

Vistas of community development : Emerging trends under Dasu Hydropower Construction Project in Pakistan

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Abstract: Based on empirical data collected from an ongoing hydropower development project, this paper analyses key-social changes and living standard dynamics of affected people resulting from project activities. Paper highlights relationship between project activities and social change including quantification of impacts relating to living standards and quality of living. Dimensions of living standards examined in the paper include: change in consumption of basic necessities such as food, clothes and medicine, health visits, schooling, housing quality, wealth creation, family welfare and personal behaviour changes of households that have a bearing on social development. Paper pinpoints that project has not engaged a specific agent to facilitate community development but has left such decisions to be made by individual households, with some basic guidelines provided by project staff. Negative effects of non-engagement of an agent are discussed. Paper finally concludes that upliftment of living standards and quality of living of affected people is the fundamental requirement for community development (CD). As these conditions are being fulfilled, the paper argues that project is making a significant contribution to CD. Risks resulting from inadequate emphasis on creation of income generation and livelihood activities being key-determinants of sustainability of approach implemented in Dasu, are highlighted.

Keywords: Community development; Dasu Hydropower Project; living standards; quality of life; family welfare; education; health; resettlement; Kohistan District; Kohistani.

Literature review

Since the coining of words “community development” in the late 1900s, the subject has grown so vast with a rich literature base. In addition to individual research articles, over a dozen of journals focus exclusively on community development (CD). Review of the reservoir of literature reveals that the concept of community development entails several aspects :

It is a process of change in social, democratic, economic, cultural and environmental aspects (Christenson & Robinson, 1980). According to Louisiana Community Network (no-date), it is a comprehensive process for managing community change. Community development as a learning process is the theme put forward by Moreland and Lovett (1997). Smart (2017) and, Tucker and Napier (1994) recognize the necessity for an agent to facilitate the process of CD whilst Merrill et.al (1994) characterize qualities, skills and competencies of an effective facilitator. Lotz (1977) identifies CD as a collective behaviour to address community problems. The same author (ibid) also argues that community development could be geographical (along a street) or horizontal (farmer, teacher, social class). Others (Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2012) attribute CD as confined to a locality (place). With the development of transportation and digital communication technology, Giddens (1990) argues that it does not have to be fixed to a specific place. Bradshaw (2008) argues that not all communities are place-based. It is both a field of research as well as a practice (Green, 2016). Drawing from several disciplines such as Geography, Political science, Social Work, etc. the principle of community development is multi-disciplinary (Hamilton, 1992). Several authors (Hamilton, 1992; Moreland and Lovett, 1977; Draper, 1971) agree that CD leads to capacity development of community members enabling them to address problems by themselves. Sherrand (1962) has

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proposed that the ultimate goal of community organizing is improving the interrelationship between the individual, the group to which he/she belongs, and the community in which he/she lives. CD can include rehabilitation of infrastructure, development of affordable housing and, the provision of social services (Gillis, C, 2019). Whatever the argument put forward in literature is, there exists a strong consensus on the final goal of CD namely, improvement of living standards and well-being of people in a given community. This view is supported by Green (2016), Sailand Abu-Samah (2010).

Purpose and structure of paper

The central theme of this article is improvement of living standard of community people as a prelude for community development (CD). Using empirical evidence from an on-going Dasu Hydropower Project (DHP) in Pakistan, this paper argues that the improvement of well-being and living standards of individual households as the basic requirement for community development. Considering that households form the basic building blocks of the larger community, the paper argues that development of living standard of individual households is sine-quo-non to improve the overall living standard of community, thus paving way for community development. The next section of the paper presents a discussion about the project and its activities that have a bearing on CD. This is followed by a detailed assessment of improvement of living quality of households resulting from project activities. The change agent in the process as taking place in Pakistan is project activities that are obviously tailored towards the achievement of overall project goal that goes beyond community development. In other words, CD in the case of Dasu appears to be a de-facto output of the main project which is electric power generation. Because there is no specific agent engaged to facilitate community development process, there are obvious drawbacks that are highlighted in the paper.

Dasu Hydropower Project and its environment

Located in the Upper Kohistan District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Province, Pakistan, Dasu Hydropower Project (DHP) is a mega scheme currently under construction on the Indus River. This project covers several aspects of development including a generous program for community development embedded in the local area development plan (Ul-Haq and Widana, 2021). The location of project within Pakistan is shown in Figure 1. Implemented by Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) of Pakistan, with external financing, it is a run-of-river project with the installed capacity of 4,320 MWh of electric power. Commenced in 2016, construction duration is currently estimated until 2027. The reservoir area will be 23.85 km² at a maximum flood level of 957 m asl. The dam will require relocation of people from 34 villages. Included in here are 10 downstream villages that would provide space for access roads and other accessory facilities. Total number of households that will be impacted directly by the project is currently estimated at over 3,000 (greater than 20,000 people).

Upper Kohistan is a remote and a predominantly mountainous district that can be reached via Karakoram Highway which is a part of the ancient Silk Road, linking Pakistan with China. Driving along a narrow, winding and up-hill road from the nation's capital of Islamabad, it takes about 6 hours to reach the City of Dasu, the capital of Upper Kohistan District. A tribal district, its population density is only 63 persons per km². Lower reach of DHP begins from the northern end of Dasu City where the main dam is about 7 km upstream of Indus River. Reservoir extends some 60 km to the north until the town of Shatyal in north. Sixty-two km of KKH that follows almost parallel to Indus River is relocated as this part will be submerged by the new reservoir. All villages along KKH and river will go under the reservoir.

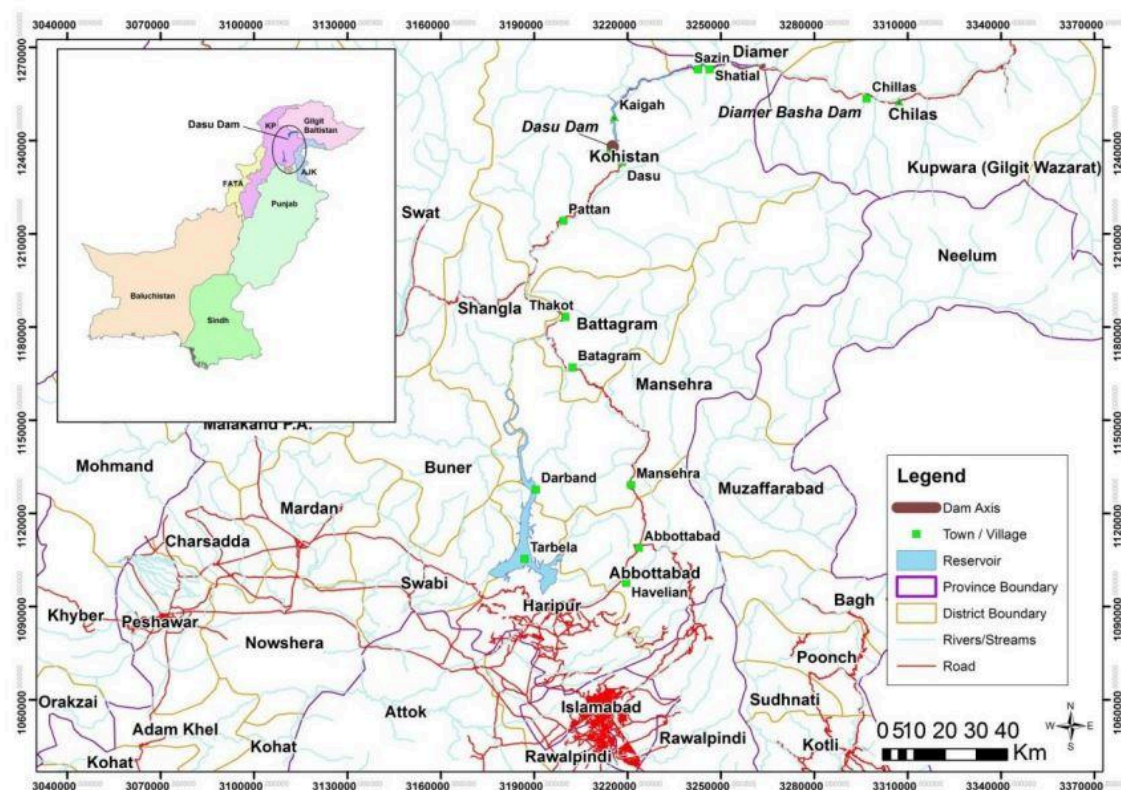


Figure 1: Location of DHP

Kohistani people are the traditional landowners of project area. As a matter of fact, the majority of land in Upper Kohistan District are under tribal ownership with only a fraction in government hands. Living in a harsh environment, Kohistani people pursue a traditional lifestyle in extended households, often 2-4 individual families living together within one roof. This unit is recognized as a household. Many tribesmen eke out a livelihood from meagre produce coming from the heavily degraded landscape supplemented by income coming from employments and small-scale income generation activities. Female literacy is still low with only below 5% adult women literate. Although much of the land is owned by local people, it is unequally distributed. Few households possess large extent of usable land often in excess of 1,000 kanals (50.50 ha) whilst a large number neither own a single piece of land nor the house they live in; they live in houses offered by their friends and relatives for free or some on rented abodes. The agricultural produce comprising of wheat, maize, pulses, vegetables, nuts and fruits, is hardly sufficient to meet the family food need. This means, the majority of both land-owning as well as all landless people buy wheat and maize, which are the staple food of the people. Because income sources are limited, many households cannot afford to purchase food in the market either. This situation affects family food supply, nutrition needs and thereby health, especially of children. Animal keeping is popular but is confined to those who possess this resource. Milk from cattle and goats provide much needed protein in the diet of people. Sale of animals is the main income source for a few who own this resource. Poor people of course are in a worst state with very low income and lack of land to grow their food nor absence of animals. The two resources freely available are clean water flowing down hundreds of streams and wood collected from nearby forests, although the forest cover is dwindling rapidly.

Pre-project living standards and quality of life of Kohistanis as identified during project’s feasibility study highlights following features (Baseline Survey, 2012):

1. Retarded human development manifested by low literacy rate of 11% with women literacy rate of only 3 %, poor health and education profiles.
2. Low education widely prevails. Women education is still low attributable to the local tradition of this highly patriarchal society where women have no public life. Women do not appear in public places and are

barred from being employed. The school attendance is low with a boys enrolment rate of 11% and that of girls only 1%; girls drop-out rate is higher too.

3. Majority of inhabitants do not receive a balanced diet. The degraded arable land can only produce a limited quantity of food, forcing people to purchase it in the market. Lack of cash and large household size (8 members or more) make food purchase unaffordable to many. Poor people do not possess livestock which otherwise is an important source of cash and milk for food.
4. Combined effects of low literacy, poor education, large household size, meagre income levels and poor family nutrition is that population particularly children are malnourished, prone to several diseases. Although there is no fee for medical consultation in government clinics, patients have to purchase own medicine which is not afforded by many. Women and girls are disproportionately affected as local customs discourage them to visit government health clinics by themselves.
5. Low level of household income in comparison to expenditure manifested in high indebtedness. This has led to high level of borrowing mainly for consumption needs. Many households live with accumulated debts who are helped by their tribal members in case of emergency.
6. Income generation activities are rare whilst only 10 % households have members in paid employment. Unemployment rate is woefully high.
7. Women have no public life, and their appearance in public places is highly restricted. So are women in employment in public and private sectors. Purdah (separation of men and women, and keeping women out of men's sight) is strictly practised.
8. High socioeconomic disparity exists between landowners and those without land.
9. On account of both low-literacy and traditional social behaviour, population is largely disconnected from the rest of the country.

Dasu Hydropower Project activities

The project commenced construction in 2016. Initially, construction work confined to 10 out of total 34 affected villages. Construction of worker camp and the space for construction meant that several hundreds of households had to be relocated from their traditional land. In general, relocation was preceded by disbursement of compensation for every household based on actual calculation of the market value for land, land-based assets as well as income generation activities and jobs that had to be relocated from construction zone. However, many were forced to relocate before payment of compensation, but the project provided cash to rent a house. By 2021, about 400 households have been relocated, all handsomely compensated for loss of assets and livelihoods. Majority of them are now living in temporary houses made out of salvaged material, others living with their friends and relatives for free with still others on rented premises. A small number have out-migrated to urban areas who have built better houses utilizing project-disbursed compensation package.

Project activities are slowly and steadily changing the socioeconomic landscape in several ways. Injection of cash by way of jobs and business activity has triggered community development. The vast amount of cash received for their heavily degraded and poor land resource by way of assets compensation is the main cash source. Other sources include: Local employment, business opportunities triggered by construction activities, sale of items (commodities and building materials) to project and, income derived from renting (vehicles, equipment and houses, small contracts for project).

The Drivers

Under DHP, four main drivers contribute to community development. They are: cash in the hands of previously poor Kohistani people, opportunity for local residents to work together with their urban colleagues and implementation of activities under the local area development program². A discussion on above activities is presented below followed by an assessment of its' impact on community development.

² This program is a part and parcel of the project. Its' purpose is to assist the affected people and the host community to improve their living standards beyond compensation payment.

Cash for Kohistani

Project has resulted in a large amount of cash in Kohistani's hands that takes three main forms. First, compensation and other cash allowances paid as part of resettlement, second, cash earnings from project employment and finally, other cash-generation activities indirectly associated with the project. A discussion on three forms of cash is in the proceeding paragraphs.

Resettlement compensation

Kohistani people displaced by the project stands at over 25,000 individuals in about 3,500 households. They are occupants of land taken over by project for construction as well as associated activities. Every household affected by resettlement is paid cash as compensation for loss of their assets and other allowances to improve their livelihoods. According to project's resettlement policy, every affected household is paid full compensation calculated at market price to compensate asset losses. This includes compensation for land loss, housing and other land-based assets calculated in accordance with government policy. Each affected household receives between PKR³ 54 (\$0.27) to PKR 170 million (\$848,500) in cash depending on market value of assets impacted. Compensation cash payment is in-progress with the average amount received per household is calculated as PKR 1,324,145 (\$ 6,621).

The high terrain, rocky outcrops and degraded soil on steep gradient has combinedly led to low-land value. Agriculture practised on steep slopes with degraded soil is neither efficient nor profitable. However, because of the deep cry of affected landowners, project authorities have decided to pay an enhanced rate for land compensation over and above the payment made in other projects in similar environments.



Figure 1 : Poor and Degraded Land Resource in Project Area

With the release of compensation, the affected people became rich almost overnight for their lost assets, mostly degraded land or rocky outcrops. Many have received cash for land that has no commercial. Still other affected

³ Exchange rate of PKR=\$ 200

people have received cash compensation for their lost business, income and livelihood. Commenced in 2016, cash disbursement is expected to be completed in 2026.

In addition to assets compensation, project affected households are eligible for one of two other cash packages namely, self-managed resettlement (SMR) or temporarily resettlement package (TRP). Each household is eligible for either form of resettlement but not both. SMR package entails each eligible household to receive a cash payment of PKR 3.5 million (\$17,500) in a single transaction, regardless of impacted assets value. Upon receipt, the recipient is free to relocate to any site of their choice. Over 90% have opted to receive SMR package where over 100 households have already received this package and have relocated to outside the project area. In parallel, others shall receive their SMR package in due course.

On the other hand, TRP recipients are those who are willing to relocate to resettlement villages (RV) built by the project. Relevant households temporarily reside with their friends and relatives or in rental accommodation until the resettlement village of their choice is completed. The package consists of a monthly grant of PKR 15,000 (\$75) per household payable every three months. This grant shall be payable from the time a household is relocated from their residence until it receives the designated plot of land in the RV to build the house. About 200 households currently receive this package. Affectees of the first RV site have been handed over their land plots but none have started building their house.

Project employment

The second source of cash income comes from employment, both directly by project and indirectly. Employment created by project activities is direct whereas employment opportunities created in other workplaces that came into being due to the project are indirect. With the commencement of project construction activities in 2016, 8 main contractors were engaged. Construction companies began to employ local people of which the numbers employed have grown since then up to 8,000 workers (45% locals) by the end of 2025. More will be employed in near future when construction of main works is commenced in 2026. It is expected that direct project employment reaches its peak in 2029. Income from both skilled and unskilled jobs were so much that some households had 2-3 workers in paid employment by the end of 2025. The total injection of cash into Dasu Economy by way of direct project employment alone stood at PKR 110 million (\$550,000) in December 2021. The average monthly salary of a worker employed in the project is PKR 50,000 (\$250). On this basis, it appears that annual employment income is 1.76 times greater than current annual household income of PKR 340,584 (\$1,703). The peak project employment is scheduled to reach in 2023 after which there shall be a gradual decline in project employment as majority of work is completed then.

Indirect income

Following the commencement of project, a range of indirect income opportunities propelled. Such opportunities are attributable to greater proliferation of businesses and commercial activities as a result of the project. Business organizations and entrepreneurs realizing the economic opportunity created by project, have started various business activities in project area. New businesses include service facilities (vehicle and equipment repair shops, spare part shops, sale outlets), banks and hotels. Entrepreneurs have built and made available for contractors and consultants working on the project. The number of sub-contractors working for the project have increased together with workers in such businesses. The increase in number of commercial enterprises that operate in Dasu and Komila towns has increased by over 70% between 2012 and 2021. The increase in commercial establishments is much higher in project towns compared to other towns outside of the project zone. All these new activities have created new employment opportunities. Whilst indirect employment is being assessed, preliminary information reveals that 9 banks established in project town have employed 54 people of which 51 % is local.

Another important indirect employment source is in the transport sector including repair shops, vehicle attendants, service entities, etc. The traffic in project area has registered an increase of 51% between 2012 and 2021. This trend will continue through next 10-15 years. In the meantime, employees associated with vehicle operations have created a demand for other services such as accommodation, restaurants, food, health, etc.

Property leasing by local people is an important cash source for local people. Various agencies working for the project and new businesses sprung as a result of project investment demand premises for office accommodation as well as residences for staff. Several large buildings are already leased out by contractors and companies. Still a large number of houses are occupied by workers many of whom have migrated from other parts of the country. These developments have quadrupled the demand for houses. On an average, PKR 7 million (\$35,000) has been injected into the local economy by way of commercial premises rent in 2022.

It is to be noted that the main beneficiary of indirect cash income are well-to-do households that have already invested in commercial buildings, repair shops, construction machinery, etc. Poor people who are employed in local businesses receive their wages which is comparatively smaller than overall business income.

It is to be highlighted that increased employment benefits are hugely disproportionate to gender. Only 2-3 local woman are employed directly by the project. This is because the tradition in Kohistan does not allow women employment and/or work in public places. It is hoped that women employment may surge in the future. This will be monitored carefully and data presented in a future research paper.

In addition to changes brought about by cash economy, the project has supported other behavioural changes in community members. Such changes have a profound impact on community development. This issue together with project's impacts on living standards and quality of life, is discussed in the next section.

Impact on community development

The above forces have begun to create an overwhelming and a visible impact on living standards and quality of life of Kohistani people. Such impact is already seen in economic, social, cultural, family welfare and in other behavioural aspects of local people. Changes that are visible at this stage of project development are explained in this section. It is to be noted that this aspect is under thorough study via a comprehensive program of monitoring which is in place at present. It is expected that further developments in this sphere will be documented in a future research article.

Living standard improvement is manifested in several ways such as an increase in household food and non-food consumption, change in attitudes towards children schooling, frequent visits to health facility, improved housing, wealth creation, greater connectivity with the rest of country and work-place personal behavioural changes. These issues are analysed below.

Change in Household food consumption : Cash circulation among Kohistani people has changed their food consumption habits. Locals now purchase a higher quantity of staple, other high-value food items such as meat, milk. They have increased food consumption from 1-2 meals to several meals a day. Interviews with all Kohistani workers confirmed that their improved food consumption habits are a result of higher level of cash in their hands. All of them have allocated more money for the purchase of high-value food items as well as a higher quantity of staples which is expected as income rises. The local shops stock new and high-value food items now than ever before. More expensive food items such as virgin olive oil, ice cream, vitamin supplements, mineral water, etc. are available in the market now. These items were not heard of by many in 2015.

Change in non-food consumption: Local people's purchasing power for non-food items such as clothes, uniforms for school children, cosmetics for women, books, stationery, shoes and utensils, etc. has improved. They could not afford to purchase many of these items in the past due to low-earning levels. More cash in their hands has increased the demand for non-food items.

Education improvement: change in parent's attitudes on children schooling and girls schooling in particular have changed. Kohistani people are investing on children education. They can now afford to buy schooling items from their monthly salary. In the past, girls were not enrolled due to local custom and lack of cash. Three indicators tell us about improvement of children schooling. First, enrolment level in schools within the construction zone has increased. The increase in enrolment is seen for both boys and girls. Between 2015 and 2025, 95% of boys and 42% of girls have been enrolled in schools. Second, class attendance has not only increased but is regular now

compared to 2019 and earlier. Third, drop-out has reduced to zero for both girls and boys in 2025. Interviews with teachers reveal that change in climate such as rainy day or snowy day result in low-level of attendance in the past. This is not the case after 2020. Teachers also gave evidence that children are now well-combed and appear in clean clothes and dress smart. For the first time in history of the district, teachers have observed that girls appeared in clean, well-groomed and in expensive attire before the ceremony to receive girls’ scholarships in 2024. Interviews conducted with Kohistani workers reveal that they are now keen to provide education to their children. 46 % workers said that increased income has helped purchase books, clothes, shoes and other items for their children. Close to 100 % said that they are sending their girls to schools, something they have learned from their co-workers from outside the district.

A household head in a remote village valued education of their children in following terms:

“We are very much interested in educating our children and for the first time in our lives pay attention to girls’ education. We have understood the value of children education from our work mates many of whom have come from affluent provinces in the country to work on the project. This is an important lesson we have learned from them. We are working with education authorities to fill teacher vacancies in two schools in this village. The recent girl students protest at the local school demanding authorities to fill teacher vacancies is the first incident of this nature in the district”.

Apart from the twin-factor of increased cash and change in attitudes of Kohistanis, a third factor has significantly contributed to the improvement in children schooling. This is the school pick-up and drop-off service provided for by the project for free. This service has been in operation since 2020 which has engaged motor vehicles to transport students in about 20 routes. Every day, the service operates from designated area within the project zone where there is no presence of public transport apart from taxis which are expensive anyway. The school transport service has eliminated the need for girls to walk long distances between school and home, which is anyway, not allowed according to local customs. The children now do not have to wait for a vehicle to take a lift to school and has eliminated waiting time. They now can reach their designated school, regardless on a rain or snow. The transport service is highly appreciated by girls and their parents. Interviews with school bus drivers reveal that all busses on all routes carry the full complement of children throughout school season.

Health improvement : Exploring principles and practice of CD in health, Fisher (2014) argues that the process leads to definite health benefits and is effective in delivering this service to wider public. He further says “We have an approach that changes people’s lives for better”. An improvement in health of people is a significant way to enhance living standards and thereby pushes community development upwards.

What we prove in this article is that project activities have both improved people’s capacity to access medical service as well as have changed attitudes of local people towards health service. The close association with co-workers who come from better developed areas of the country is one of the important reasons to have changed the attitudes and behaviour of local people towards a better health.

Data shows that health centre visit of men, women and children has increased after the project. The increase is about twice compared to pre-project situation. Interviews with all workers confirmed that they are conscious of seeking medical advice for their children and women. This is an important behaviour they have learned from their co-workers who come from other parts of the country.

Together with change in health behaviour of locals, there has been an increase in the number of private clinics (increase by 533%) and pharmacies (increase by 3.4 times) between 2012 and 2025 in project twin-towns of Dasu and Komila. Table below has further details of increase of health facilities before and after project.

Table 1: Change in Health Facility between 2012 and 2025

Facility	Number of Units	
	2012	2025

Pharmacy	10	34
Private Medical clinics	3	19
Private maternity care facility	0	4
Aurvedic practitioners	1	2
Dental clinic	0	4

Source: MSC’s research

The increase in number of health facilities in Dasu is a direct result of increased demand for services, a reflection of affordability and health awareness improvement of locals.

Family welfare : Welfare has a range of dimensions such as marriages, family holidays, picnics, non-violence behaviour within the family, religious visits, etc. There is evidence that family welfare in Dasu is changing after the project. Many affected people have made use of cash opportunity to pursue marriages that have been delayed due to pre-project economic constraints. A huge amount of cash in their hands is an opportunity to bring back those delayed marriages as between 3 to 13% of affected households have reported both first and subsequent marriages after receiving compensation payment. Proportion of household that have utilized cash payment to pursue their holy religious pilgrimage to Hajji stands at 7%. It is a belief among Muslims that one who can afford a visit to Hajji should pursue according to the religion. Many saw the opportunity of high cash in their hands to conduct this Holy religious visit. The contribution of such visits to welfare of the family and community are high. One who has visited Holy Hajji is given the title of Haj which is considered a respectful title among the local community. Interviews with households reveal that they now have a happy life at home as they can meet children’s needs, have extra money to go on a picnic and are better prepared to accomplish household needs.

Employment made it possible for them to buy new clothes and even jewellery to their wives, making them happy too. The frequency of purchase of garments, cosmetics and other household items has increased; in the past, they could afford to buy above items once every 1-2 years as compared with every 6 months now, a direct reflection of increase income. Majority (90%) of interviewed workers said that their family welfare has improved following higher income from employment.

Household debt reduction and decline in cash borrowing: Many households in Dasu have had accumulated debts at the time project came into being. Low income and low agricultural production combined with large family size meant that people are forced to borrow money for consumption. As such, the relationship between household cash availability and need for loans is very clear. When households have a better cash flow, they saw this an opportunity to pay off their accumulated debts. Data reveals that greater than 42% of households have utilized compensation payment to pay off their past debts. In parallel, 48% of households have expressed that there is no necessity to engage in further borrowing as their project employment brings in cash every month to meet all household expenses. Additionally, other households receive TRP on a continued basis that helps further elevate cash flow. Both forms of cash have contributed to household debt reduction as well as to continue pay for expenses without resorting to cash borrowing.

Box : Workforce Responses on Spending of Monthly Salary	
	Response (%)
Purchase medicine	56
Purchase schooling items, shoes, bags, clothes	46
I can now purchase high-value food (milk, sweet)	41
Meat purchase	36
Afford to purchase jewellery	95

Source: Worker Survey, 2022

Because borrowing has reduced, it gives them a higher morale within the community. This gives a self-satisfaction and confidence in a community setting. Borrowing for food and other essential items diminish one’s social standing in the community. Only poor people continue to borrow money from others to meet their basic needs.

Wealth creation: The number of people investing on income generation activities has propelled. Activities are in premises renting (for commercial and residential), equipment and vehicle hire, restaurants and other small businesses. Quite naturally, income generation activities are common among wealthy households. The benefits to poor household come from employment and other odd jobs such as janitors, security, etc. on commercial entities.

Housing quality improvement: CD’s wide-ranging attacks on evils of modern urban living of poor people such as housing improvement are noted (Von Hoffman, 2012). Drawing a number of examples of housing improvement in the USA, the same author alludes these outcomes to progression in community development.

Kohistani people have invested part of their enhanced cash wealth in housing. Number of local people living in newly constructed and obviously better-quality houses has increased by 15% in 2021 compared to only 5 % pre-resettlement. Improvement in housing include such amenities as : larger area, better quality of material in construction, more than one-level. An improvement in access to electric power and water supply is likely in the future.

Project has resulted in an improvement in social, economic, cultural and behavioural aspects of households. The change in education and specifically girls’ education is highlighted. Other changes that might take place in future include women appearance in public and their employment and local women marriages with non-Kohistani men. Monitoring program will capture such changes and will be reported in future.

Table 2: Spending Pattern of Compensation Payments by Affected Households (% responses)

Spent item	Village -1	Village -2	Village -3
Loan repayment	44	42	63
Land purchase	37	56	14
House construction	21	35	12
Marriage	7	13	3
Education	Ins	1	4

Note: Multiple responses, exceed 100%

Source: DHP Project Data, 2021

In all 3 villages, proportion of spending on loan repayment is very high. The spending is higher in village 3 where the people are poor, suggesting majority have been living in debts. For obvious reasons, the need for consumption borrowing is higher in a poor community. Timely loan repayment affords a better community life and can win the confidence and respect of other members. Paying off debts helps to develop confidence while also affording them to stand equally within the community. A majority across all sites have invested compensation in either land purchase or house building.

Being a conservative community, people are vigilant on their dealings with strangers. Their interactions are mainly with Kohistanis with minimal interactions with outsiders. Marriages are within own tribal groups. In the above background, project has brought in thousands of workers from more developed parts of the country, a trend that will continue. Both parties were living and sharing the same facilities in work camps. They interact at work, while in the playground and in other activities such as recreation, dining, etc. Continuation of this practice since 2016 has made Kohistanis to learn several aspects of human behaviour that they were unfamiliar in the past. Examples of such behaviour are in two spheres namely, work-place human behaviour and family living. Change in workplace behaviour include: regardful speech, friendly and cordial human interactions within a workplace hierarchy, tolerance, mutual respect to each other, compliments and courtesies for managers and, respectful behaviour within an office environment. In parallel, host workers continue to learn about aspects of family behaviour such as the importance of children schooling and girl-schooling which is new to the district. These are important behavioural dynamics that substantially contribute to family welfare finally paving the way for community development. By

their close association and working together with visitors, there is evidence that local people are getting used to live with outsiders and to have accepted some of their lifestyles too. In other words, project has triggered opening out of the community socially. More than physical changes learned, the social changes they have brought into the community are tremendous. The physical and social changes experienced by Kohistani people are contributing to a better knowledge about other parts of the country and to improve connectivity among different communities. A trade Union leader in Komila Bazar explained new change in following words:

“Our Kohistan community has opened out substantially during the last 5-6 years. Majority have accepted the change who have made their own adaptations to live with it. However, only a few are still hesitant to accept this social change who continue to be secluded from the wider community and remain to be poor too. Opening of our closed community to outside world will impact on the literacy rate which used to be dismally low in the past”

Majority of Kohistani workers extensively interviewed by the author clearly indicate that working together with co-workers from more developed parts of the country has been the primary reason for local workers to change their attitudes towards children education. Close contact with co-workers and learning from their experiences, local people now strongly believe that children including girls schooling is the main strategy to provide our children a better future. Moreover, many of those who have bought property outside the district gave their primary reason as children education.

Because of highly conservative nature of local culture, habits such as alcoholism, sex use and gambling are totally absent in the project zone as well as in greater part of the country, in general. This is a blessing in disguise for women who can expect much of the earnings by their men to be utilized for family expenses and welfare. Interview reveal that some workers have the habit of giving their wives one-half of their monthly pay.

Concept of change agent?

Literature clearly points out the need for a change agent to facilitate community development process. Dasu project is entirely focused on electric power generation as such majority of activities are geared towards this goal. Community development is a secondary realm proposed by project proponent. It is mainly the overall poor status of the local population that prompted project proponent to support community via a community development package. It is in the above context that we must view community development within this hydropower construction project.

The implementation of community support scheme is not backed by a community development agent. Apart from discussions at public consultations, there is no specific arrangement to assist people to decide on investment options. Neither there is a mechanism to facilitate implementation of such decisions. People who receive money are free to decide how they spend it as they like. Obviously with poor and vulnerable communities, this approach does not work as their pressing need is to spend on consumption until the money is exhausted.

The absence of a community development agent in Dasu Project has led to several drawbacks. First, it has resulted in over-spending on consumption needs, repayment of debts, leaving very little or no cash for investment on income generation or sustainable livelihood opportunities. Second, a considerable number have invested the financial wealth in wasteful practices such as purchase of motor vehicles. Local Police has seen that one of the small villages in the district has brought over 40 cars overnight. This is wasteful spending. Third, still a few have lost a huge portion of their cash wealth by venturing into poor investments options. Few have even lost millions of compensation money by entering unsolicited business deals. Others who had to engage in court cases just to recover money that has been grabbed by people who pretend to pose as investment advisors. Most of these unwise investment decisions could have been avoided by the engagement of a community development agent.

Another risk that is associated due the absence of a change agent is the lack of emphasis on income generation and livelihood activities. Sooner or later, the cash wealth is likely to be exhausted, and the people are left with only a little alternative to continue with their livelihoods. When project employment diminishes, unless other employment opportunities are created, it is difficult to prevent people from being fallen into debts again. This is a

likely scenario that has not received much attention. Under these circumstances, it is necessary that alternative income generation activities are planned, tested and implemented to avert this disastrous situation in future. The only way forward is to develop livelihood options and income generation activities.

Conclusions

Boyle (2010) critiques that community development is a philosophy of practice applicable to all human endeavours and which supports everybody's right to and potential for right livelihoods. Hence, right livelihood is the critical product of community development. This research argues that every household has a right to improve its living standard which forms the building process for community development. Without an improvement in livelihood and quality of living of individual households however much community has developed its collective actions, we cannot confirm that community development has taken place.

Using empirical data, this paper presents that households in Dasu HP zone have improved their food consumption (amount of food, dietary mix of protein and several meals a day), consumption of non-food-items such as clothes, toys for young ones, kitchen utensils, motor cars, etc. and spending on medicine. Family welfare has improved with women now enjoying better clothes and jewellery, visiting social events and an overall increase in women welfare is seen already. Local employees of construction firms have expressed their interest in children education, spending on family nutrition and welfare needs have gone up. Number of households visiting health clinics has gone up. Local workers have changed their behaviour on many aspects of community life. Housing has improved in comparison to pre-resettlement. What these improvements say is an improvement of their living standards and life quality. Greater interactions with fellow workers from more developed areas have improved personal relations and produced a better outlook for the local people.

Outcome of family changes outlined above is an advancement of overall development of the community. It is expected that people will connect with each other as well as with the outside province, be more open to modern practices, and such other behaviour like women employment, marriages with non-relatives and women likely to have a place in public life. The changes are being continuously observed which will be identified and documented. This research suggests that Dasu Hydropower Project has created a strong impact on improving living standards and quality of life of the community. Households being the basic building block of the larger community, the project is positively paving the way for community development.

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