

Awaiting attention

Adnan Aamir | [Political Economy](#) | June 20, 2021



Philanthropy alone cannot meet the multifaceted challenges faced by Balochistan



Balochistan has a large population of poor citizens. According to the *Report on Multidimensional Poverty 2016*, 71 per cent population of the province is living below the poverty line. Given its limited resources, helping local communities is difficult for the provincial government. A few foreign donor agencies have come to the rescue of the people of Balochistan.

To see how their work was helping the local communities, I embarked on a three-day tour of northern Balochistan in the first week of June. My destinations were Pishin, Loralai and Zhob that form the core of Balochistan's Pashtun belt. Together, these districts have a population of 1.44 million.

We left Quetta early in the morning, and after about 45 minutes reached Pishin. Our first stop was at the Balochistan Rural Support Programme (BRSP) regional office, a semi-government organisation implementing the BRACE programme in collaboration with the Local Government Department.

Balochistan Rural Development and Community Empowerment Programme (BRACE) is a five-year European-Union-funded philanthropic programme started in 2017. With a portfolio of Rs 3.77 billion, it covers nine districts - including Pishin, Loralai and Zhob. Under this programme, local communities are provided help in the form of income generating grants (IGG), community investment funds (CIF), community physical infrastructure (CPI), technical and vocational education training (TVET), and adult literacy and numeracy skills (ALNS). The beneficiaries of the programme were selected based on a poverty scorecard survey that the BRSP conducted from 2017 to 2019.

After a cup of tea at the BRSP office, we left to visit the local communities in Pishin. Our first stop was at Toor Shah union council. We met with the people associated with Abaseen, the local support organisation (LSO). LSOs are volunteer organisations set up at the UC level to act as beneficiaries of the BRACE programme.

Siddique Ullah, the soft-spoken community bookkeeper of the LSO, took us to the beneficiaries. He also acted as an interpreter to facilitate our conversation with the local beneficiaries. We went inside the mud-wall shop of Muhammad Ismail. Barely 20 years old, Ismail was provided with a Rs 20,000 loan under the CIF component of the BRACE. He used the loan to expand his shop. "Now, I earn around Rs 9,000 per month. I will repay the loan in monthly instalments of Rs 2,000," he told this scribe.

Next, we visited Kamalzai UC, where we witnessed a solar-powered water supply scheme. The project was built at a cost of Rs 2.4 million. The BRACE programme provided 80 percent of the cost under its CPI component. The water supply scheme caters to the water needs of 12,650 people in the UC.

Lack of electricity, water supply and employment opportunities are familiar complaints in most districts of Balochistan. The backwardness of these areas can only be overcome through government policies and action.

After these visits, we travelled back to the BRSP regional office for lunch. BRSP's regional chief Akbar Tareen was unsuccessfully trying to turn on the air conditioner (AC). The AC was fine. The problem was the low voltage. He said poor electricity supply and long hours of no supply were a significant problem for the people of Pishin. That was why the water supply scheme in Kamalzai was solar-powered based. After the day's work, we returned to Quetta for the night.

The next day our destination was Loralai. We left Quetta in the early hours of the day. Our only stop in the 260-kilometre journey was a brief stay at a hotel in Kuchlak where we stopped for breakfast. In Loralai, we were greeted by the regional head of BRSP, Qutab Khan Afaqi, who is a poet. Afaqi told us that Loralai did not have electric power for at least 10 hours a day. He also said the broadband internet seldom works. I checked my cell phone, it was not working. With no power supply and stable internet, working from Loralai is a nightmare.

The heat was intense. We agreed therefore to reduce the number of sites we planned to visit. Our first stop was at Zangiwal union council, where we witnessed another water supply scheme funded by the BRACE. Asif Khan, the village organisation (VO) president, told us that the scheme provides water to 50 households. "The BRACE organised our community and helped us develop an approach geared to solving community problems," he said.

After we were done in Loralai, we left for Zhob the same evening. The roads in Zhob were narrow and clearly inadequate for the growing traffic. It took us a while to cover less than a kilometre in Zhob town. We stayed for the night at a government mess. It was the best possible place to stay in Zhob but there was no power to run the AC after midnight.

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The following day we left for exposure visits in Zhob. Our first destination was the Wyala village where we met Gul Khan, the information secretary of Wyala Omaza LSO. At first, he was reluctant to talk in Urdu. However, when I interviewed him, he spoke the language perfectly well. He said that he had worked in Karachi as a labourer for more than a decade. He said he was the recipient of a Rs 20,000 loan under the CIF. He used half of it was for buying seed and the other half for fertilisers to farm his 1.5-acre field. "I expect to earn Rs 100,000 from the harvest," he said.

Later, we travelled for 15 minutes to an excavation site. Gul Jan, in his late 20s, was operating the excavating machine in the scorching heat. He said he earned Rs 25,000 a month from the job after he was trained in operating the machine under a 3-month TVET programme of the BRACE.

We went to the congested Zhob bazaar to meet Muhammad Rafique, another beneficiary of the TVET programme. He said after learning basic photo editing and designing skills through BRACE, he now ran a small digital photo printing shop. "My earnings can increase substantially if I can get a professional camera. But it is an expensive purchase," said Rafique.

After lunch, we started our journey back to Quetta. During the four and half hour long trip, I thought about the backwardness I had witnessed in the three districts. Lack of electricity, water supply and employment opportunities are familiar problems in most districts of Balochistan. Philanthropic activities undertaken by the BRACE help people at the household and community levels, but the backwardness of these areas can only be ended through government action.

The writer is a journalist and researcher. He tweets @iAdnanAmir

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