



Climatic changes and communities' response to the hazards, a case study from northern Pakistan

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Chitral- the northern most district of Pakistan; is located in the remote isolated region of Hindu Kush mountain range. Firewood is the main source of energy for cooking and heating for around 400,000 people (50,000 households) inhabiting in 32 different valleys. Absence of alternative source of energy has been a significant factor of persistent poverty and environmental degradation in the area. Firewood is used for cooking, space heating, and to have warm water in cold winters. Harsh climatic conditions, negligible forest covered area, low per capita income, limited and costly availability of alternative energy sources are important characteristics of the area forcing the poor communities to spend a sizable amount of family budget on purchase of firewood every year. Poor households are therefore overusing the scarce and sporadic natural vegetation on the mountains. The thick junipers forests on the mountains in most of the valleys seen in early 70's are now depleted and the mountains are cleared. Coupled with climatic changes in the region, the vegetation-less mountains started causing flash floods every year resulting in multiplying the number of people falling below the poverty line and exposing many more to high risk and vulnerability. Since 2004, there have been unexpected snowfalls, snow avalanches, land slides, glaciers outbursts and flash floods in Chitral resulting in hundreds of human lives and thousands of livestock losses; forest and fruits trees, cultivable land and houses washed away. The emerging development challenges as effects of the degradation of NRs and climatic changes in the region worked as stimulus for the local communities to re-think their traditional approach of collective action. In the period before over three decades from now, there were traditional local institutions to help the mountain com-

munities manage their limited resource and respond to the external shocks, weather these were invasions from outsiders or were the natural disasters. Then there was an institutional vacuum in late 70s to early 80s putting the scarce natural resource and other communal properties at high risk of extinction or badly degradation. Given this social context, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme intervened and organised the local communities around Village and Women Organisations (V/WOs) to reinforce the forgotten strength of Collective Action sustaining the mountain communities for centuries. At the wake of the climatic changes and increasing vulnerability in living a mountain rural life in north Pakistan during the last couple of years, the V/WOs platform played an important role in conceptualizing a second-generation of community institutions as Local Support Organisations (LSOs). The LSOs are now larger valley level institutions with a pyramid structure in which the V/WOs and other CSOs are the base.

The local government and developmental organisations have a strong faith in working with these LSOs for socio-economic development and preservation of natural resources in the area. The LSOs organise Multi-Stakeholders Forums (MSFs), to discuss the key issues of concern, formulate strategies and plan interventions for five to ten years ahead. During this year, in view of the recent incidences of natural calamities in the area, the Multi-Stakeholders Forums brought forward the Climatic Changes and degradation of the natural resources as the major development challenges to focus upon. Though this paper is not based on a rigorous scientific research but it helps in documenting the tacit knowledge of the local communities which will in turn contribute to the knowledge base of the world. This model of Civil Society Engagement through LSOs is therefore worth sharing with world's communities and replicating in other similar mountainous areas of the world.