



GRACE
ASSOCIATION
PAKISTAN

THE GRASSROOTS' ASSOCIATION
FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

GRACE PUBLIC SCHOOL IN SKARDU, PAKISTAN INAUGURATION CEREMONY SPECIAL REPORT APRIL 2009



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Our schools aim at empowering grassroots for the 21st century, providing girls, children with disabilities, dropouts and displaced communities access to free education

INTRODUCTION

Responding to the pressing need of the Northern Pakistan communities of the Baltistan area in giving children access to education, GRACE Association Pakistan, together with its partners, has built a new public school in Skardu and proudly inaugurated it last April 2009.



GRACE stands for 'Grassroots Association for Community Empowerment' and its aims are empowering and improving the quality of life of marginalized and vulnerable communities in less developed parts of Northern Pakistan. Launching sustainable and replicable projects as well as building partnerships will accomplish this mission.

With close guidance and supervision by the Board of Directors, the project was managed by GRACE Program Office Skardu in consultation and collaboration with the Village Education Committee (VEC) represented by parents, village elders, social development workers and the school's Principal as the secretary.

The School is located at the centre of the Astana village in Northern Pakistan, on the Main Airport Road, surrounded by a beautiful green landscape, rich with fruit trees. The distance from the Skardu Airport to the school is 8 Km and from the school to Skardu, just 4 Km.

GRACE Public School aims at:

- Contributing to the development of new generations and empowering grassroots to face the challenges of the 21st century;
- Contributing to the struggle to achieve "Education for all", including grassroots communities;
- Providing access and free education to girls, children with disabilities, dropouts and hundreds of displaced communities in the area;
- Promoting education with application of equitable strategies mobilizing affordable indigenous resources; and
- Developing a dynamic learning community.

The school began in 2007, in a rented old home. However, an earthquake-proof and barriers-free school building was a burning need. It was necessary to promote education not only for girls but also for children with disabilities, dropouts, and children belonging to 13,000 displaced populations that had settled in Astana and its surroundings after the India-Pakistan Wars of 1965, 1971 and 1999. Furthermore, it was also essential to strengthen community cohesiveness.

GRACE Association Pakistan was successful in acting upon the objectives of the school. It now proudly presents this report after the successful completion of the building.

The project was possible thanks to a partnership with the Himalayan Green Club NPO, through an invaluable grant donated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

INAUGURATION CEREMONY

On March 4, 2009 , the newly constructed GRACE Public School building was inaugurated by the Deputy Commissioner of the Skardu District, Mr. Asif Bilal Lodhi and Ms. Takashi San. An unforgettable day for the communities of Baltistan, in Northern Pakistan.



DC Skardu addressing the gathering. Left: Ms. Takashi and Ms. Kawasaki San.

A vibrant ceremony was held at the new school, with local and international guests and the presence of the community.

At the occasion, Ms. Kawasaki San, Mr. Nakaoka San and Mr. Masuda San, Assistant Directors of the Himalayan Green Club of Japan, also represented the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Also present at the event were also the following distinguished guests:

Dr. Hassan Khan Amacha, Director of Health Services, Baltistan Region; Dr. Shabbir Hassan; Mr. Ghulam Nabi, barrister, member of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Areas; Mr. Wazir Ghulam Abbas, GRACE Association Chairman and member of the Skardu District Council; Mr. Ghulam Hassan, former Principal at the Governmental Degree College in Skardu; Mr. Ehsan Ali Danish, a highly regarded and loved Baltistan poet; Mr. Wazir Ghulam Hassan; Mr. Wazir Abdullah; Mr. Wazir Ghulam Haider from

Kwardu; Mr. Zakir Hussain, District Forest Officer; Mr. Zamin Ali, Project Director of the Himalayan Green Club; Ms. Zeban, Women's Councilor, Skardu District Council; Mr. Khadim Hussain, founder GRACE Association Pakistan; Mr. Muhammad Qasim, Program Officer GRACE Association. Additionally, a large number of local communities, parents, teachers and students enthusiastically participated in the ceremony.

Ms. Anila Bano, Vice Principal, presented the school's academic program and highlighted the need of equitable policies to accommodate and educate all children by addressing children's marginalization, discrimination and exclusions from society. She said, "We are proud of being teachers of this unique and dynamic school that's educating our new generation. And I would like to thank our Japanese friends and the management of GRACE Public School for creating this learning-friendly, inclusive environment. We are now able to deliver our services more effectively".

She added, "I think GRACE Public School is the first in taking effective steps towards including dropout students in Baltistan, particularly girls and children with disabilities".

"As the local teacher I know that many parents did not want to send their girls to school but thanks to GRACE Association's volunteers and school teachers' engagement and enthusiasm, parents have been active enrolling their daughters and children with disabilities in the school. We now have a 14% of children with disabilities among our students. These children are partially impaired in hearing, sight and



Students presented several colorful programs including poem readings, national songs, tableaux and speeches.





Gathering (clockwise from top left): community and HGC members; parents; special guests; school's staff, students and members of the Village Education Committee gathered at the inauguration; Ms. Anila Bano addressing participants





Our commitment: 'total communication system' and 'inclusive learning'



speech. We are involving them in 'inclusive learning', adopting 'a total communication system' in specific situations. Mr. Khadim Hussain and Mr. Muhammad Qasim have been key to these efforts. Committed to the idea of 'inclusive education', they have provided essential insights for teachers in their understanding and handling of vulnerable children".

"We are running Early Childhood Development (ECD) and learning classes in the school with special focus to improve children's overall psychosocial attributes. This means the ability to think and reason, relationships with others, self-image and sense of security, language, communication and learning skills, etc. And Inshallah! We are creating an environment in which protection and support of children's issues, like health, nutrition, psychosocial and cognitive development are given full attention".

She invited parents to send their children to school and added, "The school receives nominal tuition fees that pay for the staff and has an fair policy for parents who are totally unable to pay school fees for their children. We welcome all children, no matter their disability or how destitute their situation is, and we invite all interested parents to take advantage of this new facility and give their children an education".

Mr. Khadim Hussain, founder of GRACE Association Pakistan, welcomed and thanked the ceremony's main

guests, Mr. Asif Bilal Lodhi, Deputy Commissioner of the Skardu District and Ms. Takashi San and all other distinguished participants on their enthusiastic involvement in the program. He also thanked the government of Japan, the people of Japan and the Himalayan Green Club for their keen interest in the development and education of grassroots in the backward region of Baltistan Northern Areas.

He highly appreciated and expressed gratitude for the invaluable financial and technical assistance by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Himalayan Green Club in the construction of the school building. He acknowledged this was a gift for future generations of the Astana community and surrounding villages, particularly for children of displaced and isolated areas.

Mr. Hussain also thanked the generosity of Mr. Qasim and his brothers for donating two kanalas of land for the school. He appreciated and showed gratefulness to the local communities and notables of Astana for their full moral support and cooperation in the establishment and promotion of this school. He also showed gratitude to Ms. Kyoko Endo San and her colleagues for their full efforts in transforming the school's plan into reality.

He shared GRACE Association Pakistan's vision of educational development and showed full



We are creating an environment in which protection and support of children's issues, like health, nutrition, psychosocial and cognitive development are given full attention



“ As teachers, we are proud of being part of this unique and dynamic school ”

commitment to continue their endeavors empowering and improving the quality of life of grassroots communities in the Baltistan Northern Areas.

Mr. Hussain also mentioned the United Nations Online Volunteers (UNOV) technical support in implementing GRACE Association’s mission and in helping the organization move towards their vision: “contributing to a world that recognizes, respects, and values the socioeconomic, political, legal and environmental aspirations of marginalized and vulnerable communities, particularly women and children on equality basis, promoting a sustainable, equitable prosperous and peaceful society”.

Wazir Ghulam Abbas, GRACE Association’s Chairman and member of the Skardu District Council, welcomed all distinguished guests and thanked their warm participation in this inaugural ceremony. Wazir Abbas especially thanked the Japanese friends for their gift. He acknowledged this contribution as a long-term friendship, and praised the Japanese government and community’s commitment to sustainable human resource development.

He appreciated schoolteachers and staff’s efforts in their dedication and engagement in educating a new generation of children. He emphasized the need to enroll more children from refugee areas who are in dire need of an “all inclusive education”. He highly appreciated Mr. Muhammad Qasim and his brothers for donating land for the school’s construction.

He also thanked the local cable networks, Skardu Cable Network and Pak Cable Network,

for their participation in the coverage of this educational event.

Ms. Takashi San, representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Himalayan Green Club, expressed joy at the successful completion of the school building. She excused the Ambassador of Japan and his representatives for not being able to be present at the event. She also mentioned the Himalayan Green Club’s achievements in Baltistan in promoting education, environment and vocational skills in the community. Mr. Zamin Ali interpreted Ms. Takashi’s speech in English and in Urdu.

The main guest, **Mr. Asif Bilal Lodhi**, Deputy Commissioner of Skardu, thanked the government of Japan and the Himalayan Green Club for their efforts and contributions in supporting the underdeveloped region of Northern Pakistan. He expressed gratefulness at the successful completion of the first earthquake-proof school building in the Northern Areas.

The Deputy Commissioner also appreciated Mr. Muhammad Qasim’s land donation and Mr. Khadim Hussain, founder GRACE Association, for his sincerity and commitment in developing and empowering the communities in Skardu Baltistan. He expressed his full cooperation and on behalf of the government, offered free electricity for the school.

At the end of the ceremony the guests and all participants were served with refreshment tea at the multipurpose hall.

“ 14% of our students have some sort of disability (hearing, sight, speech) ”



(clockwise from top left)
Mr. Kajita San, Director
and Mr. Mamamoto
San, architect-engineer,
Mr. M. Qasim, GRACE
Association Pakistan
Program Coordinator;
school's staff; memorial
plantation; refreshments
and agreement signing





Construction stages:
multi-purpose hall,
classroom, standard and
barriers-free washrooms,
veranda, winter view
of the construction in
progress



CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

Design map and budget

GRACE's architect-engineer Mr. Mehboob Hussain, in consultation with the Japanese engineer Mr. Mama Moto San, designed an earthquake-proof elementary school building. The building was approved by the educational department of the local government and by GRACE Public School's Management Committee.

The overall construction and furnishing costs were estimated in PKR 6 millions as per Public Works, excluding two kanalas of land. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan donated PKR 3.386 millions to the Himalayan Green Club. GRACE Association Pakistan completed the construction in 9 months with community participation. The two kanalas of land donated by one of GRACE Association's founders and local community was a gift. However, its current market value is PKR 3 Millions. GRACE Association Pakistan highly appreciates this invaluable donation.

Inclusive learning friendly classrooms and multipurpose hall construction

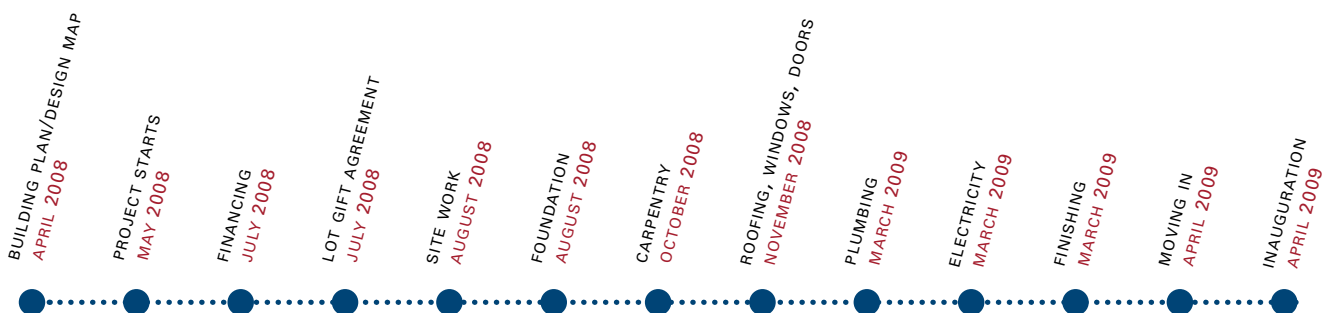
Under the designed map 4 (14x20 feet) classrooms and a big hall (14x42 feet) have been constructed along with an office attached to a dressing room and washroom. The photos illustrate details of the classrooms.

The multipurpose hall is now used in the morning as an early learning classroom for children and in the afternoon, as a vocational centre for women.

School functions and community meetings are also conducted in this multipurpose hall.

Barriers-free washrooms construction

Four washrooms along with a special washroom for children with disabilities have been constructed with applications of universal design.



Progress of the building project



We are focusing on improving children's overall psycho-social attributes





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Get involved!

Make a donation

GRACE relies on the generosity of individuals and private foundations for helping bring the lifelong gift of literacy to children in our country.

If you would like to support our efforts, make a contribution today.

Volunteer

Volunteering is a great way to be a part of GRACE's work. We rely on the valuable support of volunteers who help us change the lives of communities living in poverty in Northern Pakistan.

Take action!