
Stakeholders Meeting Report Chilas Rock Carvings Cultural Landscape Project

Prepared by
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Stakeholders Meeting for Chilas Rock Carvings Cultural Landscape Project

Chilas, December 2, 2010

Reported by Feryal Ali Gauhar

On December 2, 2010, Rogers Kolachi Khan and Associates held a Stakeholders Meeting for the affectees of the proposed Diamer Basha Dam, the building of which shall lead to environmental changes impacting upon the cultural landscape in a major way. Nominations for representatives from 38 villages which fall within the dam reservoir and construction area were sought through contact with all the communities. A total of seventy representatives of villages from the following areas attended the Stakeholders Meeting:

- **Tangir**
- **Darel**
- **Khanbari**
- **Hodur**
- **Khiner**
- **Thor**
- **Thak**
- **Chilas**
- **Butogah**
- **Guner**
- **Ges Paeen**
- **Ges Bala**
- **Shing Nallah**
- **Goharabad**
- **Thurli**
- **Gini**
- **Bunerdas**
- **Jalipuri**

The meeting commenced with a lecture on the cultural heritage of the area. Tracing the history of the movements of peoples and tribes across the world's highest mountain ranges, RKK Associate and Key Coordinator for the project, Feryal Ali Gauhar showed images of the kinds of carvings left on the rocks, rock faces, boulders, cliffs and outcrops along the Indus River, from Shatial to Raikot, points which mark both ends of the proposed reservoir. The lecture included an interactive session in which

participants were asked about some of the more widely recognized carvings and their significance, historically and culturally.



Figure 1 District Commissioner, Superintendent of Police, Politicians and local participants



Figure 2 Feryal Ali Gauhar describes the origins of the Fox Mask used by hunters in Chilas for several centuries

Following the lecture, all the participants were invited to the lawn of the meeting venue, the Shangrila Hotel, which is situated on the banks of the Indus River. Arrangements had been made to seat 75 participants, but chairs had to be added as more people expressed their interest in participating.



Figure 3 Participants at the Stakeholders Meeting held by RKK, Chilas - December 2, 2010

Ms. Ali Gauhar introduced the Chilas Rock Carving Cultural Landscape project and spoke about the value of both tangible and intangible heritage for the sustainable development of the communities that will be impacted by the building of the proposed dam. Outlining the possibilities of enlarging the scope of the current project to eventually involve the communities in the safeguarding and conservation of the heritage of their areas, Ms. Ali Gauhar emphasized the need to recognize heritage as an asset upon which the future of the effected communities could be built. She gave examples of how knowledge of the past could help communities to envision a path for the future, and also pointed out the unique place of this particular geographical area in world heritage. Citing the research produced by the Heidelberg Academy of Arts and Sciences, in particular, the Institute for the Rock carvings and Inscriptions along the Karakorum Highway, Ms. Ali Gauhar acknowledged the tremendous contribution made by German academics such as Dr. Karl Jettmar and Dr. Harald Hauptmann and his team in the gathering of invaluable data regarding the cultural heritage of the area. She pointed out that it was up to the citizens of Pakistan and the residents of the valleys in which this heritage evolved to lay claim to that heritage and to protect it, ensuring that it was an asset which could be shared with future generations. She requested the participants to introduce themselves and to share with the group any knowledge they may have of the heritage of their communities.

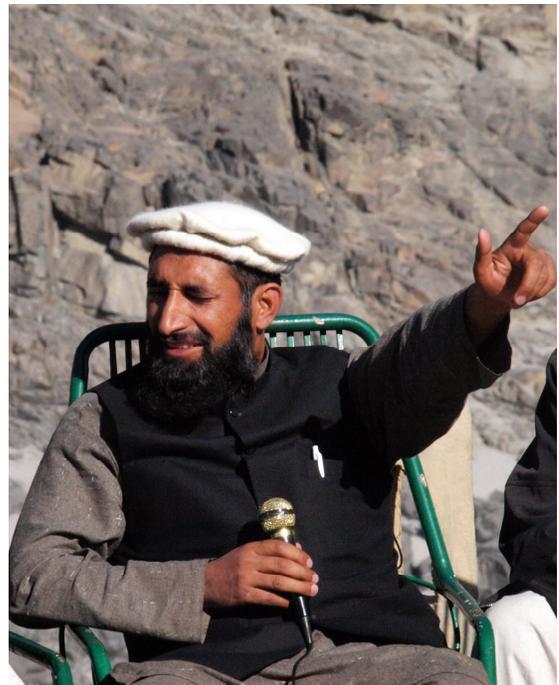


Figure 4 Village representatives sharing cultural knowledge

Summary of Discussion

Amongst the participants were community leaders, religious scholars, engineers, carpenters, academics, school teachers, students, lawyers, local politicians, local administration, proponents of the dam project, poets, writers, media men, business men, and unskilled workers. All participants shared knowledge of the cultural heritage of their respective communities. Following are the kinds of culture, tangible and intangible, which the participants felt were of value and at risk:

Thor Valley: Rock Carvings, (stupas) Old Mosque with carved wooden pillars (photo below), British era Rest House; remains of ancient settlements; swords, pots, utensils; guns

Tangir: Old Mosque, remains of Hindu temple complex, carvings of horses, remains of a water reservoir used for ablutions by ancient Hindu communities; the ancient game of Polo, still played here

Thak Babusar: remains of Hindu settlement

Thalpan: remains of Buddhist settlements

Darel: remains of Buddhist monastery, Old Mosque, British Era Rest House, rock carvings, remains of Old Fort referred to as Raji Kot, remains of ancient irrigation/water supply system

Thakot: remains of old mosque with wooden pillars; remains of ancient water supply; remains of Old Fort

Butogah: remains of ancient fort

Chilas: Rock carvings, old fort

Ges Bala and Ges Paen: ancient remains destroyed by recent floods, but intangible heritage still remains such as folk lore and folk songs. These are already being documented by a local resident who is a practicing lawyer.

Thalpan: the local language needs to be preserved, as do the costumes and local embroideries and crafts

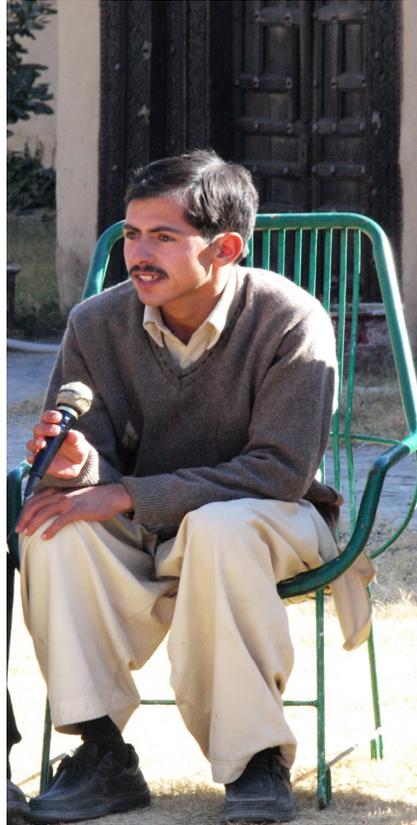
Shaheen Kot: a particular rock which is mentioned in the folk lore, needs to be preserved

Hodur: Buddhist era rock carvings; the remains of three ancient forts; the craft of hand made leather shoes; the craft of panning the river for gold still practiced by the Soniwal but dying out rapidly

It was also suggested that the natural environment, within which the cultural landscape is situated, also needs to be documented and preserved. Particular landmarks such as the Lulusar Lake were mentioned for their significance in the history and legends of the local tribes. All participants felt that their culture was threatened as was their way of life, and that any efforts to preserve or conserve cultural artifacts should involve the local communities. A museum to house these artifacts should be

located in Chilas, and skills to document and manage this heritage should be taught to the local communities.

Figure 5 Discussion on cultural heritage and sustainable development



The meeting concluded with an affirmation that the cultural landscape of Chilas and the surrounding area was rich and unique, in particular the sheer volume and variety of rock carvings. All participants were invited to lunch in keeping with the local tradition of hospitality, practiced with pride throughout the country and in particular within tribal communities.



(The lunch was delicious, as were all the lunches during the training of the documentation teams).



Figure 6 Old Mosque with wooden pillars in Thor