

KARACHI

The more I think about the condition of millions now left to fend for themselves the greater I feel a sense of despondency. After a frenzy of fund raising and ration distribution there is a pall in all activities. I am told donor fatigue has set in.

I think it is also because everybody feels that they have done their bit for charity and the helpless millions are not their responsibility any way. The fact is that if you follow the usual path of charity, there is only so much anybody could do and eventually the state has to take on the responsibility.

Another fact however, is that all state organs seem to be absent from the depths of rural Sindh. In such a case, and it is not something that has not been clear for some time, that state institutions are not really engaged in welfare of the poor, would it not be appropriate for some of us who have an understanding of the vulnerable condition of the abandoned communities that we need to work on methodologies to see how we could help them survive.

On my visits to Sindh in the aftermath of several disasters, what has always bothered me is that while there may be lush green orchards all around, the villages themselves presented a scene of total desolation. At the most there might be a few trees but otherwise the village land presents an island of barrenness in the midst of a sea of fertility and greenery.

How is it possible that those who till the farms and orchards of the landlords, do not know how to grow plants themselves. It is the same *haris* or serfs, including their women and many a time even children, who toil in the fields of the landlord that bring him so much prosperity but the workers themselves are always on the edge of starvation.

I have always wanted to change that and with the present flood's nature has given the opportunity to partner with communities to see how green could their own village could be. And that they must understand that they are the ones who have the skills to grow trees in lush green orchards and nurture the farm produce which has made the landlords so rich.

As I look at the map of Sindh and also the map of the flood plains, it is clear that flooding has happened in the most fertile central belt from North to South of Sindh. With regular inundations, as is to be expected the land has become extremely fertile. Since I am working in this region, I feel duty bound to see how I could help the communities to prevent hunger in their areas.

Although certain food items i.e., fish farming (wherever ponds and streams are available), chicken farming in as many households as possible, goat rearing in selected villages along with raised vegetable gardens have been established as part of the zero village eco system, however, we need also to look at long term food availability.

This week I have requested Naheem Shah and his team to launch a pilot for using the produce that is available in abundance close to the Pono village. For this purpose, the starting point as usual must be a platform. However, this will be a special solar drying platform at least 2' high and finished with best lime plaster. This platform will be dedicated to drying and storage of food items and must be kept clean at all times. The drying process will need bamboo trays made with bamboo lattice. For solar drying air movement is essential and the trays will keep the items above the platform with a gap for air circulation.

Since the process will allow for long term storage of food items, it is essential that in every batch at last half should be saved for future off season periods or disaster contingency.

- a. The demonstration/pilot can begin in the kitchen area dedicated for visitors in Pono village. Arrange for crushing of sugarcane within the village for each housewife to make jaggery candy. Begin with making jaggery biscuits with peanuts, pack a couple in small paper bags and place them in the clay pitchers made by Lachman village. The storage pitcher could be kept on the platform or in any storage space.
- b. Begin production of banana chips. These should be cut thin and then placed on bamboo trays. These should be covered with mosquito fabric netting to keep dogs and other pets away. Once dried these should also be packed in small paper bags.
- c. Begin drying half the spinach and Moringa leaves available to many households. Leaves should be cut and washed. They should be dried thoroughly before spreading on bamboo trays. After drying these should also be stored in clay pitchers.
- d. Other farm produce should also be considered for solar drying. As soon as green chilies are available, dehydration process and storage should be taken up.
- e. In case the experiment of growing small fish in the freshly dug mini wells is successful, fish drying should also be started.

Use of Waste Material

Since crushing season is in progress and is likely to last for a couple of months, it is essential to take advantage of the waste bagasse being generated. I have requested the following:

- a. Arrangement should be made in the Pono village for making a bamboo enclosure where bagasse should be procured and dumped for future use. One person should be made responsible who can charge for supply of bagasse.
- b. The Mother Earth village is behind in its earnings. Immediate production of briquettes using bagasse and cow dung must be started which should be marketed everywhere so that no other fuel except briquettes are used.
- c. Bagasse should be regularly used as fertilizer for community forests.
- d. Now that eco toilets are being used, we should check how much compost is being generated. Making for organic compost should be sought in order that everybody begins to earn from their waste.