Participatory Development Praxis: A Case Study from Pakistan's Punjab

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I. INTRODUCTION

A programme, which began with the goal of overcoming poverty in rural Punjab within a decade, is historically unprecedented in this province for both its magnitude and complexity of effort. It was therefore clear from its inception that the PRSP would have to bring together a talented team of managers, each of whom could combine creativity with commitment. The challenge was to create a work culture in which this creativity and commitment could be sustained through an intensive work schedule and collective synergy. Since we were facing a unique set of circumstances in each of the eight regions where we started work, it was necessary to develop a management system that permitted sufficient space to each member of the team for independent thought and action, while at the same time, creating an environment for collective reflection and conceptualisation through which we could deepen the quality of social action. This report attempts to present the principles underlying the initial management style and work procedures of PRSP, while also reporting on the strategic plan we devised through initial field visits, the objectives we specified for the programme and the remarkable results that were achieved in the first four months.

MISSION STATEMENT

Overcome poverty in rural Punjab within a decade by actualising the potential of the poor through a regional support system. This system shall be designed to enable organisation of poor village communities, through rediscovery of community consciousness, and provide access to skill training, credit and technical support. The purpose of such a support system is to initiate and sustain a process of diversified growth of income and the human, natural and economic resource base of the poor.

II. LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Overcoming poverty in rural Punjab is fundamentally a process of empowering the poor to actualise their creative potential. Such a profound social change, if it is to be

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sustainable, involves tapping into the specific cultural wellsprings of creative consciousness of the Punjab peasantry.

The peasants of Punjab may be poor, but they are inheritors of a rich cultural and philosophical tradition, which is reflected in their forms of apprehending social life, their poetry and folklore. Through their forms of love and social action the Punjab peasants express their dreams and sorrows, and make their individual and collective history.

The consciousness of the poor peasantry in rural Punjab has been deeply influenced by the Punjabi Sufi saints. This can be seen in the folklore and experiential reference points of contemporary language use in rural Punjab. Six inter-related elements of the Punjabi Sufi tradition may be relevant to the PRSP endeavour:

(1) The growth of the self involves a transcendence of the ego through a relationship of love (*ishq*) with the "other".

Tuun hi tanna tuun hi banna
Rum rum wich tuun
Kahey Hussain faqir saain da
Ma nahi sub tuun

You are the woof and you the warp
You are in every pore
Says Shah Hussain Faqir
Naught am I, all is you
                    [Shah Hussain, 16th century]

(2) The practice of *ishq* involves combining passion with rigorous rationality.

Hathi ishq mahawat Ranjha
Unkess de de horriay

Passion is the elephant
That Ranjha guides with his
Sharp spear of reason
                    [Shah Hussain, 16th century]

(3) The true stature of a person therefore is measured not in terms of what he owns, but what he *gives* to others.

Lakh crore jinha de juria
So bhi jhoori jhoori
Bhatth pai teri chadar chiti
Changi faqiran de bhori

Those who have accumulated
wealth in countless coins,
That too is dust, mere dust
Cast your white cloak into
the fire
Better is the mud coloured one of
The Faqir
                    [Shah Hussain, 16th century]

(4) By the same token the more developed a person's consciousness; the more he locates himself in the collective being of the community

Saadh Sangat dey ohley rehnday
Budh tinhaan di soori

The Faqirs have their being in the
togetherness of the Community
For their consciousness is in full
bloom

[Shah Hussain, 16th century]

(5) The process of growth of the self therefore is progressive integration with the community:

   (1) *Shah Hussain Shahadat Paenn jo maran mitraan de aggay*
   (2) *Mitraan di majmani khatar dil da lahoo bali da.*
      1. Shah Hussain they have achieved eternal life, who sacrifice themselves for their fellow men.
      2. As an Offering for your fellow men burn the blood of the heart.

[Shah Hussain, 16th century]

(6) Dialogue is conceived by the Sufi as a process of *mutually fertilising reflection*, which so enters consciousness, that it becomes the basis for existential choices and action.

Gal oh keeti saaday khiyal pai
Pai wo nibhai loriyay
   What you say has entered my
   consciousness,
   So, now my being seeks its
   fulfilment

[Shah Hussain, 16th century]

These elements of the Sufi tradition are deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Punjabi peasantry. They lie just below the surface of language use in their silences as much as the cadences of their speech. Najam Hussain Syed, (perhaps the greatest Punjabi Sufi poet of the 20th century) has referred to this subliminal consciousness of the peasantry:

   (1) *Kitay chup dhalaiaan utte dhol marindi-e-unnakhi*
   (2) *Door kidaen chaitay de kandhiaan uttey rehi ranjhan taendi chhan*
   (3) *Chup ohley chaeh lai bhathi-e-unnakhi kolon buch buch langay saray*

      1. Somewhere on the slopes of silence
         beat the drums of the unsaid
      2. Far on the banks of memory falls
         your shadow, Ranjha

3.   Behind the coverlet of silence,
       the unsaid crouches, we slip past,
       trying to avoid it

[Najam Hussain Syed, 20th century]

Once this counter consciousness of love and relatedness, of integrity and creative action, is brought to the surface, a new recognition and previously dormant set of values come into play. The challenge in the dialogues undertaken by PRSP was to bring about this gestalt switch in consciousness, through word, gesture and work procedures.

The awakening of this consciousness in however nascent a form, was seen in the work of PRSP to be a material force for social change.   One of the important factors in the rapid growth and depth of CO formation in the PRSP is that this consciousness was tapped during the dialogues.

DEPLOYING CONSIOUSNESS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Six inter-related elements of the Punjabi Sufi tradition may be relevant to the PRSP endeavour:

1.   The growth of the self involves a transcendence of the ego through a relationship of love (*ishq*) with the "other".
2.   The practice of *ishq* involves combining passion with rigorous rationality.
3.   The true stature of a person therefore is measured not in terms of what he owns, but what he *gives* to others.
4.   By the same token the more developed a person's consciousness, the more he locates himself in the collective being of the community.
5.   The process of growth of the self therefore is progressive integration with the community.
6.   Dialogue is conceived by the Sufi as a process of *mutually fertilising reflection*, which so enters consciousness, that it becomes the basis for existential choices and action.

III. PASSION, PARADIGM, AND PRAXIS

Consciousness, Organisational Structure, and Work Procedures

The defining feature of the program is the passion, which impels those who work in it and those for whom we work.   It is not just an emotion but a form of consciousness. It comes from transcending the ego and relating with the community through love.   Thus, passionate consciousness is both a cohering force of the community and also the synergy through which the PRSP team engages in a process of action and reflection. This principal is the basis of the work culture and the methodology of action of PRSP.   It is illustrated by the dialogues that occur between PRSP personnel and rural communities, on the one hand and between the members of PRSP team on the other.   The dialogues are designed to identify and actualise the creative potential of individuals.

The form of learning and creative growth pursued by PRSP through its dialogues can be called *prophetic* as, opposed to *messianic*.[1] The messianic leader/teacher/manager is one who claims to embody the truth and if his followers want to become something they can only be his shadows. By contrast, the prophetic leader/teacher/manager is one who abnegates his own exceptionality and recognises each individual as the unique origin of change. The participants in the dialogues whether between PRSP and a community or within PRSP itself, are essentially co-equals in a journey of actualising each other's creative potential in the context of social change.

The organisational structure reflecting the messianic approach is hierarchic and restricts the space for independent thinking. Its work procedures involve issuing instructions or blindly implementing them. By contrast the organisational structure associated with the "prophetic" approach is non-hierarchic, designed to provide space for thought and action by autonomous individuals in collegial interaction. Its work procedures instead of being a simple dichotomy between instructions and compliance, are designed for mutually fertilising dialogues, action and collective reflection.

Alternative Paradigms and the Methodologies of Action

The paradigm of the PRSP in its initial phase was a framework of thought and action, which has been called Participatory Development.[2] This is exactly opposite to the paradigm, which has been followed by development practitioners in this country during the last 50 years. Since Pakistan's independence, the idea behind development actions was that the poor are victims to whom certain goods and services have to be delivered. This is the "top-down" paradigm. In the past, governments at best tried to develop administrative mechanisms through which goods and services could be handed out to the poor. It is now widely recognised that such an approach has not worked because in the process of delivering goods and services, a large part of the resources get lost enroute, while poverty is reproduced after some time. The problem of the lack of goods and services for the poor is the result of the fact that they are locked into a system of dependence at the local and national levels. The dependence of individual members of poor village communities originates in the fact that they are fragmented and alone. They have neither the skills nor the resources to increase their productivity, nor the organisational strength through which to acquire resources from governments, donors and the market. The Participatory Development paradigm by contrast aims to enable the poor to organise, acquire new skills, increase productivity, achieve savings, and develop the ability to access training, technical support and credit from a variety of institutional sources.

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[1] See, David Cooper: *The Death of the Family*. Akmal Hussain: The End of Teaching, *Weekly Viewpoint*, Lahore.

[2] Akmal Hussain: *Poverty Alleviation in Pakistan,* Vanguard Books (Private) Limited, 1994, page-26. Also see: Ponna Wignaraja, Akmal Hussain, Harsh Sethi, Ganeshan Wignaraja, Participatory Development: Learning from South Asia, Oxford University Press and United Nations University Press, 1991.

Counterposed Approaches to Leadership/Management/Teaching

Messianic	Prophetic
Leader/ manager/ teacher claims to embody the truth and if his followers want to be something, they can only be his shadows.	Leader/manager/teacher abnegates his own exceptionally and recognises each individual as the unique origin of change.
Organisational structure is hierarchic in which space for thinking is restricted.	Organisational structure collegial (non-hierarchic), designed to provide space, for thought and action by autonomous individuals.
Work procedure involves issuing instructions or unthinking implementation.	Work procedures designed for mutually fertilising dialogues, action and collective reflection.

IV. THE PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM[3]

Elements of the Participatory Development Paradigm

Participatory Development is a process which involves the participation of the poor at the village level to build their human, natural and economic resource base for breaking out of the poverty nexus. It is specifically aims at achieving a localised capital accumulation process based on the progressive development of group identity, skills development and local resources generation. The essential feature of Participatory Development is social mobilisation or the formation of group identity. This is done by initiating a series of dialogues with rural communities, which can result in the formation of community organisations. The beginning of the process is therefore the emergence of a nascent form of community consciousness. This is then deepened as the community identifies and implements projects for increasing income, acquiring new skills and begins to engage in collective savings.

As the sense of group identity is deepened it gives a new self-confidence through which the community can engage in more ambitious projects involving collective action and management.

The concept of Participatory Development has three key elements:

(a) Process: It is a process whose moving forces are the growth of *consciousness* and group *identity,* and the realisation, in practice, of the creative potential of the poor.

(b) Empowerment: The process of reconstructing a group identity, of raising consciousness, of acquiring new skills and of upgrading their knowledge base, progressively imparts to the poor a new *power* over the economic and social forces that fashion their daily lives.

It is through this power that the poor shift out of the perception of being passive victims of the process that perpetuates their poverty. They become active forces in initiating interventions that progressively improve their economic and social condition, and help overcome poverty.

[3]This section is drawn from: Akmal Hussain, *Poverty Alleviation in Pakistan*. Vanguard Books (Private) Limited, 1994, pages 26, 27, 28.

(c) Participation: The acquisition of the power to break the vicious circle of poverty is based on *participation* within an organisation, in a *series* of projects. This participation is not through 'representatives' who act on their behalf but rather, the actual involvement of each member of the organisation in project identification, formulation, implementation and evaluation. It is in open meetings of ordinary members at the village/mohalla level organisation that decisions are collectively taken, and work responsibilities assigned on issues such as income generation projects, savings funds, and conservation practices in land use, infrastructure construction and asset creation.

The Dynamics of Participatory Development

The process of participatory development proceeds through a dynamic interaction between the achievement of specific objectives for improving the resource position of the local community and the inculcation of a sense of community identity. Collective actions for specific objectives such as a small irrigation project, building a school, clean drinking water provision, or agricultural production activities can be an entry point for a localised capital accumulation process. This is associated with group savings schemes, reinvestment and asset creation. The dynamics of participatory development are based on the possibility that with the achievement of such specific objectives for an improved resource position, the community would acquire greater self-confidence and strengthen its group identity.

The Implementation Mechanism

A rural support system that enables:

(i) Organising village communities and rediscovery of community consciousness.
(ii) Access to credit.
(iii) Access to skill training.
(iv) Access to technical support from:

– Government line departments,
– Donors,
– Other NGOs,
– Autonomous bodies

V. GOAL

Overcome poverty in rural Punjab within a decade by actualising the potential of the poor through a regional support system. This system shall be designed to enable organisation of poor village communities, through rediscovery of community consciousness, and provide access to skill training, credit and technical support. The purpose of such a support system is to initiate and sustain a process of diversified growth of income and the human, natural and economic resources of the poor.

VI. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME

Organise approximately 1.63 million households, into approximately 29,681 community organisations with approximately half of them female COs, in 13,629 villages, to achieve 100 percent coverage of the poor population in the target regions.

On the basis of a series of dialogues with COs, identify a portfolio of diversified income generation projects in agriculture, livestock, micro enterprises and small-scale infrastructure. Through implementation of these projects, achieve a 50 percent increase in income levels of the poor population in the target region in five years, on a sustainable basis.

Enable the provision of training to 107,372, men and women amongst the poor population in the target districts over the five-year period, in the following fields:

Community Management, Livestock, Agriculture and Forestry, Poultry, Technical/Industrial Training, and Micro-enterprise development.

On the basis of social mobilisation, skill training and provision of technical support, provide credit of Rs 6.66 billion to Rs 486,240 beneficiaries over a five-year period, and achieve 95 percent pay back.

Achieve a savings fund of COs of approximately Rs 428.51million in the target regions.

VII. VERIFIABLE INDICATORS

In a programme whose defining feature is to enable the formation of community organisations and the development of community consciousness, the most important verifiable indicator is the number of community organisations formed. A CO is deemed to have been formed only when it has acquired the ability to hold regular meetings (at least three) with proper documentation of the meetings and to have opened a savings account with contributions from each of its members.

The number of CO meetings held (with over sixty percent attendance) becomes the second indicator and the amount of CO savings is the third indicator of programme performance.

Household level, portfolio of investment is developed by the regional teams through detailed dialogues with communities. These portfolios of investment indicate the income generating activity that households wish to undertake. The obstacles to undertaking such projects and successfully completing them are identified. The number of portfolios of investment completed, thus becomes the fourth indicator of programme performance.

The basis of the credit appraisal of a portfolio of investment is the assessment of their viability first by the CO and then by program staff members. Credit disbursements therefore represent collective evaluation of individual projects and become the fifth indicator of program performance.

Training needs in the context of both household level projects and collective projects are identified as an essential element in the process of localised capital accumulation. Training needs are identified on the basis of dialogues between program personnel and COs. The number of persons trained in various fields thus becomes the sixth indicator of program performance.

Finally, credit payback performance indicates not only the success of income generation projects but also the capacity of the CO to bring to bear its collective identity in ensuring timely payback of borrowed money by the individual households.

In the long run the ability of COs to design and implement collective projects and to resolve social conflicts at the CO level would become an important indicator of program performance.

VIII. PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

Programme Performance Dimensions

THE QUANTITATIVE DIMENSION

In the period July to October 1998 we had, by the Grace of God, not only established eight regional teams in our target divisions but also formed 764 community organisations with a collective savings fund of Rs 2.758 million. We had disbursed Rs 22.41 million of credit to 1403 beneficiaries in a wide range of fields including agriculture, livestock and micro-enterprises. The pay back credit was 100%. We trained 782 village level activists in fields such as community management, livestock, agriculture, poultry, public health and light engineering.

THE QUALITATIVE DIMENSION

A change began to take place in the quality of life of the rural poor in the areas of our operation. I had occasion to talk with communities in all the eight regions. The hope that we had kindled and the love that I received from them deeply moved me. Across the eight regions, the organisation of poor village communities and the start-up of income generation projects not only gave a new confidence and collective purpose in many cases but also significantly increased their individual incomes. Beyond the income dimension I noticed, for example, in Multan a village community reported that they had begun to settle their disputes within the CO and had even resolved amicably the disputes, which they had earlier registered at the local police station. A women's CO in the same area set up a girls school indicating the beginning of collective action for the collective benefit of the community.

LINKAGES FOR TECHNICAL SUPPORT

The Department of Livestock and Dairy Development was mobilised by our, RGMs to provide training to village activists in improved livestock management, the epartment of Agriculture was mobilised to give advice on pesticide use and the Department of Health was mobilised to provide their expertise at a community managed health camp. Private sector firms such as AEFFCO was linked up with PRSP, to conduct workshops with COs for training in soil testing and use of composite fertiliser for the precise nutrient requirements of each field. Similarly, NESTLE Milkpak was approached to provide information on increasing yields of milch animals.

Programme Performance and Verifiable Indicators

Table SP-1 shows programme progress in terms of verifiable indicators specified in Section VII. A total of 764 COs were formed during the period July–October 1998, including 542 male CO's, 211 female COs, and 11-mixed Cos.

An indication of the management capability and early state of community identity formation was the fact that collective savings amounting to Rs 2.578 million were achieved, including Rs 2.397 million savings amongst male COs and Rs 0.18 million savings amongst female COs. Payback performance on credit so far is 100 percent.

A total of 1,838 CO meetings were held with over 60 percent attendance. Credit amounting to Rs 22.141 million was disbursed during the period, including Rs 20.878 million to male COs and Rs 1.263 million to female COs.

A total of 782 person were trained in a variety of fields such as community management skill training (CMST), livestock, agriculture, industrial and technical.

Software Development for PRSP

At PRSP, the importance of using Information Technology in Financial and Credit Operations was felt at a very early stage. A computer specialist was appointed who was supported by the Computer Systems Department of Sayyed Engineers (Private) Limited[4] on a gratis basis, under the guidance of the Honorary Chief Executive Officer, to cater to the specific features of PRSP operations: A decentralised accounting system in which social mobilisation, CO formation and a wide range of individual and collective activities were important elements.

The Financial Accounting System was installed in all the regional offices. The development of a Credit Control System was completed and trial run of this system was initiated. The following is a brief description of these systems.

(a) *Financial Accounting System*

The Financial Accounting System of PRSP was installed at all regional offices in October 98. Financial data was fed into this system on a daily basis. This system was running free of errors since we received the computerised monthly Trial Balance report from all regional offices.

There are three important reports that can be generated from the Financial Accounting System:

– Trial Balance
– Comparison of Budgeted vs. Actual Expenses.
– Month-wise comparison of Actual Expenses.

(b) *Credit Monitoring and Information System*

Credit Control System is a core system for PRSP because it can not only help to record and maintain data but it also helps in analysing, the information like technical

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appraisal and the sources of income of the borrower. The system has a wide scope since it is linked with Financial Accounting as well as Social Mobilisation.

A significant advantage of this system is the ease with which loan repayment schedules can be prepared specifically catering to the gestation period of each project. Moreover Credit Control Officers will be able to inform and remind Social Organisers and subsequently Community Organisations about dates of their repayments a week ahead.

Technically, this system will consist of master databases of borrowers, Community Organisations where credit has been disbursed and two transaction files to record the disbursements and recoveries. The system can generate reports to summarise the loan information by Type of Loan, by Community Organisation, by Social Organiser, by field unit or by regional office. On the other hand, it can take care of the more complex jobs of Credit Control Officer, like Bank Reconciliation, preparation of Income Statement and preparation of Loanee Ledger.

IX. CONCLUSIONS

In the period July to October 1998 we had, by the Grace of God, not only established eight regional teams in our target divisions but had formed 764 community organisations with a collective savings fund of Rs 2.758 million. We had disbursed Rs 22.41 million of credit to 1403 beneficiaries in a wide range of fields including agriculture, livestock and micro-enterprises. The recovery rate of credit in the first four months was 100 percent. Training was imparted to 782 village activists in community management skills, agriculture and livestock.

Underlying this quantitative achievement in terms of verifiable indicators, was the fact that a change began to take place in the quality of life of the rural poor in the areas of our operation. I have had occasion to talk with communities in all the eight regions. The hope that we have kindled and the love that I have received from them has deeply moved me. Across the eight regions, the organisation of poor village communities and the start-up of income generation projects have not only given a new confidence and collective purpose in many cases, but have also significantly increased their individual incomes. For example, small household *durri* producers in one region were locked into an exploitative relationship of dependence on *arhtis.* The *durri* manufacturers were provided with raw materials at higher than the market prices by the *arhtis* and *durris* were acquired by the *arhtis* at less than market prices. After PRSP intervention, these *durri* manufacturers now buy raw materials and sell *durris* independently leading to an increase in their incomes typically from about Rs 2,500 per month previously to about Rs 4,500 per month now. Similarly, in other regions, poor households set up small village retail shops, acquired buffaloes, small goats, set up bicycle repair shops and *Chikkh* producing units. A total of 1403 households benefited from such interventions. Beyond the income dimension I noticed, for example, in Multan a village community reported that they were beginning to settle their disputes within the CO and even resolved amicably the disputes, which they had earlier registered at the local police station. A women's CO in the same area set up a girls school, indicating the beginning of collective action for the collective benefit of the community.

We have also succeeded, by the grace of God, in establishing linkages with government line departments and the private sector to bring their expertise to bear for poverty alleviation at the village level.   For example, the Department of Livestock and Dairy Development has been mobilised by our RGMs to provide training to village activists in improved livestock management, the Department of Agriculture has been mobilised to give advice on pesticide use and the Department of Health has been mobilised by our RGM in Lahore to provide their expertise at a community managed health camp for 650 members of various COs. In the private sector arrangements have been made with AEFFCO leading to the holding of workshops in our regional offices to inform CO members about the importance of soil testing and how a composite fertiliser that is congruent with the nutrient requirements of each farm can increase yield per acre by 15 to 50 percent. AEFFCO has offered to do soil testing in our target areas and provide custom-made composite fertiliser to farmers on demand. Similarly, Nestle Milkpak have been persuaded to offer their services to show to poor farmers how a scientific mix of cattle feed can both reduce the costs of feed and double milk yields of buffaloes and cows. They have also offered to pick up milk from villages on a pilot basis initially at Sahiwal.

In short, across the eight regions of the Punjab, the seed was planted of community organisation, improvement in incomes, skills, systematic provision of technical support at the village level, and a change in social consciousness. We witnessed the tentative beginning of a silent revolution in the lives of the rural poor in the Punjab.

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