

Notes from the Field October 16 to November 2, 2012

To: Friends and Supports of the HiMaT Project
From: Michael and Judie Bopp

Dear Friends,

We arrived in Aliabad/Karimabad, Hunza, Pakistan where our project is based on October 19th. The first stage of the journey, on October 18, was a 14-hour road trip that took us over the same Babasur pass (14,000 feet high) that we crossed in July (where the police forced us to spend the night in a tent at the summit until daylight). This time the police allowed us travel “at our own risk”. It was snowing and foggy at the top. We arrived at the pass well before sundown by leaving Islamabad at 5:00 a.m. We were very glad to reach Gilgit at 7 P.M. that day, in time for a good meal and a much-needed sleep. The next morning we traveled another 2 hours to Karimabad. All told, it had taken us the better part of 5 days from the time we left home to the time we reached Hunza. Upon arrival, the weather was overcast, with temperatures hovering around 0°C. Definitely long underwear season, since most buildings have no heat.

As this is being written, we are sitting with some 60 participants who have come from all over the Hunza region to a training course for tutors of HiMaT’s learning and action circles. In these circles, we have already introduced 6 courses on subjects ranging from what is development and what develops in development, to leadership qualities and skills, participatory planning, business and economic development, and governance and management for development. Tutors are some of the most effective activists and animators in the region, and they are studying Book 7 in the series, which focuses on developing their capacity for their work.

The work of tutors is not only to facilitate learning and action study sessions, but more importantly to “walk with” and support individuals and groups who are initiating practical social and economic projects. Currently, we estimate (conservatively) that at least 3,000 people are involved in these learning and action circles,¹ and more than 150 practical projects have emerged. Roughly 1/3 of these are totally self-funded, while about 100 have received a very small start-up award of between \$60 and \$100(i.e. Quick Win awards).

From these relatively tiny quick-win seed grants, many groups have done great things, such as a women’s sewing business, the introduction of a new irrigation technology (self designed), the start-up of a women’s specialty shops and several variety stores, the improvement of a community centre, and the development of a community garden (the proceeds of which go to paying school fees for poor families).

Our agenda on this trip has included: a) consulting with our field team to refine the project work plan; b) holding a 1-day Leaders Development Forum in upper Hunza focused on evaluating progress to date and on inter-institutional cooperation; c) meeting with community leaders from each of the village clusters to plan next steps; d) conducting a participatory needs and situation assessment in the southern most cluster in central Hunza; e) facilitating a 2-day tutor training workshop; and f) meeting with

¹ Reports from community and area coordinators put the number closer to 4,000, but we believe there is duplication in these figures, and are now creating a name-based reporting system to avoid duplication in reporting.

potential donors in Gilgit and Islamabad. That's the external shape of our trip. Here are a few stories to give you a feel for what is really happening.

1. Shortly before this trip, a van carrying 18 of our most active and vibrant community leaders went off the road and down a 600-foot embankment, killing 10 people. Words cannot express the intense feelings of shock and loss that touched every community in our Project area. To honour those who died, HiMaT dedicated a new quick-win project (worth \$500) to a women's vocational centre that is ready to formalize a business making school uniforms. In the Hunza region, such a gesture (dedicating a gift to a project that will bring benefit to the community) is very much appreciated.
2. A young teacher returned from a HiMaT inter-institutional conference and met with a small group of young men and women to talk about why the village organization (VO) in their community was nonfunctional and basically dead. They decided that the progress of their community had been paralyzed for many years because the nominal office bearers who had been in place for almost 20 years had long ago stopped working for the community, stopped calling meetings, and even stopped keeping financial records. So, this now fired-up group of young people called the community together, showed everyone the records of the VO (which had not been updated since 1993), and facilitated the re-formation of their local institutions with a whole new slate of very active and dedicated office bearers and directors. The young teacher explained that it was the HiMaT trainings and encouragement that motivated him to act.
3. Similarly, a scout leader in upper Gojal attended a Book V intensive workshop on Governance and Management for Development. The scouts in Hunza are a volunteer young men's organization that does many wonderful things: emergency response, volunteer service at community events, youth development, etc. The scout leader realized that the entire network of scouting organizations in some 34 communities across upper Gojal had very poor administrative practices, bad record keeping, poor financial accountability practices and, in general, needed capacity building. Single handedly, the young scout leader called a training conference for 128 scouting leaders from across Gojal, who were taken through a 3-day training based on HiMaT Book 5.
4. A man in Pasu was moved to start a small business selling school supplies after attending a HiMaT Book 4 training course of business and economic development. Within a few months, the very tiny amount of stock he began with had doubled and doubled again. We visited his new location—a small garage-sized mud building that was stuffed with many products and thronged with eager customers.
5. Another couple in the same area had very little capital to start a business, but decided to try anyway. They found and repaired an old hand cranked wool carding machine that sits on a table. This machine is used to process raw wool into mattress and quilt stuffing. They got permission to use a room in an abandoned school building, and they are now running a thriving business employing 3 people that takes in wool on a consignment basis to re-stuff old mattresses or make new ones. Their business is flourishing and they expect that they will soon be able to afford to purchase wool and other mattress making supplies outright, which will enable them to make a much higher return on their efforts.

These sorts of spontaneous, unfunded initiatives are springing up in many communities. When we ask why this is happening now, when almost none of it was happening 2 years ago, people say it is the HiMaT quick-win projects and the study-

action circles that have set in motion a ground swell of individual and small group social and economic initiatives.

6. At many of our gatherings, people stand up and offer poems and songs. One of the most brilliant singers and songwriters was a young teacher named Erfan. When he sang, the room was filled with sweetness. Eyes lit up. People spontaneously arose to dance to his singing. And what he sang about was the awakening of his people and the power of the development movement of which he was a part. Erfan was one of the 10 who was killed in the accident mentioned earlier.

At our last workshop of this trip (Book 7 Tutor training), a new participant presented a song he had written (dedicated to the Project) called *Himmat*. (*Himmat* is an Urdu word that mean courage, empowerment, making a great effort even against difficult odds, which is why we chose it as the name of the Project.) Here are the words (English translation) of the song he sang.

*Himmat, himmat
can change our homeland.
Himmat, himmat
can change our garden.²*

*Don't give me bread; I'm not hungry.
Don't give me a stick; I'm not blind.
Don't tease me; I'm not a child.*

*If we stand up as teachers,
if we stand up as leaders,
if we stand up as farmers,*

*then Himmat, Himmat
can change our homeland.
Himmat, himmat
can change our garden.*

*If we have all these things,
Then why are we idle and passive?
And why are the fruits of our tree³
so small and weak?*

*Let us take good care of this tree,
and then we will taste
how the fruits are sweet and good.*

*Himmat, Himmat
can change our homeland.
Himmat, himmat
can change our garden.*

On this trip, we have had the pleasure of travelling with Mr. Ash Khan of Calgary. Ash is a Pakistani Canadian who has been doing water and school projects in Sindh Province (where all the flooding occurred that you saw on TV in the summer of 2010). Ash has been doing video interviews of people involved with our project to record their impressions of HiMaT's impact, and we are very grateful for his help. The main reason

² Garden here is a metaphor referring to all the produce of our efforts.

³ The tree of development

Ash came, though, was to learn. Ash has realized that giving people water systems and schools is good, but does not necessarily promote development. Development is, at its core, building the capacity of people so they can build their own water systems, schools, and much more. The night before he left us to return to Islamabad and then Karachi, Ash told us, "My understanding of development has completely changed as a result of seeing what the HiMaT Project is doing". Ash won the hearts of many people in Hunza, and it looks like our HiMaT team will travel to Sindh in January (as part of staff development) and will spend some days with Ash and the communities with which he works, helping them to organize development institutions.

All the things that are bubbling up in our Project areas would never be happening if it was not for your (Canadian) support and contributions. We are so grateful for that support and every time we travel to northern Pakistan, the community leaders ask us to tell you that they are also grateful.

Night is falling in Gilgit. We can hear the calls to prayer from both Sunni and Shia mosques, whose followers were killing each other a few months ago (some 30 people died only in July). Tomorrow we have confirmed seats on a flight back to Islamabad, and the weather is clear and cold. We might just be lucky (Inshallah).

With gratitude and love,

Michael and Judie

P.S. We got the flight! It took us 45 minutes instead of 15 hours.