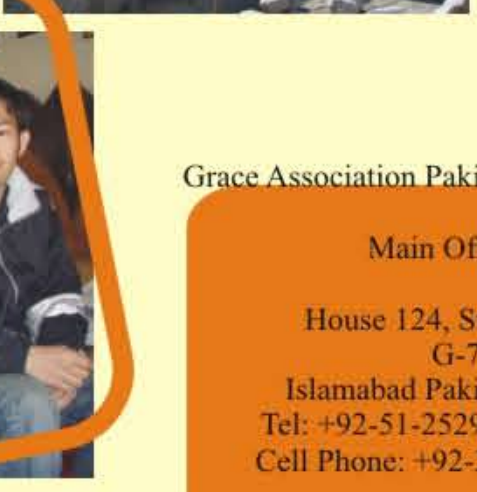


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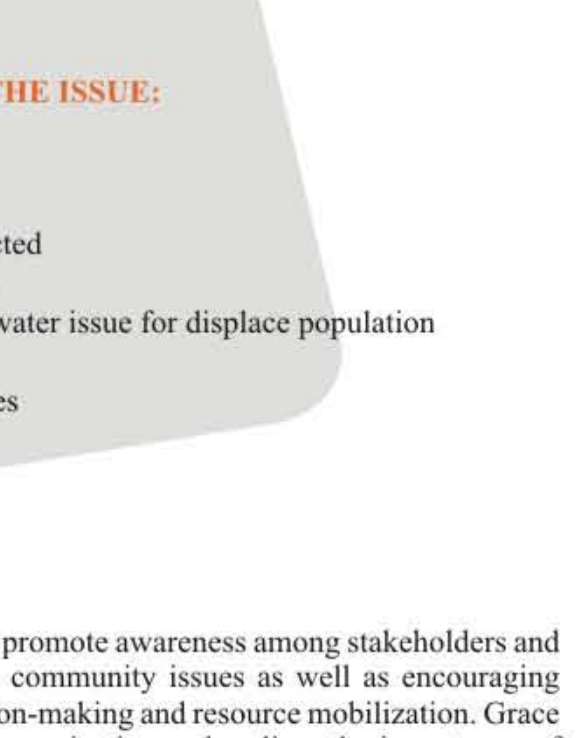
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The GRACE Newsletter!

The purpose of GRACE Newsletter is to promote awareness among stakeholders and the global community about grassroots community issues as well as encouraging participation in self-development, decision-making and resource mobilization. Grace Association is a grassroots community organization and realizes the importance of sharing information with other communities around the world, the value of sharing experiences. The Newsletter aims to promote learning from each other, with the aim of working on community projects in a participative manner and creating grass-roots awareness for sustainable development.

The Newsletter is circulated to Grace Members, Community Workers, Volunteers and Subscribers via email.

New GRACE Board Members Elected

Grace General Body met on July 21, 2008. Eight new directors, all with strong professional backgrounds, were elected for the next two years. Members of the newly elected Board are:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Wazir Ghulam Abbas | Chairman |
| 2. Mr. Muhammad Dawood Khan | V. Chairman |
| 3. Ms. Robina Iqbal | Director |
| 4. Dr. Shabbir Hassan | Director |
| 5. Ms. Sadiya Ajab | Director |
| 6. Mr. Muhammad Qasim | Director |
| 7. Mr. Muhammad Raza | Director |
| 8. Mr. Khadim Hussain | Director |

Grace members and community members expressed their hope for the new Board will continue the institutional development of Grace and continue implementing its vision of community empowerment.

Wazir Shamshad Hussain joined GRACE as Chief Executive Officer in last July.

Introduction to GRACE Association!

Vision:

GRACE's efforts contribute to a world which recognizes, respects, and values the socioeconomic, political, legal and environmental aspirations of marginalized and vulnerable communities, particularly women and children, to promote a sustainable, equitable, prosperous and peaceful society.

Mission

GRACE Association endeavors to empower and improve the quality of life of the marginalized and vulnerable communities in the least developed parts of the country through welfare, participatory research and development, capacity building, promotion of best practice and partnership building, advocacy, and by launching sustainable and replicable innovative projects.

Governance & Management

The general guidelines for the governance are spelled out in the Memorandum and Article of Association of the organization. The organization consists of a general body represented by more than 60 members. The General Body meets on an annual basis. The organization is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of seven members elected by the General Body for every two years. Overall policy and decision making rests with the Board of Directors. The directors appoint the Chief Executive of the organization and vest in him powers and functions related to the management and administration of the affairs of the NPO subject to their general supervision and control. The Board also appoints the Company Secretary to manage all secretarial functions and to ensure compliance of the Ordinance. Policies and management guidelines are provided in the 'Grace Manual of Operations'.

Organizational Values

GRACE has adopted two core values including Social justice & equity (rights, vulnerability, and access) and Democracy (Participation, transparency, accountability, rules and regulations) for its institutional norms and programmatic operations

This Quarter's Topics:

The forgotten citizens fighting for their rights in Northern Pakistan

On the 12th May, 2008 the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entered into force. This "marks a major milestone in the effort to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity". This Convention aims to be an important tool in strengthening the existing national policies and encouraging governments around the world to develop specific new measures which guarantee the human rights of disabled people.

The Government of Pakistan recently signed this Convention. It has recently been developing policies that may bring some light to the 40 million disabled people in Pakistan. The Pakistan National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2002) emphasizes realization of the full potential of persons with disabilities through their inclusive mainstreaming and providing

them full support from the Government, the private sector and the civil society. Furthermore, for effective implementation of the national policy, a National Plan of Action was formulated in 2006. Major focus areas of the National Plan of Action 2006 include medical treatment, education and training, employment and rehabilitation, research and development, advocacy and mass awareness, sports and recreations, barrier-free buildings, accessible parks and public places, transport, strengthening of institutional mechanisms and adequate funding.

But there is still a long way to go before these benefits reach the isolated disabled people of the Baltistan Northern Areas of Pakistan. In that area, the traditional exclusionary attitude toward disabled people prevails and this shapes their negative attitudes towards their own lives. It is not uncommon to hear disabled people in the region express attitudes like "What have I

done to deserve this?" or "Why me?" . Disabled people make up around 11 % of the total 500000 population of Baltistan region. This figure is much higher than the national average due to malnutrition, lack of care for pregnant mothers and a lack of education on the various diseases which give rise to disability. Another contributing factor is the mining and shelling across the border, which especially affects internally displaced populations. In this context, lack of access to information and rehabilitation facilities dramatically increases the risk of becoming socially excluded due to disability. Communities take it for granted as part of their mythic values that interpret the misery of disability as punishment from God to be accepted with no possibility of having a different life. According to the 1998 census, there are more than 23,000 disabled people in Skardu in Skardu City's population of 250,000. This number includes only those with a very visible disability.

GRACE Association Pakistan feels there is an urgent need to address the disability issue in this area, since neither the Government nor any organisation are implementing any action for change. Since March 2007, GRACE has been collecting information about people with disabilities in the region. Following are the main findings, on the basis of the 200 PWDs registered in a suburb of Skardu main town:

A disability issue is found in each one of 5 houses surveyed. In Skardu, children and people are found with different kind of diseases, mostly poliomyelitis but also: hemiplegia, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, foot club, flat foot, cyanocephalus, moderate quadriplegia (stroke), Quin Flegia, burn cases, deafness, visual impairment, visually challenged and hearing impairment and severe chronic muscular dystrophy. The majority of these disabled people are found in the poorest of the poor families. Many are willing to learn some skill, but are frustrated by the lack of access to this training.

Most of the polio affected and paralyzed can move with a wheelchair and some of them can be rehabilitated with orthosis and prosthesis. Many, however, still lack

the information and resources that would enable them to live with vulnerable conditions. It is common for children with disabilities to avoid attending school due to a sense of shame and exclusion, and there is no special school equipped to reintroduce them to the mainstream of education.

Simply having the opportunity to attend a livelihood training center and community based rehabilitation programs will be a radical change in their lives and make them respectable members of their community. This could be the first step towards a long-term livelihood support solution, allowing those people with disabilities to live with dignity. Initiatives such as education interventions, accessible environments, assisted living devices and skill training could also follow.

In May 2008, GRACE requested World Health Organization (WHO) Pakistan to assist with the rehabilitation of PWDs in the region and submitted 34 urgent cases of people with physical disabilities who are in need of assistive devices. The WHO sent a team of 4 specialists to re-assess the nature of these disabilities. They examined 33 cases in one and a half days and almost 12 of them were confirmed as polio cases. The team agreed to take steps immediately for their rehabilitation but despite follow up from Grace Association, there has been no response from WHO Pakistan

There is a dire need for organizations working in the disability sector to address this burning issue in this backward area. The needs of people with disabilities in such communities will only be met where there is community leadership and the full participation of people with disabilities and local community based organizations (CBOs). A multi-stakeholder collaboration to support community needs and activities, with the collaboration between all groups would contribute to an invaluable opportunity for meeting the goals of UN Conventions and the Pakistan National Policy in globe where PWDs remain as an invisible and forgotten population.

A Case Study: Drinking Water for displaced population in Astana Village

Astana consists of two sub villages Gamba Astana and Goma Astana and two colonies: Gultari and Brolmo in the Baltistan Valley of Northern Pakistan. There are 1275 households in the village, which is currently inhabited by some 400 indigenous families, many of whom have been living in the area for centuries. There are also 667 families of the displaced population who migrated from Brolmo and Gangni in Kargil Valley, the border area between India and Pakistan. The population migrated due to the military conflicts of in 1971 and 1999 fought between India and Pakistan. Some of the families also migrated due to mines laid by Pakistani Army. Apart from these two categories of population groups, the village is also inhabited by migrant populations who have come for the opportunities of empowerment and self-employment.

Out of 1275 households, only 400 have drinking water available through taps, while the remaining 875 households are facing immense problems. The displaced population and a larger proportion of local population are often the poorest of the poor and vulnerable groups lack access to land and are deprived of many of the socioeconomic opportunities accessible to the local population. 50% of the population has average income less than one dollar, which severely restricts their access to health facilities. Almost 80% of the displaced population are unskilled and therefore lack access to employment opportunities except piecemeal, low-wage daily labor. Until 1999, the local population had no access to clean drinking water and depended on traditional wells which were filled by water running from the open irrigation water channels from Sadpapa Lake. This was often unfit to drink. Across the length of the channels the local communities wash their clothes and dishes; a problem given the water is often polluted by animal faeces. The consumption of this unhealthy water was one of the major causes of water-borne diseases which became prevalent. The adverse health effects drew the attention of Aga Khan

Rural Support Program. This program responded by providing a small drinking water scheme to the local communities of Astana in 2001. This scheme did not cover the large and increasing number of households of displaced populations which had been striving hard to get integrated within the local communities since last three decades.

The population increase further exacerbated the demand for drinking water, a problem which has festered since the displaced population lacks political representation. To fulfill the augmented demand, the women and children, particularly girls, haul water from Radio Pakistan Chowk, which is a water source established by the government about 2-3 km from Astana. Women and girls responsible performing this task often need to make three to four round trips to bring water in order to meet the basic domestic needs of drinking, cooking and bathing. This often takes up to six hours a day. This demand on their time naturally hinders the ability of the girls to attend school. It results in the violation of the basic right of girls' education. Furthermore, women's work load is increased and they lose their leisure time which can be used for alternate home-based income generation activities. Apart from this, the health of the female members of the family is also affected by the gruelling task of collecting water, resulting in insufficient energy to provide food to the rest of the family. The male population cannot share the burden as men are largely the bread-winners engaged in generating livelihood for the family. The burden can rarely be shared by the male children as they are often in school or also acting as bread-winners.

Grace Association is looking into this situation and organizing the community to advocate for their basic right to access clean drinking water. Additionally, GRACE Association is seeking funding to provide drinking water to these deserving villagers.

News from the fields:

Himalayan Green Club Japan Helped Constructions for Grace Public School

Grace Public School Skardu is a project of Grace Association which was established in March 2007. There is a special focus on educating children from the displaced population of Kargil and Gaultari sectors. The Himalayan Green Club Japan began working with GRACE in July 2008 on the construction of the school building. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan funded 3.386 million PKR for this project. A local community member who is a member of Grace Association member from Astana village donated 2 kanal of land @1.5 million/kanal(5475 Sq Ft) as per market rate free of cost. Now the school construction is in progress and hopefully it will be completed by the end of this year. Grace Association thanks MOFA and HGC for these much-appreciated contributions.

M. Ilyas (Visually Challenged) begins attending Grace Public School

Grace Public School is endeavoring to provide inclusive education by removing barriers in terms of attitude, physical access and financial problems for children with diverse abilities. Muhammad Ilyas is 17 years old and lives near the school. His sister Hamida is another CWD with MR of the school. Grace Public School teachers are highly committed to promoting inclusive education in an area facing significant challenges. One of the teachers brought Ilyas to Grace Public school, where he requested to be enrolled. Although the school has no Braille teaching facilities, Ilyas is enjoying working with the students and learning by listening. It is said he has magical powers of memory and can repeat everything he heard yesterday. He also sing good songs at the school.

Grammar Public School Manshehra NWP requests furniture for students

Grammar Public School Manshehra caters for the displaced community children from Balakot. The school has 350 students enrolled, both male and female. The school is currently seeking donations of furniture for students and used computers for the laboratory. Muhammad Iqbal Principal of the school submitted an application to Grace Association.

PWDs Call World Health Organization for Rehabilitation

People with a disability make up 11% of the total 1.5 million people in the Federally Administered Northern Areas of Pakistan. Disability remains a major social issue in this remote region. Many of the PWDs are polio victims. In a gathering of PWDs in Baltistan FANA, they called on the government and World Health Organization Pakistan to give effect to the National Policies and UN Conventions on the human rights of PWDs because they are the still excluded section of the society where there is no concept in the society to bring them in the mainstream.

Baltistan Northern Areas A Secure and Peaceful Region: (Japanese Students)

Himalayan Green Club (HGC) Japan and Grace Association (University Students) organized a cultural exchange visit from Japanese College and University Students. This year many students visited Skardu and stayed at the homes of community members in various villages. Sayaka Watanabe, one of the students from Japan, shared her experiences: "I enjoyed the home stay very much. The families were very kind. People were very nice and very interested in developing their lives. It was a peaceful and clean environment. I hope to visit again next year."

Volunteer Stories

Ghulam Nabi, Ghuwari Ganche

Mr. Ghulam Nabi is teacher in a private public school in his village. He also works as a community development worker, collaborating with GRACE to change attitudes towards people with disabilities. He says, "Volunteering for GRACE satisfies me and I think it is fun. I am volunteering with Grace Association to collect data about people with disabilities in Ganche District. I go from home to home whenever I have time to fill in the Disability Information Form in my village. The people with disabilities become very happy when I visit them as well and that makes me feel like I am contributing to a good cause. There are severe disabilities in my village. The women with disabilities are in the worst conditions. Parents think that disabilities are because of ghost and casting of dangerous spells. Harsh attitude can be observed from majority of parents. I want to bring about change and end these kind of misconceptions by working with GRACE".

Mail from a volunteer from Karachi:

Mr. Khadim Hussain
Grace Association Pakistan

Asslam Alaikum.

Dear Sir,

It will be an honor for me to work with Grace Association Pakistan. I am always interested in community development work and I think the platform of Grace Association will allow me to use my skills to bring about social change.

Thanks for giving

Yours Truly,

AHMED SOOMRO
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