Report for the RDPI Kashmir

Observations and Recommendations

By
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A. Observations

1. The observations and recommendations (in bold) given below are the result of: i) a visit to the rural areas around Gari Duppata and Bagh in Kashmir from December 25 to 27, 2006 and meetings with communities and CBOs/NGOs in the area; ii) meetings in Islamabad with RDPI staff and Practical Action on 07 March; iii) visits to Muzaffarabad 07-08 March, 2007 during which meetings were held with DRAK-ERRA, the UNDP and the NGO Istafada. Visits were also made to the village of Korri where meetings were held with the community; iv) an RDPI arranged workshop on relevant Pakistan issues related to their work on 09 March 2007; and v) a planning workshop on March 10, 2007.

2. The main problem with reconstruction and rehabilitation of the earthquake affected areas is related to governance. The governance system is highly centralised and leaves little decision making and implementation processes at the local level and in the hands of communities. Ideally speaking identification of damage and its documentation, disbursement of funds with the involvement of communities, management and coordination of aid from NGOs or government agencies, should have been organised at the level of the union council. There are 212 union councils in the entire earthquake affected areas. Their population varies between 2,500 and 20,000. Their size is just right for decentralised planning and implementation. If these union councils could have been made the centres from which funds were disbursed and reconstruction efforts were organised it is possible that families would not have had to open bank accounts and get identity cards; tenants would not have been deprived of rehabilitation funds; and businesses and agriculture would have been supported with finances. In addition, an efficient governance structure at the local level which could have been replicated all over Pakistan would have taken shape. Also the ERRA structure by replacing the functions of local government departments, have considerably weakened the normal structure of governance in the earthquake affected areas.

   The RDPI should see whether effective decentralisation can be promoted in the ERRA structure and local government institutions can be made more responsible and effective.

3. One of the important issues that we were supposed to look at was related to identifying traditional architecture and seeing whether its technology could be used for reconstruction purposes. However, we did not find any architecture that was older than 35 years. The architecture of the Dogra period has completely vanished. A listing of heritage in the earthquake affected areas is being done by Mrs. Yasmin Cheema of the Conservation and Rehabilitation Centre, Lahore, for the Prince Claus Fund Award. It may be useful to get in touch with Mrs. Cheema. From what I gather much of the heritage she has identified is in the NWFP and consists of religious buildings and shrines and is in the urban areas. However, there were trading communities in the rural areas living in clusters. There is a need to identify such clusters so that a search for "traditional" architecture of the region can be initiated. Much of the architecture of Kashmir which is "traditional' and has been documented by various researchers is the architecture of the state, religious buildings and of the elite. It is not the architecture of rural communities. As such, I feel that the RDPI should not involve itself in such a research but should "support" those already engaged in it.

   It should be noted that the region of Bagh, Gari Duppata and Muzaffarabad is not Kashmiri speaking and has a close affinity to the Hindko speaking areas of the NWFP and the Potohar Plateau. The people are similar and so is their culture and architecture.

4. All families in the rural areas that I have visited over the years build their houses on their farmlands. This was not so previously. The reason for this is the fragmentation of society and the slow decay of clans, extended families and traditional community organisations. These changes are the result of a development of a remittance economy leading to a decreasing interest in agriculture and traditional livestock raising practices.

   There are serious ecological and socio-economic repercussions of this trend. These include the loss of valuable agricultural land; difficult in the provision of physical and social infrastructure to service scattered housing units; security issues; and further fragmentation of society leading to difficulties in creating effective community organisations.

   What has emerged as a result of our discussion with house builders and families is that the trend is increasingly to living as nuclear families and that the social repercussions of the earthquake have increased this trend considerably. There is a need to understand this trend and its repercussions and see if they can be addressed and by whom.

5. Most of the pre-earthquake houses have 12" to 18" stone walls laid in and plastered with *gara* mortar Their roofs consists of heavy beams, often 12" x 15", with wooden planks and 12" to 15" *gara* laid on them. People say that it was these beams that caused the deaths and it was the *gara* under which people were buried. The manner of making *gara*, its local name and its ingredients have been noted by Shah Sahib. The rooms are

invariably 14' x 14' and the verandah in front of them is 8' to 10' in width and supported on timber posts. We have not been able to understand why the rooms are 1' x 14'. There must be a reason. Plans of these houses were submitted by me in my note of 28 December 2006.

Another important feature of these houses are their beautifully carved ceilings and large cupboards that cover entire walls in the rooms and in the kitchen. In the rooms they are used for storing beddings and clothes and in the kitchen for storing food grains and dairy products. In the new houses being built, these cupboards are still built but they are of a design similar to those being built in the urban areas of Pakistan.

Skills for building these older houses were easily available in rural communities and tradition had established a relationship between owners, artisans and suppliers of material. Most owners had participated in building their own houses. In addition, there was a tradition that the house builders would arrange for food for his neighbours during construction and they would join him in the building process. Costs of skills were affordable. Some figures have been given by the families visited. These too could be made a part of the report.

Another important aspect that needs to be looked at is the insulation value of these houses as opposed to those of the new houses. This could be ascertained simply by finding out how much timber was used in the old houses and how much timber is used today for heating purposes.

In the Bagh region there is a perception that houses built in "dhajji" construction have not collapsed. A detailed study of the "dhajji" tradition, technology and existing techniques needs to be carried out and rationalised. This could lead to the development of a small manual in Urdu.

A number of old buildings that were not built in dhajji construction and did not collapse were also visited by us in Bagh. These buildings were built in timber post and beam construction with light weight timber partition walls ad with the external walls built in timber reinforced 12" stone masonry. A documentation of these buildings would also be very useful. I have already sent some photographs of them.

The doors, windows and ceilings of these pre-earthquake houses are beautifully carved. They are being reused in the new construction. **The identification of craftsmen who can still do this work is necessary as well along with the constraints that they and the owners face in continuing this tradition.**

6. The post-earthquake architecture of the areas we visited is the product of fear and is the result of a design for a temporary structure promoted by ERRA. These houses consist of a concrete plinth and concrete block walls upto plinth level. Above that there is a timber frame with GI sheet walls and GI sheet roofs. The house owners hope to have an

internal lining of plywood or timber planks in the roof and walls. It will not be good insulation although plywood sheets are cheap and easily available. The rationale behind this form of construction is that since it is light weight and tied together it will not cause harm in case of an earthquake. **However, if this architecture persists, it will completely change the built-environment of Kashmir and increase the use of timber as fuel for heating. The repercussions of this trend need to be understood and documented.**

Based on this documentation, the best and cheapest methods of insulation using local materials need to be developed and promoted. Also, people no longer see these "temporary" houses as temporary. They wish to improve them and use them as "permanent" houses. How best this transition can be achieved is also a subject of research and extension. Another aspect is lobbying with ERRA to get it to agree that these "temporary" houses should be considered as "permanent" and finances for them should be released by ERRA to the house owners.

The ERRA guidelines and technology have a lot of problems and these too need to be documented. First, the technology is far too expensive. Second, the transport of imported building materials such as sand, crush stone, cement and steel from the plains to the mountains increases their cost. Then they have to be transported from the ERRA yards to inaccessible locations where construction is taking place. This transportation is by jeeps or by donkeys. I think Shakoor Sahib and Shah Sahib have made extensive notes on this subject. These could form a part of the report as well.

The specifications for building materials for cement concrete construction means that aggregate has to be imported from areas outside of Kashmir. The beneficiaries of this are people who belong to the areas where these aggregates are located and they are in control of the source, the transport and the sale of these aggregates. **What needs to be researched into is if there are other local sources of aggregate which can be used for concrete construction as an alternative to the important ones.**

7. The socio-economic changes that have taken place since 1947 till the earthquake are important. During this period, traditional community organisations became ineffective and subsequently died. Therefore, there are no effective *punchayat* or clan organisations any more. A remittance economy has replaced a subsistence agricultural economy. Agricultural produce has fallen and the area is now a major importer of wheat, corn, vegetables, fruits and consumer items. All these trends have increased after the earthquake. The old house plan consisting of the *baithak*, *andaroon karma*, *bahar ka karma* and the *dab* or winter sun shelter have disappeared. So have the activities related to story-telling, folk singing and get to gathers. Shakoor Sahib has made detail notes on the conversations that took place around these issues. Also, the local names for storage, trunks, *gara* plaster, etc were noted.

8. It is necessary to develop scenarios for the future. In case of the “no intervention” market driven scenario, there will be very destructive social, economic and environmental repercussions. It is possible that two years down the road there will be a famine in this area.

It is obvious that there should be an intervention. However, we need to clearly understand the objectives of that intervention before designing it. I strongly feel that the issue of the built-environment is related to the larger socio-economic issues that we have identified in our visits and discussions which I have tried to recap in the previous paragraphs of this note. A research, extension and training centre is required in the earthquake affected areas on the pattern of what we established in the form of Thardeep in the aftermath of the Tharparkar drought.

9. **A documentation of the pre and post-earthquake houses, the performance of the pre-earthquake houses in the earthquake, the various local names associated with their components and functions, the social and economic basis on which they were designed and built needs to be documented for prosperity.**

B. Recommendation for the Establishment of a Research and Extension Unit <u>in the Earthquake Affected Area</u>

10. I do not think that the recommendations suggested in the observations can be implemented by the RDPI and its partners unless a research and extension (R&E) unit is established covering one or two union councils in the area. This R&E unit can ultimately develop into a full-fledged organisation like the AKRSP or Thardeep. The union councils that are chosen for the pilot area should be small (population not more than 10,000) and should be far away from the main roads. This will guarantee that a more vulnerable population will be addressed in the pilot phase.

11. The function of the R&E unit will be to study the problems of the union council communities with their participation and develop solutions to these problems that communities can own and manage.

12. As a first step towards the possible setting up of R&E unit, two researchers should be sent to the identified union councils. They should live there for two months. During this period they should interact with the village communities and different stakeholders to identify issues related to socio-economic, administrative, physical and environment and ecology related conditions and their emerging trends. The researchers should keep a daily diary in which they note their activities and observations and on the basis of which they produce a fortnightly report which should be discussed at RDPI staff meetings.

13. During this two month period the researchers should also identify community activities, social organisations, persons active in the economy of the area and make profiles of

them. All existing relevant data and case studies should also be identified and be a part of the research.

14. After the two month period there should a workshop to determine future directions for the R&E unit.

15. Projects that have followed a similar direction to the one which is being proposed and which the RDPI can get in touch with are; i) KRSP; ii) Thardeep in Tharparkar; OPP; iv) Community Development Institute, Bangkok, Thailand. Contact person: Somsook Boonyabanacha, email address somsook@loxinfo.co,th; v) SPARC, Bombay India (important for its savings and credit programme). Contact person: Sheela Patel, email address is sparc84@yahoo.com. May be the researchers should acquaint themselves with these programmes and their methodology before commencing their research.