

Supporting the Next Generation of Leaders in Pakistan



"The proportion of working age population is increasing and offering a window of opportunity to turn this demographic transition into a "demographic dividend." This "demographic dividend" provides a great opportunity to steer the energies of youth for Pakistan's economic growth and well being."

-Government of Pakistan, National Youth Policy (2008)

The **Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP)** – recognizes that youth have a critical role to play in determining the future of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral (GBC), a remote but strategically important region of Pakistan and Central Asia. To ensure that GBC benefits from Pakistan’s “demographic dividend” – and can respond effectively to emerging social, economic and political trends – integrating young leaders into development programs and decision-making is essential.

Why Focus on Youth in Pakistan?

As noted in the National Youth Policy, there has been a dramatic expansion in Pakistan’s youth population. Harnessing the energy of youth with new opportunities to contribute to the country’s economic and social development has become a key priority for the Government of Pakistan. In Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral (GBC), a region that traditionally has suffered from economic and social marginalization, the demographic shift is particularly significant: almost 70% of the population is under 25 years of age. Despite steady gains in literacy rates and educational attainment, in some cases outpacing other parts of Pakistan, many young men and women do not succeed in finding steady employment or starting their own enterprises.

Young people in GBC have limited access to market-relevant skills training and enterprise development services. Furthermore, opportunities for youth to participate in community life are limited. Youth groups and extra-curricular activities that would provide them with leadership building and networking opportunities are rare, particularly for young women and youth in rural areas. Youth participation in civic organizations is low primarily because these organizations have been less active in engaging youth. AKRSP estimates that youth are represented in less than 20% of AKRSP-fostered Village and Women's Organizations.

Many youth in GBC are frustrated by their current situation. Fortunately, new opportunities are emerging. Access to domestic and regional markets for high value horticultural and forestry products is increasing. The ongoing expansion of the Karakorum Highway and planned government investments in large infrastructure projects in energy and transit, including two mega dams in the area, will create thousands of direct jobs and many more in secondary industries. Also, local community organizations and enterprises are beginning to realize the need for transitional leadership and youth-relevant programming.

KEY FACTS ABOUT YOUTH IN GBC

- GBC's minimum youth unemployment rate (youth actively looking for work) is estimated at 8%, with regional variations up to 20%.
- However, reflecting the high rates of idleness and underemployment, less than 50% of GBC's youth participate in the labour force at any given time.
- Labour force participation rates are highly skewed along gender lines, with estimations of 75% of males and 25% of females participating at any given time.



Amid economic, social and political changes, strategies to engage unemployed and under-employed youth in markets and local governance will be important contributors to both prosperity and stability in the region.

Enhancing the Demographic Dividend

AKRSP's youth development approach addresses two key challenges for youth in the region: employability and civic leadership. By focusing on these areas, AKRSP anticipates that young people will increase their positive prospects, sense of equality and ultimately become productive and engaged members of society in GBC.



The youth employability component seeks to enhance the professional and technical skills of youth as well as support youth enterprise services. The youth civic leadership component will enhance the participation of youth in community and civic life and build the capacity of local institutions to support an enabling environment for youth leadership development. It will also promote their civic participation as decision-makers and promote youth-inclusive policies for development. Providing space for employable youth leaders to become active in civic life is expected to create a shift in prevailing attitudes and behaviours; a necessary prerequisite for the empowerment and professional development of young people in the region.

Gender equality and the environment are central to AKRSP's approach. Within its programming, AKRSP is addressing the diversity of male and female youth, and promoting 'green' enterprises, youth engagement in disaster risk reduction, as well as sustainable agriculture programs.

Securing the Next Generation

By focusing on the next generation, AKSRP's approach to youth development has the potential to further consolidate and sustain the impact of past Canadian investments in the region. To do so, AKSRP in cooperation with local government, elected bodies, the private sector and civil society institutions will help ensure the sustained relevance of community organizations and skills development services to its constituents. This approach has the potential to be an instructive model of youth development, enhancing stability and prosperity in Pakistan, Central Asia and beyond.



The **Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP)** is a pioneering rural development initiative in northern Pakistan. It was established in 1982 by the Aga Khan Foundation to address widespread poverty and vulnerability in the remote valleys of the Hindu Kush and Karakoram mountains. Canada was the first bilateral donor to support AKRSP in 1983. AKRSP and its partners from Canada and other countries have been engaged in a creative partnership for almost three decades.



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

The **Aga Khan Foundation (AKF)** is a non-denominational, international development agency established in 1967 by His Highness the Aga Khan. Its mission is to develop and promote creative solutions to problems that impede social development, primarily in Asia and East Africa. AKF, created as a private, non-profit foundation, has branches and independent affiliates in 15 countries.