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# Civil Society and Governance in Gojal (Gilgit-Baltistan)

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## Abstract

Focusing on both soft and hard development, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) reached Gilgit-Baltistan and neighbouring Chitral (northern Pakistan) in 1982. In a short span of time, more than 4,500 community associations, namely village and women's organisations (VWOs), were formed throughout the Region, introducing the local population to democratic governance grounded in civil society-based system. The phenomenon brought about producing significant public and agricultural infrastructures in less than 15 years. As a result, AKRSP turned into a laboratory and model of rural development for many South Asian realities. Underpinned by a qualitative case study and relevant literature review, the present research addresses the process of civil society construction in Gojal (sub-district of Hunza, Gilgit-Baltistan), including the role and engagement of AKRSP: introduced by depicting the scheme of traditional social institutions in front of novel patterns of social organisation, the paper delves into the emergence of – formal and informal – civil society organisations (CSOs) in the form of local support organisations (LSOs) as federations of VWOs and related networks, whose establishment in Gilgit-Baltistan (as well as in Chitral) is a recent phenomenon dating back to the mid-2000s.

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## Introduction: Concepts and Contexts

The discourse on civil society is not a new issue for the contemporary social scientists and development practitioners: as a core of social theory, it has been debated in different ways and stages of human history by leading social thinkers “from Aristotle, Hobbes and Locke through to Rousseau, Tocqueville and Gellner” (Pollard, Court 2005: v, 5, 25). Therefrom, the topic of civil society has been attached a row of definitions.

While discussing public participation and civil society, Desmond Connor describes the latter as being “composed of autonomous associations which develop a dense, diverse and pluralistic network. As it develops, civil society will consist of a range of local groups, specialised organisations and linkages between them to amplify the corrective voices of civil society as a partner in governance and the market” (Connor 1999: 2). Likewise, Andrew Clayton and co-authors write that: “Civil society constitutes a vast array of associations, including trade unions, professional associations, religious groups, cultural and sports groups and traditional associations, many of which are informal organizations that are not registered” (Clayton et al. 2000: 2). Pollard and Court look at the topic as follows: “CSOs include a very wide range of institutions, including non-governmental organisations, faith-based institutions, community groups, professional associations, trade unions, media organisations, research institutes and think tanks” (Pollard, Court 2005: 2). According to another study, carried out by Aisha Ghaus-Pasha, the civil society sector “embraces entities as diverse as village associations, grass roots development organizations, agricultural extension services, self help cooperatives, religious institutions, schools, hospitals, human rights organizations and business and professional associations” (Ghaus-Pasha 2004: 2).

By excluding formal institutions of the public sector, political parties (for being embedded, one way or another, in state agencies and bureaucracy), and media (for being “profit-organisations in nature like the business sector”), Sattar and Baig specify the CSOs sector as comprehensive of “nongovernmental organisations, trade unions, professional associations, philanthropies, academia, independent and quasi-independent pressure groups, think tanks, and traditional, informal formations such as faith-based organisations, shrines, seminaries, neighbourhood associations, burial societies, *jirgas* (councils of elders) and savings groups” (Sattar, Baig 2001: 1).

On the subject, Prince Karim Aga Khan, Chairman of the AKDN, a global advocate of civil society and development practitioner, states: “By Civil Society, I mean that range of social activity that does not stem from private business organizations, nor from governmental authority. The institutions of Civil Society are motivated, rather, by

voluntary energies, and their purpose is to improve the quality of community life. They are private institutions, devoted to the public good. [...] Civil Society includes a host of professional, labour, ethnic and religious groups and a broad array of non-governmental organizations – NGOs – as well.” (Aga Khan, Speech of February 21, 2016).

This brief presentation allows us to observe similarities and differences existing among definitions of civil society. Considering the whole gamut of formal and informal structures, we have adopted – for the purposes of the present study – a wide description (rather than definition) of Civil society comprising: NGOs, trade unions, professional groups, traditional associations (mainly informal), cultural associations, sports groups, village associations, grass-roots development organisations, self-help cooperatives, agricultural extension services, schools, hospitals, independent and quasi-independent pressure groups, human rights organisations, philanthropic organisations, faith-based structures, think tanks, neighbourhood associations, elders councils (e.g. *jirga*), and else (Aga Khan 2016; Clayton et al. 2000; Connor 1999; Ghaus-Pasha 2004; Pollard, Court 2005; Sattar, Baig 2001).

### Socio-Political Landscape in Gilgit-Baltistan: from Hereditary Rulers to Political Parties

Before coming under the administration of Pakistan (1947), the communities of Gilgit-Baltistan lived in princely states and acephalous social organisations: being both backed by the respective customary laws, the former governance model was run by hereditary rulers termed *raja*, *tham* or *mir*, and the latter by tribal councils. During the erstwhile princely state of Hunza (dissolved in 1974), the society was split into three classes (upper, middle, and lower)<sup>3</sup> dealing also with socio-political matters. Being observed in a number of cultural realities, such a tripartite social structure proves not to be an exclusive trait of the Gilgit-Baltistan society.

In the context of the Pakistani State, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan have embraced various national-level political parties, such as Pakistan Muslim Leagues, Pakistan Peoples Parties, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Pakistan Movement for Justice), Awami Workers Party (People's Workers Party), Labour Party Pakistan, Muttahida Quami Movement (United National Movement), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Assembly of Islamic Clergy), etc. Among a few indigenous parties, the Balawaristan National

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3 The traditional social strata included: upper class (*zharzhon* in Wakhi language, *ushum* in Burushaski, *unilo* in Shina), middle class (*darqaney*), and lower class (*borwar* in Wakhi, *balda-kuyin* in Burushaski).

Front succeeded in creating its own space and position within the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly as it has been frequently winning the last two elections. Under the administration of Pakistan, the Region has undergone various forms of development intervention – involving national-level parties too – in socio-cultural, economic, political, and environmental realms.

It is interesting to take a glance at the socio-demographic composition of political parties in Hunza. Once the former Hunza State was abolished and new democratic governance through elections introduced, the traditional social classes allied, in most cases, with national-level parties: those which used to be regarded as upper classes, added by a share of middle class, came under the umbrella of right wing – initially a Pro-Mir party, affiliated since the 1990s to the Pakistan Muslim League (PML); a significant portion of the so-called lower classes, in addition to some middle-class segments, came – instead – under the centre-left Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

In the 2009 election (November), a third national-level party called Muttahida Quami Movement (United National Movement) reached Hunza. In the last election (June 2015), two more national parties, Awami Workers Party (People's Workers Party) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Pakistan Movement for Justice), entered Hunza by defeating the PPP. Finally, many independent candidates could be witnessed in all elections: though being difficult for them to win over the national-level parties in most cases, they are supported in different contexts and at different levels.

### Evolution of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Gojal

Viewed as a first step in building Gojal civil society, village and women's organisations (VWOs) of the early 1980s could be seen as a new model of social organisation: yet, some of their conceptual and organisational aspects were already embedded in the societal model pre-existing in the Region.

Based on *traditional socio-political institutions* governing kin relationships, the communities used to be mobilised at intra-clan and inter-tribal levels. Customary assemblies (*marka* in Wakhi), where a village (*diyor*) or community (*yūrt*) gathers (*diyordoriğh* – *yūrtkoriğh*) to discuss issues and interests, are still in use in Hunza. Two more forms of social organisation, employed among the local communities, are: brotherhood at a broader level (*yūrūtdoriğh*) deals with the matters regarding a respective clan or tribe, whereas a particular brotherhood within the kinship (*yūrūtiğh*) mobilises the members around their collective or family interests and issues. The outlined system

played a vital role in the life of valley communities under the rule of principalities and acephalous states.<sup>4</sup>

The **community governance scheme**, based on clans and tribes, is further completed by *nang* or *nomūs*, a **self-help system** in Wakhi. Practised in Gojal valley as an indigenous philanthropy system of community participation, this phenomenon consisted in: contributions by affluent families to the construction of public and agricultural infrastructures (horse trails, roads, bridges, afforestation, irrigation channels, etc.); clans and tribes used to be important actors in maintaining natural resources and environment, rituals and festivities, social safety nets, social development, economic collaborations, etc.; religious institutions tried to provide an enabling environment for the social harmony, which remains valid for formal religious institutions at present; communal arrangements used to be made by villages in order to store grains and credit them to needy families in times of crisis; finally, the homes of indigenous health practitioners keep serving as voluntary clinics. Nowadays, the practice of philanthropy has shifted towards a transparent system of CSOs.

Along with traditional institutions, the Region of Gilgit-Baltistan has experienced **external interventions of social development**. Some formal structures of socio-political, economic, military, and security development (schools, health facilities, military bases, entrepreneurial activities e.g. shops) were introduced during the British-Dogra period, and continued by Pakistani administrators, mainly in Gilgit. Yet, no new organisation within the realm of civil society seems to have been established by the colonial administrators to carry out socio-economic projects and activities.

Formal development promoted by educational agency of the **Aga Khan Development Network** (AKDN)<sup>5</sup> can be followed since 1946 when the then Aga Khan Education Board (AKEB) started establishing a series of Diamond Jubilee (DJ) Schools<sup>6</sup> in the former Hunza State – under the patronisation of its last ruler, Mir Muhammad Jamal

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- 4 Among the principalities: Hunza, Nagar, Gilgit, Punyall, Ishkoman, Yasin, Skardu, Shigar, and Khapulu, while the acephalous states could be found, though in small domains, in Diamar, such as Gor, Chilas, Darel, and Tangir.
  - 5 One of the leading international development agencies, AKDN, has been trying to put theories into practice for over 60 years while closely working with CSOs in dozens of countries, and advocating for creating enabling environment and sustainability for CSOs around the World.
  - 6 The well-known DJ schools, established in Gilgit-Baltistan Region, are gifts to the mountain communities by Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, after his Shia Ismaili followers celebrated his Diamond Jubilee in Bombay (India). This could be seen as a primary development intervention aimed at addressing the poverty through education.

Khan (reign 1945-1974), as well as in the present-day Ghizer District. This initiative paved the way for other communities to benefit from educational institutions, and provided opportunity for the respective educational administrators to learn on the basis of institutional experiences and expand their intervention to other localities.

Two more initiatives related to the CSOs development within the Ismaili community can be pointed out. In the 1950s, Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah, Aga Khan III, introduced his community to the system of *cooperative societies* based upon organised collaboration and contribution to improving the quality of life. Being rather significant for the engagement of village communities in Gilgit-Baltistan, the phenomenon helped them get prepared for AKRSP as a novel pattern of civil society.

The second was the *Shia Ismaili Constitution*, introduced to the community by Mir Muhammad Jamal Khan in 1969 (President of the Shia Ismaili Supreme Council for Pakistan and Central Asia), and developed by Prince Karim Aga Khan.<sup>7</sup> The Constitution could be seen as a legal tool linking thousands of followers, namely volunteers operating through the *jamati* (faith-based) institutions of the Ismaili community, whose impact in both tangible and intangible realms of socio-economic development is rather vital. One of the main factors for AKDN's (Aga Khan Development Network) achievements are these *jamati* institutions with their multiple functions: maintaining peace and harmony, preparing people for change and development, and establishing good and sustainable relationships with sister communities by helping them in their development processes.

The *road network* in Gilgit-Baltistan have had a great impact on the overall development, especially since 1947 after Gilgit had been linked with Pakistan's administration. Though being gradually extended to other valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan, radical contribution of the road-communication network can be observed after construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) that has been serving the mountain communities since 1978 (Kreutzmann 1991, 2015).

However, the end of the former political entities (principalities and acephalous states), and the opening of the KKH in the 1970s enabled development agencies and organisations (public, private, and NGOs) to enter the towns and valleys of

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7 Sources: Fazal Amin Beg: 2008-2012 interviews with community key informants; cfr. also: Jaffer, 2006; *Constitution* <http://www.ismaili.net/Source/extra1.html>, in <http://www.ismaili.net/>; *The Preamble of "The Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims"*, in: *Simerg – Insights from Around the World*, <https://simerg.com/special-series-his-highness-the-aga-khan-iv-the-preamble-of-the-constitution-of-the-shia-imami-ismaili-muslims/>, in <https://simerg.com/>.

Gilgit-Baltistan. Apart from them, some *international development agencies and organisations* have become active in the Region, namely: AKDN, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN, or World Conservation Union), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and few UN agencies.

### AKRSP and Village and Women's Organisations (VWOs)

In 1982, the Region witnessed the arrival of *AKRSP*, hence a new participatory package of community governance and development was put into action: the overall goal of this rural support programme was improving the quality of life of the local population. Guided by AKRSP, the communities of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral were mobilised around *a triangular development model* anchored in social organisation (*tanzeem*), skill acquisition and capacity building (*hunar*), and capital development (*bachat*).<sup>8</sup>

Shoaib Sultan Khan, founding General Manager of AKRSP and exponent of community development, initiated the first *village and women's organisation* in the village of Japuka (Ghizer district) on December 12, 1982. While sharing his experiences in the field of participatory governance and development in South Asia during the AKRSP gathering at Duykar (Altit) on September 22, 2012<sup>9</sup>, he stated: "It were the local communities and community leaders [and not *me*] who were determined to bring changes to their own societies." Inspired by Michelangelo, he continued: "I have done nothing in making the sculpture: the figure already existed within the marble. I just removed the useless matters from the top ... in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral, each man and woman possess the image or capacity internally. AKRSP performed its vital role only in terms of enabling environment and removed the obstacles that were on the way." While highlighting the AKRSP approaches to community development, S. S. Khan specified that AKRSP is trying to help the communities by suggesting actions that they themselves would be able to fulfil.

Once a set of collective issues at village level was presented in front of the AKRSP team, the involved would be asked to base their upcoming decisions on the community's consensus, and to elect dedicated persons whom they could entrust the task of

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8 *Tanzeem* – literally "organisation, arrangement", hence: social organisation; *hunar* – lit. "skill, accomplishment, attainment", hence: skill acquisition and resultant capacity building through learning and experience; *bachat* – lit. "savings", hence: capital development, building capital at individual and collective levels.

9 In September 2012, an award programme was organised by AKRSP in honour of Shoaib Sultan Khan and community leaders and activists of his time to acknowledge their services to the mountain communities of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral.



representing them. This is how village and women's organisations (VWOs), as semi-formal organisations, were democratically formed. The VWO members were requested to keep their weekly meetings, discuss collective issues, challenges and interests, develop consensus, and write shared and undersigned resolutions around any issues they prioritise and submit to AKRSP in order to get rural development support.

While capitalising human resources, the AKRSP team paved the way for practical intervention that consisted in facilitating development process of mountain communities by activating diverse change models. Thereupon, more than 4,500 village and women's organisations emerged in the communities of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral, excluding Diamar district where the community leaders showed a strong reluctance to join the experience of development on self-help basis.

The community leaders, as VWOs office-bearers, and activists attended periodic capacity building trainings supplied by AKRSP, and participated in a series of conferences and workshops where they shared their development approaches and success stories, while seeking ideas and techniques to overcome challenges. In this way, linkages among community leaders and activists increasingly developed, hence mutual sharing of ideas and experiences continued.

Each member tried to save money so as to raise the collective capital of the VWOs. The collected savings represented another guarantee for getting projects ranging from construction and maintenance of irrigation channels to plantation of new types of fruits; from supplying livestock breeds to fruit drying machines; from construction of road infrastructures to bridges, etc. In parallel, AKRSP auditors would audit each VWO on annual basis and keep a record on their bank accounts.

Despite their pivotal role in introducing changes in their respective valleys and the whole Region, it needs to be pointed that these VWOs were not registered with the Government, hence their legal status was questionable. Thereby, they got a position of non-formal organisations. A ten-year experience in the field of development strategies led many rural communities – that had felt highly confident – to take a self-initiative in founding their umbrella organisations at village level: born in the 1990s, these **local development organisations** (LDOs) (or “associations”) were registered with the Government as formal entities. These new CSOs tried to facilitate the work of the local VWOs within the ongoing projects aimed at education, health, nature conservation, and the like. Yet, not all VWOs agreed to link with the respective LDOs: one of the main reasons for this mutual trust deficit was the non-acceptance of an entity, junior to

the respective VWO, that would become umbrella organisation and have a supervision over the activities. That said, the day had to come when AKRSP would no longer offer its support leaving the sustainability of the Programme to the local bodies.

In conclusion: several proactive and effective VWOs evolved out of the AKRSP triangular model of development resting on social organisation, capacity building, and capital development; likewise, a number of experiences and practices, including establishment of LDOs, was realised under the patronisation of AKRSP; more particularly, the First MicroFinance Banks (FMFBs), taken as a model of poverty alleviation, emerged at mega level. It should be observed that not all experiences worked equally nor produced equally positive outcomes: concerns have always been expressed by some organisations, areas or population segments towards specific aspects of one project or another. The fact remains that the process as a whole has been essential for the Region of Gilgit-Baltistan in many respects, especially in terms of civil society formation and its autonomy.

### Development of Local Support Organisations (LSOs)

It has been over 30 years since the first village and women's organisations (VWOs) were fostered by AKRSP, and realised by the mountain communities in the early 1980s: some of them are still active; some have become dormant; some had difficulties with managing resources. There is a number of reasons underlying such outcomes, the most important being: the AKRSP's "receding" strategy from its programme areas, accompanied by a variety of possible forms of follow-ups exercised by VWOs; the role of AKRSP as a Project of Aga Khan Foundation for a specified time frame depending on priorities; finally, in the mid-1990s, AKRSP Board of Directors and top management had to opt for downsizing of its employees.

In order to productively address the communities, the system needed to be restructured through a novel strategy. Therefore, AKRSP gradually streamlined thousands of VWOs by regularising their status through the bylaws registered with the Government. In this connection, a set of organisations that might serve the community as a mini-AKRSP in terms of its roles, responsibilities and functions, was looked for. This is how **local support organisations** (LSOs), a renewed CSOs model, came into being in 2005: styled as "second generation" of CSOs, the LSOs represented evolved and upgraded forms of VWOs. Ten years after (2016), 77 LSOs were active in the Region, 37 of which in Gilgit Region, 21 – in Baltistan, and 19 – in Chitral. According to Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (2016), most of them were formed over the 2005-07 period.

As for the district of Hunza, there are 10 LSOs: 1 in Šhinaki (Lower Hunza), 5 in Central Hunza, and 4 in Gojal (Upper Hunza).

Out of multi-sectoral issues of societal development that the engagement of an LSO revolves around, some of the LSO key features and responsibilities can be summarised as follows:

- provide legal and formal protection to the VWOs and other CSOs within the administrative jurisdiction of the respective Union Council (UC);
- advance suggestions for effective improvement while providing the follow-up mission (monitoring and evaluation) to its member organisations;
- strive to build the capacity of its member organisations (focusing on VWOs) in all respects of development;
- ensure to act and advocate for good governance and democratisation within and out of the LSOs and member organisations;
- ensure to act and advocate for gender equality within and out of the LSOs;
- ensure to promote pluralistic approaches within and out of the civil society in order to lead the related LSOs towards peace and harmony;
- act as an intermediary between its member organisations (internal) and other organisations (external);
- struggle to build and sustain strong linkages with all related stakeholders at local, regional, national, and international levels;
- mobilise internal and external resources to positively contribute to development of the respective civil society;
- and advocate for a vibrant civil society through CSOs.

In developing these lines of approach, the AKRSP aimed at a strategy including the population of the Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral in the development and linking the activities of the LSOs narrowly to the interest of the population.

The aims (both the aforesaid and else) of the LSOs operating in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral generally converge on positive and sustainable development of the communities in the respective socio-cultural contexts. Considering these development goals, thousands of men and women, many of whom volunteers, professionals and philanthropists operating either at home or abroad, are striving for a further level of positive change in their societies in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral.

In the following paragraphs, the importance of both social and societal transformation is shown through a case study on the Attabad disaster.

### Gojal Valley: Natural Resources, Economy, Society

In order to better understand social changes occurred as a result of the 2010 Attabad disaster, including the formation of Gojal LSO Network (GOLSON), it is essential to delve into some basic knowledge of geopolitical, socio-cultural, and socio-economic characteristics of Gojal valley in the pre-disaster period.

Gojal is a sub-district of Hunza consisting of the main valley, and four larger side valleys: Shingshal (Shimshal), Khunzhrav, Misgar, and Chipursan. It is bonding Pakistan with China and Afghanistan through its highest plateau, Shimshal Pamir, and mountain passes of Khunzhrav, Mintaka, Kilik, Dilisang, and Yirshodh (Irshad). Besides facilitating the course of the Hunza River, the terrains of Attabad (disaster site) represent the only narrow passage of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) connecting Gojal with Central Hunza and Gilgit, as well as Pakistan with China.

The population of Gojal is around 20,000 people (Sökefeld 2012: 179). Its valleys are inhabited by dozens of clan groups (native to different parts of Gilgit-Baltistan and Central Asia), anchored in their faith (Shia Ismaili Muslims), and split in three language communities (Wakhi, Burushaski, and Ďumaki).

As for social development infrastructures, over thirty villages and sub-villages of Gojal have been endowed with schools at primary and middle levels; it has two high schools for boys and girls each, and three higher secondary schools.<sup>10</sup> In order to continue their formal education (college and university levels), the aspirant both male and female students are obliged to go out of the valley to central Hunza, Gilgit, and main Pakistani cities. The entire sub-district of Gojal has one hospital with 10 beds, led by a medical officer; patients of the side valleys have to reach Gulmit (headquarters of Gojal) for basic medical care, whereas serious patients refer to central Hunza and Gilgit, or to the health facilities in larger Pakistani cities, such as Islamabad or Karachi.

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10 Educational service providers are: the Government, Aga Khan Education Services – Pakistan (AKESP), six community-based English medium schools, and the only higher secondary school provided recently by Gulmit Educational and Social Welfare Association (GESW) running its educational project “Al-Amyn Model School, Gulmit” since 1991.

Besides traditional agro-pastoral activities, a significant share of Gojal population is employed in a variety of organisations (public, private, NGOs), connected with local enterprises or involved with trade and business at national and international levels. The towns of Gulmit and Sost provide employment opportunities for local entrepreneurs and businessmen. Though, while Gulmit is the headquarters of Gojal sub-district, the tiny border settlement of Sost is becoming overburdened by the flood of passers-by daily leaving behind environmentally unfavourable wastes.

The whole area is reliant on the KKH to get access to the markets and various facilities. After formal opening of the KKH in 1978, almost all families of Gojal shifted their livelihood strategy within agricultural domain towards intensification of potato production guaranteeing higher level of yields: used both as a staple foodstuff and important cash crop, the potatoes of Gojal – being supplied up to Karachi – got their fame nationwide. The money acquired out of horticultural products, esp. potatoes, is being spent in purchasing food, investing on children's education and health emergencies, contributing to the community development activities, and so on.

The valleys of Gojal sub-district count a number of non-formal organisations, including traditional kinship-based institutions (families, clans, tribes); the institution of headmanship; committees for social and cultural activities, etc. The valleys are further energised by thousands of volunteers contributing, within various CSOs, to societal development of their communities: their members range from 5-year old children involved in associations of scouts and guides up to senior citizens aged 80-90 offering their advisory activities. The civil society organisations of Gojal (formal and informal) can be grouped in the following two realms:

1) ***faith-based organisations***, i.e. ***jamati institutions***: Ismaili Councils; institutions of religious education; arbitration and reconciliation boards; Aga Khan Education Board; Aga Khan Health Boards, etc., plus the affiliates of each one of these structures;

2) ***secular community organisations***: educational institutions; local development organisations; local support organisations, plus affiliates and networks; youth forums at village and valley levels; cultural forums at village and valley levels (also operating out of the valleys, in different parts of Pakistan, yet formed by the people native to Gojal); environmental and conservation organisations; business associations run by volunteers on non-profit basis, etc.

## Disasters and Politics

The Attabad disaster occurred on January 4, 2010: the rockfall abruptly took place in the narrow valley devastating the small village of Attabad situated between Gojal and Central Hunza, taking 19 human lives, and blocking the Hunza River course and the Karakoram Highway (KKH), the only Sino-Pak motorway. The routine life of the inhabitants was interrupted: they became – all of a sudden and in a couple of minutes – physically disconnected from the World, isolated and imprisoned between two political borders to its north and north-east (Afghanistan and China respectively), and the newly emergent natural border to its lower part at Attabad.

The community of Gojal began experiencing the bitter aspects of the situation in the second phase of the catastrophe when the blocked KKH started producing effects on the mobility of people linked to their socio-economic activities, health emergencies, education, and so on. Along with physical and socio-economic damages, local population suffered psychologically too. Among the victims, patients, elderly people, women, and children represented the most vulnerable groups.

The river lake had already devoured a small village of 32 households called Ayinabad whose inhabitants become internally displaced as nothing saved out of their properties, including houses, gardens, terraced fields, domesticated forests, commercial structures, livestock pens, places of worship, etc. While continuing its upward movement, the water began submerging the village of Shishkat (lower and central), engulfed significant parts of Gulmit (the centre of Gojal), lower parts of Ghulkin and Hussaini, and a portion of Passu (as measured by the experts of Focus Humanitarian Assistance, a former affiliate of AKDN).

At the time of the Attabad tragedy, the engagement of three LSOs of Gojal valley, namely Mountain Area Support Organization (MASO), Gojal Rural Support Organization (GRSO), and Chipursan Local Support Organization (CLSO), emerged. GRSO<sup>11</sup> was the pioneering LSO of the valley established in October 2006, MASO<sup>12</sup> was founded in January 2008, while CLSO<sup>13</sup> dates back to July 2008. Being not approved yet as LSO by AKRSP, Shimshal Nature Trust (SNT) was excluded:

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- 11 GRSO's administrative boundary included a significant portion of Union Council (UC) Sost including the villages of Khyber, Ghalapan, Murkhun, Jamalabad, Gircha, Nazimabad, Sost, Hussainabad, Khudabad, and Misgar.
  - 12 MASO's administrative jurisdiction was UC for Gulmit including the villages of Ayinabad, Shishkat, Gulmit, Ghulkin, Hussaini, Borit, and Passu.
  - 13 CLSO's administrative jurisdiction was composed of the villages of Yarzrich, Raminj, Kirmin, Kil, Reshit, Shorisavz, Spenj, Shütmerg, and Zudkhun.

established in 1997 (Ali, Butz 2003: 5, 7, 15) in order to protect the rights of centuries-old indigenous communities over the local ecosystem, the community-initiated and -based SNT opposed the idea to be part of either the Khunzhrav National Park (notified in 1975) or Central Karakoram National Park (1993). The goals of the Gojal LSOs were focused around: VWOs activation and mobilisation, capacity building, institutional development, culture and environment, natural and human resources management, youth development, vocational training, etc. These LSOs (SNT included) were engaged in pooling funds and carrying on development projects in the respective territories, without being immune to a kind of competition among each other. At the moment of the catastrophe, it was the MASO's jurisdiction that was directly affected, while the people of other LSOs were indirect sufferers due to the blockage of KKH, and the consequent disconnection of trade routes and supplies.

Following the Attabad disaster, most of the Government's and NGOs' attention was focused on this village. Despite seeming oppositions that could have made hard to join the efforts of various political forces, the circumstances slightly changed in front of the emergency: helicopter services were provided by the Government to transport the patients, goods in relief, and stranded people across the lake. After couples of weeks, the Government took further measures on removal of the debris of over 2 kilometres long terrain that had blocked the river converting it into a dam.

The natural catastrophe of Attabad rockfall and the subsequent formation of the river lake created a huge complex of emergency issues for the community of Gojal in terms of its overall development. The state of affairs, especially in relation to the near future, was highly challenging for the community leaders and social activists. Some informal social and political movements, organised through forums, became immediately active in sensitising the society on the related issues. Still, no sufficient voices were raised in favour of the disaster victims and the valley people as a whole by the traditional political leaders of Hunza. Accordingly, further steps were required.

### Emergence of Gojal LSO Network (GOLSON)

As soon as the Attabad disaster occurred, representatives of the three Gojal LSOs – MASO, GRSO and CLSO – got together in AKRSP office in Gilgit<sup>14</sup> to explore

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14 As AKRSP researcher and development consultant at that time, the main author of the paper, Fazal Amin Beg, was asked by the AKRSP management to hold a meeting with representatives of the three LSOs and suggest the idea of forming an LSOs network that would advocate for the communities by addressing their issues. The suggestion transformed into Gojal LSO Network that F. A. Beg served as a volunteer adviser in the first tenure.

their common issues, namely: confronted challenges, needs assessment, effective long-term strategies, and anticipated results for the suffered communities. The leaders and representatives, along with the respective facilitators (assisting LSO officials), agreed on creating an LSOs network that would advocate for community rights, civil society promotion, and overall development of Gojal valley through a platform. As a matter of fact, Gojal LSO Network (GOLSON), as a new voluntary, community-initiated, and civil society organisation, was born out of a highly critical emergency so as to represent the entire population of Gojal valley with the idea to gradually extend the network to Hunza level and beyond.

Being formed in Gilgit city, i.e. over 145 kilometres away from the Gojal context, the network needed to make itself known. Soon after its formation, GOLSON exponents held a series of press conferences and radio talks in Gilgit by the end of January 2010. Therewith, they started a line of advocacy and sensitisation campaigns regarding the Attabad catastrophe, suffered communities of Gojal valley, and related issues by means of mass media and forums within Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan.

For a nine-month period, GOLSON acted informally so as to observe the results from different angles, and to get meaningful feedbacks from the stakeholders. After ten months, a formal GOLSON body led by a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and Secretary<sup>15</sup> was composed in October 2010. Finally, GOLSON was legally registered in 2011 with the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan.

With the support of AKRSP in different realms, the newly born GOLSON experienced, on the one hand, the process of building linkages and partnerships around its goals with NGOs at regional and international levels; on the other, it put a great deal of its efforts in mobilising internal and external resources. Upholding its vision of an equitable, stable and vibrant civil society for all, grounded in a pluralistic, democratic and meritocratic values, GOLSON has been trying to promote a strategic advocacy while coordinating its member LSOs, and creating relations with various organisations including public sector, NGOs, business sector, with particular attention to the related CSOs of the Region.

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15 Abdul Rasheed (male) from MASO as Chairperson, Mehr Kamil (female) from GRSO as Vice Chairperson, and Karamat Shah (male) from CLSO as Secretary.



## Governance Structure of GOLSON

As a federation of LSOs, GOLSON has its roots in more than a hundred CSOs, primarily VWOs and LDOs (registered with their respective LSOs). And if LSOs are the pillars of GOLSON, VWOs, LDOs, and other local forums are the foundation of LSOs, meaning: these civil society organisations are inseparable from each other. It is imperative then to explore the configuration of an LSO and VWO so as to arrive at a better understanding of the GOLSON's structure.

Any person of any sex and age can become member of a VO or WO: this precondition brings about having an average of at least two persons per household (or more in the case of large families) included into a membership of the respective VO/WO.

The office-bearers of a VO or WO (President, Vice President, and Secretary) are chosen by the VWO members. For the purpose of VWO representation in the respective LSO, a VO sends to the general body of its LSO a competent and dedicated member, democratically designated through a process of election or selection. In average, an LSO has 40 General body members and 13 Board members (termed as Board of Directors).

The structure of GOLSON is composed of its General body and Board of Directors (BOD), the latter being democratically elected by the General body. The 13 Directors of the respective LSOs are General body members. Thereupon, the Board members elect or select Chairman, Vice Chairman, General secretary, and else for a three-year period. Besides, each LSO has a quota of one technocrat to which a highly educated, competent, and dedicated person should be selected to voluntary serve GOLSON in the Board as its Director.

## Success and Failure: a Matter of Governance

While the legacy of the civil society based on VWOs goes back to more than 30 years ago, GOLSON is at present only six and a half years old: still, it has contributed since its inception to the respective civil society and other stakeholders in many ways.

There was no collective CSOs platform in Gojal at the moment of the Attabad disaster (January 2010): thus, it was challenging to commit to advocating for the cause of the whole community in a sustainable way. Once constituted, GOLSON started representing the local civil society and lobbying with diverse organisations. Despite the chaos and strong political pressures in the early disaster period, GOLSON had a possibility to play its strategic role in the later phases (as the catastrophe continued for

over three years) through the network of thousands of its members at grass-roots level. In this sense, GOLSON was particularly engaged in: providing educational assistance to needy students within the territories under its jurisdiction; introducing and sensitising the (suffered) community to alternative types of agricultural seeds rather than mostly or exclusively depending on potatoes. As for its inner administration, time-to-time meetings of the BOD would be held despite the fact that the valley was under disaster, and it was difficult to travel between valleys due to the distances and road quality (unpaved and bumpy roads), along with an unprecedented rise of vehicular fuel (while in Central Hunza and Gilgit the fuel cost was almost half).

Considering its positive performance in civil society, AKRSP provided GOLSON with an office within its Emergency Field Office in Gulmit, plus a couple of years of financial and technical support so as to continue from 2013 onward. Broadly speaking, GOLSON boasts several achievements in his life history. Nonetheless, in the light of the reigning circumstances, these conquests had come with a row of challenges (as in the case of other LSOs in GBC) that put GOLSON to severe tests. Observed from different angles, especially in terms of its internal capacities, this CSO has attracted several questions that can be summarised in the following: to what extent it could productively, representatively, and collaboratively contribute to community development?

Starting from the organisational level, i.e. hard-working and volunteering office-bearers of GOLSON, more team work would be needed. Another remark regards the fact that GOLSON is not getting success yet in pooling and creating an attractive endowment fund that would be based on the mobilisation of internal resources which would reduce the need to resort to external resources. In fact, it would be important for GOLSON to move towards a self-reliance and sustainability so as to become more transparent and accountable before the stakeholders.

Due to heavy reliance on external resources, human resources management is sometimes challenging, especially when donors or philanthropists draw back after a specified time period. In this respect, hiring GOLSON human resources needs to be strict and faithful to the principles (above all, meritocracy and professionalism), and to the goals. Such an approach will contribute to GOLSON in terms of innovative ideas and resources mobilisation, particularly at local level.

## Natural and Strategic Resources: a Matter of Market or Social Investment

Gojal valley is rich in natural and strategic resources: each community settlement has its natural resources that have attracted the tourism industry, mineral industries, hydropower generation companies, etc.; as for their strategic aspects, there are the community-based Silk Route Dry Port (at Sost), community conservancies, Khunzhav National Park (KNP), and else.

Hence the question: to what extent the GOLSON leadership has envisaged and strategised these resources in terms of community rights and development? A variety of options is there before GOLSON to consult its member organisations, and look for internal resources mobilisation so as to promote development of the communities.

GOLSON, as a voluntary organisation, values the notion of free market economy (as the free market also functions on voluntary enthusiasm between sellers and consumers, producers and suppliers, without pressure from State regulations). As a non-profit CSO, GOLSON would never become a business entity: still, one of its goals is to address poverty by imparting training courses and sensitisation campaigns aimed at enabling vulnerable and marginalised segments of the society, as well as the local youths, to become self-reliant while facilitating them in undertaking their own professional life. In line with its capacity building mission and enterprise development, GOLSON promotes these activities in collaboration with its partner organisations (e.g. AKRSP and other AKDN agencies, KADO, etc.). Such objectives and strategies underlie a long-term social investment with the potentials and prospects for family and community prosperity. If the youth and vulnerable community members prosper, they will be capable of contributing (with knowledge, skills, time, financial resources) to development of their families, communities, and the entire society in many ways (in/ formally, independently, or through CSOs system).

## Conclusions

Coexisting in Gilgit-Baltistan, indigenous entities – including traditional socio-cultural and kinship structures – were able to harvest ideas, social norms, values and patterns while bringing their customary laws into exercise. Along with the intervention by some public sector organisations before and after 1947, CSOs in Gilgit-Baltistan Region could be analysed, up to the 1980s, through a prism of evolutionary process. Such a phenomenon became possible only when former princely and acephalous states were abolished and administratively merged within the State of Pakistan, in addition to the opening of the KKH in the late 1970s: it was in that period that development

started being addressed by AKDN agencies, as well as by UN, IUCN, WWF, and else organisations. Revolutionary results can be observed in the 1980s and early 1990s, when community associations, esp. village and women's organisations (VWOs), were introduced and fostered by AKRSP. In conclusion, reaching positive societal changes in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral required the target communities to be prepared for voluntary self-initiatives through a participatory model.

The VWOs of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral (more than 4,500) had an important impact in terms of socio-economic development by providing enabling environment for the related stakeholders to put their development models into practice. At local level, the acquired knowledge encouraged village communities to create their local development organisations in the 1990s; at organisational level, the emerging phenomena led AKRSP and related AKDN experts to ponder over introducing the First MicroFinance Banks inside and outside Pakistan. Motivated by the experiences emerged from the social development laboratories of Gilgit-Baltistan, the governments and development practitioners of the 1990s launched the participatory model of community development throughout Pakistan in the form of Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) operating under the name of Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN), subsequently exported beyond the national borders.

Entered the 21st century, the set of challenges encountered by grass-roots structures (VWOs) led AKRSP to inspire a next generation of community i.e. civil society organisations in the form of local support organisations (LSOs): their mission was to sustain VWOs by providing legal covers, building multilevel relationships, mobilising the local communities and resources (internal and external), advocating for their common issues, addressing challenges, etc. Organised at either district or sub-district levels, the LSOs in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral are at advanced level and beyond the scope of AKRSP now. Their performance depends on the members sent to the LSOs general bodies and boards, elected against eligibility criteria (e.g. correctness, dedication) to represent the respective VWOs at a broader level. Now praised, now criticised, the LSOs – though novices – proved in a short span of time to be productive in bringing positive changes within the domain of local CSOs.

Emerged out of the Attabad disaster (January 2010), Gojal LSO Network (GOLSON) is another example of LSOs networks facilitated by AKRSP. Being the only forum of civil society having its roots in all households throughout the sub-district, it is both allowed and duty-bound to deal with the issues, rights, responsibilities, and challenges of the communities. With the help of experts and professionals, GOLSON can sensitise

the community members through the system of LSOs and VWOs so that they could understand what types of changes could be expected in the near future.

Being the post-disaster experience demanding for both the local people and CSOs, the phenomenon has compelled many sensible members of the civil society, especially the youth, to deliberate more seriously on the states of affairs in practice. How it could be possible to effectively and positively address the situation (roles and responsibilities of CSOs)? To what extent these CSOs are capable of acting upon their own communities so as to facilitate the members in electing their political leaders against consensus-based criteria? And finally: how a good governance practice could be achieved and maintained for a sustainable societal development?

Experiences of CSOs, addressed by this study, provide us a deep insight into their governance and management practices, implemented so far. Once exposed to good governance and management practices (equality, consensus, meritocracy, etc.), CSOs – being connected to the people and understanding their priorities – can be expected to become more effective than organisations that have not gained such experiences. This kind of action has a potential to guide the process of delivering development projects in effective and transparent manner, including the system of CSOs (e.g. LSOs), rather than choosing mechanisms prevailing in tradition.

Finally, if the village and women's organisations, conceived and fostered by AKRSP, yet realised by the communities, could become models for the rest of Pakistan and abroad, why not to make these VWOs, LDOs, LSOs, and related networks a model of good governance, for both the communities, and the political and bureaucratic organisations of Gilgit-Baltistan that would lead towards bringing improvements to the whole society.

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

|       |                                      |
|-------|--------------------------------------|
| AKDN  | Aga Khan Development Network         |
| AKRSP | Aga Khan Rural Support Programme     |
| CLSO  | Chipursan Local Support Organization |



|        |  |
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| GB(C)  | Gilgit-Baltistan (and Chitral)   |
| GOLSON | Gojal LSO Network  |
| GRSO   | Gojal Rural Support Organization   |
| IUCN   | International Union for Conservation of Nature (or World Conservation Union) |
| KKH    | Karakoram Highway  |
| LDO    | Local Development Organisation   |
| LSO    | Local Support Organisation   |
| MASO   | Mountain Area Support Organization   |
| RSPs   | Rural Support Programmes   |
| RSPN   | Rural Support Programmes Network   |
| SNT    | Shimshal Nature Trust  |
| UN     | United Nations   |
| VO     | Village Organisation   |
| WO     | Women's Organisation   |
| VWO    | Village and Women's Organisation   |
| WWF    | World Wide Fund for Nature   |