



AKDN

AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Summer 2023 Newsletter
Pakistan Edition

Environmentally friendly science project by Aga Khan School students wins an international award



An environmental science project by Aga Khan Higher Secondary School students, Karachi, won a prestigious honour at the International Science and Engineering Fair in Dallas, USA, in May 2023. Hasan Raheel and Malaika Zafar's joint project, Bio-Briquettes, was selected for the Special Award from the King Abdul Aziz and His Companions Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity in the category of Energy, Sustainable Material, and Design. Along with this recognition, Hasan and Malika were granted a prize of \$200.

Bio-briquettes are eco-friendly fuels made from organic materials, such as agricultural waste, and can be made by hand. As our planet's well-being is being threatened by global warming and climate change, solutions such as bio-briquettes have the potential to reverse the trend. Hasan and Malika say they were inspired to work on green energy solutions after learning about the environmental cost of extracting fossil fuels. "Given the pace of global warming and the looming threat to communities the world over, and especially in Pakistan, which is one of the countries identified as being most vulnerable to climate risk, it is imperative upon us to work for easy-to-implement, sustainable solutions," says Malika, explaining the motivation behind their project. "A lot of agricultural byproducts are wasted," adds Hasan. "They are just waiting to be utilized productively, not just so that we can reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, but also so that more people can access cheap and readily available energy to meet their needs." A small thing like handmade fuel made from agricultural waste could have a far-reaching impact on our lives. As Malika says, "We can choose to change the ending of our story". And that can only be done when we use our knowledge to work for positive change.



Hasan with his project display.

Aga Khan Foundation receives the Development Leadership Award from the Government of Pakistan



Honourable Prof. Ahsan Iqbal Chaudhary, Federal Minister of Planning Development & Special Initiative presenting the Development Leadership Award to Waqar Ahmed Air Commodore (Retd), Director Operations and External Affairs AKF, Pakistan.

We are pleased to share that the Government of Pakistan conferred awards upon 75 individuals and institutions during a ceremony commemorating the 75th independence day of Pakistan. The institutions were commended for their exceptional contributions and their unwavering commitment to driving positive change in the country.



Aga Khan Foundation was recognised for its exceptional contribution as a development leader and the instrumental role it has played in the socioeconomic development of Pakistan. Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) was the only International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) to receive the award. AKF's focus on community engagement and participatory approaches ensures that interventions are culturally sensitive and responsive to local needs. By investing in human capital and infrastructure development, AKF has contributed to poverty reduction and enhanced the resilience of communities facing social and economic challenges. The Foundation's transformative work continues to uplift lives and promote sustainable progress in the country. Through its diverse range of programmes and projects, AKF has improved access to quality healthcare, education, and economic opportunities for communities following the SDG's spirit of leaving no one behind and furthest behind first. The ceremony was a momentous occasion, bringing together thought leaders, policy leaders, business leaders, and society leaders to celebrate the spirit of excellence and progress in Pakistan. Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal, was the chief guest at the occasion. The award is a recognition by the Government of Pakistan for the contributions of AKDN and its agencies in the country.

HBL Microfinance Bank joins hands with Special Communications Organisation to establish the first-ever Software Technology Park in Skardu



Taking another step towards creating more possibilities, HBL Microfinance Bank (HBL-MfB) has partnered with the Special Communications Organisation (SCO) to establish and operate the first-ever Software Technology Park (STP) in Skardu, Gilgit-Baltistan.

The Bank has extended support of Rs. 15 million to the cause, which will usher in a new era of technological and skills development in the Gilgit Baltistan region. During the pilot phase, STP Skardu has generated PKR 2 million from IT companies operating from the park.

With an already active presence in the Gilgit Baltistan region, this is yet another step for HBL-MfB to support local communities and improve their livelihoods. The partnership aims to boost the region's IT industry and create job opportunities for the local population by unlocking their technological potential. Through its efforts, the Bank continues to give back to the communities in which it operates. Since its inception in 2002, the Bank has been working tirelessly with like-minded organisations to expand its outreach and invest in technology-driven financial solutions to open new avenues for financial inclusion in the country.

*CEO & President, HBL-MfB,
Mr. Muhammad Amir Khan,
presenting the cheque to Director
General, SCO, Major General
Muhammad Shahid Siddeeq.*

*Also present Air Commodore
(RTD) Waqar Ahmed, Director
Operations and External Affairs,
Aga Khan Foundation Pakistan.*

The Aga Khan University Examination Board becomes the institutional member of the UNESCO Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP)



CEO of AKU-EB visiting schools that are affiliated with AKU EB.



The Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP) is a platform for exchange of knowledge, experience and expertise on the monitoring of educational quality within the Asia-Pacific region. The Aga Khan University Examination Board became an institutional member of the UNESCO NEQMAP starting from Jan 2023. It marks a significant milestone reaffirming the Board's unwavering commitment to provide access to quality education across Pakistan. Progress in information technology and artificial intelligence across the world calls for transformational changes in the education systems. The Aga Khan University (AKU) Examination Board's inclusion in NEQMAP is a strategic imperative. This collaboration will allow adaptation, innovation, and leadership to AKU Examination Board ensuring that learners are equipped with skills and knowledge needed to excel in an increasingly interconnected world. As an esteemed member of NEQMAP, AKU Examination Board gains access to a dynamic platform that brings together like-minded educational institutions, researchers, and policymakers to discuss some of the most discursive issues around education, exchange ideas and share best practices through collaboration with a mission to uplift the standards of education in the region. The network is an opportunity to ensure that AKU-Examination Board students receive quality education at par with international standards and practices that enable them to thrive anywhere in the world. The board has been presenting its best assessment practices with members of the network and actively contributes to shaping educational policies and practices at the regional and global levels. As a member of the NEQMAP network, the AKU Examination Board's journey of excellence marks a transformative step towards creating an equitable future for education in Pakistan and beyond.

The Missing Piece: Mental Health



In Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and Chitral, like many other regions around the world, people face various challenges when it comes to mental health. Harsh living conditions, isolation, economic conditions, and natural disasters are all elements that make citizens susceptible to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. These factors, left untreated, and without access to proper resources can result in substance abuse and suicide amongst other negative outcomes.

Recently, Aga Khan Health Service, Pakistan, in collaboration with AKU's Brain and Mind Institute launched Taskeen, a mental health helpline for residents of GB and Chitral. This first of a kind helpline will provide free of cost counselling to callers in GB and Chitral and is a major step forward for increasing access to mental health resources to people living in these regions. Speaking on mental health, the honourable Chief Secretary Gilgit-Baltistan, Mr. Mohiyuddin Wani said: "I would venture to call mental health the missing piece in the 'human health puzzle'. Mental and physical health complement one another, and the puzzle is incomplete without either piece."

The launch of Taskeen emphasised the significance of mental health support in improving the overall quality of life for individuals and communities. The Taskeen mental health helpline is set to play a vital role in providing assistance and guidance to individuals struggling with various mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, and stress.

Preservation and promotion of Hareep Mountain Music



The Aga Khan Cultural Service Pakistan is implementing a UNESCO-funded project, “Enhancing Craft and Cultural Initiatives in Gilgit-Baltistan.” The project’s primary objective is to safeguard, promote, and disseminate the rich cultural heritage of Hareep Mountain Music and folk traditions in Hunza. A rich tapestry of folk music and dance exists in Hunza. However, realizing its full potential requires dedicated efforts for both its preservation and advancement. Playing a crucial role in this initiative is the Leif Larson Music Center (LLMC), established under the Aga Khan Music Initiative in partnership with the Royal Norwegian Embassy, which operates within the Altit Fort compound, serving as an educational hub for music enthusiasts.

The project involves immersive workshops led by master musicians specialising in the Hareep genre. These workshops provide a unique opportunity for students to engage in hands-on training and receive guidance from experienced senior master musicians. The initiative also encompasses two significant music festivals—one in Hunza and another in Islamabad—to provide a platform for LLMC students and local musicians to showcase their talents and raise awareness. Additionally, the project emphasises inclusivity by customizing these sessions for children with special needs, allowing them to explore their musical potential under the guidance of local trainers from Gilgit-Baltistan. Furthermore, artisanal craftsmanship from Ciqam women’s social enterprise will contribute to the project by constructing instrument hangers and stands, ensuring the preservation and display of these cultural artefacts. As part of the initiative, a series of music videos are also being produced, offering senior LLMC musicians a chance to connect with a broader audience. Filmed at Altit Fort and its surroundings, these videos narrate stories and evoke emotions and increase exposure and engagement with the artists.

AKU-IED's efforts lead to Sindh Government's approval of Teaching License Policy



The Sindh Government recently approved a Teaching License policy for the province. Unlike other professions like medicine or nursing, teaching did not have a license or a minimum qualification. This has changed with the landmark decision enabling teaching to move from being an occupation to a profession. AKU's Institute for Educational Development in Pakistan (AKU-IED) played a strategic role in this key development. A multi-year research and consultation process led by AKU-IED preceded the approval of the policy. The process involved the launch of a White Paper written by AKU-IED jointly launched with Sindh Teachers Education Development Authority and Durbeen in June 2022.

Contributions from scholars, notably Rana Hussain from Ziauddin University, as well as support from educational activist Shehzad Roy were crucial to the approval of the policy. Dr Sajid Ali, Associate Professor, AKU-IED presented the Teaching License policy at the provincial government's cabinet meeting, where it was approved. Dr Farid Panjwani, Dean, AKU-IED, observed that "A teaching license may appear to be for teachers, but it is, in fact, for children. It is to ensure that children's education is trusted by people who are capable, caring, and with whom they will be safe. We will continue to dedicate our efforts to ensure that this policy, over the next few years, enhances the status of the teaching profession and the quality of teaching in the country.



AKRSP Community engagement to irrigate barren lands in Nagar



MoU signing between AKRSP and SRSO.

The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) held a landmark dialogue with the communities in Chalt, District Nagar, for an electric lift irrigation system to irrigate the barren land of Qorqon Das. The project will be supported by KfW Development Bank. The irrigation scheme aligns with AKRSP's broader strategy of building resilience in rural communities while prioritising biodiversity and environmental sustainability. This dialogue was a crucial step in AKRSP's sustained engagement with communities, underlining its commitment to fostering robust, inclusive dialogue on the path to progress and prosperity. The electric lift irrigation initiative will convert approximately 1,200 kanal of unproductive land into a thriving, efficient irrigation network. The project is poised to stimulate agricultural development, promote plantation efforts, significantly improve local livelihoods, and empower women economically. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between AKRSP and the Shainbar Rural Support Organisation (SRSO) during the dialogue to expedite the implementation process. Members of the village and women's organisations, Local Support Organisation representatives and community members attended the event. Mr Habibullah, Executive Engineer, Water and Power Department, District Nagar and Mr Rehmat Ali from World Wildlife Fund also graced the event and appreciated AKRSP's strategic partnership with local communities. While thanking the local community of Chalt, Nagar, Ms. Yasmin Qalandar, Regional Programme Manager, AKRSP, said: "We are enthusiastic about the potential of the electric lift irrigation system for the Qorqon Das land. We believe this project represents a turning point for the agricultural landscape of Chalt, and indeed for District Nagar as a whole. This initiative is set to unlock not only the farming potential of the land but also the economic prospects of the local community."

Serena Hotels' commitment to community enhancement



Serena Hotels operates with its ethos of building communities and has launched a crucial initiative undertaking an affiliation with the International Finance Corporation-Excellence in Design for Greater Efficiency in collaboration with the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat. This initiative entails three stages of Building Standards Certification for the two new properties under construction in the Gilgit-Baltistan Region, i.e., Hunza Serena Hotel and Sost Serena Hotel.

A key highlight of this initiative is the initiation of the Sewerage Treatment Plant technology in Pakistan, focusing on the climate crisis to minimise our ecological footprint and work to promote and utilise clean energy. This also includes a solar project dedicated to meeting the energy needs without impacting or damaging the areas around it. The solid waste management plan utilises modern principles that include waste segregation, waste recycling, and the development of compost for reuse. In order to minimise the effects of landscaping, it is based on sustainable principles in the areas around the centuries-old Baltit Fort, making Hunza Serena Hotel & Sost Serena Hotel the cornerstones of cultural significance. In addition to these environmental management practices at the institutional level, Serena Hotels will also partner with the community from catchment areas on water stewardship as well as site-specific interventions.

A Beacon of Hope: Early Warning System Saves Lives in Flood Prone Guldheri, Mansera



The residents of Guldheri, in Mansehra District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were jolted by the sound of an emergency siren just past midnight on the night of 3 July 2023. The siren came from the Early Warning System (EWS) installed by the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat (AKAH) to inform the residents of an incoming flood. The people evacuated their houses just in time before the flood descended upon the village with unprecedented fury. Guldheri, is particularly susceptible to riverine and flash floods. The district witnessed a significant flood event in recent years, causing immense damage to critical infrastructure. Recognising the urgency of the situation, AKAH installed an EWS in close coordination with the community and the National Disaster Risk Management Fund. The goal was to prepare the community for anticipated disasters and introduce an innovative, community-based approach to disaster management.

Mohammad Thair, a community member from Guldheri, shared his feelings, “As the floodwaters surged, we were overcome with anxiety- a feeling of impending doom the floodwaters might engulf the entire village, leaving nothing but destruction in their wake.” Given the sensitivity of the situation, the trained volunteers of the community emergency response team of the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat Pakistan (AKAH) in Khandheri villages and the village disaster risk management committee members in Guldheri village evacuated families and informed community members in other villages. As a result, around 60 people were evacuated from their homes and there were no losses of precious lives. The success of the EWS proved to be a game-changer, not only in saving lives but also in enhancing the community’s confidence.



Dear Readers,

We are pleased to share with our readers the Summer edition of AKDN Newsletter 2023. The stories highlight the impact of AKDN programmes at the ground level. We want to thank the Government of Pakistan and all our partners who have been supporting AKDN's development work in the country for many decades. These achievements have been possible due to the support of the communities on ground who are the actual owners of the programmes.

If you have any questions and comments, please contact the editor, Laila Naz Taj, Director Communications, AKDN Pakistan at laila.taj@akdn.org. The next volume of AKDN Newsletter will be available in Autumn 2023.

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