

ACTIVIST EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Visit to Swat and Shangla 2024
Supervised by Mehran Wazir



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Introduction to Activists' Exchange Program

There is a significant gap between the Southern and Northern districts, Peshawar valley and Hazara Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in terms of infrastructure development, social service delivery, and state visibility. The social and political dynamics of these regions provide different experiences for social and political activists, resulting in varied forms and challenges of activism. Despite these differences, the core narratives and motivations for activism—peace, political mobilization, and democratic values—remain consistent across these four regions.

The Centre for Regional Policy & Dialogue (CRPD) recognizes the need for connectivity through sharing experiences among activists, understanding the dynamics of different regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and fostering a common national interest for their activism.

To this end, CRPD supports, organizes, and sponsors inter-regional activists' visits. Activists from different districts travel across the province, where guest activists and host activists collaborate on various activities. These activities include study circles, poetry recitation events, music events, meetings, and advocacy initiatives.

Exchange Program Visit to Swat

In the Activists' Exchange Program, activists from four southern districts, including South Waziristan, Tank, Bannu, and Orakzai, visited two districts in the north, namely Swat and Shangla. The visit were on 24th, 25th, 26th of May 2024. There, they carried out various activities in collaboration with local and host activists. These activities included meetings for sensitization on peace and democratic values, study circles, poetry recitation events, music programs, walks through the streets, and visits to hill stations. The project team helped the activists identify the host activists (those who received the visiting activists) and facilitated contact between them and the guest activists (those who were visiting). The project team also supervised the activists while conducting these activities.

During the exchange program, four activists visited Swat and Shangla for the first time, gaining valuable insights into the social and political dynamics of these regions compared to the southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This interaction provided an amazing experience for the activists, enabling them to understand and appreciate the activism for peace, tolerance, and inclusivity in different areas. Inspired by this visit, the activists felt motivated to further their efforts in their own districts, contributing to a larger struggle for these values.

The host activists expressed their approval of the exchange program, suggesting that similar initiatives should be arranged among different tehsils within the district. They plan to continue the intra-district exchange program to encourage and enhance activism. Local activists and political workers recommended extending the visits to at least seven to ten days and covering more tehsils. They also offered their support for future visits.

However, the program faced several challenges. One major issue was the uncertainty regarding security in Swat, which local activists have already countered with protests and rallies called "Da Amn Pashoon" (Peace Uprising). Ensuring women's participation was another significant challenge. Additionally, time constraints posed difficulties, as activists had to travel across hilly areas and then conduct their activities, impacting the overall schedule.

The following are profiles of participants of the exchange program a guest activists who visited to Swat and Shangla under the program.

Activities

Both guest and host activists organized various activities during the visit. These activities included study circles, meetings, music programs, a poetry recitation event (mushaira), and visits to hill stations. All activities were coordinated by the guest and host activists under the supervision of the project team.

Study Circle

The study circle was held in the Hujra (a personal guest house, also used for community and political activities) of Iftekhhar Hussain Shah Ji in Kabal on May 24, 2024. The topic of discussion was the “Role of Regional Connectivity in Pashtun Politics.” Speakers included Maqsood Maseed and Sajid Orakzai. Mehran Wazir spoke about the “Activists Exchange Program,” inviting young activists to participate and replicate similar activities in their respective areas. Dr. Khadim Hussain concluded the session, encouraging the exchange program and expressing his support for it. The session was moderated by Qamber Bettani.

An engaging question-and-answer session followed, and afterward, certificates were distributed to the activists by the host.

Cup of Tea

During the visit, the activists met with various local activists who work to promote peace, diversity, political processes, human rights, and social integration in Swat and Shangla. Some meetings were conducted individually, while others were in groups. On their way to Shangla from Swat, the guest activists visited the home of Mazhar Azad, a lecturer at Buner University and an active member of the Pakhtunkhwa Mili Awami Party (PaKMAP). He shared his experiences of activism both at the university and in his village, Chamtalai. Though initially invited for a simple cup of tea, the meeting evolved into a meaningful discussion on social and political activism in Swat and Malakand.

Village Visit

Walking through the streets of Shangla, greeting locals, and engaging in brief discussions was another fascinating activity. The activists visited villages, discussing topics like social cohesion, peace, tolerance, and activism with the local people. They also visited hill stations, hiking through the streets of Shangla.

Music

The music program was organized by the guest activists, with the support of local activists from Alpurai, Shangla. Many locals attended, and the program was well-received. They noted that the event was not only entertaining but also served as an opportunity for people to gather and strengthen collective action and cooperation. Local musicians from Alpurai and Puran villages performed exceptionally well.

Poetry Recitation Event (Mushaiara)

The Mushaiara (Poetry Recitation Event) was a joint effort between the guest and host activists, with both sides presenting their poetry to the audience. The event took place at the local hujra of Azam Khan, a political leader who promotes peace and democracy in Shangla, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Mehran Wazir welcomed the participants and briefly discussed the importance of poetry in narrative building within society. He emphasized that poetry reflects essential social trends for promoting peace and tolerance, guiding society towards these values.

The poets recited works focused on peace, touching on both the challenges and opportunities for peace in the region. One local poet connected cooperation and collective political action with inter-district exchanges, such as the one facilitated by the exchange program, saying:

مینه په تلو راتلو زیاتیری

کله راځه کله به زه درځم مښه

Translation

Love increases with visits,

Sometimes I will come to you, and sometimes you will come to me.

He expressed that such visits could enhance political activism and participation across the province. The participants appreciated the activists' visit, which they believe will encourage others to visit different districts and areas.

Participants' Profile

Maqsood Maseed

Waziristan, is a multifaceted professional dedicated to music and peace activism. As the Founder, Director, and CEO of [Sandaara School of Music & Arts](#), he actively promotes music as a tool for social change. Maqsood organizes concerts and study circles on music and social issues, supports Afghan musicians in Pakistan, and advocates for peace through artistic expression. His commitment extends to educating others, offering classes and lectures to inspire future generations in the fields of music and art.



Uman Wazir

[Usman Wazir](#) is a dedicated social and political activist hailing from Domail, actively involved in the regions of Dera Ismail Khan, Lakki Marwat, and Bannu. Currently studying at Law College Gomal University D.I. Khan, Usman is a member of the "Election and Organizing Committee" at Pakhtun Students Federation - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He assists the Centre for Regional Policy & Dialogue (CRPD) in organizing activities across Bannu, Lakki Marwat, and Dera Ismail Khan. Passionate about advocating for peace, pluralism, and diversity, he emphasizes the importance of lifting the ban on student unions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Usman is also known for organizing political rallies, peace walks, and study circles to promote these causes.



Qamber Bettani

[Qamar Bettani](#), from Lakki Marwat, is a multifaceted individual who studied at Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST). He serves as an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Teacher at Ghazali Public School in Jamrud. As a social and political activist, Pashto poet, and orator, Qamar actively organizes study circles and poetry recitation events in Lakki Marwat, Kohat and Jamrud. His activism focuses on promoting peace and literature, advocating for connectivity among activists, and offering support and guidance to young and emerging activists.



Sajid Orakzai

[Sajid Orakzai](#), hailing from Hangu, is an active student at Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST). He currently works at The Lead School & College Kohat and has previously served as the General Secretary of Orakzai Students Welfare Society KUST and the Study Circles Incharge of Pakhtun Students Federation KUST. Sajid's activism extends across Orakzai, Hangu, and Kohat, where he organizes study circles and promotes peace, dialogue, and debate. Committed to fostering tolerance and social harmony, he supports initiatives that encourage thoughtful discussion and understanding within the community.



Activists' Observations and Experience

Sajid Orakzai

The three-day visit under the 'Activists' Exchange Program' from the southern district to Swat and Shangla has concluded. Under this program, various activities were organized, including study circles, poetry recitation events, attan (Pashtun traditional dance), and music events. Besides, the activists had the opportunity to meet different social and political activists.

During the visit, the first study circle was held in the Hujra (guest house) of Iftexhar Hussain Shah, where people from Swat, from various walks of life, participated. The participants included young activists, elders, political leaders, and socio-political workers. We appreciate everyone's participation, especially the district *Salar* (district head of Khudai Khidmatgar Tehrik, an affiliate body of Awami National Party), who attended despite his son undergoing major surgery. The hospitality of Iftexhar Hussain Shah will remain in our memory; we wish him success and prosperity in his life. Additionally, we had the pleasure of meeting and discussing with Fwad Khan and Ehtesham, the founding members of Swat Ulasi Pason (Swat People's Uprising or Swat Uprising).

On the second day of the visit, we met Mazhar Azad and Ezaz Khan on our way to Shangla. They belong to the Pakhtunkhwa National Awami Party.

After reaching Shangla, we had a wonderful discussion on Pashtun national issues and the current situation of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Pakistan with the youth of Shangla. We continued our discussion in the Hujra of Azam Khan, a local political leader, until late at night, fostering deep and meaningful exchanges. The Secretary of Culture, Dr. Khadim Hussain, also participated in the discussion.

On the third day of the visit, we organized a poetry recitation event in the Hujra of Azam Khan.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to Mehran Wazir, head of the Activist Exchange Program, for providing this opportunity. His efforts in organizing such programs and activities to connect young activists of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are commendable. We fully support these initiatives and wish him continued success in his endeavors.

Maqsood Maseed

مينه په تگ راتگ زياتيري

کله به زه کله به ته راخي مينه

Translation

Love and compassion grow stronger with frequent visits to one another
Sometimes I should visit you, and other times you should visit me

In continuation of the above tappa (Pashto folk genre of poetry and songs), I would say that when we discuss the social and communal life of Pashtuns, it is now common to see that they are deeply divided into countless small tribes and regions. When we talk about avoiding this divide and bringing about Pashtun collective consciousness, it has been observed that this cannot be achieved without the efforts of the politically conscious and educated Pashtun class. The solution to this divide is for these young, educated, and politically conscious individuals to travel and visit different parts, regions, and districts of Pashtunkhwa. During these visits, they would discuss psychological, social, and political issues with

each other. They would share their issues and prospects for peace and prosperity to find collective solutions.

In this respect, leaders like Mehran Wazir gave us the opportunity to visit Swat and Shangla under the “Activists Exchange Program,” where we represented the Southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. We were lucky that Dr. Khadim Hussain was with us in the visit and activities. During our visit to Swat and Shangla, we had the opportunity to conduct study circles and poetry recitation events where we could share our thoughts and activism with people from different areas of Swat and Shangla. During the visit, we were loved and respected by the locals.

I hope that these kinds of programs will continue to find collective solutions to the issues and problems of Pashtuns as a nation.

Pectoral Presentation

Study Circle



Mr. Mehran Wazir



Dr. Khadim Hussain



Mr. Maqsood Maseed



Mr. Sajid Orakzai



Mr. Qamber Bettani



Eng. Saleem

Some Glimpse of Audience



Poetry Recitation Event (Mushaiara)



Some Glimpse of Audience



Interaction with activists' delegations from different Tehsils of Swat & Shangla



Visit to hill station



Certificate Distribution

