

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Note for Record

Shoaib Sultan Khan
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The Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) kindly organized a programme of visit to IDPs for me in Mardan and Charsadda on June 17, 2009.

I had hoped that Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) involvement in emergency relief and rehabilitation on a scale like the 2005 earthquake would never be repeated. It was indeed heart wrenching to find SRSP again being sucked into a tragedy of similar proportions in 2009.

Despite its meagre resource but with the help of UNHCR, more than 40,000 families comprising over 250,000 persons, have been distributed nonfood items (NFIs) over 17,000 families have been provided transit facilitation at 5 locations and over 6,000 families have been provided transport facilities. In collaboration with UNHCR, SRSP is also embarking on construction of kitchens alongside tents, shading of tents for protection from summer heat, construction of Parada Wall around blocks of IDP habilitation for privacy and construction of waiting sheds. Almost 83% of SRSP assistance for IDPs has come from UNHCR amounting to Rs. 157 million.

The second chunk of assistance amounting to 6% has been donated by Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) for setting up 3 Skills Training Centres in Sheikh Yaseen Camp and construction of two temporary schools in the same camp with an outlay of Rs. 12 million. The vocational training centre imparting training in plumbing, electrification, carpentry etc., alongside a women sewing centre and a daycare-cum-girls and boys school, was the brightest spot that I saw set up by SRSP with PPAF assistance, in the otherwise depressing and desolate Sheikh Yaseen camp where 17,000 families have sought shelter.



AusAid, IDRF, ICCO combined have provided 5% of assistance amounting to less than rupees nine million.

Through good offices of the Chairperson SRSP, more than ten million rupees of direct donations to SRSP and indirect assistance facilitated by SRSP has been provided to IDPs. Punjab has been in the forefront of this assistance through SRSP.

The bulk of the relief and assistance to IDPs is being provided by local residents. I met one of them Mr. Fazle Akbar of Saleem Khan village who initially looked after hundreds of IDPs alone from his own resources and then approached Chairperson SRSP who happens to own some land next to his house and both of them pooled resources to help the unfortunate victims of Swat tragedy coming to the area till SRSP came up with NFI assistance and private donors gave money for a food package of Rs.7,000 per family, sufficient for one month. Fazle Akbar took me to a school where he had accommodated 16 families comprising 80 persons, including the family of a Nazim of a union council from Mingora. Some distance away another eight families had been accommodated in a derelict building.

The plight of these men and women, who had been uprooted like a bolt from the blue, was indescribable. The story of a teenager boy whose mother was slaughtered in front of his eyes because she used the money Taliban had given to buy a Burqa, used it to buy food for her starving son and daughter and how the boy lost his sister when

running away as she fell to death in a ditch. Fazle Akbar's brother was now looking after him.



The two lost eight years old girl and her four year old brother being looked after by Mohammad Ejaz, whom we met at the Charsadda Sugar Mill Camp of IDPs, was only the tip of an iceberg of the problem of lost children. The girl told us when the bombs starting flying over their heads and firing started all around them, a neighbour of theirs put all the children who were playing outside their houses in a van and sent them off to Sheikh Yaseen Camp. One day her little brother strayed away from the tent, where they were accommodated with others and she went out in search of him. Having found him, she could not find her way

back, when Mohammad Ejaz espied them lost on the Mardan-Charsadda road and took them under his refuge and is determined to reunite them with their family and look after them as long as necessary or even for ever.

The malmastia of the Pakhtoons (tradition of hospitality) has saved the IDPs otherwise 93% of them would have nowhere to go. But how long this hospitality the hosts of IDPs can afford. Many of them are poor themselves. Some way has to be found to help the host families to enable them to keep on looking after the IDPs till their return.

The vagaries of weather is another issue needing urgent attention and the future of IDPs accommodated in schools, which in a couple of months, will have to be vacated, after extensive repairs, to be readied for teaching.

The most recent problem seemed to be the arrival of new IDPs for whom there is no place in the camps set up in the area accommodating 260,852 IDPs. SRSP facilities transportation provided by UNHCR but the tired and traumatized IDPs have to knock from one camp to the other being refused entry for lack of space. There is urgent need for setting up additional tents for the new arrivals.

However, the most distressing and the most volatile problem is the registration of IDPs. The registration done by different agencies came up with a figure of 4.49 million IDPs which when filtered through NADRA got reduced to 1.9 million. Without an urgent solution of this matter, the IDPs will continue to suffer untold misery. The agencies/departments involved in registration should come to a consensus on registration. Pending consensus, help and assistance of all kinds should at least be extended to the IDPs whose registration appears not in dispute and has been included in NADRA list. The IDPs left out of the list can later be added after due verification. Currently except for WFP food assistance, all other types of assistance by donors seems to be on hold, pending resolution of the registration issue.

I would earnestly beseech the authorities to resolve the registration issue at the earliest to mitigate the sufferings of the traumatized IDPs.
