

Taking Action for the World's Poor and Hungry People

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SPEAKER SUMMARY NOTE

Session: How to Design, Implement, and Scale Up Action for the Poor and Hungry

Keynote Speaker: *Kamal Hyat*, Chief Executive, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, Pakistan

Title: How can interventions be effectively designed and implemented in environments where limited human and institutional capacity poses a key constraint?

In order to address the question “**How can interventions be effectively designed and implemented in environments where limited human capacity and institutional capacity poses a key constraint?**” I thought it best to share the lessons that we learnt from the experiences of the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund whose principal objective was to alleviate poverty on a national scale, especially in rural areas.

The first important and critical question was how to design a structure that would be able to fulfill the objectives of the programme. The design stage is crucial for any project as it is at this juncture that the basic pillars that will support the future edifice of the institution are determined.

It is not necessary to reinvent the wheel, and studying “best practice” institutions that may have already performed well is a good way to begin. In our case we blended two models - one from Pakistan, The Agha Khan Rural Support Programme, which had worked in the remote areas of the northern regions with vulnerable and poor communities and produced excellent results. The other was the PKSF, an apex organization in Bangla desh which was set up to build the capacities of micro credit retail institutions in order to serve the poor.

The main lesson we learned from a study of the Agha Khan Rural Support Programme in Pakistan and the PKSF in Bangladesh was that instead of following the conventional top-down approach it was more suitable to reverse the order. This would mean that decisions affecting the lives of the poor would now be taken by the communities themselves rather than from a distant bureaucracy unfamiliar and unconcerned about the problems of the people.

In the light of the above success stories the Government of Pakistan decided to set up the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund as the lead Apex institution for reducing poverty in the country at the grassroots level. The methodology adopted by the PPAF was to work through civil society development organizations that had links with rural and peri-urban communities and could best serve their aspirations and interests.

Our first task therefore was to assess the capacity and competency of the civil society partners to carry out their mission and objectives in a professional and cost effective manner. This entailed a detailed understanding of the organization in order to become familiar with its strengths and weaknesses. Once this was accomplished the capacity and competency gap would become clear, and the necessary steps to correct the situation could be put in place.

The above presumes of course that the necessary human resources are available within the Apex institution to carry out a proper need assessment. In the case of the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund this problem was resolved through two important policy decisions taken by the Board of Directors at the

conceptual stage. The first of these was to have a very lean and manageable structure so that it would not be difficult to acquire the requisite number of executives from the market place. This policy was further refined by ensuring that the process of recruitment was to follow a transparent, merit based system so that only the best candidates were recruited.

The second policy decision which was to form the basis of PPAF interventions, was that civil society partners must be the principal drivers of the project with the PPAF playing the role of an enabling facilitator. The introduction of this policy meant that the partners of the PPAF must also ensure that their human resource development and induction policies followed the same pattern as adopted by the PPAF. This was comparatively a more difficult task taking into account that there were a substantial number of civil society development organizations working with the PPAF.

It was in this context that we decided that the best way for the PPAF to assist the partner organizations in developing a professional management cadre was to provide an opportunity for them to be exposed to best practice development initiatives both within Pakistan and abroad. This turned out to be an exceedingly effective and quick way of transferring knowledge and avoiding mistakes that could be costly in the future.

Having ensured that through the process of training and exposure visits adequate capacity had been built within the PPAF and the partner organizations we had now reached a point where we could tackle our main concern, namely the building of the capacity of the poor and vulnerable. The first step for this was the initiation of the social mobilization process, which may best be termed as the catalyst which starts the process of change by providing a platform from where the concerns of the poor and vulnerable can be articulated together rather than as isolated voices seeking personal redress.

The end result of this mobilization process is the identification of activists within the village community and the formation of semi-formal community organizations, of men and women, which democratically elects a president, a general secretary, and a treasurer to take forward the aspirations of the members. With the formation of the community organization it is now possible to invest in human capital, and to arrange a series of interventions and training programmes, which help in both reducing poverty, and preparing a well trained cadre of competent professionals dedicated to serving their own local communities.

Having given this brief background in relation to the manner in which the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund approached the problem of building human and institutional capacities in remote rural and peri urban environments we will now describe how the proposed interventions were actually implemented.

The main components of the programme are the provision of micro-credit, community physical infrastructure and health and education facilities. These were to be delivered to the communities through a network of partner organizations working in different regions of the country.

However the key component of the PPAF programme was the Capacity and Institutional building facility. This would ensure that proper training and quality inputs for developing the human resource base of the institutions was firmly in place before disbursing funds or implementing projects. The training programmes were introduced both for the civil society development partners and their communities.

As a consequence of these trainings the civil society partners who previously had little technical knowledge or understanding of preparing coherent and well structured business plans were now able to do so. The plans submitted formed an integral part of the formal agreements between the PPAF and the civil society partners, and clearly set out the targets and deliverables.

Once the groundwork had been accomplished it was extremely important that it should be consolidated by a proper implementation mechanism. We have already talked about the importance of design for successful implementation of projects and we may now add to this the necessity of rigorous monitoring

and evaluation. Without this effort all the preceding hard work of training and building institutions could very easily be lost.

The PPAF followed a two pronged approach in respect to its monitoring and evaluation policy. On the one hand it prepared an extensive training programme for its own executives, and coupled this with regular visits to the field and back to office reports. Similarly it chalked out training programmes for the partner organizations and communities so that they may be able to monitor and evaluate their own interventions. Presently the PPAF is engaged with several leading research institutions to carry out a detailed third party evaluation of the interventions undertaken over the last seven years.

To conclude I am pleased to say that the PPAF as of today has built the capacities of seventy partner organizations which are actively working in twenty seven thousand villages and hamlets of Pakistan. In addition, 13000 village infrastructure schemes have been initiated and we enjoy a 100 percent recovery of our micro credit loans.

Though much has been accomplished in the fight against poverty, there is still a long way to travel before we reach the end of our journey.