

March 14, 1990

TAS-UD-DEEN KURJI,  
CHAIRMAN, AKFC.

Dear Varas Sahib,

Enclosed herewith are some of my thoughts and ideas that I have put together after we went on the volunteer awareness trip to India and Pakistan in October-November 1989. I apologize for the delay in putting these ideas in paper. This was partly due to pressure of work, but it was partly a conscious decision. The reason for that is that I felt that if I had written down my ideas soon after the trip they would be quite coloured by the various emotions, physical fatigue and other factors that we encountered during the trip. I did not want that to happen. Allowing a few weeks to go by has been helpful in putting together these ideas as objectively as possible.

These are just my personal views. I apologize right at the outset if there is any error in any of the issues that I have raised. The purpose has not been to criticize, but to give constructive comments and to show my gratitude for being selected as one of the individuals to go on this trip. It was truly an experience of a life time for me. I am extremely thankful to Aga Khan Foundation Canada for giving me the opportunity. If in the future I can be of any help whatsoever to the Foundation activities, I will be most glad to do my best.

Sincerely yours,



A. Abdulla, M.D.

AA:mm

With fondest regards.

PAGE 2...

different backgrounds from Canada to India and Pakistan where there were significant problems of travel and communication, I would have to say that the trip was extremely successful in meeting its objectives.

The various areas that we visited were areas which were based on economies related to agriculture and livestock. There was extreme poverty in the villages that we visited. The level of education according to Western standards was extremely low. There were considerable problems related to living conditions and public health. Due to shortages of water and appropriate sanitation, considerable problems arose in areas of nutrition, growth and development of children, personal hygiene. The areas most affected were maternal and child health care needs. This was in a setting where the social economic conditions were extremely poor, there were areas of population over growth and poor living conditions.

The other major area of difficulty seemed to be related to extreme climatic conditions. Some of the villages we visited were in areas that were extremely arid, there was very little rain fall and temperatures were very hot throughout most of the year. Obviously the problems in this situation were related to water and crop irrigation.

Other areas that we visited showed extreme climatic conditions in the other direction where temperatures were extremely cold, people were living in mountainous regions where there was lack of cultivatable land. Here the problems were not only of lack of land available for agriculture, but also those related to water and energy. Traditional fuel sources were related to wood and with deforestation there was marked lack of timber. Electrical power either produced from diesel fuel or from hydro-electric projects was not available in most areas.

The next major problem area seemed to be related to transportation and communication. Most of these villages were extremely difficult to reach. Very poor transportation services were available between villages and also from the villages to the bigger cities. This posed problems locally where villagers could not get access to resources such as health clinics or local education centres. The problems of transportation and communication also cause difficulty in allowing external resources to reach these villages.

The next major area of problem that we saw was related to housing. Due to extremely low social economical conditions, problems of population overgrowth and lack of appropriate resources, housing was extremely poor. This led to increasing public health problems which ultimately resulted in poor nutrition and health standards of the villagers. This problem again had its major effect on maternal and child health.

PAGE 3...

The next area of problem that was recognized were those related to area of culture and traditions. Due to long standing traditions and cultural taboos, it was recognized that there was considerable inequity of work between genders. Women's needs and issues were very poorly addressed. Women tended to do a large majority of the work both in the home and in the agriculture and livestock areas. There was very little exposure or knowledge for women to get involved in other vocations or careers. It seemed that prior to the Aga Khan Foundation Network recognizing these issues, in the past there had been very little effort being made to see how various developmental projects or development programs would have effect within the village community particularly as it pertained to gender and interpersonal relationships based upon cultural and traditional issues.

Just taking an overall look at what we saw during the trip it becomes completely clear that the needs of the people that we visited are very great indeed, the problems are enormous related both to climatic conditions, low social economic level, lack of education, population overgrowth, low level of education worsened by lack of transportation and communication to various rural villages. It becomes very obvious to anyone who was on this trip that it is completely impossible for any one person or a small group to make any substantial difference in a positive fashion for the people who live in those areas. The only solution to improving their living conditions and giving their children a better future is to work through a very well organized, professional network that is dedicated to third World development.

I do not want to go into the details of the various villages and projects that were visited during this trip. The details of these projects are very well described in the information orientation kit that was provided by the Aga Khan Foundation Canada. Also the various professionals working on those projects have previously documented the technical details of these projects. I feel that there is no need for me to try and duplicate this at a much lower level of expertise. However what I would like to do is give insight into what we learned by visiting these villages or projects.

It became clear to me that there was a process of "need establishment" that was carried out right at the beginning between the Aga Khan Foundation rural support program (AKRSP) and the villagers. It seemed like the two parties established the need for any project together and a consensus was reached. This seemed to give the villagers a feeling of ownership and responsibility for the initiation of any of the developmental projects. The next step seemed to be the development of an organization within the village that would provide a structure for administrative purposes to oversee the initiation, completion

PAGE 4...

and maintenance of the various funded projects. These organizations have been termed "village organizations." The AKRSP seems to strive very hard to ensure local participation and ownership by the villagers in any of these projects. The next step seemed to be the need for development of skills within the local villagers pertinent to the particular project. Funding for the project would be facilitated by AKRSP either in the form of an aid, loan or collateral. The village organizations were taught techniques of savings, banking and marketing. Strong effort was made to utilize the resources available locally, collaborative efforts were made to coordinate activities with other nongovernmental organizations and with local as well as national government agencies. The Aga Khan Foundation Network provided direction, technical expertise, appropriate professionals needed for the projects. The AKRSP staff seem to be always there to guide them through problems and help them find local solutions.

The overall concept seems to be that of involving the villagers right from the beginning in establishing the need for various developmental projects. Giving them a sense of ownership. Improving their skills both for the administration and for the implementation of the projects. Planning seems to be organized in a fashion where AKRSP sees each project which has a definite beginning and a finite ending at which point the village organization would then take over the continued running and maintenance of the project at which point the AKRSP would extricate itself from that one particular project or village and then move on to another area where there expertise and need is established. There is a definite policy within the AKRSP that whatever projects are initiated in the third World, the local recipients should be able to take over the maintenance and the running of the project and the AKRSP should be able to terminate its involvement after a period of time and then move on to newer projects.

One of the other concepts that became clear to me on this trip was that those of us who live in the Western world and visit areas of third World which are in need of further development, we have a tendency to have preconceived ideas as to what their needs are and often tend to make hasty decisions as to what should be done for them. It was a real learning experience during this trip that in order for developmental projects to be successful in the third World, the need and understanding for these projects should come primarily from the recipients who live in these areas. They seem to understand their own special needs, there are problems of language and culture and there are problems of low education standard. The secret of Aga Khan Foundation Network success seems to be that they have people in their network who live amongst these people who are the recipients in the third World countries. These people who work for the Aga Khan Foundation Network are experts and professionals in

PAGE 5...

community development. Most of them have grown up in these areas and have lived amongst these people who are the recipients of the developmental projects. They can identify with their needs and have a good understanding of their local problems and cultural interactions. When projects are initiated after consensus between the local recipients and the AKRSP staff, there seems to be a real sense of ownership that develops amongst the recipient villagers.

Also the other issue which became clear during this trip is that those of us who go from Western countries to these third World areas should not be tempted to try and identify specific projects for development purposes. The reason for this is often times we do not understand the full ramifications of these projects as they pertain to long term maintenance, availability of local skills, need for future supplies and equipment that may be needed to continue to run these projects, impact upon the local society and environment. These issues seem to be all addressed by the AKRSP staff and the village organizations when various projects are being considered.

#### AGA KHAN FOUNDATION NETWORK

During this trip the status and functioning of the Aga Khan Foundation Network in India and Pakistan was quite evident. It seems to have a totally noncommunal approach with regard to race, colour, religion or language. The basic criteria for a developmental project seems to be recognition of particular need. The Aga Khan Foundation Network seems to have an excellent track record and there seems to be considerable respect for the organization amongst the villages that we visited. It seems to have an excellent network of paid as well as volunteer workers who live amongst the people in those areas and therefore identify with them very well. The Aga Khan Foundation Network utilizes a lot of the local resources, there seems to be good coordination between it and the other nongovernmental organizations and there seems to be good relationship with the local as well as the national governmental bodies. There seems to be good concern and care taken to look into the administrative structure of the village organizations and to determine the impact of various projects on the social structure within the village particularly as it pertains to women and children. The Aga Khan Foundation Network seems to have some real innovative ideas for training of local personnel. Fair amount of the training seems to occur locally at field level. It also organizes skill development of individuals by sending them to other areas for extra training and arranging for them to come back to the villages for future leadership roles.

The development of women's organizations in the various villages seems to have been a very positive step in allowing women to take part in decision making in areas that effect them

PAGE 6...

or the household particularly.

From the way the organization functions, it appears that a fairly high percentage of the donated funds seem to be used for actual, direct benefit of the developmental projects and therefore go to benefit the villagers directly.

The professional staff that we met within the Aga Khan Foundation Network seemed to be well experienced and seemed to have good expertise in rural and community development.

Due to the AKRSP track record, there seems to be a very good acceptance of this organization amongst the villages that we visited. There seems to be mutual respect and trust between the village organizations and the AKRSP personnel.

PAGE 7...

MESSAGE TO BE DELIVERED BACK IN CANADA UPON RETURN

First, with the use of slides and audio-visual material, the Canadian public should be made aware of the enormous nature of needs and problems that exist for these people in the third World. With discrete examples, the emotion and personal experiences should be related in small group sessions to give colleagues and friends a good understanding of what we experienced during the trip in India and Pakistan. The idea should be to awaken their social conscience and to make them feel involved and initiate a drive within them to want to participate in the improvement of living standards for the people of the third World. The purpose is to kindle a desire for them to participate in this developmental process.

We should, however, make them aware that it is very difficult for us living in the West to be able to identify specific needs for the people in the third World. We should make them aware that it requires considerable expertise and planning for various projects to be initiated and implemented. For this to occur there needs to be a group of professional people with good experience working in the third World environment. This group must have an excellent network amongst the various villages to be able to implement any of the projects.

During these sessions, the message should come quite clearly that anyone individual really cannot make any significant difference in a positive fashion. If any individuals feel the desire to participate in the developmental process, they somehow need to work through well organized networks that have the experience and knowledge of community development and rural development in the third World. The process is not simply of donating particular pieces of equipment or building schools, but much more complicated than that.

In these sessions the idea should emerge that the most logical way of participating in the developmental process and making a contribution would be to work through one of these organizations which is well established in the third World. Of the many organizations that do developmental work in the third World, the Aga Khan Foundation seems to be particularly well suited to achieve these goals in the countries where it works.

This message could be spread in various formats.

1. It is best done in small "social" groups. Discussions could be held with friends, colleagues, members of social clubs and various contacts within the community. Appropriate use of slides and audio-visual material prepared by the Aga Khan Foundation office would be extremely helpful.

PAGE 8...

2. The other way where people in the West could be helpful would be to help in the arrangements of training or skill improvement for individuals who come over from the third World. This could be by arranging apprenticeship type training such as for lab technicians, pharmacy assistants, child care workers, bookkeepers etc. Such apprenticeship type training could also be arranged within the third World countries themselves for people to go from rural areas to the urban centres. Using contacts and influence would help with admission for colleges or Universities. Funding could be obtained for scholarships. Help could be provided for lodging of these individuals for short periods of time when they come over for skill development and improvement.

3. I think the major area of involvement for the individuals on this trip would be to help with Aga Khan Foundation activities as it pertains to fund raising. In this regard, effort should be made to improve the network of fund raising within the Canadian community at large rather than concentrating within our own community (Jamat). The reason for this is that members of our own community are already considerably burdened by the need for various fund raising and donations for projects that are totally communal. Therefore, these activities of Aga Khan Foundation which are international and totally noncommunal, should involve the Canadian public at large when it comes to fund raising. These fund raising projects are best done again in small groups with "cohort sessions." This would be bringing together group of individuals who work in similar areas so that discussion can be carried out with ease. In order to give recognition and feeling of accomplishment to various groups certain projects could be "adopted" by these groups. They would then be kept apprised of the initiation, implementation and maintenance of these projects. They would get satisfaction out of the regular information available as to the benefits reaching the recipients in the third World countries. Future awareness trips would then involve members of these groups who would go over and actually first hand see the benefits to the villagers from projects that they had funded or initiated. Donors have to be made to feel as participants in the developmental process. They have to be given due recognition and have to be kept abreast with the progress of various projects that their funding is helping implement.

PAGE 9...

#### PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS ENCOUNTERED ON THIS TRIP

1. The size of our group seemed to be a little too large to be able to achieve the objectives for this trip. This made transportation difficult, it made communication between various members of the group difficult and led to disorganization at certain times.

2. The group was also made up of individuals with very varying backgrounds. They came from different parts of Canada. They had different degrees of involvement in the AKFC. Therefore they had different levels of knowledge of the functioning of the Aga Khan Foundation Network. They seem to have different personal objectives and motives for the trip. These objectives were sometimes in conflict with the original objectives of the trip itself. The level of commitment of the individuals on the trip was also quite diverse.

3. Due to the above mentioned two limitations, it became difficult to keep on schedule for various project visits. It became difficult to coordinate the group so that appropriate information could be obtained at the various project sites. It made it difficult for the Aga Khan Foundation Network people in the local areas to appropriately get their message across to us.

4. The time period for this trip was approximately 2 weeks. However a very large proportion of the time was taken up in travelling to and from Canada to India and Pakistan. Then a large amount of time was also taken up travelling between the various towns, villages and cities where these projects are being implemented. This made the trip extremely physically taxing. The time zone changes certainly did not help. What took up more energy was the fact that fair amount of sight seeing, social functions and shopping was mixed in with the other objectives of the trip and therefore most members were quite fatigued during the trip and could not concentrate on the real objectives of the trip. Quite a few members did become ill with minor illnesses such as the flu and bronchitis.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In the future if these awareness trips are organized then I would recommend that they should be done in smaller groups. Preferably about 10 to 14 people.

2. There should be a fair degree of orientation and background information discussed with the participants of the trip prior to leaving Canada. They should be fairly aware of the activities of Aga Khan Foundation Canada and of the Aga Khan Foundation Network in the third World countries. They should have fair understanding of the noncommunal nature of Aga Khan Foundation functioning.

PAGE 10...

3. They should clearly understand the objectives of the trip. Care should be taken to make sure that there is no lack of concentration away from these objectives during the trip.

4. Prior to leaving Canada each member of the group should understand clearly why he or she has been invited to attend the trip. They should have clear understanding of which projects they are going to visit. They should have their responsibilities clearly delineated to them so that they are aware that during the visits of the various projects and after they come back to Canada what is expected of them. This way during the trip they can ask the appropriate questions, they can look into the appropriate issues relating to their area of responsibility and therefore make appropriate notes during the trip. When they come back to Canada they can therefore be individually making their own specific reports in areas where they were originally assigned responsibility. This way the Aga Khan Foundation Canada would receive specific reports from each of the participants on the trip. The reports would be all quite different dealing with different aspects of the various projects. This way a monograph could then be compiled after return to Canada. This could then be distributed to other Aga Khan Foundation Canada key volunteers and committee members.

5. In future trips I would strongly recommend that individuals from outside our community be invited to attend as well. This way other members of the Canadian public who have similar interests would become very aware of the Aga Khan Foundation Network and the excellent work that the Foundation is doing in the third World countries.

6. One or two individuals on the trip should have the primary responsibility of taking the appropriate photographs, slides or videos so that upon return to Canada there is one specific package available for audio-visual presentations at various small group sessions where this message would then be spread.

7. Upon return to Canada each of the members on the trip should be asked to make one specific recommendation as it pertains to improvement of the Aga Khan Foundation Network activities in the third World countries. From all these recommendations, some good ideas would come out which could be implemented in the future.

Essentially what I am saying here, is that such trips take a lot of effort to organize, a fair amount of financial resources are spent for individuals going on these trips. The Aga Khan Foundation Network people in the third World countries spend a lot of their time, effort and money in hosting the members of the trip. The trip tends to disrupt their work schedules for 2 or 3

PAGE 11...

days at a time at each of the various sights. Considering all this financial and human effort that goes into this trip, the trip should be more goal directed, individuals on this trip should know their background information very well and should be fully aware of their responsibilities during the trip and after their return to Canada.

PAGE 12...

### RECOMMENDATION

On this trip aside from learning a lot of other things, I learned about two specific facts.

1. There is no question in my mind that there is an enormous need for developmental purposes in the third World countries. This need is being met to a certain degree by the Aga Khan Foundation Network. In order for the network to be more successful it needs more resources. These resources could be in the form of voluntary or paid personnel both skilled and semi-skilled. The needs are in terms of raw materials, equipment and sophisticated machinery. The needs are also in terms of financial funding.

2. The second fact which I have learned is that there is enormous degree of good will amongst the community in Canada and in other Western countries. This good will is towards wanting to participate in this developmental process for our brothers and sisters in the third World. There also seems to be a fair recognition that the best method of participating in this developmental process is through the Aga Khan Foundation network.

Therefore realizing these two facts, it appears that there is very acute need for some form of a matching service which gives information of what the specific needs are in the various countries where the Aga Khan Foundation is active. This information regarding the various "needs" to be then transmitted to the various donors in the Western countries who can then take a look at the listing and therefore recognize for themselves specifically what areas that they can be of help.

Initially, this could take the form of a simple newsletter that could be published every 3 to 6 months. It could be best coordinated through Aga Khan Foundation Geneva. What this newsletter would have is a fairly simple listing by countries and by geographical location where Aga Khan Foundation is actively participating in developmental projects.

These listings could be divided into activities of AKRSP, AKES, AKHS, AKU, etc.

This would list projects that are in the stage of implementation and projects that are in the planning phase. Associated with each project would be documentation of the various "needs" that have been established. These could be listed in terms of human resources needed both paid and voluntary. Skilled and semi-skilled. Raw materials, equipment or material goods that could be needed. Financial costs associated with these specific projects. Training needs for any local individuals either within the recipient country or overseas. Whether these training needs require help in terms of providing

PAGE 13...

lodging, sponsoring scholarships, using contacts or influence to achieve positions in colleges or Universities etc.

This newsletter could then be circulated after it is updated every 3 to 6 months to all the Aga Khan Foundation offices around the world particularly in the Western countries. It would then be disseminated in each of these countries through the various conveners to the volunteers, various donors within the Jamat and particularly to various businesses, industry, co-operations and other institutions outside the Jamat which could be then brought in to become involved in the Aga Khan Foundation network activities.

The various volunteers of the Aga Khan Foundation Canada could help co-ordinate these activities within Canada in helping to disseminate this information, contact the various individuals or agencies to see where they have identified areas that they wish to participate in. If substantial amount of equipment is being donated as it was requested by the recipient country then the volunteer network of Aga Khan Foundation Canada would be used to help co-ordinate the transfer of this equipment. The issue here is to make it as easy as possible for the donors or the donor agencies to participate. If it becomes difficult to contribute any of their resources then people tend to shy away from such activity.

**VOLUNTEER AWARENESS TRIP****PARTICIPANTS****Toronto**

Mohamed Manji  
Mohamed Samji  
Al Noor Abdulla  
Abdul Thawer  
Mehboob Kara

**Vancouver**

Jenny Kaderali  
Zool Meraly  
Mohamed Abdulla  
Aziz Haji  
Abdul Kara  
Saida Rasul

**Calgary**

Sherali Saju  
Malek Musa

**Edmonton**

Azim Jeraj  
Nargis Rayani

**Montreal**

Fayaz Visram  
Yasmin Nathoo

**AKFC**

Taj-ud-Deen Kurji  
Nazeer Aziz Ladhani  
Nazir Pirani