

Ghizer District LSO Network  
A Path to Change

Note for the Record

Shandana Khan, RSPN  
16 June 2010

The group of 20 men from Diامر's (Chilas) NGO Network were on a visit to a girls' higher secondary school in a Ghizer village. At the school one of them asked "Is this school also for Muslims?" One of the students got up. She said "What do you mean by that? I am a Sunni and we all study here together." She had put the man on the spot whereupon he replied "what I meant was, does this school cater to all sects of Islam." The young student responded "Yes, it does because I also study here. For the first time I have been made aware of what sect I am. I had never felt any difference and was never asked this question before - until today."

Is this not what we need in Pakistan today – and yet getting there seems more and more difficult as we cut each other down and as our pontification continues with an unbelievable righteousness – often one that has little knowledge behind it. And yet, in these valleys, we see this change. We hope this change will hold and not give way to what is so common in the rest of the country – intolerance.

The group from Chilas were provided amazing exposure by the Ghizer LSO Network which deliberately concentrated on showing them efforts in girls' education and women's project. This exchange may have started a unique relationship and a pathway to change in a conservative area like Chilas.

The Ghizer LSO Network is a coalition of eight LSOs. Three additional LSOs are to become members of the LSON soon - including a women's LSO covering Singal and Bubur union councils of Ghizer. The LSON was formed in 2009 and is still to be registered. LSO formation in Ghizer district started in 2004. The total number of union councils in the LSON area are 15. LSOs do not yet exist in four union councils as the VOs and WOs are mostly dead and need to be 're-activated' by the LSON. The households in the LSON area are 17,059 and a population of 153,278.

LSO representatives present at the meeting were from LSOs Hatoon, Gahkuch, Singal, Taus Yasin, Kurumbur Ishkoman, Chatorkhans Ishkoman, Gupis, Teru. Also present was AKRSP's RPM for Gilgit, Muzafaruddin; Area Manager AKRSP and Institutional Development Officers AKRSP as well as the head of the women's LSO in Singal.

The visit of the Chilas NGO Network was organised by the Ghizer district LSO Network (LSON) with RSPN and AKRSP support. For the readers of this note who are not familiar with the area, Ghizer is a district of Gilgit-Baltistan, as is Chilas/Diامر. However, Diامر district has not been as 'advanced' in its progress, in fact it lives in another century still. The AKRSP never worked in Diامر due to the animosity there was

towards it. Today, things are changing. There is greater acceptance, there is a little more education and exposure of men. The people to people exchange, however, will most probably be the greatest impetus for meaningful and sustained change.

Ghizer LSON explained how they exposed the Chilas NGO Network members mainly to women's programmes. They took them to the women's market which AKRSP had helped them set up in Chatorkhand. Apparently the group from Chilas was quite animated by this and said they would try and set up at least two shops run by women in Chilas bazaar!

In return the Chilas NGO network has also invited the LSON to Diamer – specifying that only the men could visit. A visit of 12 LSO members from Ghizer took place to Chilas where they met with Chilas NGO Network members as well as religious and political leaders and VOs formed under the Northern Areas Development Project. They found that the Chilas NGO Network had briefed the ulema of Chilas on how the women of Ghizer had made such remarkable progress. The Diamer NGO Network is now planning to bring ulema from Diamer to Ghizer for exposure. The LSON members were quite amused when the Khatib of Chilas, Abdul Bari, said to them that he had revisited the concept of 'NGO' after meeting them and that, in fact, even the mosque is an NGO!

## **LSON Work under RSPN-AKRSP Support**

### **1. Widening the net**

Since its formation and support from RSPN in December 2009, the LSON and its member LSOs have put in efforts to spread the 'net' of the LSOs. The following progress has been made by the LSO:

No. of LSOs in LSON – from 8-10 (and 1 more women's LSO to soon be included)

Registered LSO members of LSON – from 7-5 LSOs

V/WOs membership from 276 to 336 (increase of 60)

Household coverage increase from 7569 to 8624 (increase of 1055)

Membership increase from 11,968 to 13089 (increase of 1121 with WO membership increasing from 6,711 to 7,711, representing 59% of total membership of the WOs in the 10 LSOs)

Cumulative savings of LSON member LSOs from Rs 4.3 mill to Rs 6.3 mill (increase of Rs 2 mill)

### **2. Fund Raising and Project Proposals Submitted**

A total of eleven proposals have been submitted by various LSOs ie to AKRSP, DFID, EU. Six of these proposals have been submitted to DFID. Unfortunately three of the six were submitted late, with only three now submitted in time to DFID. One proposal has been submitted to the EU. The DFID proposals have been submitted by LSO Kurumbur, LSO Shandur and LSO Gupis Rural Support Programme (GRSP). The Shandur LSO has submitted an NRM and skills development proposal worth sterling 53,300 to DFID's Development Innovations Fund. The GRSP has submitted to the same fund a proposal for

NRM and enterprise development for sterling 58,442. The GRSP has also submitted a proposal to the EU for technical and vocational training development. It is interesting to note that large organisations like the IRM have also applied for this programme.

### **3. Concept Clearance Workshops with VOs and WOs**

The LSON has held one meeting with some VO and WOs to clarify the concept of LSOs and the LSON. This is also part of the process of ‘re-activating’ VOs and WOs.

### **4. Advocacy**

The LSON has held a meeting with government officials and political representatives (members of the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly – GBLA) to discuss the issue of ‘intrusions’ from Diamer into Ghizer. Historically there has been a problem of thefts and kidnapping of women by people from Chilas who come through the mountain passes and ‘nalas’ into Ghizer valley. The LSOs have made a rather impressive video, with interviews of affected families, which they used as an advocacy tool to show the GBLA members. The demand of the LSON was to station para-military forces along the district borders as the policy has not been able to control the situation. The GBLA members who are from the area have promised to bring up this issue with GBLA members from Diamer. The LSON has also raised the issue of the Shandur (part of the LSON area) polo tournament royalty, which goes to Chitral in KP province, with the ex GBLA. This is a critical issue for which a Boundary Commission was earlier set up by the federal government. It is interesting to see how the LSON is venturing into such ‘political’ issues.

### **5. Youth Internship Programme**

The LSON has supported the placement of six interns in three LSOs. The interns are being used by individual LSOs for tasks such as surveys, data collection as well as publicising the AKAM health insurance scheme. LSON pays each intern Rs 2000/month for a period of three months each. Of the totals of Rs 14,000 provided by RSPN to the LSON, Rs 6000 has been used to date.

### **6. Development Forums**

As part of its plan to celebrate certain days based on social themes and issues, the LSON organised one women’s day celebration in Gahkuch. This was attended by all but one LSO. The RSPN has provided the LSON an amount of Rs 25,000 per event for four such events. The remaining events will be organised by individual LSOs eg on 14<sup>th</sup> August, labour day, mother’s day, etc.

### **The Future**

*Union council plans and influencing the GBLA (Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly):*  
The LSON leadership ie its Chairman Bulbul Jan as well as other office bearers spoke

about how a district-level network can be a strong influence on government. A discussion took place regarding the next financial year and planning by the newly elected GBLA and LSON input into this process. The LSON said they had individual, LSO level union council plans that could be shared with the GBLA and these could be included in next year's budget. However, they needed AKRSP's assistance to create a platform at the district and GB level for the LSON to engage with government. The LSON explained that the government was making a budget based on recommendations of earlier formed village councils. When asked how many of the LSO leaders in the room were members of these councils, I was surprised to find that there were none. Village councils are highly politicised and the LSO leaders and the LSON said that they could informally influence these councils but that they did not see themselves as being part of them. This is perhaps how things are at present. Clearly VO, WO and LSO leaders are potential future political leaders. The Chairman of the LSON himself stood as an independent but could not win as the election was rigged in Ghizer.

The representative from Gahkuch LSO said that their LSO had taken some political representatives on board, in order to influence policy. The representative from Chatorkhand LSO said that they had invited district and union council members to their LSO meeting and presented their union council plan to them already.

*Possible Links with Benazir Income Support Programme:* The members LSOs present said that they had all done a poverty ranking of households in their villages and that this data could be shared with the BISP office. They were informed that the BISP 'system' has changed and that a poverty score card census will now take place in GB, by the RSPN and AKRSP, to determine BISP clients.

Talking to LSON about sustainability and member contribution reminded me of RSPN and RSP contributions towards it – very unforthcoming and difficult to extract. We had a good laugh about this similar situation. LSON needs about Rs 36,000 per month to sustain its costs. A discussion took place about a membership fee but LSON will have to strategise with the LSOs on the tasks that it should undertake and on some contribution from LSOs towards the LSON.

RPM Gilgit, Muzaffaruddin, informed us that Ghizer LSOs had been visited by SRSP staff and VOs formed under the GOP-PPAF funded Social Mobilisation Project. It was amusing to hear the stories of communities from Kohistan who visited Ghizer and how they were under the impression that His Highness The Aga Khan literally gave 'bags of money' to the people of the area. They were surprised when they found out that what the people of the area had done was all through self help. They were impressed that the women of Ghizer were so 'serious and clever.' The LSOs visited get paid an amount of Rs 10,000 per visit by the AKRSP – for this trip this amount was charged to the SRSP.

## **Conclusion**

At some point we should expect a 'take-off', small turning points, culminations of people's potential, coming together, creating a critical mass and making that change.

Most of us are busy in day to day projects, in administration and often in things that are really 'besides the point.' We need to keep in mind the big picture. My visit to the Ghizer district level LSO Network was like the sudden clearing away of the details of a picture, showing ahead the big road - a path to change.