

Social Media as a Tool for Transparency and Good Governance in the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan

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1. Introduction

In Pakistan, social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and web logs (blogs) have the potential to substantially supplement the customary communication of paper work between citizens and the higher administrative apparatus. The flow of crucial information between citizens and executive branches is sometimes interrupted by officials who might be unable to solve the problem or might have an interest not to process this information. The print media (also referred to as the fourth pillar of the state) generally has a potential to function as controlling body – e.g., against corruption – but in Pakistan this potential is curtailed by government executives and security agencies. The media in Pakistan, especially the English-language press, is said to be very critical, but as recent cases have shown, the pressure on the media to refrain from criticism of the state is increasing.¹ In order to address such constraints, social media as a fifth pillar can substantially change this arrangement. For example, in many Eastern European countries and members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, where we find similar constraints, the flow of critical information between the officials and citizens is controlled by executive branches. Here, social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, discussion forums and blogs could change personal discussions and individual opinions into a topic of public debate and secure support of high ranking officials (cf. UNDP, 2011: 1-2). Furthermore, social media allows citizens not only to influence public debate, public opinion and public policy, but, on a more direct level, also to get the chance to tackle matters of consequences, for example to address deficiencies in infrastructure projects, improve project planning and uncover cases of corruption.

According to Strand (2010a), transparency means that citizens are being provided more direct and more easily available access to information on the activities of the government. Citizens can exercise their civil and political rights in a better way when they can access information on government performance. This means that they can assess and assert their influence on public policy making, monitor the expenditures of the government and claim accountability. Access to information and transparency are therefore basic conditions for democratic governments and serve as a key tool to fight against corruption (Strand, 2010b). Felten (2009) has furthermore differentiated between mere government outreach and transparency, in that “outreach means [the] government [is] telling us what it wants us to hear; transparency means giving us the information that we, the citizens, want to get”². In Pakistan, government institutions so far are hardly providing access to information with which citizens could hold them accountable. This is true for the conventional way of communication, i.e. through paper work, as well as for material available online. With the help of personal relations to Government officials, relevant information (e.g. about the availability of funds for infrastructure projects) can be accessed more easily; without personal contacts, obtaining such information usually is a lengthy and tedious process. Therefore, the general context in which this study is located is characterized by a situation of low information outreach of the government and hardly any transparency regarding its activities. We can also assume that this is thoroughly interlaced with various instances of corruption.

¹ See, e.g., Mir, Hamid (2014): Six bullets and seven nights Qalam Kaman. In: The International News, 28 April 2014. Available from <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-246863-Six-bullets-and-seven-nights-Qalam-Kaman>, accessed on 04.08.2014.

² In the spirit of the subject matter, Felten has published his definition in an online forum where the definition remains open for comments and discussion.

According to Florini (2000), the provision of necessary information by the government enables the citizens to learn about government accomplishments. E-Government is therefore considered as one of the channels to enhance trust in the government through increased accountability and empowerment of its citizens (Demchak et al., 2000; Kauvar, 1998). E-Government means the use of technology to increase the access to and the delivery of public services in order to benefit citizens, the private sector and employees (Silcock, 2001). Increased access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) provide additional options to citizens to link up to their governments, as well as to other concerned people, for example, in order to promote or demand social benefits (Hampton and Wellman, 2001; Lin, 2001). For example, Cho and Choi (2004) and Shim and Eom (2008, 2009) have shown that this is a process which accelerates: ICTs can provide increased access to public information; this increased transparency also leads to an increased confidence, encouraging citizens to participate in democratic processes. In this shift towards external services (government-citizen interaction), i.e. to provide information to the citizens, E-Government initiatives have been increasingly emphasized as a tool to implement both outreach and transparency. E-Government services can fulfil two concerns: improving internal efficiency and public service delivery as well as providing transparency (Brown, 1999; Fountain, 2001).

One of the big hopes of greater transparency is to control and decrease corruption. Especially in recent times, the agendas of economic growth and 'good governance' are being pursued through tackling corruption. One driving force for these are worldwide movements for democratization. Citizens mobilize for their rights to take part in "the 'what and how' of governance" (Brinkerhoff, 2000: 239). This is furthered by civil society organizations and transnational movements, in which the flow of information is increased and made easier through ICTs. Citizens stand up against abuses of public trust and breaches of law and instead demand accountability and transparency (Brinkerhoff, 2000).

Though, as Brinkerhoff (2000) argues, greater transparency and countering corruption is often dependent on the 'political will' which he defines as

"a complex phenomenon that incorporates: (a) individual actors, along with their aspirations, motivations, and capacities; (b) organizations, within which individuals function and on whose behalf individuals often act; (c) socio-economic and governance systems, which frame both constraints and incentives for individuals and organizations; and (d) the policies, programmes, and activities that actors and organizations are involved with at various stages (identification, design, implementation, and evaluation)." (Brinkerhoff, 2000: 241)

This article focuses on a social media initiative of the Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) using the popular social network platform Facebook as a tool to enhance E-Government services in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), a province-like entity in Northern Pakistan. From 6 April to 30 May 2013, the Chief Secretary, the head of the local bureaucracy of Gilgit-Baltistan, introduced a Facebook page representing his office as an attempt to provide an additional channel of public communication, to enhance government outreach, to increase transparency and to counter corruption in order to improve governance in Gilgit-Baltistan.

This working paper analyses (1) the utilization of social media (in this case Facebook) as an additional channel of communication to improve the outreach of the Chief Secretary's office as well as the communication by private actors with the Chief Secretary's office, (2) the effectivity of its temporary

usage in improving transparency and countering corruption and (3) the challenges for the local administration to address citizens' concerns through social media (Facebook) in GB. This analysis is based on the distinction between the notions of 'transparency' and 'outreach' as given by Felten (2009) and applies in this context the conception of a 'political will', as suggested by Brinkerhoff (2000). This conceptual basis offers at first a frame to scrutinize the efforts of the Chief Secretary to increase good governance by endorsing one particular form of e-governance, i.e. disseminating information on the actions of the local government and offering an optional channel for communication with the public. Secondly, it enables an analysis of the events with due consideration of different actors, as well as of the social and micro-political circumstances through the concept of 'political will', and thus allows discussing the case in holistic way. As will be outlined in more detail below, the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan had regularly been subjected to a number of reforms in the past. Recent reforms have introduced a system that somehow resembles the setup of the four regular provinces of Pakistan. Part of these reforms has also been the policy and ambition to introduce E-Government services in Gilgit-Baltistan.

In Pakistan, the most visited social network platform is Facebook, followed by Google, YouTube, different blogs, Wikipedia, Twitter, LinkedIn and others. There are various different statistics available about the use of the internet and the various social networking sites. However, the statistical trend indicates an increasing use of internet and social networking sites. For example Ali et al. (2013) state that in 2013, there were over 4.4% Facebook users in Pakistan, among a total population of around 180 million.³ The website Statista (2014) shows that one year later, in January 2014, the active social media penetration rate in Pakistan was 6% of the country's population.⁴ This also indicates that Facebook is the most used social media network. There were more than 4 million Facebook users in the age-group of 18–24 years, accounting for 51% of all users, just followed by users in the age-group of 25–34 years. The ratio between male and female users is 72% and 28% respectively (Social Bakers 2014). According to Warraich (2011), in 2010 mobile internet usage shot up 161% within one year and Pakistan has one of the highest rates of mobile phone uses in South Asia.⁵ The use of mobile Internet is especially significant since Pakistan faces an acute shortage of electricity, thus impeding the use of computers and cable Internet connections. Although there are no reliable figures available for Gilgit-Baltistan, the internet use likewise increased since the turn of the century and mobile services were introduced by different companies in 2007. Especially the use of mobile phones is widespread and the use of mobile internet services is increasing rapidly, thus providing internet access which here, as it provides internet access which is here dependent on the unreliable and short supply of electricity, too.

According to an World Bank report on Gilgit-Baltistan (2011), Pakistan is facing several and diverse governance challenges.⁶ Except for one exception (i.e. regulatory quality), Pakistan is below the 25th percentile of the index value regarding the key dimensions of governance (i.e., regarding control of

³ "The total number of FB [Facebook] users in Pakistan is reaching 8,068,900 and grew by more than 1,307,340 during last 6 months" (Ali et al., 2013: 14).

⁴ See Statista (2014): Active social media penetration in Asian countries in January, 2014. Available from <http://www.statista.com/statistics/255235/active-social-media-penetration-in-asian-countries/>, accessed on 12.04.2014.

⁵ Warraich, Haider (2011): Pakistan's social media landscape. In: Foreign Policy (South Asia Channel), 18 March 2011. Available from: http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/18/pakistans_social_media_landscape, accessed on 02.05.2014.

⁶ Since there is hardly any published or publically accessible information available on governance in Gilgit-Baltistan (World Bank, 2011: 22), this report often falls back on information available for Pakistan as a reference.

corruption, rule of law, government effectiveness, political stability and absence of violence) and even considerably below the South Asia average. Furthermore, the factors of government effectiveness, political stability and corruption control have even deteriorated in the past years. Regarding the economic sector, the assessment of the investment climate proves that more and more companies and firms identify corruption as a major impediment (World Bank, 2011: 22).

One of the key challenges that have hindered effective public administration in Gilgit-Baltistan is its complex governance mechanisms. Compared to other parts of Pakistan, the administrative and legislative authority of the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan has so far been rather limited. Additionally, for social reasons, it is difficult to ensure local accountability, transparency, capacity building and resource mobilization (World Bank, 2011: vi). Prominent are here, for example, the growing importance of categories of ethnicity, place of origin and sectarian affiliation, and growing tendencies to use such categories for blackmailing and threatening in order to coerce individuals and institutions into distributing resources along these categories. Mostly, violent conflicts in the area are explained with reference to communal and sectarian rivalries between the majority Shia and minority Sunni groups (Hunzai, 2013; Kreutzmann, 2012: 236). The region has had its share of challenges — including sectarian conflicts, instability, and military takeovers — all of which have ushered in incidents of corruption, lacking transparency, and weak governance. There are still pockets of political and governance instability, as exemplified by the violent internal conflicts in Gilgit-City and along the Karakoram Highway.⁷ Coercive methods that are at hand with the higher authorities and official institutions are hardly used to ensure equal or just distribution of resources; thus transparency of government in order to promote democratic qualities and quality service delivery may be hard to achieve.

Conventional ways of communication between the local government in GB and the public are in-situ communication and communication via written files. In general, the file system in Pakistan is not reliable and there is hardly any computerization so far (Hull, 2012). Physical restraints in mountainous areas like Gilgit-Baltistan as well as social and economic constraints often make it difficult, time consuming and expensive to arrive personally at Government offices and meet officials in order to submit applications, petitions and files. Thus, Internet services keep gaining more and more popularity and importance in the area, particularly with respect to communication, information access and social mobilization. For the same reasons, E-Government services are believed to facilitate access and communication for the population.

In this paper I investigate the role of social media (using the Facebook presence of the Chief Secretary Office of Gilgit-Baltistan as a case study) based on Brinkerhoff's (2000) approach to the concept of political will and Felten's (2009) approach on government outreach and transparency. This paper examines the Facebook page of Sajjad Saleem Hotiana, Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan as an additional communication channel to enhance government outreach, increase transparency and improve governance. In regard to this case, it seems important to look at the various stakeholders (bureaucrats, politicians, and citizens) and the environmental factors (social, economic and political contexts, technical infrastructure) in order to understand how the improvement of transparency and good governance depends on the political will. The main research questions are:

⁷ See Kreutzmann 2012: 240-242.

1. In how far did the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan as a particular implementation of E-Governance services function as an additional, supplementary channel of communication for the citizens of Gilgit-Baltistan in order to increase government transparency and accountability? How did it differ from the customary channels of government–citizen communication and what benefits and/or negative impacts did it have for the different actors involved?
2. Which factors and actors were important in shaping the 'political will' (or, in some cases, reluctance and unwillingness) to deliver government services through the adoption of social media (Facebook) as an E-Government system for the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan?

2. Social Media, Governance, Transparency and Anti-Corruption – a Conceptual Approach

Various other studies have analysed the benefits (and, in rare cases, the detriments) of the use of social media in governments. Especially transparency and accountability are facilitated through the use of social media in and by governments (Abdelsalam et al., 2013; Bertot et al., 2010; Cho and Park, 2012; Cisar, 2003; Felten 2009; Hofmann et al., 2013; Kayani et al., 2011; Lee, 1989; Michaelsen, 2011; Mossberger et al., 2013; Mundy and Umer, 2012; Osimo, 2008; Picazo-Vela et al., 2012; Zheng, 2013). It has the potential to reduce corruption, empower citizens in the sense of involving them in the decision making process, and enforce a system of checks and balances. These processes are dependent on the political will, which, drawing on Brinkerhoff (2000: 241), includes individual actors, organizations, the socio-economic system, the governance system, as well as the policies and activities that the various actors are involved with. Therefore, ICTs such as social media need to be accepted by the various actors in order that they can make a change regarding the current shortcomings in the government and governance. As the case discussed here suggests, this is a critical process, since there are not only people who benefit from it, but also people for whom it may mean a loss of authority or influence to control decision-making processes.

In order to understand the potential of social media in governance, the following chapter offers an overview of the concepts of governance, social media, transparency and accountability, and links them with Pakistan. It is also drawing on studies from other contexts and places to discuss the potential of ICTs to support good governance, transparency and accountability.

2.1 Social Media

Social media has been defined from different perspectives. Some of the definitions focus on its social impact, while other definitions are technology-oriented. According to Hansen et al. (2011), social media is a set of online tools designed and centred on social interaction. Practically, social media is a phrase for the mixture of web-based technologies and services such as blogs, micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter), social sharing platforms (e.g., YouTube, Flickr, Stumble Upon) and social networking services (e.g., Facebook, MySpace). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a social structure in which technology puts power in communities, not institutions, as well as a set of open, web-based and user-friendly applications that enable users to network, share data, collaborate and co-produce content. According to research conducted by Sensis Bureau in 2012

“Facebook dominates as the most used social networking site, being used by 97% of social networking participants or 6 out of 10 Internet users. This was unchanged in the past year. Facebook is used by more than 95% of social media users from both sexes and at least 93% in all age groups.” (Sensis Bureau, 2012: 16)

According to Magro et al. (2009) social media is considered to be part of the web 2.0 movement which is marked by user-generated content and interactive networking. According to Bertot et al. (2010)

“Social media has four major potential strengths: collaboration, participation, empowerment, and time. Social media is collaborative and participatory by its very nature as it is defined by social interaction. It provides the ability for users to connect with each [other] and form communities to socialize, share information, or to achieve a common goal or interest. Social media can be empowering to its users as it gives them a platform to speak. It allows anyone with access to the Internet the ability to inexpensively publish or broadcast information, effectively democratizing media. In terms of time, Social media technologies allow users to immediately publish information in near-real time.” (Bertot et al., 2010: 266)

2.2 (Good) Governance

As defined by Kaufmann (2005: 82), governance means “the tradition and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised.” The World Bank has defined governance as “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development” (World Bank, 1992: 3). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines governance as “the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences” (UNDP, 1997: 4). One of the fundamental principles of good governance is transparency, which ensures that the decision-making and the subsequently due process monitoring and implementation of this information is freely available and directly accessible by all stakeholders. The information provided should be of the highest quality and presented in a way that is easily understood by end users, enabling them to actively participate in the governance process. Transparency must go beyond the mere provision of relevant information (Parigi et al., 2004). State actors must serve as whistle-blowers, and stimulate engagement with all stakeholders (Parigi et al., 2004). Therefore, trust and engagement of citizens is considered a prerequisite to ensure accountability and good governance. Without citizens' participation, democratic governments cannot function properly. Therefore access to information and transparency are considered the backbone for democratic governments as well as important tools for fighting corruption (Bertot et al., 2010).

2.3 Transparency and Anti-Corruption

Under a democratic government, the print and broadcasting media often take over the function to monitor what governments do and report to the citizens as a basis for them to realize their democratic entitlements. Going a step further, ICTs enable citizens themselves to make doings of the government transparent online. With their help, citizens can directly access information on the doings of the government – provided that the government publicizes reliable and correct information.

The provision of reliable information from the government to the public is one crucial element of good governance. Felten (2009) conceptualizes a one-sided information provision, which is fully under control of the government, with the term “outreach” and contrasts it to the concept of “transparency”, in which the citizens have guaranteed rights on obtaining certain information, enabling the civil society to influence, or rather purposefully steer and increase the flow of information. Through this, citizens can check the decisions of the government, their execution and contingencies and monitor and evaluate changes within policies in order to take a more direct influence on these processes (besides partaking in the electoral processes) (Felten, 2009; Hamid, 2008).

The United Nations Development Programme views corruption as “the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit – through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement” (UNDP, 2006: 2). ICTs can contribute to minimize the opportunities for corruption, to diminish incentives for corruption and to increase the probability that acts of corruption are detected (Cisar, 2003). Measuring corruption is a difficult task “due to the secretive nature of corruption and the variety of forms it takes” (Svensson, 2005: 21). Corruption does not necessarily appear only in monetary terms. For example, when an official fails to deliver the services that were paid by the government, this may be defined as “quiet corruption”. Quiet corruption thus may include deviations that can be potentially observable, such as being absent from work, but also deviations that are hard to observe, for example to bend rules for personal benefits, or to deviate from the expected conduct (World Bank, 2010: xi).

2.4 Potentials of Social Media for the Public Sector

The use of social media applications by governmental bodies has been raised and discussed many times in the literature. Bertot et al. (2010) argue that social media has a great potential to increase government outreach, enhance problem solving capacities and improve decision-making processes. Citizens’ demand for a transparent government is fermenting a new age of opportunities through social media, web-enabled technologies, mobile technologies and E-Government (Bertot et al., 2010). Picazo-Vela et al. (2012) point out that some government organizations are experimenting with social media to communicate with their constituents and reinvent government–citizen relationships. Besides the impact of social media use in governments with respect to increasing transparency and participation of citizens in decision-making, Osimo (2008) also mentions its effects on fostering collaboration between government agencies. Within and across government bodies at all levels from the local to the federal, social media also allows large-scale distributed collaboration, information sharing and the creation of collective intelligence (Chun et al., 2010). Picazo-Vela et al. (2012) point out that social media use in governments is increasing transparency and the participation of citizens in decision-making. In this, he maintains, that the public sector is experimenting with social media to communicate with their constituents and reinvent government–citizen relationships. Similar to Felten (2009), Golbeck et al. (2010) differentiate transparency from outreach (or self-promotion) by illustrating that “outreach is the practice of promoting and disseminating information and ideas to a specific or general audience. Transparency is the activity of making information free, open, and easily accessible to the public to help ensure accountability.” (Golbeck et al., 2010: 1620).

Lee (1989) argues that there are multiple factors and stakeholders which influenced those E-Government projects which were particularly designed to combat corruption, for example, citizens as users, civil servants, civil society groups, internal management and vendors. This multiplicity of stakeholders, as well as other factors such as the political system and the technological setup are included by Brinkerhoff (2000) in his conception of 'political will'. This, integration of human and non-human actors into a framework allows for a comprehensive analysis of factors which have to be taken into account when looking into the success or failure of anti-corruption programmes.

2.5 Previous Experiences on Governments' Use of Social Media

Numerous studies have been carried out on the use of social media to investigate the performance of governments, particularly with respect to North America. Social media studies carried out in United States show that the higher levels of federal government agencies are engaged in online interactions in order to increase transparency and increase participation and collaboration with citizens. Mossberger et al. (2013) examined the use of social networks and other interactive tools in the 75 largest U.S. cities between 2009 and 2011 and further analyzed interviews and focus group discussions on social networks. They found that one-way 'push' strategies are predominant, although there are some signs of greater openness towards dialog with citizens as well. Similar studies have also been conducted in European countries. Mundy and Umer (2012) selected ten UK Borough councils with active accounts on Twitter and government found that these councils were primarily using Twitter as broadcast channels, i.e. as outreach strategy, and were not truly engaging with these channels as social platforms. Hofmann et al. (2013) explored how local governments are successfully utilizing social media for managing external communication with citizens in Germany. They evaluated government communication behaviour in social media by examining the Facebook sites of German local governments. The study found that the online communication of local governments in Germany is based on disseminating information in a conventional way, without adapting their communication habits to the particular characteristics of social media. Although social media offers potential to overcome the defects of government conventional communication, this potential of social media as outreach and transparency is not well-exploited by German governments. In South Korea, Cho and Park (2012) analysed the Twitter activity of the Ministry for Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MFAFF), and indicated the limitations of MFAFF's use of Twitter as a mutual communication channel. Abdelsalam et al. (2013) examined the presence, usage, and effectiveness of Egyptian government social media websites and conclude that they were used mainly to post information, with very little two-way interaction between citizens and government.

With respect to Pakistan, most studies are conducted on barriers that impede the adoption and a positive impact of E-Government projects. The very first web portal of the Government of Pakistan was launched in 2005 under the URL 'www.pakistan.gov.pk' by the Electronic government Directorate (EGD) of the Ministry of Science and Technology. It contained 1,100 pages with 500 downloadable forms (Afreen, 2004). Nowadays social media constitute an important forum for communication in Pakistan and serve as a disseminator of information, a mobiliser of protest, a tool of humanitarianism, an advocate for social causes and a facilitator of political discussion (Kugelman, 2012). The huge potential of social media in Pakistan to create public exchange on marginalized issues becomes manifest in the overwhelming public participation in such debates, which serves as "a first step towards social change" (Michaelsen, 2011: 53).

Not in all cases was the integration of social media in governance successful, though. Zheng's study suggest that the application of social media in China faced several challenges, such as a "digital divide" among the people, a low trust in the government, lack of competent management and designated staff, and low leadership attention and support, as well as problems with inter-institutional collaboration, the hierarchal structures and centralized power. Furthermore there is a lack of funds and the problem of hackers that endangers the information security (Zheng, 2013).

In Pakistan, Kayani et al. (2011) have pointed out major challenges in the implementation of E-Government projects, such as lacking Information Technology (IT) infrastructure, absence of regulations related to E-Government, lack of skilled personnel, low levels of network security, and a detrimental social setup and culture (Kayani et al., 2011).

As the study at hand reveals, there are several oppositions and challenges to implement E-Government projects in Gilgit-Baltistan as well. In the case in question, the opportunities and benefits for the citizens could not be implemented successfully nor be institutionalized – the details of which will be outlined and discussed in the following chapters.

3. Setting the Stage – Administrative and Political Reforms in Gilgit-Baltistan

This section provides a brief sketch of the political and administrative reform developments in Gilgit-Baltistan in order to understand the particular characteristics and features of the local governmental and administrative setup in which the GB Chief Secretary office's social media initiative has been implemented. It needs to take into consideration administrative changes made under subsequent regimes, reaching from the Dogra rulers of the mid-nineteenth century, to the revenue settlements under British rule in the early twentieth century, and to the period starting with the partition of British India, when Gilgit-Baltistan came under the administration of the Government of Pakistan.

The area which is today known as Gilgit-Baltistan was conquered around 1842 by Kashmiri troops and came under the rule of the Dogra dynasty. In 1879–81 and 1889 the British established parallel administrations in the area. In 1935, the Kashmir government leased out the region west of river Indus to the British for a period of 60 years. This lease was, however, terminated in July 1947 with the partition of British India. In Gilgit—since long the centre of political power in the area—and in the area of what was later subsumed under the term "Northern Areas", local officers of the Gilgit Scouts, a group of Muslim officers of the Jammu and Kashmir Infantry Battalion, and the local inhabitants of different ethnic identities incited a revolution in October 1947, trying to end what they perceived as 'foreign rule' of the British and the Maharaja of Kashmir. While the Kashmiri ruler had formally acceded to India, this accession was not recognized in the Gilgit Agency, and troops were sent towards what was to become the border. A cease-fire with India was established on 1 January 1948 (Sökefeld, 1997, 2005). In November 1947, the Government of Pakistan appointed a political agent in response to the invitation by the provisional government setup in Gilgit after the successful revolution. In 1950, the Ministry of Kashmir affairs was established replacing the control of Government of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP, today: Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa). A political resident was installed as an agent by the Governor General and was directed to look after the affairs of the area (Dani, 2001). In 1952, the joint secretary of the Kashmir Affairs Division of the Federal

government was entrusted with the additional charge of the post of the president and chief advisor for Azad Jammu and Kashmir – an area that is similarly under the control of Pakistan, but, like the Northern Areas/Gilgit-Baltistan, is not part of the constitutional territory of Pakistan nor a Pakistani province. Both areas had been released from British India after the separation of India and Pakistan, but, because of the historic attachment with the state of Jammu and Kashmir, are still politically contested. From 1967 to 1974, the administrative structure of the Gilgit Agency was reshaped and the kingdoms of Hunza and Nagar were absorbed in the newly denominated Northern Areas (Wallace, 1996: 117). After 1985 the Northern Areas were administratively divided in five districts, viz. Gilgit, Ghizer, Diamer, Skardu and Ghanche (Ameer, 2002).

Subsequently, the area saw many political and legal changes, although the unclear status as a contested area remains. In 1994 the Federal Cabinet approved a reform package as *Legal Framework Order 1994* through which the *Northern Areas Rules of Business* were framed; the post of the Chief Secretary and Civil Secretariats were established and judicial reforms introduced. The post of the Judicial Commissioner was abolished and a three-member Chief Court was constituted under the chairmanship of a retired judge. Under the *Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009* the name of the area was changed from Northern Areas to Gilgit-Baltistan. The new post of the Governor, Chief Minister and several Ministers were created and the Legislative Assembly was renamed as Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly. Following the model of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Council, the Gilgit-Baltistan Council, headed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, was introduced. The Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly was delegated with the powers of approving the development budget. The concept of a consolidated fund was introduced and the legislative powers of the assembly were increased from 49 to 61 subjects along with powers to legislate on all other subjects which are not in the domain of the Gilgit-Baltistan Council. The Gilgit-Baltistan Council has the power to legislate on 55 subjects (Government of Pakistan, 2009; see also Hussain, 2009).

4. Research Methodology

This study is based on a single case study. A single case study design is justified when the case under study “represents an extreme case or a unique case” (Yin, 2003: 39), and when the case serves a revelatory purpose. The social media (Facebook) account of the Chief Secretary of GB was unique in that as it was the first and only E-Government system adopted to enhance government outreach, increase transparency and improve governance in Gilgit-Baltistan. The presented case study also serves a revelatory purpose. Corruption is a phenomenon that is very difficult to investigate because it involves secrecy and deceit, and because there is the possibility of informants being punished when exposed. Anti-corruption projects regularly meet with resistance and hence, they are studied only reluctantly. The author is able to overcome some of these difficulties because he had participated in the implementation of the Chief Secretary’s Facebook page in Gilgit-Baltistan and is able to reveal some aspects that would otherwise remain unknown. In order not to impinge personal rights, to protect privacy and keep confidentiality, some actors are therefore anonymised and some details withheld from publication where necessary in order to protect confidentiality.

The data used for this study is based on participant observation within the office of the then-Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan, S.S. Hotiana, on a semi-structured interview with S.S. Hotiana, on content collected from his Facebook account, as well as on documents from within the Chief

Secretary's office of the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan.⁸ A flexible guideline was applied for the interview with the former Chief Secretary S.S. Hotiana in order to initiate a narrative of the changes directly and indirectly related to the social media (Facebook) page of the Chief Secretary Office. The current study focuses especially on the period from 6 April 2013 to 31 May 2013, i.e. the period during which S.S. Hotiana initiated the Facebook page during his tenure as the Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan. The data of the Facebook page was collected both during and after this primary time frame. Participant observation in this case relates to the circumstance that the author of this paper has worked for the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan as one of the administrators of the Chief Secretary's Facebook page. He has been in charge of operating and managing the system. His experiences with and recollections of the project provided the basis for this study, as he acquired first-hand and insightful information over an extended period of time and has been on-site during and after the temporary implementation of this endeavour. This has allowed the author to draw on personal knowledge during the formal interpretation stage of analysis. Additional data was collected through secondary sources. These secondary sources include print and online newspapers and blogs, all of which published news items and hosted vivid discussions referring to the E-Government system in Gilgit-Baltistan.

5. Case Study: Success and Failure of the First E-Governance Initiative in Gilgit-Baltistan

The Government of Gilgit-Baltistan officially announces on its website, in the words of the Governor Syed Pir Karam Ali Shah, that it is "dedicated to creating a healthy, safe and educated environment to fuel prosperity and enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike" (Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, 2010). In the same message on the official website of the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, the Governor invites his staff and the people of Gilgit-Baltistan to establish an "E-Government" project in order to create a new forum on which citizens and the government can communicate. The option of establishing an E-Government is thus posed as one way to enhance the government-to-citizens communication, and possibly even the citizens-to-government communication.

In June 2012, Sajjad Saleem Hotiana was appointed as Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan, thus functioning as the head of the executive authority of the provincial bureaucracy. Literally taking up the Governor on his request and in the light of recurring charges of corruption and nepotism against politicians and parts of the administration he worked on the option of introducing e-governance.⁹

In the beginning of February 2013 the Chief Secretary office put up a Facebook page under the name of 'Friends of Gilgit-Baltistan' (www.facebook.com/FOFGB), inviting everyone interested in the

⁸ All documents and insight statistical data from the Facebook page of Sajad Saleem Hotiana were obtained with his explicit permission in order to use it for analysis in the research paper at hand. The interview was kindly granted on 19 April 2014.

⁹ Pamir Times, 6 December 2012: Charges of corruption baffle Gilgit-Baltistan government during assembly session. Available from: <http://pamirtimes.net/2012/12/06/charges-of-corruption-baffle-gilgit-baltistan-government-during-assembly-session/>, accessed on 19.09.2013.

Pakistan Today, 20 June 2013: Message from the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Available from: <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2013/06/20/city/islamabad/adoption-of-e-governance-must-to-enhance-coordination-pm/>, accessed on 22.09.2013.

The Dawn, 27 March 2013. Available from: <http://www.dawn.com/news/798444/gb-official-uses-facebook-to-address-public-issues>, accessed on 13.6.2013.

development of the region to participate. This page was not successful though, arguably because of the impersonal nature of the page and doubts about who was behind this page, i.e. whether someone had created this page using the name and portrait of the Chief Secretary, but without his consent or knowledge. The page got hardly popular and had only a small number of followers.¹⁰

In April 2013, S.S. Hotiana created a new account on Facebook under his own name. The Facebook page was created in order to gather data on the various issues and problems that the citizens in Gilgit-Baltistan are facing. The page was created with the help of Facebook’s tutorial “Connecting to your Constituents with Facebook” (Facebook, n.d.), which is essentially a best practice manual for general governmental organizations. In addition, the Chief Secretary’s personal profile was used in conjunction with Facebook’s manual to develop and implement the Chief Secretary Facebook page. Right after its implementation, the Chief Secretary’s page attracted several followers, and it continued to constantly attract new followers, as can be discerned from Fig. 1, showing the daily ‘like’ statistics of the Facebook page between April and May 2013.¹¹

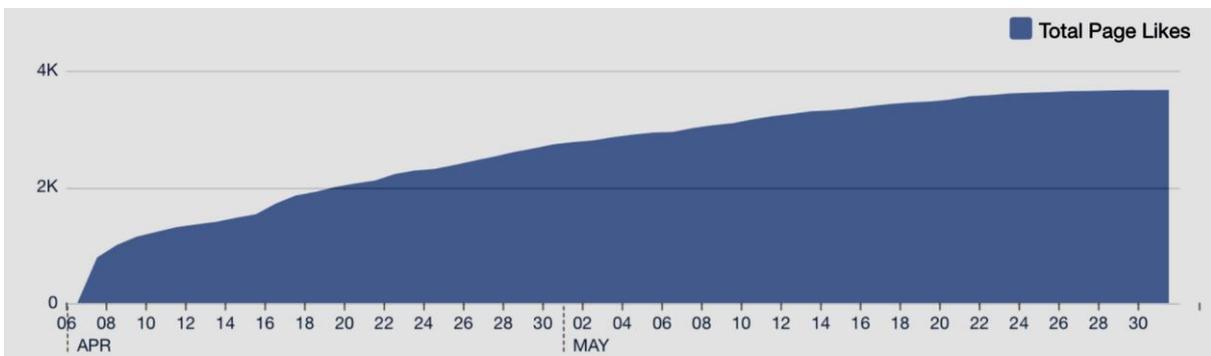


Figure 1: Total number of followers of the Chief Secretary’s page, 6 April – 30 May 2013. Source: Screen shot extracted from page insights (www.facebook.com/sajjad.hotiana)

In order to promote the Chief Secretary’s Facebook page, the Chief Secretary used his account (i.e. his personal ‘user profile’¹²) on the social networking service Facebook. Starting from 6 April 2013, he was able to increase his number of ‘Facebook Friends’ up to 5,000 friends on his ‘user profile’ and another more than 200 friendship requests were pending within 10 days. When the personal user profile thus got inadequate due to a restriction by Facebook regarding the maximum number of friends, it was supplemented on 6 April 2013 by an additional ‘Facebook page’ that can be followed by clicking a ‘like’ button, enabling an unlimited number of people to receive follow-ups on the Chief Secretary’s updates. Within one day, the Chief Secretary’s Facebook page got followed by 709 people (Fig. 1). The number of followers rose to 1,467 people within the first seven days (i.e., by 14.04.2013) and on 31.05.2013 it was followed by 3,666 people. The number of followers increased steadily and on 19.09.2013 it was followed by 22,754 people.

¹⁰ Followers in this study are defined as all persons who ‘like’ the Facebook page by clicking the ‘Like’ button on the page. Up to August 2014 it received only 452 ‘likes’.

¹¹ ‘Like’ means people who click the ‘like’ button on the Facebook page to follow the page for information and to get updates from the page regularly.

¹² For the purpose of this study, ‘user profile’ refers to a ‘personal profile’ on the Facebook site, which has the disadvantage of allowing only a limited number of friends of up to 5000. In contrast, there is also the option of creating a ‘Facebook page’, i.e. a specially created page for which there are no limits of accepting followers. It is a requirement and policy of Facebook that the Facebook page followers must exceed 25 members to start interaction and to administer the page.

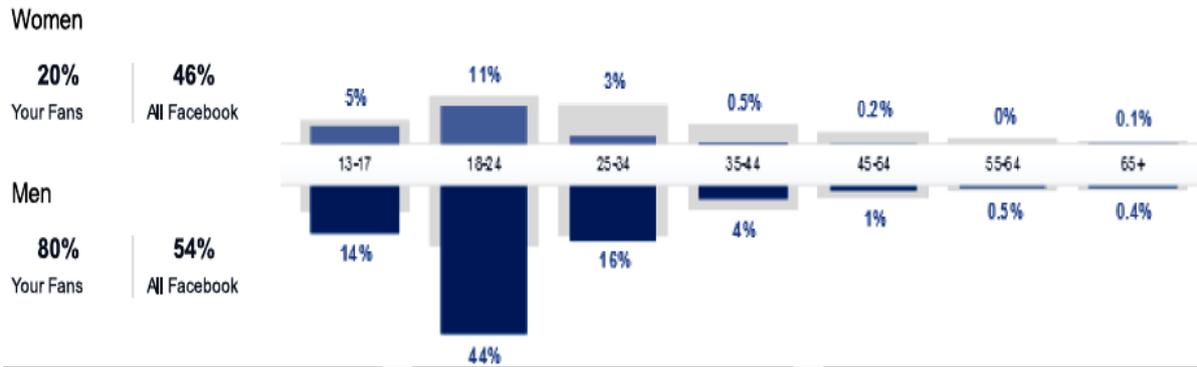


Figure 2: Gender and age cluster statistics of the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan, 6 April – 30 May 2013. Source: Screen shot extracted from page insights (www.facebook.com/sajjad.hotiana)

A clear majority (around 80%) of all followers of Chief Secretary’s Facebook page were between 18–34 years old, while ‘older adults’¹³ were hardly accessing the page directly (Fig. 2)—given that people sign in to Facebook using their actual data. As can be rightly criticised, people do not necessarily have to use their true gender, age, and place of residence in their Facebook profiles. As a personal observer though, the majority of people who engaged with the Chief Secretary’s Facebook site actually do belong to the youth of Gilgit-Baltistan and have given accurate personal data, with the exception that some had registered their Facebook account under a pseudonym.

The infrequency of the older adults using social media resembles a pattern that can be found elsewhere as well.¹⁴ Older adult populations are often not completely accommodating to the online social networks (cf. Vyas, 2013). Figure 2 also shows that only 20% of the Chief Secretary’s Facebook page followers were female. There is obviously the option that women create Facebook profiles in a way hiding their female gender, although most women would rather hide their pictures and use an ambiguous name, but still tick ‘female’.

The low number of women in this study may rather be explained with the restrictions often put on women in the sense of lesser options to access the internet, as well as lesser acquaintance with technologies. Research in other social and regional contexts shows that females tend to have less access to the internet as compared to males (Al-Rababah and Abu-Shanab, 2010; Mossberger et al., 2003). Despite differing circumstances in other locations and social settings, the role and status of women across countries show common patterns.

Figure 3 shows the overall location of the followers of the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary. It can be seen that majority of the followers of Facebook page of the Chief Secretary were from within Pakistan but also some people were from outside Pakistan. The given location of the followers is based on the information provided by them in their ‘user profile’.

¹³ The definition of ‘older adults’ is generally 50 years of age and above and is often used in relation with habits of using the internet. The definition employed for this research is extended to include adults of an age of above 36 years.

¹⁴ For example, e-mails are considered to be the key method in terms of communication channels to contact friends, family and colloquies among older adults (Madden, 2010).

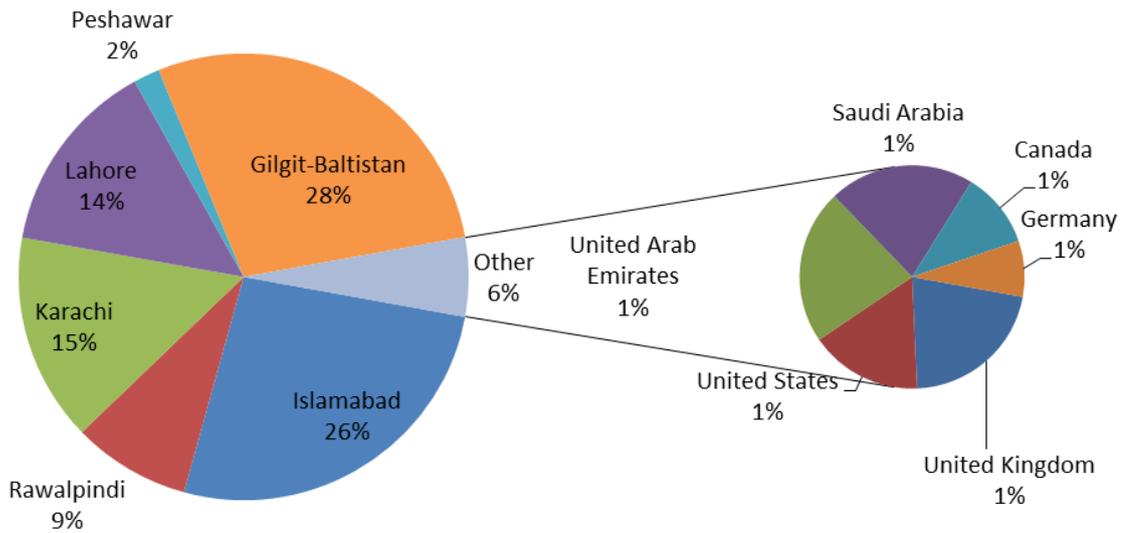


Figure 3: Location of followers of the Chief Secretary's page, 6 April – 31 May 2013. Source: Extracted from page insights (www.facebook.com/sajjad.hotiana), based on information ticked by the users in their Facebook 'user profile'. Design: Hussain 2014.

Within Pakistan, it can be seen that 28% of the followers were located in Gilgit-Baltistan, followed by 26% who lived in Islamabad and 9% in Rawalpindi, which means that there were more followers who were in the twin-cities than in Gilgit-Baltistan. Another 15% and 14% were in Karachi and Lahore respectively, and a small fraction of 2% in Peshawar. The majority of those followers who lived in the different Pakistani cities as well as those who lived outside Pakistan belong to Gilgit-Baltistan as confirmed via the information which users give in the category 'from' in their 'User Profile'. Presumably, most have left the region for the purpose of study or work. Only very few followers were not from Gilgit-Baltistan and even less were not from Pakistan.

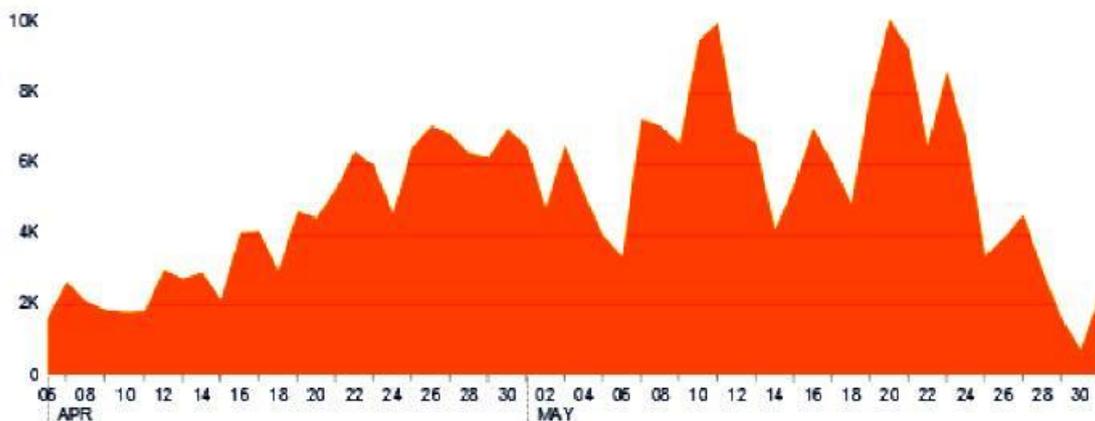


Figure 4: Number of readers of the posts on the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary Gilgit-Baltistan, 6 April – 30 May 2013. Source: Screen shot extracted from page insights (www.facebook.com/sajjad.saleem)

Figure 4 shows the number of people who accessed the provided information (posts) in real time, i.e. within the same day. Information about the Chief Secretary Office activities was rapidly accessed by an increasing number of people: while the number of readers was around 2,000 in the first week of April, it reached peaks of up to 10,000 readers in the mid of May. Outreach and promotion was essential for increasing the number of followers of the Chief Secretary’s page. The increased number of followers has allowed the Chief Secretary Office to communicate with participating residents on various activities of the government and to receive feedback that may not have been possible without the social media presence. The Facebook page was launched based on the hope and assumption that it would ‘go viral’ even without specific advertisement, like so many other things in the Internet did. Figure 4 shows that the information provided by the Facebook page ‘went viral’ in the sense that it reached even more citizens than just the number of registered followers. E.g., in May 2013, the number of followers was around 7,000, while up to 10,000 people accessed the information provided on the page.

The Chief Secretary used both, the user profile and the page, for two kinds of updates (so-called ‘posts’): (1) to inform his contacts about his professional activities related to planned projects, cases of corruption or mismanagement of government facilities (e.g., infrastructure, social sector development, health, energy, education projects), and (2) to share personal news and religious and secular ‘inspiring quotes’.

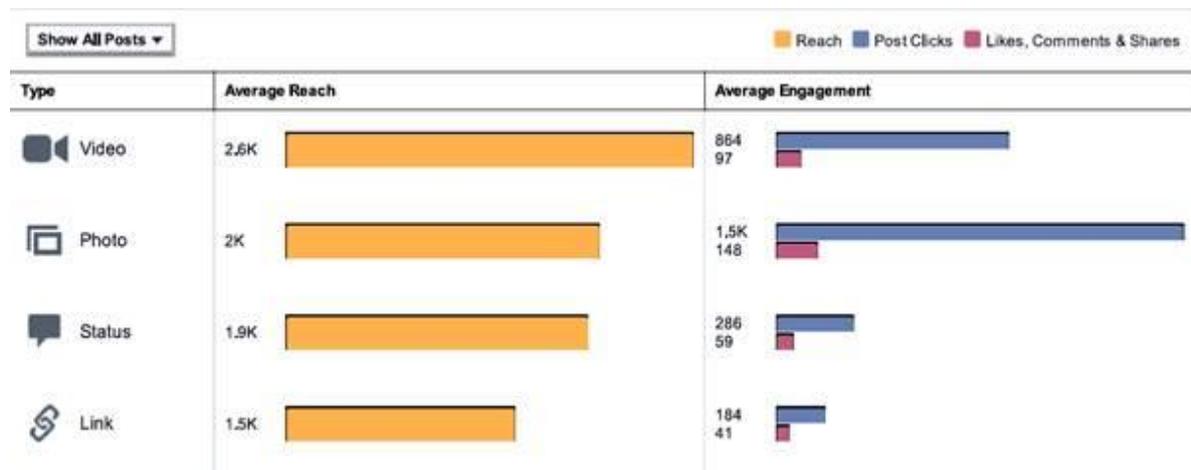


Figure 5: Average engagement and reach status of the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan, 6 April – 30 May 2013. Source: Screen shot extracted from page insights (www.facebook.com/sajjad.saleem)

Figure 5 shows that the accesses and engagement of people is mainly connected to visual representations, i.e. videos and photos, and the people most often commented upon them, both in English and Urdu. Posts or status updates were accessed less and show a significantly lower rate of engagement. Reasons for this might be language barriers, since not everyone in the region is fluent in English (the medium of official writings in Pakistan besides Urdu).

In the following sections three cases are presented in order to exemplarily discuss the main concerns that in the first place motivated the Chief Secretary to start his social media presence, i.e. to go up

against corruption, to increase the public outreach of the government, to improve project planning and to create an additional channel for communication with citizens.

5.1 Improving Citizens' Participation in Project Planning – the Case of the “Chief Minister Self Employment Loan Facility for Unemployed Graduate Youth of Gilgit-Baltistan”

Large numbers of young people of Gilgit-Baltistan remain unemployed after their graduation from universities. About a decade ago, some of them formed the ‘Gilgit-Baltistan Graduates Association’ in order to promote public debate and awareness of the difficulties they face to find jobs. This organization among others advocates for a recruitment and promotion system based on merit, and highlights cases of corruption in the context of filling posts in the government service. In order to get direct support from the government, they approached the Chief Minister with the request for a special fund to help them setting up their own businesses in order to promote self-employment. On 12 April 2012, the Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan announced a ‘Chief Minister Self Employment Loan Facility for Un-employed Graduate Youth of Gilgit-Baltistan’ for the upcoming year. Although a project targeting self-employment matters normally falls within the responsibility of the Department of Labour, Commerce and Industries, the Planning Department allotted it to the Department of Youth Affairs (due to a confusion of names and responsibilities), where an initial project proposal was drafted, containing details on the overall strategy, the involvement of a local bank for disbursement of loans, as well as the scheduled project phases and costs.

The project was reflected in the *Annual Development Programme 2012–13* and the total amount initially agreed upon was PKR 100 million. The initial project was prepared for micro-business loans of PKR 50,000 for graduate youths on a mark-up of 8% annually. The project was proposed to be implemented through a pre-decided local bank as announced by the Chief Minister without any tender in the newspapers that would offer this opportunity to the various service providers in the private sector. The Department was directed to speed up the process to complete the project for early distribution of loans to the graduate youth in consultation with the local bank. In order to finalize the project, a meeting was held with the local bank to set out the procedures and modalities of the loan disbursement and recovery. With these modalities the Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan and representatives of the local bank sat together to finalize the scheme on agreed terms and conditions (e.g. duration of scheme, service charges by the bank for disbursement and collection of loans, definition of the category of ‘youth’, the standards of business plans, and interest rate to be charged from the beneficiaries).

At the same time, the Chief Secretary repeatedly received complaints on his Facebook page—similar to those of the GB Graduates Association—by many young people from different districts about unemployment and missing opportunities for both graduated and less educated youth in the scheme announced by the Chief Minister. The Chief Secretary posted the microfinance scheme on his Facebook page to increase the government outreach of the project, to spread information and collect feedback from the citizens.¹⁵ Upon the announcement he received comments of

¹⁵ The Federal government had also advertised a similar project through newspapers and on the online website of the Prime Minister’s office (www.pmo.gov.pk), providing the details of the project to be launched and inviting comments from citizens. See also: The International News, 21 September 2013: PM to address nation today. Available from: <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-25596-PM-to-address-nation-today>, accessed on 06.08.2014.

appreciation, as well as criticism from citizens through the Facebook page. These concerns filed by the citizens on the Chief Secretary's page were later taken by the department as the basis on which the project was amended significantly.

Noor Pamiri, for example, a very prominent and influential journalist in the region, was concerned about the training of the youth who have no experience in running business after obtaining the loan from the government. It was therefore proposed to offer training sessions (how to conduct business, book- and record-keeping, marketing etc.) for the beneficiaries in order to increase the chances that the beneficiaries would be successful with their businesses.

M. Khan, resident of Gilgit and working in a private school as a teacher, was concerned about the staff to be employed for disbursement of the loan. His concern was based on the problem that in the last couple of years many Pakistani firms acquired exploration licences in the area and hired the staff from the Pakistani lowlands instead of local staff from the area. This practise is sometimes perceived by the people of GB as a tool for establishing 'Punjabi control' over other provinces.¹⁶

Mast Maula, resident of Gilgit, used the Chief Secretary's social media page to articulate his concerns about the criteria and the procedure of disbursement of loans. He was of the opinion that the project had been launched only to benefit those graduates who worked during the last election for the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) (the ruling party in GB) as *jiyala*, i.e., as party propagators, in order to reward them with benefits and to secure their loyalty. He also quoted the example of the *Benazir Income Support Programme*, a programme to support "underprivileged sections of the society"¹⁷ launched in 2008 in the whole of Pakistan, including the federally administered areas. Here it is commonly said that most of the employees as well as the beneficiaries selected for monthly support were *jiyalas* from the PPP.¹⁸

Hussain, a planning officer in the Aga Khan Housing Board, commented that there are many financial institutions in the country facilitating micro-loans and wanted to know about the institution going to implement the project. A bank employee voiced his concerns on the Chief Secretary's Facebook page about assigning a financial institution with the disbursement of the loans instead of the department itself. His explanation for hiring of a third party (as a service provider, i.e. receiving the applications for the loans, checking the eligibility, disbursing the loans, training the beneficiaries, managing recovery etc.) was to reduce pressure of religious and political groups on the department, for example in form of trying to influence the distribution of funds among their own supporters. It has

¹⁶ As Kreutzmann (2012: 232) argues, democratic rights and participation in decision-making, but also in governance were historically mostly denied to the citizens of Gilgit-Baltistan by the Government of Pakistan. This also entails that officers at the decision-making level are from 'down-country' parts of Pakistan (i.e. never from Gilgit-Baltistan) and are deployed by the Government of Pakistan to the region. There are no statistics as to such numbers; nonetheless, there is a sentiment that many people in Gilgit-Baltistan subscribe to. This is evident in the newly established province-like status of Gilgit-Baltistan where the Federal government continues to neglect basic democratic rights of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan and ending the regional aspirations in violent insurgence and suppression.

¹⁷ Benazir Income Support Programme, Government of Pakistan. Available from: <http://www.bisp.gov.pk/>, accessed on 06.08.2014.

¹⁸ Pamir Times, 15 April 2011: Nepotism alleged in appointment of BISP Assistant Director for Ishkoman. Available from: <http://pamirtimes.net/2011/04/15/nepotism-alleged-in-appointment-of-bisp-assistant-director-for-ishkoman/>, accessed on 09.08.2014.

Pamir Times, 1 October 2011: Sixty million rupees to be distributed among deserving women of GB. Available from <http://pamirtimes.net/2011/10/01/sixty-million-rupees-to-be-distributed-among-deserving-women-of-gb/>, accessed on 09.08.2014.

been observed that, for example, job appointments, new projects and distribution of funds were dealt by government employees in a biased way, under the pressure of political parties, military or religious leaders, and often on the basis of sect, race, or ethnicity.

The announcement of the project led to a vivid discussion on the Chief Secretary's Facebook page. The main points of concerns articulated by the citizens on the Chief Secretary Facebook page were doubts about hiring a service provider (third party) without tender, the project's transparency and concerns over corruption (i.e., that the scheme might be preferentially distributed among youth who have affiliations with the governing political party), the amount of the loans (PKR 50,000 as a rather menial amount), the high interest rate of the loans (reduplication of interest loans of banks), the rather narrow group of beneficiaries (disregard of non-graduate youth) and the constrictive demand for a business feasibility plan (disregard of non-educated youth).

Besides mere voluntary distribution of information, S.S. Hotiana also responded to the criticisms and comments given by the citizens in the sense of Felten's concept of transparency. The Chief Secretary directed the Youth Affairs Department to invite tenders through the newspaper for the hiring of a service provider so that proposals could be received from various financial institutions available in the private sector facilitating micro-loans. The tender went to the Akhuwat Foundation (AF), an NGO that had so far been working in the province of Punjab facilitating microloans. In their application for the tender they demanded a 7% share as 'service charges' for handling the loans scheme. In its bid, AF suggested recovery plans of five years, and offered the services of approval of the loan applications, the checking of the feasibility of the applicants' projects by the technical staff, assisting the recipients while setting up their business, and managing the recovery of the loans. The repayment date was suggested to start six months after launching the business in the form of small scale redemption payments of around PKR 1,400 monthly, so that the loan may be disbursed and recovered within a five years period. In order to apply for a micro-business loan, PKR 200 had to be paid for the application form. This money was paid into a fund for bad debts (e.g. in case of death or misadventures). The department arranged a meeting of the selected service provider with the Chief Secretary to finalize the project where the ensuing discussion of the Chief Secretary with the citizens on Facebook page was then incorporated into an improved project planning and design and resulted in contributions from local donors to the fund as well. In reaction to the criticisms the project was amended, for example, by the interposition of a third party as a service provider through a tender (to the Akhuwat Foundation) in order to tackle corruption and reduce the influence of political and bureaucratic subjects, by an increase of the loans amount from PKR 50,000 to 75,000, by the assignment of interest-free loans, by the deregulation from graduate youth to the general youth irrespective of education level, by waiving of the business feasibility plan in favour of a one-page application form with project description, and by the provision of training for the loan awardees by the service provider before start of the business as well as by employing local people in the project to assist in identifying potential youth for the loans scheme in the region.

Normally such projects are planned by the concerned departments on the directives of the relevant minister or the Chief Minister or through Prime Minister Directives.¹⁹ After preparation of the

¹⁹ As Sahibzada and Mahmood (1999: 1112) elaborate, projects in Pakistan are often identified on the basis of three pillars, i.e. political decisions, proposals from external donors and local interest. As Sahibzada and Mahmood comment, the power of political representatives is increasing in the course of the planning processes, often at the expense of civil society participation.

project on a prescribed format of the Planning Commission of Pakistan, it is submitted to the Planning Department of Gilgit-Baltistan for administrative approval and for the release of funds. In the whole process of project planning the primary stakeholders and target groups (in this case the youth) are conventionally not consulted. Therefore the project design at stake may be seen as a novelty, concerning the fact that the public was asked to comment on the planning. The social media were used as a platform for citizens and potential beneficiaries to contribute to the design of the project and to amending it, taking into account the needs of the people, as well as considering possible traps.

After ensuring all the critical points taken up by the citizens, the project was announced again on the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary as quoted below:

“GB-Akhuwat Micro Finance---Breakthrough beginnings for our Youth Akhuwat, a non profit organization and GB government launched a micro-finance project that would alleviate poverty and promote entrepreneurship---above all introduce a totally transparent and merit oriented process. I HAVE READ ALL OF YOUR COMMENTS AND NEED THE DEBATE TO GO ON AS YOU ARE MY REAL ADVISERS.”²⁰

Since the time of the first announcement of the project on the Facebook page it was shared 19 times which further enhanced its outreach; it received 2000 “likes” and 173 people commented on it. Taking into consideration the criticisms, the scheme was delayed one year and eventually started in June 2013. During the first year of the project, loans have been distributed to around 7,000 youth across GB with a recovery rate of about 98%.²¹

Thus, the project got amended in accord with most of the criticisms and demands of citizens received through the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary. This was taken as one form of a public discussion on the project, offering citizens to partake in a new kind of public sphere. Social media here offered the means for a transparent process of project designing in order to ensure good public service delivery.

5.2 Increasing Transparency and Opening New Communication Channels to Government Authorities

In March 2013 a complaint was submitted through a personal message on the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary by Ahmed and Sheraz, college students and local residents of Hym village, Ghizer District. They reported that the Hatoon bridge had been destroyed by the 2010 floods, resulting in a disconnection of the two villages Hatoon and Hym. Through this disaster the residents of Hym faced difficulties, e.g. in reaching schools and colleges as well as the agricultural fields of the village which are located on the other side of the river. After the destruction of the bridge in summer 2010, a project to repair the broken bridge had been prepared by the district government and got administrative approval from the Planning Department for the execution of the work in 2011. Up to the end of 2012, though, no progress had been made on the site. According to Ahmed and Sheraz,

²⁰ Sajjad Saleem Hotiana, 12 April 2013: Akhuwat GB Strategic MF Deal. Available from https://www.facebook.com/sajjad.saleem.hotiana/media_set?set=a.149755225199328.1073741840.100004945533415&type=3, accessed on 08.08.2014.

²¹ According to an internal document on the disbursement of loans submitted by the Akhuwat Foundation as an Interim Report to the Department of Youth Affairs of Gilgit-Baltistan in February 2014.

the residents had filed a number of written complaints to the concerned district government but had neither received any notice or response, nor seen any action on the matter.

After the creation and dissemination of the social media presence of the Chief Secretary's Facebook page, they demanded the Chief Secretary to make a surprise visit to the site to check the situation himself. The Chief Secretary Office requested the complainants to gather the village residents on the site so that the Chief Secretary would be able to talk to them personally on his visit in order to get a picture of the situation. The concerned district officers responsible for the construction of the bridge were also asked to be available on the spot for the visit. Eventually, the Chief Secretary visited the site on 17 March 2013.

Mr. Jabbar, a social worker from Hym village, complained to the Chief Secretary that the project was delayed intentionally by the Public Works Department (i.e., the executing department) and the contractor, in order to realize mutual benefits by showing cost overruns of the equipment required. Another villager asserted that the officials in the department kept the released funds in their personal bank accounts to get interest benefits from the bank. The *lambardar* (village headman, who had historically been responsible for administrative and legal issues in the villages) of the village pointed out the villagers' powerlessness. He explained that since there is no political representative of the local government in the village to influence the officials in the department, projects such as the repair of the bridge use to keep pending with the departments. In this context he also referred to the district and union council elections that had not been held since 2009. Therefore, local-tier political representatives are absent, who could monitor the progress of such projects and who would commit themselves to the promotion of residents' interests. As Kreutzmann (2012) has also argued, Gilgit-Baltistan has been left out whenever an administrative reform aiming at strengthening the local government level was implemented in Pakistan. For example, the *Local government Act 2001* was not extended to Gilgit-Baltistan (Kreutzmann, 2012: 227). According to the *Gilgit-Baltistan (Empowerment and Self Governance) Order 2009*, the GB Legislative Assembly has been entrusted the responsibility of local government legislation. But since 2009, when the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) came into power, the PPP fraction in the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly has showed little interest in formulating any laws regarding the local government system and in conducting local level elections. Instead, the PPP of Gilgit-Baltistan kept depending on the previous *Local government Act 1979* of the Punjab that had been extended to GB 25 years ago.²²

The *lambardar* of the village Hym further put it to the Chief Secretary that, "[...] if we don't pay someone, they just send us up and down the chain of hierarchies", referring to the practice of circulating files within the departments without taking any final decision or concrete action regarding the matter. As Hull (2012) attests with reference to Pakistan:

²² Only recently, i.e. in summer 2014, the committee which had been constituted by the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly to facilitate the formulation of the local government system in GB, has agreed on a draft act, which will be presented to the GBLA in the next assembly session in order to be passed as *Local government Bill 2014 for Gilgit-Baltistan* and to replace the *Local government Act 1979* (see The Express Tribune, 17 July 2014: Power to the people: G-B to form city metropolitans under new local govt law. Available from: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/736549/power-to-the-people-g-b-to-form-city-metropolitans-under-new-local-govt-law/>, accessed on 09.08.2014). It remains a matter of speculations when this bill will be passed, when the local government elections will be held and when the system will function practically.

“Most Government officers have more files to deal with than they can manage, so explanation for delays usually need no to be given, aside from exceptional cases [...]. This opens a space of unofficial discretion for officers, who can hold up a file in order to come to terms with the private parties concerned in the matter. A powerful person can use connections (sifarish) to move a “stopped” or “stuck up” file, a file languishing in negligence or intentionally withheld from circulation. Those without influence have to “put wheels on it” (us ko pahiye lagana), as an Urdu idiom for bribing puts it. A person unwilling or unable to use connections or provide gratuities often experiences exasperating waits. Some clients face the opposite problem of not being able to stop their file from moving because no official has an interest in deciding the case.” (Hull, 2012: 156)

In the case at hand, the district and department officers and the contractor alternatively explained the delay with the retention of the money by the Finance Department due to which they could not purchase the relevant material. As Sahibzada et al. (1999) argue, project implementation in Pakistan is widely recognized as one of the weakest areas of the project planning cycle in the development process. The major components during the implementation stage are the construction of civil works and the installation of equipment. The timely availability of equipment within the allocated budget in the implementation stage depends on the timely release of funds. The major problem which emerged since the early 1970s is delays during the project implementation phase causing cost overruns. This problem is mainly due to delays in the release of funds by the Finance Department, delays in the timely supply of equipment and inadequate monitoring and evaluation (Sahibzada et al., 1999: 1116).

Since there are no separate monitoring and evaluation sections in the departments of the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, the Planning and Development Department of GB and the Chief Minister Inspection Team are responsible to ensure the correct implementation of the projects of all departments. If any project exceeds the limit of its scope as specified in the respective project document, the Planning and Development Department and the Inspection Team are responsible to hold the inquiry to identify the reasons and responsibilities for delays and cost overruns. Though, neither of these units is able to fulfil their responsibilities in Gilgit-Baltistan due to a lack of capacity and resources, as well as due to social constraints. The latter comprise the growing importance of categories of ethnicity, place of origin and sectarian affiliation, and growing tendencies to use such categories while implementing and monitoring the projects.

After hearing on the spot about the villagers’ grievances in Hymn as well as about the details pertaining to the Hatoon bridge project from the district officers, the Chief Secretary issued directives to release the amount immediately to the contractor for completion of the project within one month. In order to ensure fast and proper service delivery, he promised to visit the site again. The Chief Secretary posted information about his visit on his Facebook page with the commitment that he will visit the project site again. Due to his inspection, the ensuing monitoring and the propagation on Chief Secretary’s Facebook page, the social pressure was increased on the local administration of the district as well as the contractor to complete the project on time. The official directive to release the fund at the same time offered them the option to save their face. On 10 April, just 24 days after the visit, the project was completed and the bridge was made available for transportation and movement between the two villages.

In Gilgit-Baltistan there are many such projects which are not completed in time due to delay of funds, weak institutional planning and inadequate monitoring and evaluation. For example, when the Chief Secretary and Chief Minister were invited in a sports festival in Oshikhandas (a village near Gilgit city), the Chief Secretary updated the information on his Facebook page that he himself, the Chief Minister and the member of the constituency will attend the sports festival's final match. On this occasion some whistleblowers from Oshikhandas, e.g. Hashim Hassan, requested to the Chief Secretary via his Facebook page to visit two current development projects, namely a 30-bed hospital and an inter-college in the village. Both projects that had been approved in the Annual Development Plan (ADP) of 2005–06, but had not been completed since. Every year the Public Works Department showed cost overruns regarding the delay of the completion. As it turned out during the visit, the two projects were planned and constructed without the provision of water supply and installations. In the case of the hospital even the provision of electricity was not included in the project design. Such projects are being drafted by the Public Works Department to make the decision-makers approve the project by pretending that it is not expensive and to keep the project within the financial limits of the department. With such a strategy, the approval of the project remains in a low-tier forum which consists of the secretary of the concerned department as a chairman and representatives from the Planning Department, Finance Department, and the Chief Minister's Inspection Team.²³ On this level, projects can be approved rather easily.

Realizing the debacle in the two projects, the Chief Secretary made an update on his Facebook page on such practices within the departments and claimed that under his tenure no project, which is not complete in all aspects of design, will be approved. The Chief Secretary directed the Public Works Department to prepare a proposal of missing facilities in the hospital project for extra funds so that the project will be completed in time. Due to this ill-planning, a new project was launched with the name of "Provision of missing facilities for 30 bed hospitals Constituency III" at a cost of PKR 1 million in the ADP 2013–14.

There were more development projects for which the citizens raised their demand on the Chief Secretary Facebook page to intervene. For example, the citizens of Rondu valley asked the Chief Secretary to intervene in the case of a hydro-power dam. So far the dam went under the name of Bunji Dam since the power station is placed in Bunji, which means that the royalties of the dam go to Bunji. What was neglected here was that the water for the dam is diverted from Rondu. As is indicated in the name, the people of Rondu had not been considered for the future royalties of the dam. One social activist, Manzoor Parvana, on his Facebook page requested the Chief Secretary, who was on a visit to the Baltistan region, to stop in Rondu valley on the way back to Gilgit and to look into the matter. Subsequently a meeting was held on site, where the Chief Secretary clarified that Rondu had already been included in the arrangement and Rondu would thus also be considered for royalties, later onwards updating on his Facebook page. The citizens had not been able to contact the concerned authority (in this case the Water and Power Development Authority, WAPDA) in order to be included in the project. They remained unaware of the change in name of the dam (and

²³ If the project is within the limits of PKR 60 Million, the Gilgit-Baltistan Departmental Development Working Party (GBDDWP), headed by the secretary of the relevant department, approves the project. Projects up to PKR 200 Million are approved by the Gilgit-Baltistan Development Working Party (GBDWP) headed by the Chief Secretary of GB. Above PKR 200 million and up to PKR 1,000 million, the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) of the Federal government approves the projects and projects above PKR 1,000 million have to be approved by the Executive Committee of National Economic Council of the Federal government (Government of Gilgit-Baltistan, 2009).

the ensuing inclusion in royalties) until the Chief Secretary informed them on the spot as well as through his Facebook page. Through conventional channels (written petition, personal visits to offices, telephone inquiry), the citizens had not had a chance to get contact, response or information on their case at all. Finally the Chief Secretary's page on Facebook allowed them to get information on their case and fulfil their demands for transparency.

Another delayed project was the construction of the Roller Compacted Concrete (RCC) bridge between Gilgit-City and Danyor, which was revised two times due to delay in project funds. The Chief Secretary had visited the place in January due to complaints received through the Facebook user profile messages. He issued directives on the spot, showing the people that he is actually interested and invested in their problems. Nonetheless the bridge did not get finished, and the issue was taken up again by the successive Chief Secretary Younous Dagha. The issue was also highlighted by the print media on 29 August 2013, which pointed out that the construction of the bridge, which was planned during General Musharraf's presidential term, is still incomplete even though the whole amount has been paid by the Finance Department to the executing agency. The case of incomplete projects was also highlighted in the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly session by the opposition leader who demanded the Chief Minister to investigate and hold an inquiry. One opposition member, Nawaz Naji, during the 22nd session of the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly, commented on this as follows: "There are so many incomplete projects in G-B, but nobody is willing to take stock of the situation."²⁴ But as the case of the bridge indicates, even though several Chief Secretaries did get invested, there are factors that are out of control for even a Chief Secretary. As in this case, the bridge remains incomplete up to date. This refers to Brinkerhoff's concept of political will and the many stakeholders and factors which are involved in corruption.

ICTs such as internet and social media have changed the lifestyle and the means of communication for the citizens. The citizens seek information in different ways and develop new strategies (cf. Nwanekezie and Choudrie, 2014). In the described case of the Hatoon bridge project, the building of the bridge had been approved but not completed for around one year. Concerned citizens had already tried to press ahead with the construction of the new bridge through the conventional channels of submitting applications to the district administration. As has been revealed in the request to and the conversation with the Chief Secretary, they had sent more than ten times applications to different departments and posts, but nonetheless they had not been successful, as no officer had taken interest in their case. The choice of the Chief Secretary's Facebook page as a new channel of communication was used by the villagers to approach the high officials directly to solve their problem as compared to the conventional channel of communication through paper applications. Kaye and Johnson (2002) observed that people may choose one (media) channel over the other in accomplishing a particular need or serving a particular function. Eventually people, depending upon their influence and convenience, use different contact channels. Therefore, regarding governance-related communication processes, it is important to pay attention to and gain a better understanding of the digital divide and to note that some population groups are more likely to use E-Government services such as the younger, educated and higher income groups (Morgeson et al., 2010).

²⁴ The Express Tribune, 29 August 2013: Taking stock: G-B chief secretary takes notice of incomplete projects. Available from: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/596558/taking-stock-g-b-chief-secretary-takes-notice-of-incomplete-projects/>, accessed on 08.08.2014.

Under usual conditions, any attempt to approach a high-ranking official like the Chief Secretary seems like a very optimistic venture, keeping in mind the conventional way of communication between citizens and the government. Traditionally, papers make their way through lower and higher officers' bureaus from bottom up and vice versa. An application submitted to a higher level of the government apparatus, for example, is subsequently sent down the tier for investigation. After journeying down the tiers, a file (be it an application, a complaint or a request) may journey up again, thus perambulating the offices almost infinitely, especially since files may also "get stuck" on desktops or be delayed otherwise (cf. Hull, 2003, 2012). The Facebook messaging system thus offered—not only to the local residents of GB but also to GB citizens living in other parts of the country—the option of contacting, communicating and interacting with a high official (in our case, the Chief Secretary) directly without their complaint being sent up and down the levels of officers and offices, and without the option of "getting stuck" on some desktop. Of course, this option is owed to the willingness of the high official (in our case, S.S. Hotiana), to offer such a mode of direct contact. Using electronic services for this undertaking thus offered S.S. Hotiana the option of circumventing the traditional system of perambulating files. Using social media services also means introducing competition to established channels by providing alternative delivery channels, thus potentially curtailing power positions of gate-keepers and other stake-holders controlling information flows and access in the conventional system. By providing an alternate to a departmental channel, "users can choose to avoid agents who are corrupt" (Bhatnagar, 2001). Therefore, the citizens may choose different contact channels or a combination of all available communication channels depending on the nature of interaction they seek with their government. Visiting Government offices, making a phone call or submitting a written petition can be problematic for governments as these conventional communication channels are much more expensive to maintain than an E-Government facility (Moon, 2002).

At the same time, corruption cannot always be resolved through the powers of only a few individuals, as we saw in the case of the bridge between Danyor and Gilgit, where even several Chief Secretaries, members of the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly, and the print media, as well as citizens got involved, but the bridge remains incomplete.

5.2 Tackling Corruption – The Case of Illegal Appointments in the Education Sector

On 1 May 2013, the Chief Secretary made it a point on his Facebook page that complaint cells in Chief Secretary Offices are a regular feature in all provinces of Pakistan, while for Gilgit-Baltistan so far this was not the case. He thus established a complaint cell by notification and issued directives to all subordinate departments to open a complaint cell in their respective departments.

On the same day the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary started to receive various complaints. A large proportion was concerned with corruption in the education department, such as complaints from 'Baltistan Leaks' (a social media activist group from Baltistan) and the 'Gilgit-Baltistan Volunteer Movement' (a social media group with the aim of mobilizing voluntary work of young people). A number of postings on the Chief Secretary's Facebook page contained news cuttings from print media, claiming that the state institutions were corrupt and selling teachers' positions to

people regardless of their education for an amount of PKR 300,000 to 400,000.²⁵ Evidences for this practice were collected and brought to the fore by Baltistan Leaks through personal messages on the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary. The matter was further investigated through the Chief Secretary Office, and it was found that hundreds of teachers had been inducted illegally in this period, among whom a majority had either fake degrees or they are under/over age to meet the government's criteria. For years, not even a single test or interview had been carried out to recruit those illegal teachers. Hassan, a social activist from Baltistan who approached the Chief Secretary openly on his Facebook page shared that most of the beneficiaries are 'near and dear ones' of provincial political figures, local bureaucrats, religious leaders and other influential personalities of Gilgit-Baltistan, and that the rest have used heavy bribes and related unfair means to get through the process. Since he had repeatedly commented on this openly, both on social media, as well as on public gatherings, he was threatened by those under scrutiny and finally also been shot at (he luckily remained uninjured). The Chief Secretary Office found, after a detailed investigation in the matter, that 183 teachers had been appointed illegally without advertisement and regardless of their qualification, especially in the Baltistan region, through political power brokers. For example, a retired official in one of the Education Departments had been reappointed again on contract basis who—being expert in maintaining papers—had subsequently issued illicit appointment letters for teachers' positions. In this he was supported and furthered by politicians and other high-ranking officers in the Education Department. After reports had been gathered from various sources as well as from the Education Department itself, the Chief Secretary suspended the provincial head of the department and other involved officials and issued instructions to the new provincial head of the Education Department Gilgit-Baltistan to cancel all illegal appointments made during the period in question. The next day, print media issued a press note that the Chief Secretary had cancelled the illegal appointments and suspended the provincial head and the illegally re-appointed retired officer in the Education Department.

For example, the matter was brought in the news by the online newspaper Pamir Times:

*"An inquiry about the corruption in the Education Department GB is in progress now-a-days. The Chief Secretary Gilgit-Baltistan is playing a leading role in the whole investigation. The special inquiry team set up by him, has presented a report claiming to have found illegal induction of thousands of teachers in all the seven districts of GB. The Chief Secretary has ordered to conduct test and interviews of all those illegally inducted teachers but severe hurdles are being created in the way of fair investigation, by the so called political leaders and other culprits of the society."*²⁶

Michaelsen (2011: 32) argues that in Pakistan the media mostly enjoys freedom of expression. But still there is political pressure, and certain topics have to be dealt carefully.

"Aside from legislation there are other factors hindering the media from fully exercising their democratic functions. The security of journalists remains a major concern in Pakistan."

²⁵ Pamir Times, 15 March 2013: 183 illegally recruited teachers and other staff fired in Gilgit-Baltistan. Available from: <http://pamirtimes.net/2013/03/16/183-illegally-recruited-teachers-and-other-staff-fired-in-gilgit-baltistan/>, accessed on 16.7.2014.

Saach TV, 31 May 2013: Education in Gilgit-Baltistan. Available from: <http://www.saach.tv/2013/05/31/education-in-gilgit-baltistan/>, accessed on 31.05.2013.

²⁶ Pamir Times, 16 February 2014: Corruption in Gilgit-Baltistan Education Department. Available from: <http://pamirtimes.net/2014/02/06/corruption-gilgit-baltistan-education-department/>, accessed on 04.07.2014.

Journalists are frequently harassed or even attacked by state and non-state actors. Critical reporting on military campaigns, government corruption, or religious extremism can have dangerous consequences, either from the side of the security establishment or from the militants.” (Michaelsen, 2011: 34)

Moreover, media reports are constrained by deficient professional education and unfamiliarity with what is perceived to be ‘journalistic ethics’, which hinders them to play a role in the “democratic consolidation of the country” (Michaelsen, 2011: 32). Citizen’s journalism, as well as online platforms that are used to promote otherwise secret information have been able to increase transparency within the political landscape (Michaelsen, 2011: 58). In Gilgit-Baltistan, for example, the traditional media is getting benefits from these leakages and developments by integrating topics of transparency and corruption into their contents. Since locally most print newspapers are understood of being rather uncritical, some people began projects of ‘citizen journalism’—most prominently here is Pamir Times, an online and social media newspaper. Through this, citizens can take up on locally important topics as discussed by Stadler (2014). But, although Stadler concludes along her informants that such platforms provide people with the opportunity also to take critical standpoints, such initiatives in the long run also come under censorship and self-censorship. Journalists and editors, whether in print or online media, often get threatened by different actors. As an example, Gani Afzal, who is the first journalist of Gilgit-Baltistan, editor of two newspapers and also holder of a Presidential award for his work in journalism, wrote a personal message on the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary. With his message he meant to encourage the Chief Secretary to continue his Facebook initiative and to make a statement about threats from local political leadership. When he had written an article on the activities of the Chief Secretary himself, i.e. about using Facebook to solve problems of the people, he was approached and threatened not to write “*qaseeda*”, i.e. praise poems, in favour of a bureaucrat. Afzal replied that “if a bureaucrat is doing a good job I have no hesitation and said that Hotiana sahib is an outstanding, transparent, impartial, fair and honest chief secretary of GB and he is very much sincere and working for the people of GB.” With this message he addresses the issue that people who tackle corruption—journalists, whistleblowers, as well as bureaucrats—often get threatened, but despite this feel the need to continue their work.²⁷

Although the present Government of GB under the Pakistan People’s Party has expressed that it is willing (at least officially) to launch new anti-corruption campaigns, corruption still appears to be deeply entrenched. Due to this grave problem, Shaikh (2009) argues that the most urgent need in

²⁷ It is worth noting, though, that corruption cannot be found only with politicians, but also within the bureaucracy. Through the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary Office, not only corruption in the education sector was indicated by citizens but also many cases of ‘quiet corruption’ within the bureaucracy. For example, Nuzhat, a woman from Gilgit-Baltistan who is working in the British Council in Islamabad, submitted the complaint that her house in Gilgit was rented out to the Deputy Commissioner Office Gilgit for three years through an agreement. After completion of the period they vacated the building but no payment was made for one year of rent. She submitted her petition letter by post to the Deputy Commissioner Office many times, but got no response. After one year, she also approached the Civil Court in Gilgit but the case is pending since three years. She claims that it is not possible for her to be available in Gilgit all the time so as to pursue her case personally. When the matter was investigated through the Chief Secretary Office, it came to know that the rent was lying with the Deputy Commissioner Office since three years, while it was disbursed by the Finance Department in order to be paid out. Usual proceedings are such that money is being paid to the client directly. Instead, many departments create their own bank account where they accumulate project money, either in order to avoid a laps of funds, or in order to benefit from the interest rates. After the instructions from the Chief Secretary Office to clear the pending liability within 24 hours, the Chief Secretary received feedback from her that the pending amount has been transferred to her account.

Pakistan is a good government. In order to claim to be a 'democratic' government it is not enough just to hold elections, it is rather important to install a system of accountability (Shaikh, 2009: 133).

Investigating matters of corruption indicated by the local citizens through the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary was felt as a threat by the local political leadership. Presumably they had the fear that they might lose popularity with the population when the executing powers shift to bureaucracy, that 'dirty politics' would be revealed, and that the Facebook page would provide a forum for people to voice criticism and provoke actions against the local politicians and politics. Soon after starting to make information available through the Facebook page (regarding corruption cases as well as other information related to development projects), the secretariat of the Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan issued a press release in a leading newspapers of Gilgit-Baltistan that officials should refrain themselves from using Facebook during office hours. This demand triggered an extensive debate in some leading newspapers of Pakistan.²⁸ The Chief Secretary's Facebook page was used a platform for comments on the debate in the media by the citizens of Gilgit-Baltistan. More than 250 citizens commented in reaction to the press release of the Chief Minister. The citizens' reactions suggest that the endeavour of the Chief Secretary on Facebook was seen as an important step towards transparency and good governance, and that it should be continued in order to work towards a better public service delivery and state affairs. Based on feedback received from the followers of his page, the Chief Secretary announced that he will continue to use social media rather than stop the endeavour. The local political leadership also turned towards the federal government for support on this issue. This became public when S.S. Hotiana shared on his Facebook page that the Prime Minister Secretariat had asked him to either stop his Facebook page activities or else expect to be transferred from his position. Soon after, the S.S. Hotiana indeed got transferred from GB to the Federal government. S.S. Hotiana is currently serving on the post of Chief Secretary in the province of Sindh, and there he continues his Facebook page activities – without any consequences and opposition from political leadership of the Sindh government. In Gilgit-Baltistan, his transfer meant a discontinuation of the online access and social media presence of the local government for the citizens. Subsequently, some of the departments in Gilgit-Baltistan have created their own Facebook pages under the name of the department and share information about their activities. The flow of information is mostly one-way in form of department outreach. These Facebook pages have been created by the lower staff in the departments without any formal approval of the administrative head of the department – presumably because the heads of the departments either are not aware of their existence or are not concerned with it as such, especially since there is no formal policy on the use of social media.

Shortly after the transfer of Hotiana, all the orders of suspension of the illegally appointed teachers and the retired superintendent were cancelled, and on the order of the Chief Minister of GB the ousted persons were reinstated again by the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan. Although the matter has subsequently been investigated by the Services Department Gilgit-Baltistan for the duration of another year, and the re-appointments have been temporarily suspended by a court decision, finally,

²⁸ The Express Tribune, 24 April 2013: Popularity ploy? G-B CM does not 'like' Facebook updates. Available from: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/539509/popularity-ploy-g-b-cm-does-not-like-facebook-updates>, accessed on 19.09.2013.

Pamir Times, 22 April 2013: "Abstain from wasting time on Facebook during office hours", Mehdi Shah tells govt officials. Available from: <http://pamirtimes.net/2013/04/22/abstain-from-wasting-time-on-facebook-during-office-hours-mehdi-shah-tells-govt-officials/>, accessed on 19.09.2013.

The Daily K2, 23 April 2013, lead headline page 1: Government officers facebook ka istemal band kar den.

in May 2014 the teachers were again appointed due to the political pressure of the ruling Pakistan Peoples' Party. This action may be related to fears in the PPP to lose their position in the impending elections to the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly, which are scheduled for autumn 2014. The general gratification of teachers is said to be rather important in elections, since government as well as private school teachers serve as polling agents during elections in Gilgit-Baltistan, thus having the opportunity and power to fraudulently influence the voting results. Throughout Pakistan, especially the public sector education administration has many times been accused for "political manipulation and corruption" (Winthrop and Graff, 2010: 34). Especially the local level provincial education departments are charged time and again with accusations of "bribery and manipulation" (International Crisis Group, 2004: i; Benz, 2012).

What can be considered as corruption or quiet corruption (such as appointment of posts, embezzlement of money, misuse of authority etc.) goes hand in hand with the misuse of political power, and the manipulation of electoral agents. Attempts to intervene here from the side of the Chief Secretary (representing the executive), the courts (judiciary), the traditional press (fourth estate) and blogs and social media groups (fifth estate) have proved not to be successful in ending the abuse of power on the side of politicians. Although, for example, Quah (1999) and Piotrowski (2007) argue, that government transparency can generally be induced through the four primary channels, i.e., a) proactive dissemination of information by the government; b) release of requested materials by the government; c) public meetings; and d) leaks from whistle-blowers. As Quah (1999) sums up, political commitment, proper legislation incentives for honest officials, and effective punishment for corrupt ones are necessary to counter illegal practices in state departments. But as is discussed in the case at hand, all those forces may not be sufficient if the respective will for change and improved transparency is lacking, e.g. among the politicians.

In the case at hand, even the engagement of four estates (executive, judiciary, traditional and social media) in providing transparency (as suggested by Felten (2009)), did not suffice to end corruption, as the third channel, i.e. the executive (especially the political leadership and some bureaucrats) was opposing these trends. Transparency thus does not necessarily induce good governance.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined several models of social media use to enhance public transparency and accountability. It was shown how online information sharing technologies and social media (forums, blog platforms, social networking) enabled individuals and groups of civic activists to disseminate information about corruption in GB. Looking at the case of a micro-finance loans program discussed on the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary of GB, we can see that increased outreach and civil society participation through Facebook has considerably influenced the project planning. People demanded information about micro finance loan criteria and its disbursement and, disappointed from similar projects of the past, started to criticize this and demanded changes for what they perceived as a more just, fair, workable and equitable project planning. Through this, the project was amended according to the people's demands.

Secondly, a case was presented in which the Chief Secretary got engaged in the project of a bridge that had been under construction for two years without much progress. People had been able to

approach the Chief Secretary directly via Facebook, while for the past year they had been trapped with their complaints in the lower tiers of the administration without any result. The Facebook page here opened a new (alternative) channel of communication to bridge the people on the ground with the higher tiers of administration.

In the third case, illegal appointments within the education sector were discussed. Here, the Chief Secretary addressed incidences of corruption. Hotiana was able to do so after 'whistle-blowers' and social activists had used the Facebook page to contact the Chief Secretary in order to identify the people of the executive branch who were involved in the corruption cases. The Chief Secretary's engagement in this corruption case eventually led to his transfer outside of GB, which also meant the end of the social media e-governance approach in Gilgit-Baltistan. As discussed in the case of corruption in the education department, information sharing had a considerable impact and led to the prosecution of the corrupt officials. A single post on a social media forum attracted attention of other individuals, but also of the regular media. On this basis an individual or organization could connect such information with existing legal mechanisms in order to create political will to investigate and prosecute the reported violations.

Communication channels within the public sector can be categorised into face-to-face communication, written paper-based petitions and files, and web-based communication. Since there was no technological option to link the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan to an online representation of a related department for further action, complaints from the citizens on the Facebook page had to be verified by the Chief Secretary Office through phone calls with the complainants, and then passed on to the relevant department for action. Periodic follow-ups were sent out until the concerned department resolved the issue. For this, the electronic communication content was either forwarded telephonically or turned into a paper-based file. Especially the heads of the departments were reluctant to join the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary to receive online instructions. For once, they feared that they would lose control over the flow of information, as well as that their misuse of their positions would be exposed to the citizens and the executive branch. Thus, where the citizens may be considered beneficiaries of the new system being empowered, this group might be seen as the actors who lose power through the inclusion of the ICTs, in the sense that it would decrease their power to influence decisions and their control of information and processes. Besides this, there was a lack of adequate technology platforms in the relevant departments, as well as human capacity constraints that also account for the continuing dependence on paper-based systems.

Although the Governor and the Chief Minister claimed to promote good governance with the help of electronic media, this was not pursued further after the transferral of S.S. Hotiana from the Chief Secretary post. Some high rank bureaucrats explained that there were no legal provisions on how to integrate social media devices in the governance structure. Possible challenges of e-governance are security risks within the internet concerning issues of confidentiality and privacy. Besides, due to the on-going sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan, greater emphasis is being placed on peace building and conflict resolution. Further, preparations are going on for the upcoming elections which are scheduled to take place in October 2014. In light of this situation, prioritisation is not in favour of e-governance, and consequently there are currently no major activities in GB in which E-Government is being utilized for the monitoring of public service quality or anti-corruption work. The lack of

political will among the political leadership to reduce corruption and to push these initiatives forward remain a key challenge.

If we take a closer look at the communication which took place on the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary during the concerned period, April to May 2013, some further considerations have to be made. Most of the followers and commentators were based in urban settings. As compared to the whole population, only a small percentage of citizens were able to make use of the facility. As a result, the initiative failed to be inclusive of all citizens. Also, politically unstable and conflict-prone areas are being left behind in terms of availability of better internet facilities. For example, in Gilgit-Baltistan, the Special Communication Organization (SCO, an army based telecom company) has the monopoly for the provision of broadband services to the citizens. Most of the citizens in Gilgit-Baltistan are usually not content with the quality of services being offered by SCO, since the internet provision is slow and not uninterrupted and there are no alternative service providers for broadband services. Also the latest technology of 3G and 4G²⁹ which has been introduced in other provinces of Pakistan has not been extended to Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu Kashmir—both regions have been excluded by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) from these services.³⁰ No regional level ICT projects tackling this matter were included neither in the previous *Annual Development Programme 2013–14* nor in the current *Annual Development Programme 2014–15* of the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan. This shows that the government has other interests. There is a lack of effective collaboration between the media, civil society actors, technology companies, and state actors across Gilgit-Baltistan. There are a few instances of ‘crowd-sourcing’ by individuals and groups of civic activists. Crowd-sourcing as a form of disseminating information through technological media (leading to a kind of snowball-effect through social media platforms) means that users can publish information, for example, about incidences of corruption and other information of public interest. In Gilgit-Baltistan the biggest social media platform is the Gilgit-Baltistan Volunteer Movement, besides others such as Baltistan Leaks, Gilgit-Baltistan Leaks and Gilgit Leaks. There are currently no systems in place that integrate the technological innovations developed by the civil society with applications used by state actors. To the contrary, a number of projects aiming at raising awareness and the promotion of effective legislation and governance were banned in GB in 2013 by the Home Department of Gilgit-Baltistan, accusing the respective organizations to lack a permit, while there are hints that the reason behind the opposition is their collaboration with US institutions rather than an allegedly lacking registration. Among them were projects funded by USAID (United States Agency for International Development) such as “Citizens’ Voice for Effective Legislative Governance in Gilgit-Baltistan” and a “Gender Equity Program” (co-funded by Aurat Foundation). Instead of supporting such projects, they were banned and the implementing NGO was pressured to stop its activities by the Home Department and the military.³¹

The case studies presented in this paper provided some practical examples of how social media can make a difference. Many governments envision the use of ICTs as a means of promoting efficiency and transparency (von Haldenwang, 2004). The use of social media alone cannot deliver results,

²⁹ 3rd Generation (3G) and 4th Generation (4G) are the fastest internet services especially for downloading, recently launched in Pakistan through cellular companies by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority.

³⁰ See also Express Tribune, 14 July 2014: Alienating Gilgit-Baltistan. Available from: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/735349/alienating-gilgit-baltistan/>, accessed on 22.07.2014.

³¹ Gilgit-Baltistan Tribune, 10 March 2013: Human Rights Organization Banned. Available from: <http://gbtribune.blogspot.de/2013/03/human-rights-organization-banned-in.html>, accessed on 14.05.2014.

though. Transparency does not necessarily induce good governance. ICTs in general seem to be a promising and effective means of reducing corruption, but social attitudes can decrease the effectiveness of ICTs as an anti-corruption tool (Shim and Eom, 2009). Therefore, different attempts have to supplement ICTs in this respect. For example, regarding the Pakistani system of taxation, the entire tax system and department was restructured with the specific purpose of reducing direct contact between citizens and tax officials to reduce opportunities for requests for bribing (Anderson, 2009). As a result of these measures, recent years have seen a trend towards the use of E-Government for better access to information and for promotion of transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption goals (Anderson, 2009; Cullier and Piotrowski, 2009; Fuchs, 2006; Shim and Eom, 2008). Anti-corruption reforms which deploy social media technology in tandem with other factors are more likely to succeed. Among the few initiatives taken in Gilgit-Baltistan by the government since 2009 are the websites developed by only four departments out of the seventeen different departments. These are simply static websites with no interactive online platforms. They fail to fully utilize the great potential of social media, despite of their growing popularity throughout the region.

Due to the increasing availability of new technologies, dwindling costs for internet access, a spectacular growth in mobile penetration and improvements in the legal and regulatory environment, it is important to start to work on this field in GB — even more so, since this type of reforms and interventions need time to show successes. However, it must be combined with relevant institutions and effective leadership backed by reforms. State and non-state actors must work collaboratively, and collective action must be prioritized. Also, an extra effort should be made to ensure the option of inter-operability of different technical systems in each department.

One solution does not fit all, therefore in each situation the unique cultural, societal, and developmental context must be considered in the reform design and its implementation. For example, social networking sites such as Twitter, which do not require a high-speed internet access, could be easily linked with the government websites. On the other hand, the data analysis of the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary shows that videos and pictures are the most attractive features for the engagement of citizens. Since access, affordability and ability to use social media were not consistent across different populations, sub-regions, age groups, ethnic groups and gender, care must be taken in future to ensure that economically and socially disadvantaged groups are provided with opportunities to also take advantage of ICTs. Citizens must also be educated in use of ICTs and about their right to access information as a means of rising up against corruption and demand good public services. The recent formation of the *Awami Action Committee* that consists of men from all over Gilgit-Baltistan (regardless of sect, political party affiliation and ethnicity) is a prominent example that people in GB can demand the delivery of services and the respect of their basic rights from the government.³²

International actors must support innovative projects on ICTs and facilitate engagement and sharing of knowledge among stakeholders — especially in terms of discussing best practices and lessons learnt from other projects. Within its internal resources, the government can initiate relevant projects without waiting for external parties to take the lead in this direction. Social media can make a remarkable difference if there is an adequate ICT infrastructure, including broadband internet. As

³² It should be noticed though that women hardly can participate here either, which again means the exclusion of a big part of society.

much as the government needs to invest in physical infrastructure, it should also devote resources to increase access to ICT infrastructure to ensure access in all parts of Gilgit-Baltistan.

As Ahiabenu (2013: 21) has argued for West African states, “attaining good governance and transparency in its totality is complex, time-consuming, and fraught with challenges.” Nonetheless, in Gilgit-Baltistan a first attempt was made. The effective use of ICT tools, i.e. through the inclusion of all stakeholders, such as state and non-state actors, can help the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan to ensure democratic rights to their citizens, equitable distribution of resources, and access to public services.

Dissemination of information on the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary regarding the monitoring of existing development projects in the region has proven to be very effective as an instrument to promote the use of social media for transparency and accountability. As discussed above, the lacking will of some stakeholders, especially in the middle level of administration and within the local politicians, did not allow for this attempt to be successful in the long run. The findings also showed that if there is a lack of willingness and if not all factors and actors – such as the state and non-state stakeholders, the regime or the infrastructure – are working towards the successful implementation of E-Government, it will easily fail. The study has shown that the characteristics of political will and the consideration of different actors and context factors pose a useful framework through which we can understand the processes involved in the attempt and failure of the social media initiative in Gilgit-Baltistan. For practitioners of E-Government, the paper makes an appeal how to implement an E-Government system as a tool for transparency and anti-corruption. The basic issue is to develop a ‘political will’ in which the need for a planned system is considered as a tool to implement anti-corruption reforms. Only if the ‘political will’ is widely available and internalized among the stakeholders, the processes will be successful.

7. Limitations of the Study

The author recognizes the limitations of this study and suggests that these limitations can be viewed as opportunities for future research and reflections. First, this research was limited to a single case study. Future studies should attempt to replicate this research in different settings and countries. The empirical findings in this research are influenced by the Gilgit-Baltistan context, particularly the assessment of E-Government initiatives.

The second limitation concerns the detailed analysis of the Facebook page of the Chief Secretary Gilgit-Baltistan from the citizen’s point of view. In this study, the citizen’s point of view was not addressed systematically. This is not an easy task, since many transformation projects do not integrate the public directly and properly into the implementation of the project. Future studies will have the potential to provide more insights if a survey of the public opinion is conducted.

Third, the analysis of the viewpoint and the concerns of low and mid-tier bureaucrats, as well as that of politicians, could provide a deeper insight into the factors that eventually led to the failure of the attempt to establish this kind of E-Government service in Gilgit-Baltistan.

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Information on the competence network Crossroads Asia

The competence network Crossroads Asia derives its name from the geographical area extending from eastern Iran to western China and from the Aral Sea to northern India. The scholars collaborating in the competence network pursue a novel, 'post-area studies' approach, making thematic figurations and mobility the overarching perspectives of their research in Crossroads Asia. The concept of figuration implies that changes, minor or major, within one element of a constellation always affect the constellation as a whole; the network will test the value of this concept for understanding the complex structures framed by the cultural, political and socio-economic contexts in Crossroads Asia. Mobility is the other key concept for studying Crossroads Asia, which has always been a space of entangled interaction and communication, with human beings, ideas and commodities on the move across and beyond cultural, social and political borders. Figurations and mobility thus form the analytical frame of all three main thematic foci of our research: conflict, migration, and development.

- Five sub-projects in the working group "Conflict" will focus upon specific localized conflict-figurations and their relation to structural changes, from the interplay of global politics, the erosion of statehood, and globalization effects from above and below, to local struggles for autonomy, urban-rural dynamics and phenomena of diaspora. To gain a deeper understanding of the rationales and dynamics of conflict in Crossroads Asia, the sub-projects aim to analyze the logics of the genesis and transformation of conflictual figurations, and to investigate autochthonous conceptions of, and modes of dealing with conflicts. Particular attention will be given to the interdependence of conflict(s) and mobility.
- Six sub-projects in the working group "Migration" aim to map out trans-local figurations (networks and flows) within Crossroads Asia as well as figurations extending into both neighboring and distant areas (Arabian Peninsula, Russia, Europe, Australia, America). The main research question addresses how basic organizational and functional networks are structured, and how these structures affect what is on the move (people, commodities, ideas etc.). Conceptualizing empirical methods for mapping mobility and complex connectivities in trans-local spaces is a genuine desideratum. The aim of the working group is to refine the method of qualitative network analysis, which includes flows as well as their structures of operation, and to map mobility and explain mobility patterns.
- In the "Development"-working group four sub-projects are focusing on the effects of spatial movements (flows) and interwoven networks at the micro level with regard to processes of long-term social change, and with a special focus on locally perceived livelihood opportunities and their potential for implementation. The four sub-projects focus on two fundamental aspects: first, on structural changes in processes of transformation of patterns of allocation and distribution of resources, which are contested both at the household level and between individual and government agents; secondly, on forms of social mobility, which may create new opportunities, but may also cause the persistence of social inequality.

The competence network understands itself as a mediator between the academic study of Crossroads Asia and efforts to meet the high demand for information on this area in politics and the public. Findings of the project will feed back into academic teaching, research outside the limits of the competence network, and public relations efforts. Further information on Crossroads Asia is available at www.crossroads-asia.de.

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