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FEATURED CASE STUDIES



BALTIT FORT



ALTIT FORT



SHIGAR FORT



KHAPLU PALACE



HUNZA VILLAGES REHABILITATION

Programme Scope/Objectives

The goal of the programme is sustainable development through culture and strategic investments. These are social, economic and institutional processes that aim to protect, manage and promote cultural heritage as an integral part of sustainable development. The hope is to enable effective and participatory community stewardship of heritage and environmental resources, and to create income and enterprise opportunities for communities based on proactive cultural heritage management. This has entailed the restoration of monuments and the improvement of living conditions through housing, sanitation, local capacity building, revival of arts and crafts, and the creation of new employment and income opportunities.

Preceding pages:

A view through a pair of carved wooden windows in Khaplu Palace to the valley and the Karakoram Mountains beyond.

Gilgit-Baltistan Area Programme

Gilgit-Baltistan, spread over 69,930 square kilometres, brings together a land of majestic mountain ranges and deep gorges with raging rivers and a heterogeneous population of a million whose origins are lost in the myths of antiquity. Defining the region are the Karakoram Mountains and the Indus River with its several tributaries, with the Himalayas extending in the south and the Hindu Kush range in the east while the Pamirs cordon the north.

It is home to the high mountain valleys of Hunza and Baltistan, located in the upper catchment area of the Indus River and deep within the Karakoram, where nature with its peaks, glaciers, rivers and streams is omnipresent. Terraced fields draw water from a great distance through extremely well-engineered irrigation channels, attesting to efforts to make the best use of nature under harsh living conditions.

The location of the region is sensitive and strategic because of its boundaries with Afghanistan (Wakhan territory), with China and with Indian-held Kashmir. The construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH), connecting Islamabad with Kashgar over the Khunjerab Pass (over 4700 metres), added to its importance, while the construction of further roads connecting Skardu with the KKH has given this region even more significance. The hydroelectric power potential of the Indus river system in Gilgit-Baltistan is another reason for the region's significance.

The area may be perceived as impenetrable, but it has historically provided conduits for trade between Central Asia and South Asia, with some of the strands of the Silk Road passing through it. This vast mountainous region is populated by heterogeneous communities and tribes of fairly distinct ethnic and linguistic groups, deriving their origin from Aryan, Scythian, Mongolian, Tibetan, Turanian and Caucasian stock.

The earliest forms of religion reaching this region seem to be Hinduism, in time supplanted by Buddhism, before the spread of Islam between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries. The languages spoken in the region are Shina around Gilgit, and Balti, a form of Tibetan in Baltistan. People of Hunza and Nagar speak Buruskaski. Other languages or dialects spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan are Wakhi, Khowar, Turki, Kashmiri and Gujri. Urdu is understood and spoken in almost all areas, while English is gaining ground, particularly with the young.



Altit Fort is typical of building construction in the Gilgit-Baltistan area, with reinforcing cribbage structures at the corners and horizontal cators stabilizing the walls.

Opposite page:
Baltit Fort in 1996, after restoration, looks out over the Hunza Valley.

Over time these peoples developed life styles that meshed fully with local environmental conditions. Frugality, self-dependence, optimal use of resources, and community endeavour emerged as their bedrock. The mountainous terrain is such that barely 1.5 per cent of the land is available for habitation. Water, though running in mighty rivers, was too far down to be readily harnessed. Streams were tapped and brought to parcels of land such as alluvial fans for seasonal crops through ingenious water channels. Only 'useful' trees were planted and looked after, with the apricot being a favourite, while quick-growing poplar was preferred for use in construction. The insufficiency of precipitation and the consequent lack of natural forests, particularly in Hunza, coupled with the burden of creating stone from huge rocks and the scarcity of available land resulted in the construction of multi-purpose single-room dwellings. These, typically, have a storeroom attached, and are made of mud and stone with no chimney or window, only a square hole in the centre of the roof over a fireplace where the cooking was done. Walls are tied in at various levels by wooden beams. A typical Hunza house presents a unique architectural design combining space, security and comfort, with a second storey for summer use. These houses clustered together to form settlements built on barren land that was of no use for the cultivation of crops. Their small size helped conserve energy required for heating as well as other resources. The cluster was also intended to provide security, as protective walls and watchtowers witness.

The first habitations in Hunza are reported to be those of Ganish, Altit and Baltit (since 1960 Karimabad), where *khuns* (fortified settlements) were formed, and water from the Ultar was taken to irrigate land. Over time watchtowers were added and the forts at Altit and Baltit took their present form. Skilled artisans from Baltistan reportedly carried out the work.

With easier access to and from Kashmir and having historical links with Tibet, Baltistan developed at a faster pace than Hunza. It generally also has bigger open spaces compared to Hunza, and has better resources in terms of land, or tree cover. Of the five valleys of Baltistan, Shigar is perhaps the most attractive. The valley is fertile with abundant water. Situated at an elevation of over 2440 metres, Shigar and the Shigar River drains the waters of the glaciers, feeding into the Indus. The Baltoro glacier, one of the largest in the Karakoram, begins at the north-west end of the valley. This is the main route for mountaineers headed to K2 and the Gasherbrums.

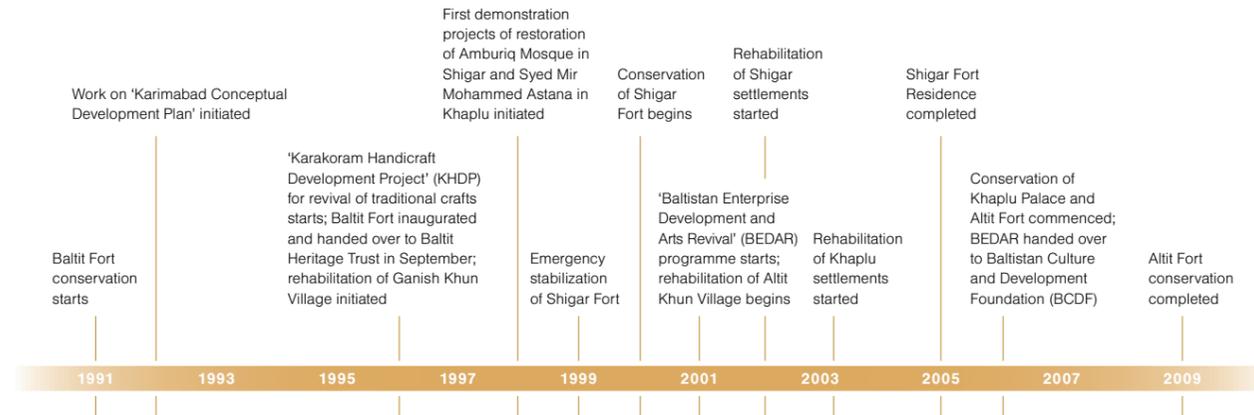
The other important valley in the area is Khaplu, which has borders with Ladakh (Indian-held territory). The average elevation of this valley is 2740 metres. Mountaineers on their way to the Masherbrums and the Saltoro range have to pass through Khaplu. Traditional housing here shows a great range in the use of timber, and has larger spaces as well as two-storey structures that use innovative wooden pillars. The palaces and forts are better developed and places of religion also testify to the rich architectural heritage that is regionally standard. A number of these forts or palaces, though relocated to lower sites during the Dogra regime, offered opportunities for restoration and adaptive reuse.

Our inventory of important cultural buildings in Gilgit-Baltistan includes eight major forts and palaces and nearly twenty minor ones; forty-five *khanqahs* (Sufi retreats), 150 mosques, over fifty archaeological sites, thirty important tombs and fifty traditional polo grounds. Gilgit-Baltistan contains a very rich and pluralistic heritage – representative of Muslim cultures, but also of Buddhist and Hindu influences.

As mentioned, strands of the Silk Road passed through the Hunza and Indus valleys. Commerce, art, skills, ideas, religious faiths, languages and technology passed between East and West through these mountains. The cross-fertilization that occurred facilitated



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an unprecedented exchange of ideas and the development of a unique culture, which deserves to be preserved and shared.

The cultural enclaves of central Hunza, Shigar and Khaplu were focused upon for Area Development, as these offered a sufficient level of heritage that could collectively permit a discernible improvement in the quality of life. Landmark monuments provided the centrality while the traditional settlements and the heritage and traditions surrounding these forts or palaces allowed for community-based conservation and rehabilitation efforts. The fact that these cultural enclaves were rapidly being transformed from a rural to an urban setting underscored the need to ensure that cultural heritage and values informed the inevitable transition to modernity.

Conservation work started with the most identifiable landmark buildings, such as the Baltit and Altit forts in central Hunza, and Shigar Fort and Khaplu Palace in Baltistan. These forts or palaces, through their gifting by the *mirs* and *rajas*, transformed private hereditary assets into public resources that benefit local communities.

The experience of conservation of Baltit Fort, and rehabilitation of the traditional settlement just below it, indicated that meaningful restoration work needs to be associated with rehabilitation of traditional settlements as well as promotion of building techniques that can thus have an area development effect.

Conservation of the Fort/Palace and the improvement of living conditions in the adjoining settlements was started simultaneously in Shigar and Khaplu, while in Altit, community-based built-environment upgrading and rehabilitation – a process for conserving historic villages and settlements by providing basic sanitation, water supply, electrification and street paving – was undertaken. Community spaces were restored prior to the conservation of the Fort itself. Economic empowerment of the community involving the revival of skills, particularly those of masons and carpenters, and the creation of modern skills, such as engaging young men and women in documentation functions, were part of the process.

It became clear that a broad range of activities was needed to complement these efforts, including the revival of arts and crafts through an enterprise process. Meaningful



cultural development necessitating the involvement of local partner organizations, such as the Town Management Societies, the Karakoram Area Development Organization and the Baltit Heritage Trust, proved essential to building ownership and sustainability in the future for these projects.

Between 1992 and the present, not only have the three forts of Baltit, Altit and Shigar been conserved and put to use for the benefit of the communities, but work on Khaplu Palace is continuing, with completion expected in 2012. Sixteen historic settlements have been rehabilitated, a number of monuments and houses have been stabilized, and seven public buildings built, demonstrating traditional construction techniques and the use of local building materials. Two major enterprises were established: one in Hunza for embroidery and rugs, and one in Baltistan for apricot kernel oil and production of wood products (carving, construction and furniture). These efforts were backed up with the establishment of a number of new institutions.

The revival of traditional crafts, such as weaving and embroidery, has been an important part of the socio-economic programmes. Trades such as carpentry have been fostered, and the handing down of household traditions has been encouraged.



Background

BRIEF HISTORY OF PROGRAMME AREA

Hunza, nestling in the shadows of the Karakorams, first gained notoriety and fame from its location, the possession of which was coveted by the two expanding rival empires during the 19th century in Asia: Russia under the czar in Central Turkistan advancing towards the Indian borders, and the British Indian empire expanding to the north. In 1842 Sikhs who held Kashmir as part of their domain entered Gilgit, opening the way for the Dogra rulers to get a foothold in the region. The latter had acquired Kashmir after the British had broken the Sikhs' power in the Punjab and the treaty of Amritsar was signed, in accordance with which Kashmir (which included the territories of Baltistan and Astore) was transferred in 1846 to Maharaja Gulab Singh, the Dogra chief from Jammu. Realizing its strategic importance, in 1876 this area was taken away from the maharaja under a treaty by the British. The region was directly administered by the British, while Baltistan continued to be administered by Kashmir State as part of Ladakh, which was conquered by Sikh and Dogra troops before 1842. In December 1891 a successful campaign was conducted against Hunza/Nagar. The main battle was fought at a place called Nilt in Nagir. In 1935 the Government of India arranged with the maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir a lease for 60 years whereby all the territory except Baltistan and Astore areas would be administered by the British Raj. In 1947 (independence of India and Pakistan) the whole area was returned under the control of the maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir who appointed a Governor in Gilgit with military garrisons in Gilgit and Baltistan. On 31 October 1947 the control of the Jammu and Kashmir administration was wrested from the maharaja's representative in Gilgit and his troops were routed by a successful 'War of Liberation' in favour of Pakistan. On the request and invitation from the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, the Government of Pakistan took over the administration in mid November 1947, which in 1948 was extended to Baltistan following its liberation.

Challenges

DEMOGRAPHICS

In 1974 the overall population for Gilgit-Baltistan was estimated to be half a million, now estimated to be one million. The rate of population growth is estimated to be 2.5%. Gilgit and Skardu are the main towns with populations estimated at a 100,000 each.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

The construction of the Karkoram Highway (KKH) which connected Islamabad to Kashgar, and the construction of other roads linking all the major towns with Gilgit, also opened the area up to outside influences. The ease of having construction materials at hand, such

as cement and corrugated iron sheets, had a major negative impact, as, rather than relying on local materials such as stone, poplar wood and mud bricks that were suitable for the extreme climatic conditions, these so-called modern constructions started to encroach into the area. Arresting this trend and steering design and construction to respect local materials and traditional construction techniques is an area of focus for AKTC work in Hunza and Baltistan.

Significant Issues and Impact

MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

In Hunza, the process was based on participatory inputs. Meetings and detailed follow-ups by experts with the community and with government planning departments were held and options explored, resulting, in the case of Karimabad, in the 'Karimabad Conceptual Development Plan'. In Shigar, with the community and government representatives on board and in collaboration with other agencies such as World Conservation Union (IUCN), land-use plans were generated.

BASELINE STANDARDS

These relied on 'Aga Khan Rural Support Programme' (AKRSP) surveys in most cases for data on the socio-economic conditions. For physical surveys, teams were trained locally and employed. Some of these teams, especially women-based ones, were further supported and have since 2005 been carrying out excellent survey work.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

The first initiative was the Swiss-funded 'Karakoram Handicraft Development Programme' (KHDP), with a focus on reviving the traditional art of embroidery work, which has since been subsumed by the Karakoram Area Development Organization (KADO) in Hunza. KHDP was initiated in 1996 as an action-research programme, when the community in Hunza, the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency (SDC) and AKCS-P decided to revive crafts and promote enterprise and economic development with a special focus on women. The success of the action-research phase in 1996 and the formation of a regional body – KADO as a local institutional body representing Hunza Valley – offered AKCS-P the opportunity to transfer the operational responsibility for KHDP to KADO in a staggered manner. Capacity building for KADO during the early phase of the project, especially in administrative and financial skills, facilitated this handover. KHDP allowed 3000 women, working out of their homes, to enhance their incomes through production of embroidery work – a craft which Hunza women had prided themselves on for over generations but which was dying out. In Baltistan, a similar organization, the 'Baltistan Enterprise Development and Art Revival' (BEDAR) was set up by the Baltistan Culture Foundation (BCF) and AKCS-P with

funding from the SDC. BEDAR is the Urdu word for "awakening" and was chosen for its symbolic connotations with regard to the resurrection of traditional values. Initiated in July 2003, BEDAR selected a number of product lines. Of these, woodwork has achieved the best results, while responding to a local and regional demand using the comparative advantage strategy to effect. In woodworks, woodcarving and production of *jalis* (perforated screens) – a traditional skill that was recently on the verge of extinction – have been revived by apprenticing young trainees with *ustads* (masters) and the products are being sold in the markets. The small workshop was expanded and now furniture and construction carpentry are the main products. This allows for substitution of imported goods, since furniture items were trucked in all the way from Islamabad, a road journey of two days. Producing local poplar-wood furniture of a reasonable standard in Baltistan helps the local economy. The large numbers of poplars planted with the help of AKRSP are becoming an economic resource, and plenty of wood-related employment opportunities are emerging.

QUALITY OF LIFE

In order to meet the ever increasing needs for proper sanitation systems, an initial project was conceived and launched in Karimabad to cater for the needs of people living in the historic settlements. Based on positive results, these efforts were extended and through a community-led initiative the historic villages of Karimabad, Ganish and Altit now have these facilities. In Baltistan, the Shigar community preferred to use traditional community toilets; these have been improved through better design and better locations. In Altit, Shigar and Khaplu clean drinking-water projects were launched that provide water for the restored landmark monument while also supplying water to the adjoining settlements.

Partners

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Karimabad Town Management Society, Altit Town Management Society, Ganish Khun Heritage and Social Welfare Society, Shigar Town Management and Development Society, Khaplu Town Management and Development Society, Karakoram Area Development Organization, Baltistan Culture and Development Foundation.

Authoritative Framework

Frameworks – known as 'Terms of Partnership' (TOP) – were negotiated for each of the project interventions with the beneficiary community. These TOPs laid down the roles with AKCS-P invariably having technical responsibility while the community would be responsible for the social aspects and for subsequent use of the project.

Opposite page:

The carved wood balcony of Khaplu Fort, which is being transformed into a guest house, is undergoing restoration.