

**HiMaT Indigenous Leadership and Development Program**  
**Notes from the Field – Judie and Michael Bopp**  
**September 2, 2013**

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As many of you know, we are now in northern Pakistan for our second trip this year (we also spent a couple of weeks here at the end of April and the beginning of May). Some of you have expressed concern for our safety, given the recent distressing events in Gilgit-Baltistan (the province in which we are working). Maybe that's putting it mildly. Some of you said, "Are you crazy?" We won't argue about the crazy part, but we do want to assure you that we are safe and well.

The trip up here went very smoothly. In fact, we made from our home in the foothills of Alberta to the HiMaT project office in Aliabad, Hunza in about 60 hours—the fastest ever. Although the weather in Pakistan was a bit iffy (with a thunder and lightning storm during the night before we were scheduled to fly up to Gilgit, the provincial capital of Gilgit-Baltistan Province). The flight was not cancelled and we were spared the 18-hour drive up the Karakorum Highway. So, here we are again, in the midst of some of the most dramatic mountains in the world—a region that some argue is the site of the famed Shangri-La.

Today Michael and some of the HiMaT team members met with the area development council (LSO) in Shinaki, an area just south of our project office that suffers from some challenging social issues (e.g. young people who are alienated and beginning to use drugs) and economic and infrastructure issues that include an irrigation system that has been damaged by landslides and the lack of partnerships and capacity to market their agricultural products. We have been helping Shinaki create their long-term development plan, to develop linkages with government departments, donors and the private sector to help solve infrastructure and agricultural value chain challenges; and to strengthen the capacity of the LSO to manage all of this.

Today we are also getting ready for our trip tomorrow over the Attabad landslide and across the Attabad Lake that was formed as a result of that landslide into Gojal (or upper Hunza). There we will meet with area leaders (men and women who are representatives of village and area councils and other active volunteers and entrepreneurs). Our purpose is to reflect together on the impact of HiMaT's work to date. We have been feeling that, although we have achieved a remarkable spread across the region, we need to find ways to go deeper. By this we mean, that although many people are engaged in HiMaT activities (such as our study-action circles, our quick-win projects and comprehensive community planning), we need to understand more clearly how all these elements work together in an organic way to make significant improvements in the lives of many people. We know that our KADO/HiMaT team members are becoming more and more sophisticated in their understanding of development practice, but it's time for that same level of understanding to be gained by our key collaborators in the 114 villages with which we are working. We also need to ensure that the benefits of HiMaT are actually reaching the poorest of the poor.

We will also be holding the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gojal Women's Conference. This is lots of fun for Judie (Michael has to sit this one out, since women really enjoy the opportunity to express themselves, sing, recite poetry and consult in a way that is harder in a mixed gender group). We will be focusing on making further strides in improving food security through women-led businesses and improved agricultural practices. We also hope to help the

Women's Organizations (which exist in every village) to take on ever-stronger roles in social and economic development work.

On Saturday, our first full day in Hunza, the HiMaT team met to go over their work plan in some detail. They are really making excellent progress and we are all learning from our experience about how best to support communities to take charge of their own development. Now that we have a basic foundation of social mobilization and strong institutions, we will be able to focus more sharply on strategies to reach the poorest households, which are often female led because they are widows or have experienced other tragedies. We have also committed to somehow establishing a small micro-credit fund (\$10,00) that we will administer while we continue to negotiate with the more formal micro-credit institutions in the region so that they will extend their services to the communities with which we are working. Our communities are not considered to be credit worthy by those institutions that were originally established to serve the poor!

The following day we worked on a proposal for the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), which is a larger donor program, funded primarily by the World Bank. Some of their senior managers are very impressed with HiMaT and they have invited us to begin working in the Chitral region of Pakistan. This will be a huge step forward for HiMaT if it works out, because we will be moving into the most receptive area of a much more troubled region of the country, and one where literacy rates for women are much lower and poverty rates even higher than Hunza. There are still hurdles to overcome in being accepted as a partner with PPAF, but we are cautiously hopeful.

Yesterday the whole team had the opportunity to hear from our friend and colleague, Dr. Bill Hanlon, whom some of you know as a family physician in Cochrane, as well as the medical officer of an ascent of Mount Everest and a trek to the South Pole. He is intrigued by Gojal as well, especially the most remote communities at the highest elevation. He has spent the last 6 days in Misgar, Chipursan and Shimshal and has made a commitment through his organization—Basic Health International—to support these communities in the HiMaT region such as the donation of some very basic and low-tech medical equipment, some training and other support for village health workers, a mobile medical clinic next summer to the high mountain pastures in this region. The HiMaT team is so excited to have Dr. Bill (as he is respectfully called) work with them.

In closing, we want to assure you again how much your interest and contributions mean to the people here in northern and central Hunza. They are acutely aware that your contributions are from the heart and often represent real sacrifices on your part. They are very careful stewards of the resources with which they have been entrusted and they share your passion for the work. For all of them, HiMaT is not a job; it is a sacred vocation.

We join them in thanking you,  
Judie and Michael

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**Notes from the Field – Judie and Michael Bopp**  
**September 7, 2013**

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We are spending a day in Gilgit, the Provincial capital of Gilgit-Baltistan, waiting for a flight. We didn't get on today despite booking weeks in advance. The vagaries of how the system really works are completely opaque to us. No one gets a "confirmed" flight despite the fact that they accept your booking. You hear a few hours before the flight if you will get on—that's if the flight even operates, which it does not 40% of the time due to weather. [As it turned out, we had to drive 16 hours to get to Islamabad.]

We want to explain a little of what our mission was on this trip, mainly because we want our friends and supporters to understand something of what we and our team are striving to achieve.

Usually we tell you about concrete visible results, because they are easy to see and understand, but when we use words like "capacity building" most people's eyes glaze over. **And yet developing human resources and mobilizing them for the work of creating development results is at the very core of what we are doing in the HiMaT program.**

By last November (2012) we were already working with 114 communities. Some 5,000 people had been involved in our training courses and roughly 90% of the development institutions in our target areas, (such as women's councils, village councils and area support organizations) were operational and functioning fairly well (compared to 30% before HiMaT began working with them). Some 250 small social and economic projects had emerged from as many grassroots core groups. In general, we concluded, the framework capable of supporting a broad scale, community-led development movement was in place.

The next problem is to get every part of the HiMaT strategy fully operational in all 9 clusters we are working with. This is important because it is the combination of these strategies that has proven to really move populations toward sustainable social and economic progress. For this to happen cluster leaders, activists and entrepreneurs need to understand the framework and to systematically apply it in their own areas. Up till now, our field team really facilitated the various lines of action and the local leaders and communities were willing collaborators and contributors.

This visit we met with leaders and activists (male, female and youth) and asked for their help **in making HiMaT their project in their own areas**. Each cluster leadership circle made plans to implement the following five HiMaT strategies.

### **Five HiMaT Strategies**

#### **1. *Raising the Spirit***

- Connecting to God and to relevant spiritual teachings and guidance
- Developing moral capabilities
- Spirit of solidarity and unity
- Spark of hope/belief in the possibility of change
- Regular monthly gatherings to inspire, unite and mobilize
- Quarterly reflection meetings to evaluate progress and refine goals and strategies
- Use of music, poetry, drama and other arts to inspire and bring joy

All of this at the local and area cluster levels.

2. ***Strengthening the Capabilities of Development Institutions*** to develop and mobilize human resources
  - Building trust through financial audits
  - Leadership training
  - HiMaT team coaching and mentoring (walking with institutions as they work)
3. ***Community Development Planning***
  - Facilitating the making of 10-year development plans that are: a) built from the grassroots up through extensive participatory consultation, and b) wholistic – covering all sectors of development (health, livelihood, agriculture, children and youth, women, social and cultural life, governance, natural resource management, etc.)
4. ***Education and Training***
  - Utilizing a continuously expanding system of volunteer tutors, local study circles and volunteer coordinators, seven core courses are being delivered. Each course has a strong development action component. So the study circles become core action groups that are mobilized. The more people who take the course the more trained and mobilized human resources are available for development action. We set a goal of getting 10,000 people through the series of courses in one 3-cluster area.
5. Many Small and Medium ***Practical Social and Economic Projects***
  - We now have roughly 250 of these, stimulated by the training courses and by “quick-win” awards—small seed grants of about \$100. Only a third of the existing small projects received a “quick-win” awards.

Like the fingers on a hand, when all of these elements are operationalized together in a particular area, they become mutually reinforcing and development progress is almost immediate, visible and sometimes dramatic.

Trying to get all this to happen from the grassroots up is new to this part of Pakistan. People are used to thinking about “development” as something professional projects deliver to people (like a bag of groceries or a package of pills).

Our team understood in principal that this is where it had to go, but during this visit they learned a lot about how to actually stimulate, facilitate, encourage and mobilize community leaders, activists and entrepreneurs to make it happen. This learning happened through our role modeling of various processes and also through extensive team reflection sessions held frequently throughout the visit.

By the end of the trip all cluster leaders had made plans to train and mobilize thousands more people and to harness this new energy to the work of systematic development guided by well grounded development plans that address the hard issues such as food security and chronic poverty, the need for agriculture renewal, and women’s empowerment.

We also held our third women’s conference, and this year the lid came off. The women were clear that in many ways they are being held back by male dominance in their communities, despite the spiritual guidance their communities have received from the Aga Khan to build equality.

The women have decided to create a women’s movement by connecting the 100 plus cluster women’s organizations into a Regional Women’s Forum. They have also decided that they have a critical role to play in leading authentic development, and that because

no one is going to give them that role they are going to have to take it (in culturally appropriate ways). For our team, all of this will mean they will be spending a lot less time in the offices and a lot more time in the field working directly with the people, supporting, coaching and guiding all of this on-the-ground action.

We can already see that the power and scale of mobilization and capacity building is attracting the attention of donors and International NGOs that previously took no notice of HiMaT.

We are more confident than ever that if we can just keep up this momentum a little longer, the resources needed to really invest in large-scale social and economic improvement will be achieved.

Warm regards,  
Michael and Judie