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# Humanitarian Leader

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**Innovatively addressing localisation: Pakistan's Sarhad Rural Support Programme**

MASOOD UL MULK



# THE HUMANITARIAN LEADER:

## Innovatively addressing localisation: Pakistan's Sarhad Rural Support Programme

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# Abstract

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The humanitarian work of the Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP) in turbulent north-western Pakistan is an interesting example of how local organisations evolve, adapt, build their capacities and go to scale. SRSP has tackled the limitations of existing humanitarian architecture in implementing localisation by addressing issues like organisational capability, risk, capacity building, trust and best fit approach. This paper explores how SRSP's management, systems, policies and community outreach show a deep commitment to the marginalised segments of its population and demonstrate downward accountability, while also being upwardly accountable as registrants under Pakistan's company law, which sets stringent, internationally acceptable standards for financial accountability and protects the organisation's autonomy against predation from the government and politicians. Its approach to capacity building has been incremental, and built around hands on problem solving, and its program design has been based on iteration, learning and adaptation. The SRSP's work also highlights how good local intermediaries can link the international system to a vast outreach of communities.

## Leadership relevance

*One of the reasons advanced for the slow pace of localisation is said to be the weakness of local organisations—their lack of capacity and organisational capability, their inability to take risks, issues around accountability, their small scale, etc. This study demonstrates to humanitarian leaders how strong local organisations can be built, using the Sarhad Rural Support Programme as an example. In this organisation, the process of capacity building is centred around problem solving and is incremental in nature. In the 35 years of its organisational life, SRSP has not used any expatriate staff or consultants. By adopting a 'best fit' approach, SRSP humanitarian programs fit easily into their environment and can grow in size and scale. SRSP smoothly fills gaps when international organisations withdraw. There is lot of rhetoric around helping to build local organisations, but there is a lack of attention paid to those that build their own, and SRSP deserves its achievements to be recognised, celebrated and replicated.*

## Introduction

The humanitarian work of Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP)—a non-profit NGO operating in the turbulent north-western regions of Pakistan—is an exemplary case study of how local organisations evolve, adapt, build their capacity and take their programs to scale. Founded in 1989, SRSP worked as a community development organisation for the first 16 years of its life, before it was compelled to add humanitarian work to its portfolio after the repeated humanitarian crises in the region.

Over the next 19 years, SRSP tackled the limitations of the existing humanitarian architecture in implementing localisation, by addressing issues like organisational capability, risk management, capacity building, adherence to humanitarian values, upward and downward accountability systems and building trust with the communities. SRSP has adopted a ‘best fit’ approach to humanitarian work, which measures contexts within their social and cultural environments and has resulted in remarkable success for the organisation, as expressed by the results on the ground.

The scale, diversity and outreach of SRSP’s humanitarian programs in addressing the 2005 earthquake, the 2007–16 Internally Displaced Person crisis, the 2010, 2015 and 2022 floods and COVID-19 in 2021 can be glimpsed in the following figures. It has helped build about 60,000 houses and 23,000 shelters; undertaken registration of 621,000 families; provided non-food items to 869,000 individuals; built and improvised 2,808 infrastructure projects in drinking water, irrigation and communication; rehabilitated 719 schools; reached 61,000 women and adolescent girls through protection programs, gender-based violence, and women empowerment interventions; distributed 28,000 metric tons of food; and undertaken advocacy at the national and international level (See SRSP website, 2024; Bureau of Statistics Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2024; Asian Development Bank, 2022).

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***[SRSP is a] demonstration model for other local and national organisations engaging with the international humanitarian architecture, and a case study for global organisations looking to support their local counterparts.***

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This paper explains the history, context and achievements of SRSP as a humanitarian organisation and accounts for factors that have contributed towards this success, both as a demonstration model for other local and national organisations engaging with the international humanitarian architecture, and a case study for global organisations looking to support their local counterparts.

## The context: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)

SRSP works in the turbulent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The province stretches along the northwest frontier of the country, and shares a porous, 2,640 km long border with Afghanistan. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is 74,521sq km and has a predominantly Muslim population of 40.8 million.

The people are mostly Pashtuns, with a sprinkling of other smaller ethnic and linguistic groups. KP is basically a tribal society, and conservative tribal values dominate the way of life, affording very little public space to women. The region has seen conflict since 1979, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, leading to mass migration into Pakistan. The American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 led to serious outbreak of conflict, with Taliban intrusion into the area. Bombs blasts, suicide attacks, kidnapping, and population displacements have been a regular feature of life here since then. The border regions see a lot of smuggling and livelihoods are subsistence oriented. There is seasonal migration to cities and the Middle East, which generates remittance income—a big source of livelihood in the region. There is potential for tourism in the mountains as well as mining minerals.

Out of the 38 administrative districts of the province, eight lie in the tribal region. These districts have been the centre of the regional war and have very poor economic and social indicators—the result of long historical neglect. The literacy rates in the province are 53%, with literacy rates for men being 73%, and 37% for females. Infant and maternal mortality rates are high and access to hospitals is very poor.

The unemployment rate is among the highest in the country and the overall poverty in the province stands at 40.7% (Bureau of Statistics Khyber Pakhtunkhwa website, 2024; Asian Development Bank, 2022).

## The organisation: Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP)

The organisation was established as a nonprofit NGO to undertake community driven development work in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan in 1989. It was registered under Pakistan’s Company’s Act.

The idea for SRSP was inspired by the community driven work of Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) in the northern mountain regions of Pakistan, and the leadership of SRSP at the Board level was provided by Mr Shoaib Sultan Khan, the founding General Manager of AKRSP. He was joined by some eminent civil servants, members from the media, and civil society.

The program was based on the idea that the communities had the capacity for self-help which could be tapped for

their development. It was believed that could be catalysed by an organisation that was people centred, and had flexible, adaptive learning and accountable systems to tap into social capital and generate trust. SRSP planned to do this by mobilising communities into groups and training their leaders to take on leadership responsibilities, while providing technical and economic assistance to the organised communities to address their common problems.

In its 35 years of life, SRSP has grown from a small organisation to a large, respected and credible organisation. Its journey has been an emergent one, taking the opportunities as they came along to further its mission.

Over the years, SRSP has developed competencies in community mobilisation (44,500 community organisations, with one third of these women-oriented), and community infrastructure development (10,955 infrastructure projects benefitting 2.5 billion people built at the cost of Rs 10 billion). Its infrastructure work has covered areas like drinking water, irrigation, roads, bridges, sanitation, schools, and micro hydro electricity generation. An additional 524,000 people have been trained under its human resource and vocational training programs; and it has distributed micro finance and community banking funds amounting to Rs 2 billion to 135,000 households. It has also established programs in small enterprise development, value chains, gender-based violence and female empowerment. At the policy level, SRSP has advocated for community institution building and poverty alleviation through the Rural Support Network, which brings together sister organisations working across Pakistan.

SRSP has had 6,400 staff, including 4,313 professionals. It has worked with 73 international and national donors on 293 projects and raised total funds amounting to Rs 47.1-billion.

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***Its [SRSP's] flexible systems, multiplicity of organisational structures and emergent policies have helped the organisation adapt to changing political governments, and to many diverse humanitarian crises in different regions of great physical, cultural and political diversity.***

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Long term survival and sustainability has been seen as an important capacity for the organisation. A fund for this purpose has been built up through contributions by the government, institutional costs and services. This has enabled SRSP to retain good staff, build their capacities and preserve institutional memory and organisational stability over a long period of time. It has also used the fund to leverage over 25 billion rupees of humanitarian

assistance from international sources. Its flexible systems, multiplicity of organisational structures and emergent policies have helped the organisation adapt to changing political governments, and to many diverse humanitarian crises in different regions of great physical, cultural and political diversity. It has coherently dealt with a highly complex and uncertain environment, winning space to operate and filling gaps where both national and international organisations failed to work. After 16 years as a community driven development program, it readily adapted its work to incorporate humanitarian work after the earthquake of 2005 (SRSP publications, 2006-23).

## **Humanitarian crises in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)**

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has undergone humanitarian crises of different types for the last three decades. These are briefly described as follows.

### **2005 earthquake**

In the earthquake of 2005, the official death toll was 87,380, including 19,000 children. Around 38,000 people were injured. 3.5 million people were rendered homeless. 780,000 buildings, including housing, schools and hospitals were destroyed, as was drinking water and irrigation infrastructure and roads. 250,000 farm animals died. SRSP's program area in Abbotabad, Mansehra, Battagram and Kohistan were badly hit (Relief Web, 2006).

### **IDP crisis**

From 2008-9 to 2017, military operations against insurgents led to the displacement of 6.8 million people. 2.8 million of these were displaced from Malakand Division districts of Swat, Buner, Dir and Shangla, while four million were displaced from the tribal districts of Mohmand, Bajaur, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North and South Waziristan. It is estimated that 15% of the people decided to reside in camps, while the other 85% went to reside with host communities or with relatives or in rented houses. 95% of infrastructure, including schools, health facilities and roads were damaged. Women and children suffered the most at the start of the displacement and during the displaced period they were more prone to protection, health and education issues. Livelihoods were totally disrupted. Most families returned to their homes by 2017 when the operations wound up (Human Rights Commission, 2010; *The Guardian*, May 2009).

### **2010 floods**

In 2010, monsoon floods hit Pakistan, killing 1,700 people, affecting 20% of the land area and impacting 20 million people. The floods caused billions of rupees' worth of damage to infrastructure, housing, agriculture and livestock. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, 1,068 people died, and 912,999 people were displaced. In the 13 most severely affected districts, over 52,000 cattle died, over 5,000 acres of crops were destroyed, and 191,215 houses were damaged (Government of Pakistan, 2011).

## COVID-19

In Pakistan, 1.6 million cases of COVID-19 were reported, leading to 30,000 deaths. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province had 140,000 cases and 4,400 deaths. There was vast unemployment as businesses shut down and in households there was a higher incidence of gender-based violence. School shutdowns and pressure on health centres all contributed to the misery of the people (www.worldometers.info, 2024).

## 2022 floods

The summer floods of 2022 led to the death of 1,739 individuals. 2.1 million people became homeless in Pakistan and over 897,000 houses were destroyed. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 18 districts were affected, leading to 600,000 households being displaced and 320,877 houses being destroyed. 7,742 cattle were killed. There was massive destruction of small infrastructure at the community level (World Bank, 2022).

## Afghan refugees

Between 1979 and 1988, between 4-5 million Afghans sought refuge in Pakistan because of the Soviet War. By 2002, 5.2 million had returned to their homeland. Pakistan still hosts 2.8 million refugees of different status, and 58% of these live in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. There are 800,000 individuals with proof of registration and 500,000 unregistered Afghans. Another 600,000 Afghans moved to Pakistan after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. Initially, Afghan refugees moved to rural areas and settled in villages. There are 43 Afghan Refugee villages in the province throughout 18 districts. Over time, they have increasingly moved to urban areas in search of better livelihood opportunities. The influx of Afghans has overburdened the already meagre services and facilities in the host communities and caused friction between the locals. Living conditions are poor, with limited WASH facilities and poor hygiene practices leading to waterborne disease and infections among children and women (Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees/Safron, 2024).

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## SRSP's humanitarian programs

The devastation caused by the earthquake of 2005 convinced the SRSP Board that it had to move into humanitarian work to address the needs of its community members. Since then, the organisation's humanitarian portfolio has continued to expand, reaching almost half of its development portfolio.

The scale, diversity and outreach of SRSP's humanitarian program can be judged by the following summary of its work:

- SRSP has worked with 31 international and four national donors to deliver humanitarian programs. The financial portfolio of this program is over Rs 26.5 billion.
- Reconstructed or built 2,808 infrastructure projects in irrigation, drinking water, sanitation, bridges, and mini-hydros to benefit 1.6 billion individuals at the cost of Rs 3 billion in humanitarian crisis hit areas
- Reconstructed 83,908 houses and shelters at a cost of Rs 8.5 billion. This included rebuilding over 60,000 houses to World Bank standards after the earthquake in 2005 under funding by Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund
- Assisted 42,724 individuals with training in heavy machinery, solar panels, electrics, plumbing, mobile, tailoring, motor mechanics, hand embroidery, cooking etc.
- Provided 224,233 individuals with health care facilities through medical camps and the rehabilitation of 109 Health Care Facilities
- Provided 869,666 Non Food Items during relief phases
- Registered 621,651 families during IDP crises to enable them to access humanitarian assistance
- Distributed 28,943 metric tons of food among 317,781 families to ensure food security
- Distributed Rs 1.6 billion among 509,351 individuals under Cash for Work programs
- Provided 1.2 million individuals with WASH interventions with a financial outlay of over Rs 1 billion
- Reached 61,000 women and adolescent girls through protection, GBV and female empowerment programs.
- Targeted Afghan Refugees with WASH, education and health programs

SRSP has also advocated for humanitarian causes at national forums and high-level meetings, including at the IVCA conference at Geneva in 2007; at the Cambridge Humanitarian Forum in 2010 and at the 2022 International Humanitarian Leadership Conference at Deakin University in Melbourne (SRSP publications, 2006-23).

## The strength strong local organisations bring to humanitarian work

Over the first 16 years of operation, SRSP incrementally developed considerable outreach and trust in the communities where it was working, and had put in place management, financial, human resource, procurement, audit and organisational value systems that were trusted by international and national donors and other stakeholders. When called upon to undertake humanitarian work, these systems were already at the disposal of management.

SRSP keeps in view the perceptions and needs of its communities. It does not divide its work into two neat

and rigidly divided parcels, one called 'humanitarian' and the other 'development'. It sees them as overlapping. For most communities, reconstruction begins on the day the disaster hits them. An irrigation channel or a drinking water pipe or a mini hydro power project that was destroyed cannot wait for the relief phase to be over before work begins on it.

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In the earthquake of 2005, 15 out of the 18 union councils requiring housing reconstruction in the Mansehra/Battagram/Abbotabad districts were assigned to SRSP. These union councils had serious landlord-tenant and housing ownership problems complicating the compensation issues. SRSP managed these issues successfully because of the credibility it enjoyed in the communities. It helped communities rebuild over 60,000 houses in a program funded by the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) and World Bank.

SRSP has also demonstrated that the best way to reach grassroots community groups is to access them through strong local intermediaries, who play a role in nurturing them and linking them with service providers. Studies have shown that small local NGOs lack the capacity to reach a large number of community groups, while large and strong intermediary organisations such as SRSP reach thousands of community groups. It's a myth that community groups come up on their own and do not need the support and nurturing of intermediaries. While there were hundreds of small NGOs working in the earthquake area, the reconstruction of houses had to be undertaken by SRSP in 15 out of 18 union councils because it had the competencies and outreach within the communities to do it (Carroll, 1992 and Mulk, 2006).

International experience said that those hit by the earthquake should be moved into large camps established by aid giving organisations, but SRSP could see very early that conservative values and a desire to be near their homes would prevent people from moving to these camps. It therefore took the initiative of establishing 27 local community camps for over 28,000 people near the villages, which were more culturally acceptable to the communities (Mulk, 2006).

After floods in Chitral District in 2015, SRSP found that several hundred community-maintained irrigation channels had been severely damaged in the floods. Since these channels were built by the communities, they did

not show up on figures for damaged infrastructure and were denied help; but SRSP found them critical for the livelihoods of the people in the region. It was able to convince the government to use the funds available under the European Union (EU) funded Community Driven Local Development Project to address the issue promptly. EU agreed with this suggestion because addressing people's immediate needs and finding a local solution to a local problem was the spirit behind the program. Strict adherence to the development-humanitarian divide would have been at the cost of the communities.

The IDP crisis began in 2007-08 and lasted till 2017. The serious threats to the lives of aid workers compelled international and national organisations to move out of KP. SRSP decided to stay and fill the gap created by this withdrawal, ensuring that services would reach millions of displaced people, handling a very large UNHCR operations warehouse for almost two years. SRSP also had to undertake the registration process of millions of IDPs when a helpless government requested it to do so. All this was possible because of SRSP's deep commitment to helping people in distress, its competencies and its ability to better understand and handle risks.

The security situation and stringent rules for operations greatly reduced the space for civil society operations in conflict areas. From its experience, SRSP saw that one factor that went against the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) was their failure to balance the hardware (or brick and mortar) and software components of their programs in these regions. For example, most international organisations focused on the software components of WASH programming—like hygiene and washing hands—while SRSP stressed addressing drinking water constraints alongside a handwashing program. Security agencies examining the work through a security lens would usually attribute agendas to organisations that did not balance the two components, because they failed to comprehend why washing hands was a priority when drinking water was not available. By balancing the two, SRSP found its acceptability higher among security organisations and it demonstrated to the humanitarian organisations how to win operational space in difficult areas. SRSP handled the civil-military relationships in the region without compromising its integrity.

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SRSP has also been able to address Gender Based Violence issues by changing project terminologies and processes

to make them culturally sensitive while dealing with displacement in North Waziristan tribal areas.

Similarly, while SRSP was able to pinpoint that the poorest communities had no hesitation about standing in long queues to receive tents during the displacement crisis, some of the classes that stood slightly higher in the social hierarchy found it very difficult to do so because of 'shame culture'. They would only turn up late at night to receive their tents and a more humane way had to be found to help them.

These instances demonstrate how SRSP's localised background and approach helped find innovative solutions to poorly understood humanitarian issues and how it filled gaps that international organisations could not (SRSP publications, 2005-2024).

### Organisational capability and values

The organisational capability for a mission driven and purposeful organisation comes from its commitment and ability to implement this mission. SRSP was fortunate to find a highly committed, respected and credible Board of Directors, motivated by a desire to help the poorest in the society. These were eminent men and women from civil society, academia, media and government (who joined in their individual capacity).

Together, they brought experienced leadership to the Board and balanced the need for good governance with a willingness to give sufficient autonomy to the management to enable it to build up a program in a highly complex and uncertain environment. Their deep commitment to marginalised groups ensured that the organisation never lost focus. The value of giving primacy to the needs, opinions and views of the communities remained paramount for the organisation. The Board was deeply committed to the philosophy of community development and disallowed any deviation from it. But when the earthquake hit the program areas in 2005 and conflict and floods subsequently devastated the region, the Board agreed to allow the management to initiate humanitarian programs. The humanitarian imperative to help fellow human beings in distress moved them. Over the next two decades, as the program area continued to be hit by the IDP crisis, floods, COVID-19 and the refugee crisis, humanitarian programs became an important part of SRSP's work.

While the humanitarian imperative drove SRSP's Board to undertake humanitarian programs, it must also be noted that the ideals of impartiality, neutrality and independence were already part of SRSP's value system. The organisation operates in societies that are deeply riven by social hierarchies, caste, ethnic and linguistic divisions and political polarisation and it was practical to remain impartial, neutral and independent (SRSP publications, 2005-24).

### Long term capacity for survival and sustainability

One of the challenges that faces CSOs in the 'Global South' is the absence of a critical capacity, which we call "the long-term capacity for survival and sustainability" (Banerjee, 2006). Most organisations live from project to project and fail to retain staff, build up their systems and policies, and readily lose institutional memory. Donors rarely provide institutional support to build this capacity. The SRSP Board of Directors understood that this weakness was a major stumbling block in building up organisational capacity. For this reason, from the first day the Board focused on building a 'long term survival and sustainability fund' for the organisation that would bridge the financial gap between projects and also enable the organisation to think long term. In 2007, SRSP's Board of Directors was able to convince the government to provide a fund of Rs 700 million rupees for exactly this purpose. The fund was provided as a grant and created much-needed institutional stability. The terms of the fund ensured that the autonomy of the organisation was not compromised, and enabled SRSP to leverage more resources. It also enabled it to retain staff and institutional memory for long periods of time. The Board also took the decision that international organisations would be charged institutional costs for projects SRSP implemented on their behalf. The Board did this because it thought that international and multilateral organisations discriminated against local organisations by not paying such costs to them. It also understood that international organisations were not in a position to refuse this because of their dependence on SRSP for delivery of humanitarian aid in difficult conditions (Bannerji, 2006).

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### Laws under which civil society operates

In Pakistan, CSOs are mostly registered under three laws: the Societies Act; the Cooperative Act; and the Company Act. Most small organisations register under the first two laws because the registration process is simple and the accountability requirements few and weak. SRSP decided to register as a not-profit company under the Company Act. The process of registration under this



Act is cumbersome and the accountability requirements both expensive and stringent. Internationally acceptable standards of financial accountability have to be maintained. But registration under the Company Act has its advantages too. It protects the organisation against traditional predation by the government and politicians and organisational autonomy is protected under the law. Repeated attempt by vested interests to reduce its autonomy have failed because of the laws that govern it (SRSP publications, 2005-2024).

### Relationship with government

The SRSP Board of Directors decided to invite the government to sit on its Board to help build trust and to ensure that the government is fully in the picture about the work it is undertaking. The Board thought this was important because the size and spread of SRSP's program was such that it could evoke suspicion, jealousy or envy. The presence of the government on the Board also gives the Board credibility with donors. The government therefore sends ex officio representatives to the Board (although it remains in the minority). This has ensured that the autonomy of the organisation is protected, and policies and staff appointments are not controlled by the government. It has also meant that SRSP has successfully worked with 10 different provincial governments over 35 years, which is not normal in a region where organisational relationships with the authorities can break down with every change in government.

### Adaptive policies

The Board is comprised of people who have had long experience of management and public service. While they focus on governance, they also ensure that management has considerable autonomy to handle very difficult, uncertain and complex environments. One good example of this is that the Board understands that human resources policies should be made with awareness of the context in which the organisation is operating. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a deal-based, rather than rule-based society. Individual relationships, networks and ties are important in making or breaking organisations and programs. While working in some of the tribal areas, a balance had to be found in addressing local sensitivities around tribes and communal issues when selecting and placing staff. Failure to do that has resulted in some good international organisations being forced to withdraw from the area. While the goal remains to create a rational merit-based organisation, the importance of incorporating local sensitivities into the process is kept in mind and organisational policies reflected this.

Another example is that SRSP is not the best paying organisation in town. Its salaries are on the lower side when compared with international organisations and many national organisations. In the early years,

international organisations would rush in after each crisis and start poaching SRSP staff by paying them higher salaries, disrupting the work of the organisation. To overcome this, the SRSP Board developed a flexible policy of remunerating staff. When faced with a crisis situation, SRSP management is allowed to change its compensation policies to protect it against poaching until things return to normal (SRSP publications, 2005-24).

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### Retaining institutional memory

SRSP's donors have described one of the strengths of the organisation as its ability to win the loyalty of its staff. This is because of its institutional stability, as well as its policy of retaining staff and reassigning them to new projects. While it is not the best paid organisation in town, it compensates for this by creating an organisational environment where staff are intrinsically motivated. This ability to retain staff for a long time has also helped preserve institutional memory and retain local and regional knowledge about the different areas that staff have worked in, which has given SRSP an advantage when it comes to implementing programs. On a number of occasions, SRSP has been asked to implement large projects in a short timeframe when donor projects fail to take off. This capacity comes from SRSP's deep knowledge of the local environment, and of different contractors and communities and stakeholders. It has helped the organisation manage risk in a better and more efficient way, because implementation is not done in abstract, but is based on ground realities.

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Unlike international organisations, SRSP's competencies are multidisciplinary and extend across a broad spectrum. This enables it to work with communities through an

entire humanitarian life cycle—whether it is providing relief, undertaking registration, arranging transportation, or helping with reconstruction. Social mobilisers are at the interface of the organisation and the communities, and are always present, creating a sense of trust and ownership for the organisation. In Alai region of Mansehra, dozens of offices of international and national NGOs were burnt down by tribesmen after a dispute in 2006 while reconstruction efforts for the earthquake victims were ongoing. SRSP teams were allowed to come back within days because of the trust they enjoyed.

### Iteration, adaption and learning in the field

In view of the complex and uncertain political and social environment in which SRSP operates, the diverse needs of the communities it serves, its multi-disciplinary competencies, and the numerous donors and projects it works with, SRSP adopts highly flexible systems and a multiplicity of organisational structures and emergent policies to deal with various situations. The principle of subsidiarity is widely practiced in the organisation, which allows the staff who are nearest to the problem being addressed to make decisions. Program designs are based on the principles of iteration, adaptation and learning, which has allowed SRSP to totally avoid the use of international and national consultants. Instead, organisational capacities are built through innovation and problem solving in the field.

A good example of this practice was when SRSP found that the large tents provided for earthquake, IDP and flood hit areas (which were considered international best practice for schooling) were not suitable for the harsh climatic conditions. The SRSP Engineering Section was then asked to come up with prefabricated structures that would use local materials and skill sets, be able to handle the harsh climatic conditions, be built within a short time, meet education department standards, and last for at least ten years. Over the next ten years, SRSP piloted, built and advocated building of these improvised prefabricated schools, improving the models through iteration and adaptation, incrementally changing them at each stage in each different crisis according to local requirements, and winning recognition and funding from international donors and the Pakistan Education Department for taking the model to scale. In due course, the designs of the schools were improved with supervision from the

Engineering University and international firm, Halcrow. The first schools built under this experiment have now lasted 17 years and are still being used. More than 50 schools were built under this program.

Another good example is when SRSP built cable cars capable of assisting people to cross rivers in flood hit areas, helping thousands of people before longer-term arrangements were made. In one area, it was found that the cars were still being used by hundreds of school children, because six years after the floods, a damaged bridge had not been rebuilt.

Similarly, in Khyber, SRSP has encouraged communities to use cash for work programs to build and sustain agriculture and forest nurseries which would help the communities in climate adaptation—92 nurseries have been established here (SRSP publications, 2005-24).

### Conclusion

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***The experience of the Sarhad Rural Support Programme demonstrates how local organisations can grow in the humanitarian field, and how many of the perceived shortcomings of localisation, such as organisational capability, capacities, systems and mechanisms, can be built through an incremental process of problem solving, innovation and learning.***

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The experience of the Sarhad Rural Support Programme demonstrates how local organisations can grow in the humanitarian field, and how many of the perceived shortcomings of localisation, such as organisational capability, capacities, systems and mechanisms, can be built through an incremental process of problem solving, innovation and learning. The lack of these competencies is no excuse for not furthering the localisation agenda, but instead an opportunity to nurture and support organisations willing to develop them. SRSP shows how a win-win situation can be created for donors, local organisations and communities through new ways of thinking.

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