two villages, Rabat and Chaprote, in the Nagar Sub-division of Gilgit District, in 1990-91.¹ It seeks to examine the projects launched by the AKRSP, the relevance of these projects to the local context, and their performance at the micro-level.

There is a broad consensus in the literature on community-based programmes on the need for some important conditions for effective development programmes. These include: (a) exclusive and separate programmes for the poor because when programmes are for general development they fail to reach the poor; (b) a need for a holistic approach because problems are interrelated; (c) providing access

Durr-e-Nayab and Sabiha Ibrahim are, respectively, Staff Anthropologist and Faculty Member at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad.

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Editor's Note: Dr Soofia Mumtaz who supervised the study to which this paper refers does not subscribe to the understanding of the original analysis by the authors of this paper nor to their interpretations.

¹The reason for selecting Rabat and Chaprote for the sake of study was that these were non-Ismaili communities and, according to the AKRSP sources, were among the first few communities that had responded favourably to the thrust of the programme.

to productive assets; (d) authentic decentralisation; (e) delivery system suited to the needs of the people, specially the poor; (f) activities dealing with self-employment and which build capital, assets and skills; (g) mobilisation and organisation of the people; (h) empowering the people in terms of information, knowledge, skills and awareness of the larger socio-economic and political environment; and (i) close supervision, greater accountability of local leadership, and strict control on malpractices [Bhatt and Vyas (1991); Getubig and Shams (1991)].

2. THE AKRSP IN THE SURVEY VILLAGES

The AKRSP had two broad objectives when it started in 1982. These were:

- (i) Improving the economic condition of the inhabitants of the region; and
- (ii) developing a replicable model for rural development [AKRSP (1991)].

The thrust of the "development effort" is on income-generating activities [World Bank (1987)] in order to increase the income of the rural population of this region. The AKRSP claims that it is not only an exercise in development but is based on equitability, productivity and sustainability [AKRSP (1991)].

The central feature or the programme is the formation of a village level institution called the Village Organisation (VO) for managing the whole process. The VO is to raise its own capital through member savings and use it for collective gain. The planning and implementation of projects and maintenance of the completed projects is the responsibility of the VO.

The AKRSP for the survey villages entailed: a project on grant; a credit and banking system; improvement in agriculture and livestock; devising a marketing system; training for various skills; and encouraging women to organise themselves to increase their productivity.

3. OBSERVATIONS OF THE LONGITUDINAL STUDY

The study is based on a sample of 45 households, selected from the 255 households of Rabat and Chaprote villages. Rabat is 52 kilometres northwest of Gilgit and 7 kilometres off the Karakorum Highway (KKH). Chaprote is a further 3 kilometers from Rabat. The sample had representation from each economic category in proportion to their number in the community.

Village Economy

As opposed to the general belief of a homogenous society prevalent in the

Northern Areas [Khan (1989); World Bank (1987) and Khan and Shah (1990)] vast differences were found to be present between the rich and the poor. And these differences were reflected in almost every facet of life.

The poor had an average household size of 6.4 members while the middle income and rich households comprised of 9.8 and 16 member, respectively. The poor with meagre resources, preferred a smaller household unit.

Land and livestock which form the basis of the economy also show the differentiation between the rich and the poor. As can be seen from Table 1, the poor who constitute 31 percent of the population own just 10 percent of the total land, while the rich who form 11 percent of the population hold 46 percent of the land. The people in the middle income and rich economic categories also enjoyed a far greater percentage share of animals (see Table 2). The poor, constituting 31 percent of the population, had a percentage share of 16 percent, 10 percent and 2 percent of the total number of cows, sheep and goats, respectively.

The villages were deficit in wheat, the staple crop. Wheat was being bought by people of all economic categories. As Table 3 shows, there is a progressive increase in the average production and consumption of wheat as we move up the economic ladder. Barley is basically used as fodder and so is maize. Potato is the only crop being sold. Table 3 also reflects the differentiation between the rich and the poor in their percentage share of different crops.

Fruits are sold by households in all economic categories. Walnut, peach and plum are the most sold fruits. As Table 4 shows the poor lag far behind the rich in their percentage share of fruit production, consumption and sale.

Despite the availability of credit facility from the nationalised banks and the AKRSP, the primary source still remains the informal sector (see Table 5). None of the rich household was indebted while 79 percent of the poor and 65 percent of the middle income households were under debt.

An Analysis of the AKRSP in the Two Survey Villages

As opposed to the projects initiated by the government which were mainly in the social sector, the AKRSP has concentrated on the economic sector. Nearly all the evaluation reports, most of which are either funded by the Foundation or based on the figures given by the AKRSP, have shown the programme to be a great success.

Our findings and their analysis, in the perspective of the local conditions, regarding the performance of the AKRSP in each field is as follows:

Table 1

Survey Village: Privately Owned Land (Kanal): Land Use Pattern

Economic Category	% of HH	Land	% Land	Culti- vated Land	% Cultivated Land	Non Culti- vated	% Non Cultivated	Baran Land	% Baran	Pastures	% Pastures
Total	100	1511	100	562	100	97	100	410	100	442	100
Poor	31	146	10	81	14	12	12	30	7	23	5
Middle Income	58	677	45	317	56	77	79	88	21	195	44
Rich	11	688	46	164	29	8	8	292	71	224	51

The figures might not add up due to rounding off.

1 Kanal = 0.125 Acres.

Definition:

Landless	0
Poor	0.1-15 Kanals
Middle Income	15.1-30 Kanals
Rich	30.1 Kanals and above.

Table 2
Survey Villages: Sample: Livestock

Economic Category	Animals	% of HH	Animals	% of the Total	Average No.
Total	Cows		82	100	1.8
	Sheep	100	202	100	4.5
	Goats		449	100	10
Poor	Cows		13	16	1
	Sheep		20	10	1.4
	Goats	31	7	2	.5
Middle Income	Cows		47	57	1.8
	Sheep	58	112	55	4.3
	Goats		359	80	13.8
Rich	Cows		22	27	44
	Sheep	11	70	35	14
	Goats		83	18	16.6

Institution Building

For the success of any programme there is a need to build an efficient delivery system accompanied by an effective receiving mechanism to be able to channel multiple inputs to the intended beneficiaries. The Village Organisations (VOs) established by the AKRSP for this purpose have not been very effective.

There were five VOs and one Women's Organisation (WO) in the villages of Rabat and Chaprote (see Table 6). Out of five VOs, three were inactive, one had been dissolved while only one was functional, that too just partially. The AKRSP reports, however, continue to show these VOs as active [AKRSP: Village Profiles (1990)].

The basic reason behind the failure of the VOs was the inadequacies in the basic institutional model. It did not take into consideration the economic and social conditions of the area.

The conviction that there is little economic and social differentiation in the population of this region was negated by the research conducted in the area. The rich, who constituted only 11 percent of the population, monopolised the posts of office-bearers of the VOs, took control of their accounts and activities. The VOs as a result became a means for exploitation by the rich and the affluent.

Table 3

*Survey Villages: Sample: Percentage Share of Total Production
and Consumption of Crops*

Economic Category	Crops	% HH	Production	% Production	Consumption	% Consumption	Sale	% Sale	Brought	% Brought
Total	Wheat	100	1203	100	2139	100	0	100	936	100
	Maize		312	100	395	100	0	100	80	100
	Barley		150	100	163	100	0	100	13	100
	Potato		582	100	430	100	167	100	15	100
Poor	Wheat	31	194	16	440	21	0	0	246	26
	Maize		54	2	78	20	0	0	24	30
	Barley		14	9	14	9	0	0	0	0
	Potato		130	22	99	23	42	25	11	73
Middle Income	Wheat	58	604	50	1233	58	0	0	629	67
	Maize		123	39	182	46	0	0	56	70
	Barley		102	68	115	71	0	0	13	100
	Potato		322	55	237	55	87	52	4	27
Rich	Wheat	11	405	34	466	22	0	0	61	7
	Maize		135	43	135	34	0	0	0	0
	Barley		34	33	34	21	0	0	0	0
	Potato		130	22	92	21	38	23	0	0

Figures might not add up due to rounding off.

Table 4

*Survey Villages: Sample: Percentage Share of Total Production
and Consumption of Fruits*

Economic Category	Fruits	% HH	Production	% Production	Consumption	% Consumption	Sale	% Sale
Total	Grapes	100	185	100	143	100	41	100
	Apple		138	100	106	100	32	100
	Apricot		323	100	271	100	52	100
	Walnut		116	100	73	100	43	100
	Peach		78	100	49	100	29	100
	Pear		48	100	30	100	18	100
Poor	Grapes	31	16	9	14	10	2	5
	Apple		15	11	8	8	722	
	Apricot		49	15	45	17	4	8
	Walnut		23	20	18	25	6	14
	Peach		*	2	*	1	*	1
	Pear		9	19	9	30	0	0
Middle Income	Grapes	58	92	50	72	50	20	49
	Apple		58	42	48	45	10	31
	Apricot		150	46	112	41	38	73
	Walnut		65	56	41	56	24	56
	Peach		15	19	14	29	1	3
	Pear		28	58	13	43	15	83
Rich	Grapes	11	77	42	57	40	20	49
	Apple		63	46	48	45	15	47
	Apricot		123	38	113	42	10	19
	Walnut		30	26	16	22	14	33
	Peach		62	79	34	69	28	97
	Pear		11	23	8	27	3	17

Figures might not add up due to rounding off.

* Shows nominal production/consumption/sale.

Table 5

Survey Villages: Sample: Personal Debts

Category	Source									
	Formal Sector**					Informal Sector**				
	% of HH Indebted	% of HH Indebted**	% from Govt.**	% from AKRSP (Rs)	Average Amount (Rs)	% of HH Indebted**	%** from Shop-keeper	%** from Kins	%** from Others	Average Amount (Rs)
Total	62	18	100	0	27800	89	84	36	12	3610
Poor	79	18	100	0	4500	100	91	45	18	3305
Middle										
Income	65	18	100	0	43333	82	79	29	0	3471
Rich	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Shows Multiple Count.

Table 6

Survey Villages: Sample: Villages Organisation: Profile

Name of Organisation	AKRSP Claims		Empirical Verification	
	No. of Members	Status	No. of Members	Status
Rabat Paen VO	29	Active	–	Dissoved
Rabat Bala VO	32	Active	20	Inactive
Chaprote Paen VO	43	Active	31	Partially Active
Chaprote Bala VO	25	Active	16	Inactive
Chaprote Jhole VO	30	Active	18	Inactive
Rabat Bala VO	36	Active	–	Inactive

“Cluster of households”, the criterion to form the VO, does not take into account the issues of stratification, ranking, ethnicity and economic motivations of different economic categories. Physical proximity was found a link too weak to unite people of diverse backgrounds and aspirations together in a VO.

The size of the VO also contributed to its lack of efficiency. A VO having almost fifty members can hardly function cohesively. The splitting up of the already existing VOs in certain villages of Gilgit District is indicative of the fact that participatory management of collective goods becomes difficult when the size of the group is large.

The VOs were to have weekly meetings but such meetings did not take place for months. Most members started absenting themselves since they thought that there was no point in attending the meetings when most decisions on behalf of the VO members were taken unilaterally by the office-bearers, without consensus.

Productive Physical Infrastructure (PPI)

Apart from Rabat Paen VO, which received the PPI from the AKRSP for the construction of a link road, the rest of the four VOs received PPI for the widening and extension of irrigation channel. Since the poor had a little cultivable land, they did not want the extension of the water channel as the PPI project. As Table 7 shows, to 86 percent of the poor construction of a metalled road was their first priority which would have increased their mobility, and consequently their income.

Credit and Banking System

This scheme, like the others, did not meet the expectations of the bulk of

Table 7

Survey Villages: Sample: Communal Priorities (%)

Economic Category	Social Development**					Economic Development**				
	Hospital*	Schools	Metalled Roads	High Voltage Electricity	Bridges	Extension of Water Channels	Job Opportunity	Veterinary Clinics	Easy Loans	Vocational Centre
Poor	100	86	86	36	50	57	33	29	14	21
Middle										
Income	100	85	69	42	15	46	35	35	19	15
Rich	100	60	80	20	0	20	20	0	20	0
Total	100	82	76	38	24	47	33	29	18	16

* Includes Maternity Hospitals and Midwives.

** Shows Multiple Count.

the community. In the initial years the AKRSP's credit activities were quite significant with respect to credit for agricultural purposes. With the passage of time, however, the people started buying inputs from the open market because of the mistrust in the VO office-bearers who at times rejected the requests. In addition, the prices of the inputs were the same both at the AKRSP and in the open market.

Banking on an individual basis, introduced the year this research was conducted, will provide relief from the dependence of the common VO member on the office-bearers. However, the need for collateral will still act as a deterrent for the poor.

Agriculture

The AKRSP's aim of producing a surplus and making it marketable, and thus a source of income has not been successful. Despite the use of some new agricultural techniques, the people of the community were still deficit in wheat. The only crop they sold was potato, which could be partially attributed to the new seed potato introduced by the AKRSP.

For improvement in horticulture the AKRSP established two fruit nurseries, for which land was provided by the respective VO presidents. Both the nurseries failed to develop because the VO members were not interested in working on a land that was the property of an individual.

A technique of drying apricots in sulphur tents was also introduced, which was at first adopted by some but later stopped. The duration of the process and difficulty in making access to it were the reasons given for not using it.

The AKRSP introduced two schemes regarding livestock improvement. One related to feed improvement, called the silage making programme, and the other dealt with breed improvement, called the Heifer Project. Both the schemes, being unsuitable for the village economy and ecology, were not successful. Silage making was not adopted because it was too time-consuming and expensive. In the Heifer Project, the Fresian-Sahiwal crossbred milch cows proved to be far less productive and fertile than expected. The cows did not adapt to the very different environmental conditions that prevail in this region. The amount of fodder required by these cows to outperform the local cows breed was beyond the means of most farmers.

Marketing System

Though all the households sold fruits on individual basis (see Table 4), they attributed this to the construction of KKH, instead of the packages introduced by

the AKRSP. The AKRSP encourages collective marketing but it could not be promoted as people were not satisfied with the profit rate and preferred to market their produce themselves.

Human Resource Development (HRD)

Training programmes were of little use in practice. Major drawbacks were:

- (a) Duration of the course was too short to impart comprehensive knowledge;
- (b) there was no formal selection criteria for the trainees, resulting in poor quality of trainees;
- (c) staff was not formally trained; and
- (d) no refresher course was ever arranged for the trainees.

Women in Development (WID)

The AKRSP introduced three packages through the WO related to: vegetable production; poultry; and appropriate technology. The poultry package was a complete failure. The techniques used for vegetable production were the same as used some 10 to 15 years back and the impact of labour-saving packages was not much. It was generally felt that the technology employed was not appropriate. The nut crackers were too heavy to operate and the butter churners too large to handle. In addition, these machines were placed in the house of the president of the WO, thus inhibiting other members from using them.

The Conceptual Model

The AKRSP equates "rural development" with improving just the "economic condition" of the people while the priorities of the local population, shown in Table 7, fall in the social sector.

The belief that social development follows economic growth stands valid no more. Recent studies Bhatt (1990); Morato (1989); Tilakaratna (1990); Rahman *et al.* (1990); etc.] have shown that for a development programme to be effective, it must seek to answer the needs of the community whether these fall in the social sector or the economic sector or both. This is evident from the success of all those programmes that adopted a holistic approach towards development.

Economic Model

The AKRSP economic model restricts economic activity to agriculture

alone. In an area where the bulk of the population has very small land holdings, non-farm activities should have been considered in order to achieve the aim of "doubling the per capita income" of the people of the region.

These observations lead us to two conclusions:

- (a) The programme is not ideally suited to the economy of the village; and
- (b) it has a bias towards the rich, both in its model and implementation, and has failed to benefit the poor who should be the real beneficiaries of any such programme.

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Rabat and Chaprote were among those communities that, according to the AKRSP, had responded most positively to the Programme. The failures of the Programme in this community may therefore reflect the shortcomings of the Programme in general, given similar ecological, economic and social conditions. To make the Programme effective certain steps can be taken.

The criterion for the formation of a VO should be a group of those households which have a similar economic background as well as motivation. Various studies in Asia have proved that the major reasons for the failure of poverty alleviation strategies have been the incapacity of the Programme to reach the bottom poor and the hijacking of the Programme by the relatively rich [Getubig and Shams (1991)]. Therefore, in the absence of the rich in the group, the majority of the community, comprising poor and middle income households, would benefit from the Programme.

The size of the VO should be reduced to 15 to 20 members, making it a more manageable and cohesive unit, and rotation of office-bearers should take place to discourage monopoly by anyone.

The VOs should be encouraged to develop horizontal linkages with similar organisations at the same level and vertical linkages with organisations above and below. This will give the VO more capacity and stability.

There is a need to replace material collateral with social collateral, at least for the most disadvantaged group.

The AKRSP needs to evaluate and report its achievements in a more balanced way. There is a general impression now that the "all good" monitoring reports are written to attract the interest of donors to the Programme. Instead of confining themselves to the office-bearers of the VOs, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Research (MER) section should collect first-hand information while writing a report.

Because of the Karakorum Highway and the link road network, changes were inevitable in this region. For the credibility of the Programme, the MER section must distinguish between the changes that would have occurred any way from those that would not have occurred had the programme not been there.

It was one of the objectives of the AKRSP to formulate and demonstrate a model for rural development. For replication, it is necessary that the model prove its effectiveness. In the survey villages, as can be seen from Table 8, 79 percent of the population termed it as ineffective. If the model has failed to prove its effectiveness in an area where the whole ground work was done, it has little potential for replication in other parts of Pakistan where the socio-economic and ecological conditions are altogether different. There is a need to make a provision for efficiency, equity and empowerment in the model, if it has to be made effective.

Table 8

Survey Villages: Sample: Locally Perceived Effectiveness of the AKRSP

Economic Category	Effective % HH	Ineffective % HH	Partially Effective % HH	Total
Poor	0	93	7	100
Middle Income	15	73	12	100
Rich	80	20	0	100
Total	18	73	9	100

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QUESTIONING THE PREMISES

The main thrust of the paper is aimed at questioning the premise of societal homogeneity, which the community-based programme takes as its point of departure (5.1). The argument for the hierarchical and heterogenous nature of the society studied is convincingly supported by the tabular presentation of empirical data, using a three-tiered ranking of rich, middle and poor income groups (Tables 6, 8, 9a, 13). A qualitative ecological and ethnographic perspective in addition to the empirical data presented in the paper can lead to a better understanding of the findings. Ethnographic data for the area is supportive of the paper's case for the existence of a heterogenous society on the ground. The area must certainly have a large number of the Shin caste dominating the VOs. Ethnic affiliation and social stratum must have a significant correlation in the study area, since this is generally the case in Gilgit District.

AKRSP's novel and laudable policy of grafting innovative approaches onto tradition and growing from tradition has the advantage of maintaining a continuum and preventing “development shock” to any rural community. However, when the established social structure and tradition is of a hierachical nature, the avowed goals of equity and poverty alleviation cannot be reached only be following such a policy. This conveniently adopted homogenous premise may thus have been a constraint to the success of the programme. The high indebtedness of the poor and middle income-groups (79 percent and 65 percent. Table 13) is in sharp contrast to the lack of encumbrance enjoyed by the rich.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The sustainability of any rural community depends on the level of activation and the motivation that the individual members of such a group can generate towards communal activity. There is always a persistence of continuity in certain elements of development undertaken traditionally. Any change in development planning and activity must be cognisant of such a continuity, such cognisance being

crucial to the success of any plan that envisages significant change in the future. A planned community structure does not start from a neutral ground: it will carry both the detrimental and favourable effects of tradition.¹

Problems arise when an episodic (i.e., irregular single-activity oriented motivation) activity is confused with a periodic activity (i.e., a motivation based on predictable activity occurring with regularity). Thus a weekly or regular meeting as designed in the AKRSP strategy is an innovative periodic activity, but tradition may confuse it with episodicity. Despite AKRSP's emphasis on the regularity of meetings, ad hoc short-term meetings of people hurriedly called can be misconstrued and reported as the nucleus of future sustainability.

On the ground, this presents major challenges. Existing traditional strategies have been internalised to a large degree by both the target group and the development personnel who belong to the area. A shift from this strategy must take into account that this internalisation could generate a tendency to view new approaches in terms of existing ones and could therefore slow down the adaptation to new strategies.

The paper's contention that VO "meetings did not take place for months" (5.2.1 p. 15) is probably correct for the summer months, but investigation of the winter period is indispensable, for which the social scientist's tendency to be "field-shy" has to be overcome. The study and the follow-up were certainly undertaken in high summer [sic] when collective activity traditionally reduces and dispersive tendencies are visible. An intensive coalescing of social organisation and participation in the study area traditionally takes place during the winter months, when people congregate and share dwindling resources. The paper does not say whether the AKRSP approach has sensitively addressed and integrated such annual cyclic variations in social solidarity and social dispersion. Since meetings form a central aspect of the AKRSP philosophy, and their allegedly sustained absence is disturbing.

Women in Development

This is a crucial part of social organisation in any given human community.

¹An example where community development intervention can and must negate tradition was the zetu, a sort of "village police". The zetu's functions were ideally to enforce the regular repair of water channels, prevent theft of animals and grain, and enforce the decisions of the village council. This tradition could and did break down into a group of autonomous bullying thugs no longer in control of the community. The breakdown of the zetu system does not appear to be adequately substituted by social organisation activity in the policing of community decisions.

The paper indicates that the one WO initiated was “totally inactive” and “monopolised by the rich” (5.2.1). The vicious cycle of gender bias exists everywhere in Pakistan and here too appears to follow the pattern that most NGOs face.

PRODUCTIVE PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE (PPI)

The disparate perception that favoured a water channel over a link road (5.2.2) appears to be a significant example of physical infrastructure projects that limit the mobility of the poor while strengthening the power of the rich. Although absolute poverty may be reduced, the resentments and conflicts engendered in a given society are counterproductive.

LIVESTOCK

The study notes the loss of livestock body weight by a third because of inadequate winter fodder (3.1), but misses the point: traditionally, the livestock of a settlement was fed with all available fodder; finally when no fodder was left, a massive slaughter took place in early winter, with a few selected animals retained for spring breeding. The meat was air-dried and then consumed over the winter months. Furthermore, the breed of local mountain cattle is small, agile and wiry and capable of foraging in places one normally does not expect to see cattle. The Heifer Project (5.2.4.3) introduced cows from flatlands and apparently promised milk yields that did not materialise, certainly because of requirements. Crucial for the Heifer Project was also the provision of silage, which being perceived as too cumbersome by the villagers, suffered the same fate as biogas plants elsewhere in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

Though weak on ethnography and traditional economy and somewhat prolix, the paper builds a plausible argument backed up by primarily quantitative data. Replicability appears to hinge upon an ideal though not present condition of homogeneity. While there is certainly general agreement on the underlying universal principles of equity, poverty alleviation and general prosperity for any given community, replicability should be treated with caution.

The most successful of community participation approaches are those that are “tailor-made” for a specific community. This factor is integrated in the AKRSP approach which emphasises a baseline study to develop a community-specific strategy. In practice, however, the baseline study is either not conducted at all or

sufficient care is apparently not taken, leading to possibly erroneous premises that can and, if the findings of this paper are to be believed, do result in failures.

In general, the paper has the temerity to challenge a "sacred cow" in rural development tempering the general uncritical euphoria that greets all rural development initiatives based on the AKRSP. Such an alternative viewpoint is essential for the debate on rural development strategies to move forward and for all community participation approaches to modify and focus their approaches more sharply.

However, the criticism of the paper that AKRSP "needs to evaluate and report its achievements in a more balanced way" (6.11) is perhaps too harsh. The preoccupation with moralistic accuracy (e.g., at 6.12, that the KKH and its link roads would have made development inevitable) should not result in reduced resources for the beneficiaries, whatever the approach. After all, the AKRSP has been very successful in attracting donors to contribute generously to its programmes, which in turn do in varying degrees benefit the target groups. It has been able to do this through a well-executed communication and media strategy: this strategy covers a wide range from commissioning international television units to create film reports on its activities, to actually employing journalists as a part of its programme.² It is this ability to drum up donor support for the beneficiaries that other NGOs would do well to emulate

Adam Nayyar

Lok Virsa,
Islamabad.

²An element of overkill in this strategy is the only discordant note: the AKRSP "tombstones" that litter the landscape of the Northern Areas.

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This paper reflects the partial understanding by the authors of the Agha Khan Rural Support Programme's (AKRSP) conceptual framework and operational details.

Institutional Development

At the time of AKRSP's initial intervention in the Northern Areas, there was an institutional vacuum at the village level: traditional development efforts had ceased. Most notably, the process of bringing new land under irrigation, so important in face of rising population pressures, had stopped. The existence of different economic classes did not, and does not, minimise the need for participatory village level institutions; all classes are affected by the lack of local institutions. The stratification of the sampled households into 'rich', 'middle', and 'poor' economic groups is purely relative, the predominant farm size remains below the average farm size down country.

A village organisation (VO) is a forum through which both collective and individual needs can be addressed. The VO can only be effective if the majority village owns the organisation, thus making the VO an informal, yet powerful, source of administration and local development. For example, a VO comprising of thirty percent of the population which unanimously decides to ban livestock free grazing has no power to penalise non-members. The authority of a grassroots organisation which does not command the support of the majority lacks legitimacy.

Small farmers initially organise around productive collective interests such as an irrigation channel, which benefit the village as a whole. Later, as VOs gain confidence, resources and expertise, and demonstrate their utility, they can enter into the social sector activities.

VOs do not follow a linear and predictable path of evolution, but rather the process of institutionalisation is complex, determined by a variety of external and internal forces. Numerous examples exist of 'dormant' VOs being reactivated by members for the sake of common benefit, for example the repair of irrigation

channels or the introduction of the Social Action Programme. Viewing a VO as a static entity does injustice to the dynamics of social reality.

SPECIFIC DISCREPANCIES AND INACCURACIES PRESENTED THROUGHOUT THE REPORT ARE ADDRESSES BELOW

Methodology and Objectives

The aim of the paper is clearly too ambitious for the scale and detail undertaken. The success or failure of AKRSP's model cannot be extrapolated from a minuscule sample. The 'appropriateness' of a programme which operates in six districts (74,000 sq. km.), with a population of nearly one million, working with over 2,500 grassroots organisations, with 100,000 members, with a total savings of Rs 200 million, trained nearly 13,000 villagers, provided Rs 330 million in credit, initiated 1,479 village level infrastructure projects, with 71 percent coverage of rural households, cannot be adequately assessed by a paper, which is a by-product of a research activity which focussed on something else.

Out of 255 households in the villages, only 45 were interviewed, a fairly unrepresentative sample (17 percent) from which to draw conclusions on AKRSP's impact in the entire programme area.

There is no clear methodology outlined through which data on household income, literacy, and farm size are calculated. The break-up of economic classes is based only on landholding while household income is not even mentioned as a criteria. Available secondary data¹ has not clearly been consulted. Figures on landholding are also open to serious doubt.

Furthermore, figures of increased cultivable land under the PPI (productive physical infrastructure—an irrigation channel in this case), dissemination and adoption of agricultural innovations, and poultry management indicate a positive trend contrary to that portrayed by the authors. These few examples raise doubts about the accuracy of this paper and methodology employed, and thus implicitly the conclusions drawn.

Representation of AKRSP Objectives

AKRSP enters into a development partnership with the Village Organisa-

¹Khan, Mahmood Hasan, 'Impact of AKRSP in Northern Areas, Pakistan, Part 1', Gilgit District, 1989. Mr. Khan's report is compiled from a 100 percent sample. Completed one year prior to the PIDE field work, is a valuable source for comparison of statistics and other information.

tion/Women's Organisation (VO/WO), avoiding a top-down service delivery approach. Terms of partnership are clearly outlined, stating the responsibilities of both parties. The paper's brief overview of AKRSP is both misleading and superficial. AKRSP's follows an iterative process, with constant dialogues with the villages whereby individual and collective needs are identified and packages introduced.

Village Economy

The authors portray AKRSP's understanding of its programme area as naive, if not completely unfounded. The diversity of the region is characterised by four distinct Islamic religious groups, several cropping zones, five languages, access to social services, administrative structures, and varying degrees of physical isolation. AKRSP is conscious of these differences and caters its projects to meet the varying needs of its beneficiaries. For example, the wheat varieties introduced in single cropping zones differ from those in double cropping zones. At the village level too there are agro-ecological and socio-economic differences, yet there are also common interests.

The only aspect of heterogeneity the authors focus on is economic classes, which, as shown above, are not entirely reliable. The authors failed to contextualise the social and economic environment of the Nagar valley while studying the villages. Classification of rich and poor is overly simplistic and ignores the other unifying strands in the community.

Within diversity lies the communality of interests, the prime example being the PPI identification and implementation, a key point overlooked. The paper fails to focus on the macro conditions and needs at the village level, and how AKRSP assesses these.

Institution Building

The Village Organisation has an elaborate set of rules and procedures for effective and democratic management. For example, the VO members can replace their office bearers through a simple motion of no confidence or by exerting social pressure. There are numerous examples from within the programme area where VOs have ousted unsatisfactory office bearers.

Office bearers are selected by a general consensus, not through an election. Despite the numerous references cited (and apparent VO-based research), the authors have failed to understand the simple roles, functions, and rules of village

organisations, and how these change over time in response to internal needs and/or external options.

The brief reference to the WO is neither analytical nor illustrative; AKRSP welcomes input on the determinants of institution building, the reasons behind a 'dormant' VO/WO, to improve its programming and strategy. However, the authors fail to investigate the reasons for dormancy and when there is an attempt to explain, it is done on a superficial level (e.g. rich versus poor and exploitation by the rich, making the analysis doctrinaire without any substantial evidence).

The average size of the VOs is about 50 members; some of the larger VOs formed in the initial years have bifurcated for simple managerial purposes. Institutional innovation is a continuous process, both below the VO level (in several VOs, interest groups are emerging), as well as above it. Throughout the AKRSP programme area, including the area where the study was undertaken, several VOs are getting together and coming up with innovative institutional arrangements for meeting their common needs, both in the productive and the social sectors.

Physical Productive Infrastructure

The selection of the PPI is decided in a general body meeting of the VO and is only taken up if it benefits at least 75 percent of the total households in the village. The reference to Table 7 in the paper is misleading: in the economic sector, for 57 percent of the poor the first choice is the extension of water channel (only 20 percent for the rich). According to another source, 60 percent of the households increased their landholding after the completion of the PPI. Due to the completion of irrigation related projects the farm size has increased by about 50 percent in Gilgit region.² Contrary to an out of context quotation, irrigation channels do not necessarily widen income disparities, for example in Gwachi, a village south of Rabat Bala, the construction of an irrigation channel decreased the disparities in landholding by augmenting the smallest farmer's landholding.

Credit and Savings System

The authors do not give an introduction to the credit and savings programme: why and how it was initiated, how it has evolved over the years and what are the plans for institutionalising it. AKRSP has one of the largest community-based credit programmes in South Asia, yet there is no mention of the

²Khan and Bhatti, 'Farm Household Income and Expenditure Survey: Benchmark Survey and Impact Evaluation of AKRSP in Gilgit Region', 1992.

strengths of the credit programme.

In the original paper presented at the 10th AGM of the PSDE in April, 1994, the authors have quoted a figure of Rs 60,000 given to the VO of Chaprote Jhole for land development which was hijacked by the VO president. No other sources of information have any indication of such a loan, leaving one to assume that this was based on hearsay. According to well-documented reports, the VO accessed short term loans and after repayment initiated VO Credit Programme (VOCP) with Rs 66,000.³ At the time of the survey, the VO already had initiated a Vo Credit Programme, a fact not mentioned by the authors. The obsession with exploitation of the poor flows over into the discussion of credit, while VOCP has proven to be one of the most equitable programmes.⁴

The entire section's arguments are based on the apparent incident involving the misappropriation of land development loan while no concrete discussion of the credit programme is presented. The authors have attempted to manipulate data by not even mentioning the situation in Rabat Bala, which by 1990 had accessed medium and short term loans.

Agriculture/Crops/Horticulture/Livestock

An evaluation of the success or failure of a package can only be determined through the inclusion and analysis of all variables. Fruit nurseries may not have been successful due to lack of incentives tied to collective management, but nurseries were also used as demonstration plots for new seed varieties, planting techniques, etc., and one must investigate the impact of these variables before assuming failure.

Figures such as 95 percent livestock vaccination among households, the continuation of the poultry package, 62 percent use of new wheat and maize varieties, 50 percent use of new vegetable seeds, and new demands for vaccination medicines contradict the broad assumptions of 'failure' and the 'unsuitable' nature of the packages.⁵ The Heifer and Silage making projects were Research and Development (R&D) efforts. After due follow ups by the concerned sections these packages have been re-designed and are proving successful in other areas.

The work done under the forestry programme of AKRSP has not been mentioned at all in the paper.

³See internal Credit and Savings Section Records.

⁴See K. K. Qamar, 'VO Banking: Issues and Practices', Gilgit Region, AKRSP 1993.

⁵See M. H. Khan (1989).

Women in Development

Appropriate technology, especially nutcrackers and butter churners were in R&D phases. The decision to place appropriate technology items with office bearers is with the WO, not AKRSP. All other comments relating to WID are selective, ignoring the successes in poultry and vegetable growing, where women have a much greater role.

Conceptual Model

The basic concept is to organise communities around economic activities because past experience clearly demonstrates that small farmers remain organised when the flow of benefits is regular. Once these organisations gain experience and competence then they can diversify into the social sector. The recent move by the Northern Areas Administration to implement the primary education and rural water supply components of the Social Action Programme through the VO/WO framework illustrates this point. AKRSP's demonstrated strength has been its institutional model.

Economic Model

The authors conclude that the AKRSP economic model is unsuitable to the village economy and that it is biased toward the 'rich'. While this may still be the opinion of the authors, more comprehensive assessments of AKRSP would indicate that there is some value in AKRSP's approach. The AKRSP model has been replicated in Balochistan Rural Support Programme, National Rural Support Programme, Sarhad Rural Support Corporation, GTZ/LB&RD Mardan Integrated Rural Development Project, Kalam Integrated Development Project, and the replication of the AKRSP model throughout South Asia, with the UNDP support. The impact of AKRSP on public policy has totally been ignored.

Future Directions

Even if it can be assumed that the AKRSP model has 'failed' in a community, it is better to learn the specific lessons of this situation and not to translate the findings into much broader generalisations.

Some Final Observations

At best this paper is descriptive, failing to incorporate analytical issues and concerns. The approach of the paper is static in nature which renders it less

relevant to capturing the dynamics of an integrated rural/community development programme. Rather than testing hypotheses and drawing conclusions, this paper uses selective data within a doctrinaire framework, thus, leading the readers to draw conclusions about the programme that may not be valid and contributing little to serious development research.

UNDP,
Islamabad.

Shoaib Sultan Khan