

## **FROM STEP TO STRIDE**

**Education is deemed as the most productive investment in long term. An educated youth is definitely an asset of the society. If the potentials of educated youth are not harnessed through proper institutional arrangements and activities, then it could result in negative repercussions on the society. Realising the gravity of situation concerning youth in District Ghizer, a group of active youth got together to form an organization to unite them for development and positive activities. This story narrates a case whereby youth in a locality in district Ghizer initiated classes for local youth to cover their courses. This small step has paved the way to a giant stride that appeared in the transformation of coaching class into a full-fledged school.**

Youth Holistic Development Organization (YHDO) is functioning in Gahkuch, the headquarter of District Ghizer, located at about 75 km away from Gilgit town, with an aim to increase youth participation in community development work. In Gahkuch, a positive relationship has been observed between high literacy rates and unemployment, i.e. high rate of literacy leads to increased number of unemployed people. Unemployment in turn leads to social exclusion of many youth and begets crimes, suicides, frustration, widening of inequality of income and wealth etc. To ensure an optimistic future for Gahkuch, a group of enthusiastic youth of the town formed Youth Holistic Developmental Organization. They decided to tackle the problem of unemployment by using high literacy rate as a catalyst to promote the idea of entrepreneurship in the local youth.

A literate person is more likely to be a good entrepreneur. In addition, it cultivates entrepreneur culture on the one hand, and provides employment to educated youth on the other. Lack of financial resources, however, threw spanner in the works. In October 2012, Aga Khan Rural Support Program announced Youth Micro Challenge Award (YMCA) under its EELY project. Through this award different Youth Organizations were invited to come up with innovative ideas and win a grant at village, union council and district level. Youth Holistic Development Organization came to know about the proposal through AKRSP's Area Office in Ghakuch. Considering YMCA as a good opportunity for the organization to materialize its plan, the organization submitted its proposal. Its proposal fulfilled the selection criteria and requirements and won the award of PKR 80,000 through which the YHDO established a Coaching and English Language Enhancement Centre to help students to cover their courses.

At the initial stage the organization hired five teachers. The centre succeeded to enroll 37 males and 25 females. Gradually, the students came to know about the centre and their number multiplied. The increasing number of applications for admission provided them a cogent reason for transforming the coaching Centre to School. Within the span of three month they transformed coaching centre into school named, Ghizer Higher Secondary School, Gahkuch. The school hired five male and ten female teachers, an accountant, a watchman, one security guard and two female house keepers. Thus, the organisation has accomplished its goal of engaging youth in positive activities and providing employment as well. Now the school caters education to 150 students.

Now YHDO plans to establish two more campuses in Signal and Ghakuch. These campuses will prove to be beneficial in economic and social terms as it becomes source of income, enhances the management skills of youth and the most importantly, strengthens the pillar of literacy. After undergoing the experience of YMCA the organization has capacitated itself to implement larger projects and learnt how to generate funds. EELY programme of AKRSP provided a base for leadership and institutional development for Youth Organization to avail the opportunity in the best possible way by converting a short run programme into long run.

