

Thematic session IV: Experiences with regional development¹

The fourth session of the workshop consisted of three contributions that dealt with different aspects of regional development in the Pamirs. Two presenters focused on the role, the strategies, and the effects of the activities of international development organisations, from an internal and external perspective. A third presentation underlined the importance of local efforts for rural development in peripheral high mountain regions, using the example of the settlement of Shimshal, Gilgit Baltistan (Pakistan).

Ghulam Amin Beg, Program Head of the Institutional Development/Civil Society Strengthening & Thematic Lead, Youth Employability and Leadership Program of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in Gilgit, Gilgit Baltistan (Pakistan), presented his personal views and assessments of the challenges development programmes face in the region. He provided a historical overview of successful activities the AKRSP and other organisations of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) have pursued in Gilgit Baltistan since the 1980s, and concluded that local development should be determined by local participation and decentralised local decision-making, rather than solely by top-down approaches and external agencies.

Muzaffar-Ud Din, at that time Country Representative & Chief Executive Officer of BRAC, Islamabad (Pakistan), presented the colourful example of the formerly isolated and poor settlement of Shimshal, where, with the support of AKRSP, the proactive local community managed the challenge of constructing a road passing through difficult mountainous terrain. Due to this new interlinkage with the road network of Pakistan, Shimshal became one of the most prosperous villages in the region.

After a presentation about the Swiss organisation ‘Pamir’s Bridges’, its President Bernard Repond gave a stirring introduction to the importance of bridges for local communities in terms of connection with the outer world, and accessibility to economically important, though remote, places such as high mountain pastures. He emphasised that the local implementation of such infrastructure rehabilitation projects and the following maintenance activities are crucial for the creation of responsibility and ownership among the local population, which are crucial prerequisites for sustainable rural development.

During the discussion, it was emphasised that romanticisation and generalisation of successful examples must be avoided because there are many counterexamples where such community mobilisation did not work. Another point stressed during the discussion was the

¹ Based on minutes recorded by Michael Spies and Tim Polster

importance of leadership for local development efforts, which is often underestimated in development work.



Karakoram Highway and Kulma Pass Road have been developed to be the modern arteries of commercial exchange and human mobility
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