PROOF *of* POSSIBLE




accelerate
prosperity

Accelerate Prosperity is a regional impact investor and enterprise accelerator, and an initiative of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), supporting aspiring and existing entrepreneurs through incubation, acceleration, mentorship, business advisory, market connections, and access to financing.

1

MISSION

To inspire rising entrepreneurs in emerging regions to grow into new markets, create sustainable employment, and strengthen communities.

2

VISION

Inclusive prosperity in emerging economies powered by entrepreneurs.

accelerate prosperity

AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

PROOF OF POSSIBLE

Broadening Economic and Social Transformation for Women's Economic Empowerment and Recovery (BEST4WEER) (2021–2027)

In the mountains of Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral, where resilience has always been a way of life, a new generation of entrepreneurs is redefining what is possible. They are launching businesses, creating jobs, strengthening local economies, and proving that when women have access to the right opportunities, entire communities thrive.

At the heart of these stories is Broadening Economic and Social Transformation for Women's Economic Empowerment and Recovery (BEST4WEER), a six-year initiative (2021–2027) that is accelerating women's economic empowerment and supporting communities as they recover and build a more resilient future. BEST4WEER is funded by the Government of Canada and the Aga Khan Foundation in Canada (AKF-C) and implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation in Pakistan (AKF-P), through Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) and Accelerate Prosperity (AP).

This report celebrates Accelerate Prosperity's journey within BEST4WEER, a journey of ambition, innovation, and impact. Through business training and advisory under its incubation and acceleration programmes, expert mentoring, and catalytic blended financing, aspiring entrepreneurs, startups and small and growing businesses (SGBs), particularly those led by youth and women, have transformed ideas into thriving businesses. The results extend far beyond business growth. They are reflected in new jobs, stronger household incomes, greater financial independence for men and women, and more vibrant, inclusive local economies.

These pages capture more than achievements and numbers. They tell the stories of entrepreneurs who dared to dream, communities that embraced change, and a partnership that is helping shape a future where opportunity is within everyone's reach.

In **partnership** with Canada

LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

Talent was never absent in Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral. It was simply raw, and the region's own sense of what was possible had been quietly narrowed. When we began, the assumption, even locally, was that this was a land of hospitality, handicrafts, and food. Nothing more ambitious was expected of it, so nothing more ambitious was funded.

Through BEST4WEER, Accelerate Prosperity set out to change that. Over six years, we paired tailored financial support with hands-on technical assistance, the polish that turns raw talent into investable ventures, working alongside 734 entrepreneurs. But the harder and more important work was instilling a conviction: that entrepreneurship belonged here too, in forms far beyond what the region had been told to expect.

The portfolio in this book is the proof. What began as an assumption about handicrafts and resorts has become a diverse range of businesses, built by entrepreneurs who saw opportunities others had missed and, for the first time, had the capital and the confidence to pursue them.

What comes next asks more than any single project can give. It calls for deeper local capital, longer partnerships, and a shared commitment to keep investing in this region's ambition, an ambition it has already proven is real.

ZAHIR SAKHI
Country Director, Accelerate Prosperity, Pakistan

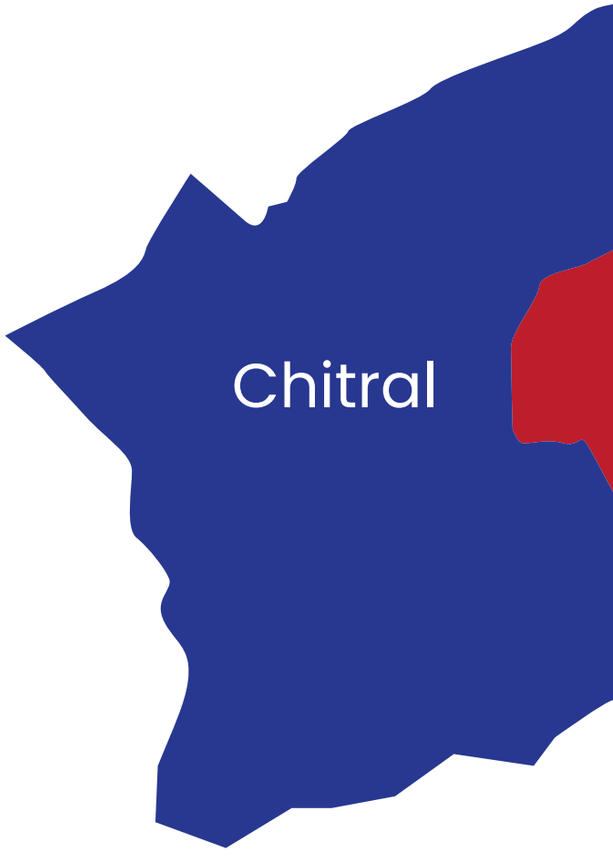


THE GROUND BEFORE THE SEED

Pakistan ranked 153rd out of 156 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2021, ahead of only Afghanistan in South Asia. Despite Article 38 of the Constitution guaranteeing equal economic rights regardless of sex, social constraints on women's mobility, gendered divisions of labour, and the burden of unpaid care work continue to confine many women to informal, low-income employment. In Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral, these structural barriers are further intensified by geographic isolation, climate vulnerability, and a heavy dependence on tourism and value-added agriculture—two sectors that were brought to a standstill almost overnight during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The scale of disruption was immediate and severe. A rapid situational analysis conducted in August 2020 found that 37% of private-sector workers in Gilgit-Baltistan lost their jobs, 42% experienced delays in salary payments, and 50% of households relied on savings to meet basic needs. Women were disproportionately affected, with 84% of women and girls reporting high or extreme levels of anxiety, depression, or sleeplessness. At the same time, incidents of domestic violence increased, while access to markets, finance, and skills development opportunities became even more limited, deepening the economic and social challenges faced by women.

Into this context came Broadening Economic and Social Transformation for Women's Economic Empowerment and Recovery (BEST4WEER), not as an emergency response, but as a long-term investment in what the region's entrepreneurs could become, given the right support at the right time.



THREE BARRIERS

01

MOBILITY

Cultural taboos around women's mobility and market access restricted work outside the home. Only 314 women were enrolled in TVET training in Chitral, almost all in sewing and embroidery.



02

SKILLS INFRASTRUCTURE

No formal apprenticeship or business training programme existed in Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral. Technical colleges offered little for women beyond traditional trades, and no high schools offered regular business training courses.

03

COVID-19 ECONOMIC SHOCK

Tourism and value-added agriculture, two of the main sectors for young women, collapsed with travel restrictions. 33% of households took loans to survive. Women with limited mobility were disproportionately offline and unable to pivot to a remote economy.

Source: Rapid Situational Analysis, August 2020 — cited in the Project Implementation Plan

THEN CAME THE RAIN





BEST4WEER was built on a deceptively simple insight: an entrepreneur cannot grow if the soil around her does not support growth. No amount of training or funding changes a business if social norms restrict her mobility, if her family does not accept her independence, or if the market she is trying to reach is closed to her. The project's theory of change, described through a soil and acorn metaphor, placed the enabling environment and women's agency as twin conditions for any lasting transformation.

In the most straightforward terms: if there is an enabling environment AND women have the skills and confidence to make informed decisions AND they have access to and control of resources, then there will be improved women's economic empowerment. BEST4WEER worked on all three conditions simultaneously, across communities at three different levels of readiness, over six years.

DELIVERY MODEL



349 BUSINESSES

Startup ideas transformed into validated businesses. Entrepreneurs moved through the START programme by AKRSP and incubation programmes by Accelerate Prosperity, covering business modelling, marketing, financial analysis, and pitch development.





114 BUSINESSES

The Women in Business programme strengthened enterprises through tailored technical assistance and mentorship, and helped them build investment cases to access financing for growth and scale.



CATALYTIC FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Entrepreneurs presented their businesses to panels of advisors, investors, and peers, competing for growth-stage and early-stage catalytic technical assistance funds that would unlock the next phase of their growth.


DIGI HUNAR
TRACTION
3000+
Individuals Trained
in market demanded skills
50+
Direct Jobs
created
20+
Expert Trainers
delivering skill-based,
industry-aligned programs.
STARTUP SUMMIT


EASY DROP TRAVEL
EASY DROP TRAVELS
FROM EVERYWHERE TO GETAWAY
Safe | Reliable | Affordable
Pick & Drop & Tour Services in Giigit-Baltistan
STARTUP SUMMIT
EMPOWERING INNOVATION

POST-PROGRAMME GROWTH SUPPORT

Support did not end at disbursement of the funds to the startups and Small and Growing Businesses. Post-investment technical assistance, including follow-up advisory, networking and linkages, connections with other financial institutions, kept AP present long after the programmes ended.






STARTUP SUMMIT GILGIT BALTISTAN
CELEBRATING THE POWER OF IDEAS
STILL MANAGING YOUR HOTEL THE OLD WAY?
CHITRALI

THE ACCELERATE PROSPERITY OPERATING MODEL

Start. Achieve. Celebrate.

Submission of Application



1 WE REACH

Accelerate Prosperity works nationwide, reaching into rural and peri-urban areas where capital options for businesses are scarce. We invite women, youth, and first-time founders across the country to apply. An open, competitive application marks the start of the journey.

Interviews of Shortlisted Applicants



WE SELECT 2

Through interviews and a merit-based shortlist, we select founders who combine a clear market niche and a credible path to revenue with contextual innovation and impact at their core. Selection applies a deliberate gender and youth lens, and only a small share of applicants advance.

Onboarding on Virtual Accelerate · Business training and advisory



3 WE EQUIP

Once selected, founders are onboarded to Virtual Accelerate, our blended learning and mentorship platform. Through our specialized investment-readiness training, one-on-one coaching, and expert advisory, they sharpen their models and prepare to raise capital.

Pitch for Financing/Investment · Due Diligence by AP team



4 WE INVEST

Founders pitch, and shortlisted businesses undergo due diligence, and those who meet our criteria are offered subsidized patient debt, built for early and growth-stage realities. We deploy capital in regions with little prior exposure to such tools, where conventional finance is out of reach. Our capital is catalytic, unlocking co-investment from entrepreneurs and other financiers.

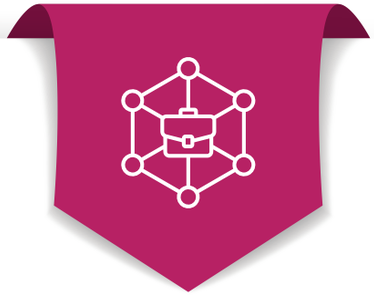
Post-Investment Technical Assistance



WE ACCELERATE 5

After investment, our team stays close to each business through post-financing technical assistance, mentorship, and market linkages. This support helps founders navigate the pivotal moments of growth and build companies that last. The relationship continues well beyond the initial financing.

Impact & Ecosystem Arc

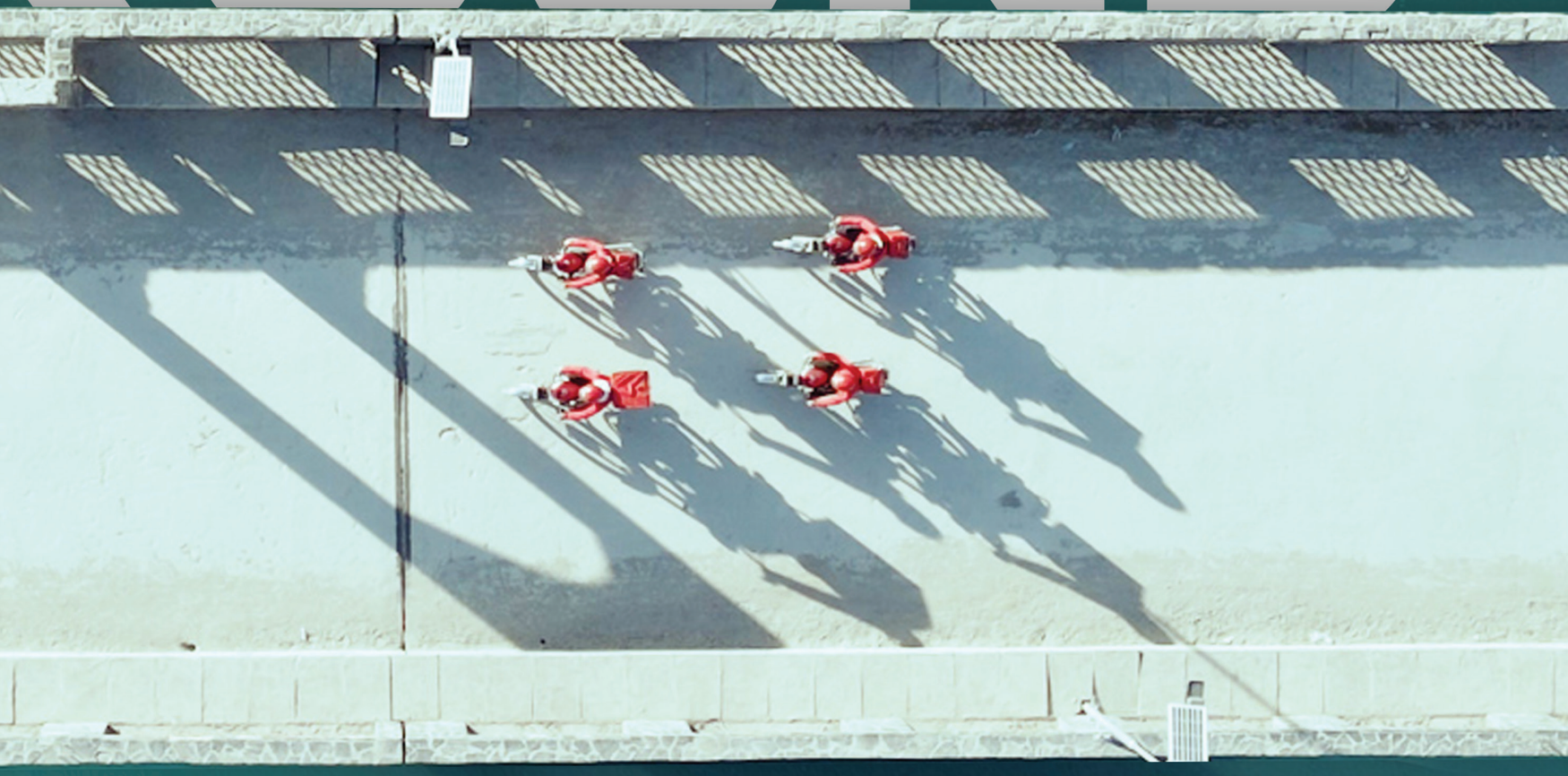


6 WE MULTIPLY

As the businesses we back grow, they create sustainable jobs and strengthen local supply chains. Over time, founders become role models and mentors for the next generation of entrepreneurs. Prosperity spreads well beyond a single enterprise, strengthening entire communities.


THE GR
WE CO

ROUND



VERED

Bolain Kiya Chahiye riders on their way for deliveries





Even in the heart of a Chitrali winter, joy finds a way. Mastuj, Upper Chitral





No easy paths here, Sheosar Lake, Deosai.

It began, for most, with an idea. Something they had seen missing in their community, a skill quietly accumulated over years, a gap in the local market that everyone had noticed but no one had yet moved to fill. In Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral, where entrepreneurship had rarely been presented as a viable path, and even more rarely as one open to women, that idea needed more than encouragement. It needed structure, challenge, and someone willing to take it seriously.



A Kalasha mother holds her child close, wrapped warmly against the mountain chill.

That is what Accelerate Prosperity set out to provide through BEST4WEER. Not just training, but a shift in how entrepreneurs in this region saw themselves and what they believed was possible. The incubation programmes were often the first moment a founder had ever been asked to stress-test their idea, to name their customer, to think about what their business would look like in three years. For many, it was the beginning of an entirely new way of thinking.



Sailing into the mountains, turquoise waters of Attabad Lake.

From there, the journey deepened. Businesses that were already operational entered the acceleration track, working with advisors on value chains, financial management, and market access. Pitch sessions became a defining moment in the programme calendar, entrepreneurs standing before panels of advisors and investors, making the case for their business with a confidence that had been built, practised, and earned. The strongest among them went on to receive growth-stage and early-stage catalytic technical assistance funds, paired with continued advisory support, that unlocked the next stage of their growth.





Passu Cones standing over the beautiful Hunza Valley



But the most significant impact of this programme cannot be measured in funding rounds alone. Businesses that began in this programme have since raised financing from external institutions, scaled their operations, and built products and services now reaching customers at the national level and beyond.



Rattu Lake, Astore

Names that were unknown six years ago are becoming known entities in their sectors. And behind each of those businesses is an entrepreneur whose mindset was fundamentally changed by the experience of being taken seriously, challenged rigorously, and supported consistently.


4X4
前汽前車灯泡
Kumamoco City Fire Department



Mastuj Top, wrapped in winter's quiet magic.

Blooms of Ghizer, Gilgit-Baltistan





That is the ripple effect BEST4WEER was always working towards. Not just businesses, but a generation of entrepreneurs in Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral who now know that prosperity does not have to come from somewhere else. It can be made here, by them, from what this region has always had.

VENTURING OFF THE BEATEN PATH

From the garlic fields of Yasin Valley to the delivery streets of Skardu. From a physiotherapy clinic in Gilgit to a mushroom farm at 2,500 metres in Chitral. The portfolio of BEST4WEER spans the full length of Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral, and nearly every sector of its economy.

Food Processing · Agriculture · Dairy · Delivery & Logistics · Education · Hospitality & Tourism · Health & Rehabilitation · Sustainable Architecture · Sports & Arts · Fashion & Textiles · ICT & Digital Services · Fishery · Floriculture · Energy

MEHER-E-KHUN

• Hundur, Yasin Valley • Experiential Tourism









An experience founded by musicians with deep roots in Ghizer's cultural traditions, Meher-e-Khun offers guests accommodation in traditionally constructed huts, organic farm-to-table meals, and immersive encounters with local artists and community life. Beyond hospitality, it runs a music school, hosts artist residencies, and delivers community programmes focused on mental health and skill development. The business currently employs seven local staff and is expected to create additional direct jobs, while generating indirect employment and strengthening market opportunities for rural producers through its local supply chain.

LITTLE ANGELS

• Gahkuch, Ghizer • Daycare & Early Childhood Development Centre











Little Angels provides daycare and early childhood education from ECD through Grade 2. In a region where formal early years education is rare, Tanzeela built a space where young children receive structured learning, life skills development, and nutritional care under one roof, giving them the foundation that every child deserves but few in this valley have had access to.



BIRENO

• Gilgit • Food Processing




FASHION
PASTA
PASTA
PASTA


Organic
PASTA
PASTA


Bireno
Foods
350 gr
Garlic
Pickle
White
350 g



Shahab returned to Gilgit from the food manufacturing industry, realizing that the region's traditional food had been replaced by mass-produced alternatives. In 2025, he founded Bireno Foods with his wife Sharifa Batool to reverse that. The business produces traditional pasta, pickles, vinegar, and other value-added products using locally sourced ingredients, each quality-tested for safety and consistency. Every product is designed to taste the way it always did. Alongside preserving those recipes, Shahab built the business model around employing women from underprivileged backgrounds on flexible part-time shifts, creating income opportunities that fit around their daily responsibilities rather than competing with them.

Starting from zero, Bireno Foods generated healthy revenue in its first year, validating market demand and demonstrating that culturally rooted food products can find a paying audience. The business has created three direct jobs for women and established forward linkages to 50 businesses that distribute or stock its products.

> *"Our pasta tastes just as our ancestors used to make it."*
>
> — Shahab, Founder, Bireno Foods

AKS-E-ZULIKHA

• Gilgit • Creative Services, Media



Shakila Bano started with a camera bought with her dowry savings and a gap no one else was filling. In Gilgit, women had little access to professional photography services they felt comfortable with. She changed that with her studio Aks-e-Zulikha. What began as event coverage has grown into a full studio providing trusted photography and media services to women across Gilgit-Baltistan, while mentoring the next generation of women to build careers behind the lens.

RIVLUX ARTISAN

• Chitral • Artisan, Manufacturing







Rivlux Artisan converts river stones into luxury products: sinks, decor pieces, and lifestyle accessories that carry the weight and texture of something naturally handcrafted. Combining traditional stone-craft with contemporary design, the brand produces pieces that are durable, eco-friendly, and impossible to replicate at scale. Behind each product is a local artisan employed fairly and a craft tradition given the premium platform it deserves.

EARTHALENE

- Garam Chashma, Lower Chitral
- Mushroom Farming



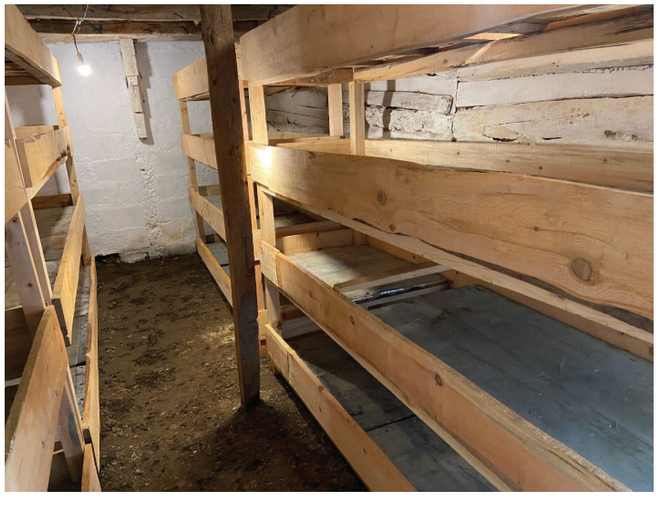


In 2024, Javeria Fayyaz founded Earthalene to explore a new future for mountain agriculture, smart farming focused on high-value, nutrient-rich crops. Growing chemical-free mushrooms in Garam Chashma, Chitral, Earthalene is demonstrating how innovative farming can improve nutrition, strengthen local food security, and create new economic opportunities in remote communities.









BAQAR-UL-ULOOM

• Nagar Valley • Education





Baqar-ul-Uloom is a school built on a simple idea: academics alone aren't enough. Founded by Kishwar Batool, it teaches formal education in the morning and practical skills in the afternoon.

Its Life Skills Lab covers cooking, financial literacy, recycling, and basic entrepreneurship, while green spaces and environmental activities run throughout. The focus falls especially on girls' education.

More than a school, it's a community hub, training teachers and youth toward a more skilled, sustainable future.


2026

BOLAIN KIYA CHAHIYE (BKC)

• Skardu, Baltistan • Delivery Service, App






BKC RIDER
BKC RIDER
BKC



When Manzoor Hussain returned to Skardu after working as a delivery rider in the city, he saw something his hometown was missing: a reliable way to get what you need, when you need it. In 2022, he launched Bolain Kiya Chahiye, Urdu for "tell us what you need", and built Skardu's first dedicated delivery service from the ground up. Today, BKC connects local restaurants, bakeries, pharmacies, and grocery stores with residents and tourists across the city, operating on both a B2C and B2B model. For local businesses, BKC removes the cost and complexity of maintaining their own delivery fleet. For customers, it delivers essential goods directly to the door.

In just two years, BKC completed over 27,000 deliveries across Skardu, created 15 direct jobs, and reached over 25,000 customers, 17,500 of them women gaining easier access to essential goods from their homes. Manzoor moved his riders from casual wages to monthly salaries, bringing stability to a workforce that had none. Revenue grew 44% year on year over its first two years and his five-year ambition is only getting bigger.

> *"In the next five years we want to provide job opportunities to at least 200 to 250 people."*
>
> — Manzoor Hussain, Founder, Bolain Kiya Chahiye

STEP-UP ADEMIA

• Gilgit • Edtech









Step-Up Ademia is a digital skills and employment platform giving young people in the region a way to build a professional career without leaving home. Step-Up Ademia provides digital skills training while developing SynkUp, a subscription-based platform connecting freelancers and professional service providers with short-term employers locally and globally. Commission-free for its users, SynkUp handles everything from team formation to project tracking, turning Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral's growing pool of digitally skilled talent into a workforce that employers anywhere in the world can find and hire. With six direct jobs already created and a pipeline of over 50 indirect opportunities, Step-Up Ademia is quietly building the case that the next generation of Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral's professionals does not have to choose between home and opportunity.

REEN'S TALES OF HUNZA

• Hunza • Textile, Fashion







Ambreen returned home to Hunza with a fashion design degree and a question she could not shake: why were the embroidery traditions of the North disappearing while the rest of the world was paying premium prices for exactly this kind of craft?

In 2019 she founded Reen's Tales to answer it. The brand handcrafts coats, jackets, purses, and shalwar kameez using eco-friendly materials, weaving traditional Hunza motifs into contemporary silhouettes that feel as relevant in a city boutique as they do in the valley they came from. Every piece is made by local artisans paid fairly for skills that deserve to be treated as exactly what they are, a living cultural heritage. Through workshops and exhibitions, Ambreen is making sure the stories and techniques behind Hunza textiles outlast the trend cycle and find the audience they were always meant to reach.



In Chitral, outdoor activities are becoming limited and screens have filled the gap, Huma Akbar co-founded Umeed Sports & Arts Centre to offer something different: a real space, with real people, built around sport, movement, and creative expression. Open to everyone regardless of gender or age, this space is a bet on what young people become when they are given the right environment.

> *"We tried to create opportunities for women and girls in the area that were inaccessible to us. This sports centre is open to everyone, free from gender or age barriers."*

— Huma Akbar, Co-founder, Umeed Sports & Arts Centre · Chitral





RURAL ARCHITECTURE STUDIO

• Hunza • Sustainable Construction





Drive through Gilgit-Baltistan today and you will see what has happened to the landscape: concrete buildings rising in valleys where, for centuries, homes were built from mud, wood, and stone, materials that insulated naturally and sat in harmony with their surroundings. In 2024, a group of young architects founded Rural Architecture Studio (RAS) to revive the sustainable construction techniques the region's built heritage had long embodied. Rural Architecture Studio specializes in stabilized mud blocks, rammed earth walls, and cator-and-cribbage construction that replaces non-load-bearing concrete without sacrificing structural integrity. Its aim is to cut reinforced concrete use by up to 60%, substituting locally available materials that need less water and energy and carry a fraction of the carbon footprint. For every tree removed during construction, the studio plants another.

Rural Architecture Studio (RAS) is not just building structures. It is making an argument about what construction in Gilgit-Baltistan should look like as the region urbanizes and the climate changes. Beyond its lighter footprint, the approach lowers client costs, creates local jobs through local materials and craftsmanship, and preserves the architectural heritage of a region at risk of homogenization.

In its first year the studio engaged 25 clients and created five jobs, two of them held by women.













The place has become a concrete jungle, which is a big villain in our mountainous community."

— Waseem, Co-founder, Rural Architecture Studio (RAS)




N. SLAB
SEGMENTATION: TO CREATE THE DEFINE
BOUNDARIES WITHIN DIFFERENT
PROGRAMMES, AND ALSO INVITES THE
COMMUNITY OR PUBLIC INSIDE FOR
COMMUNITY ORIENTED PROGRAMMES
HOSTED THROUGH OUT THE BUILDING.



KAI CAFÉ

• Chitral town • Food and Hospitality

For more than six years, Abida Sharif built her culinary journey from her home in Chitral, carrying a dream that had rarely been imagined for women in the region. In 2024, she opened Kai Café, the first women-led restaurant in Chitral town, bringing authentic Chitrali flavours to a welcoming space where women feel comfortable. With an all-female chef team, the café celebrates the women who have preserved the region's food traditions while creating new opportunities for local women. Beyond serving food, Kai Café represents courage, possibility, and a new chapter for women's entrepreneurship in Chitral.

The café has created 5 direct and 10 indirect jobs, with plans to generate 12 additional roles over the next five years. It also actively supports women-led agricultural and dairy producers, and has grown revenue by 50% in its first year.







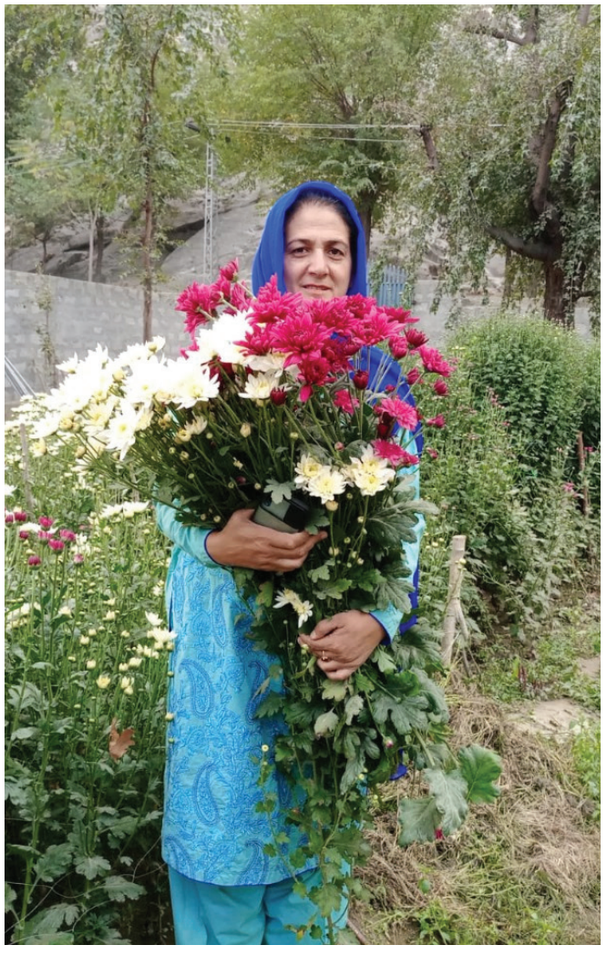
KARAKORAM FLORICULTURE

• Gilgit • Floriculture

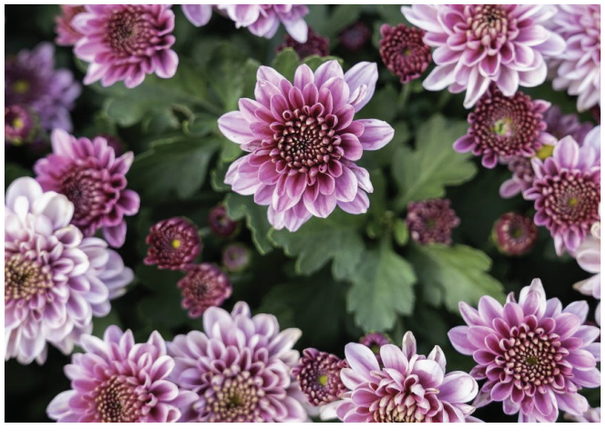
Kaneez Fatima began her floriculture journey in 2018 with a small patch of land in Gilgit and a belief that the region could grow something different. What started with seven marlas of cultivation has evolved into a pioneering flower enterprise producing Lilium, Chrysanthemum, and Gladiolus for markets across Pakistan.

Kaneez is building a new path for agriculture in Gilgit-Baltistan, introducing high-value crops, creating employment, and showing local farmers the potential of modern floriculture.







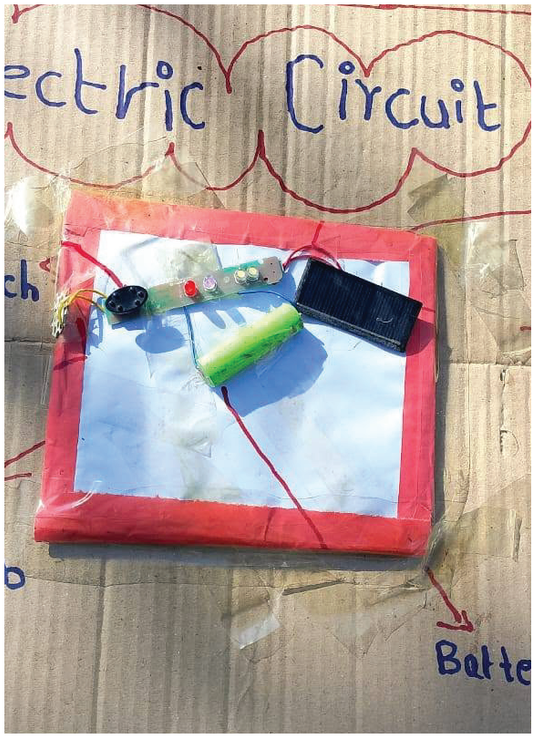


LEADING STAR MONTESSORI SCHOOL

• Gilgit • Education






ectric Circuit
Batte




Leading Star
Secondary School
EMBARK ON THE NEW MILLENNIUM JOURNEY
I am a Peacemaker Because:

Leading Star Montessori School was founded in 2011 by a team of women educators: Bibi Baskia, Bibi Farzana, Dilshad, Shamshad and Safina, who shared a single conviction: that children in Gilgit deserved better than what the system was offering. More than a decade later, that conviction has grown into three campuses: two in Danyor and one in Sultanabad, serving over 500 enrolled students from early childhood through Grade 5. Every principal, every teacher, every administrator at Leading Star is a woman. With catalytic financial support from Accelerate Prosperity, Leading Star invested in campus renovations, solar panel installations, new furniture, and expanded classrooms, directly improving the quality of the learning environment for hundreds of children.

Leading Star's impact operates on two levels simultaneously. For the children in its classrooms, it provides quality early education at prices families can actually afford. For the women who run it, it represents sustainable livelihoods, professional leadership, and proof that an institution built entirely by and for women can survive, expand, and thrive for over a decade. The school has created 6 direct jobs, all held by women, and reached over 500 students and families.

KAZI FAIZAN MUSIC

• Chitral • Music & Art



Kazi Faizan has spent years building a reputation in Chitral's music scene, recognized across the northern region for his instrumentals and compositions. Now, he is creating something the region has never had: a professional recording studio that local musicians can afford to use. For years, artists from Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral have had to travel Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other regions to record their work, losing valuable time, money, and creative momentum along the way. Kazi's studio is changing that by providing northern talent with a dedicated space to create, record, and share their music without having to leave their home region.

DAAMATO

• Hunza • Smart Agri

Daamato grows oyster mushrooms. Fresh, dried, and ground into curry masala, the products are simple, nutritious, and until recently, largely unavailable in the region. What started as an idea is now a small but growing venture, bringing a new agricultural category to a region that has the climate for it and the appetite for something different.





KORGAH CARPETS

• Gulmit • Artisans, Manufacturing

Korgah began in Gulmit as a small effort to preserve a disappearing craft and create new possibilities for local women. Established by women artisans, the weaving centre has transformed generations-old carpet-making skills into a source of dignity, income, and pride. Each carpet carries a piece of Hunza's heritage, shaped by careful hands, traditional designs, and stories passed down through generations. Beyond creating beautiful handcrafted pieces, Korgah has given women a space to work, earn, and keep alive an art form deeply rooted in the culture of the valley.









NORTHNINE

• Hunza • Gaming Studio

NorthNine is a borderless company turning learning into earning, building its team's skills while delivering them to clients. Founded by Jamila Bano, it offers UX/UI design, web development, digital marketing, bookkeeping, financial projections, business analysis, and strategy.

At its heart is a game development studio in Hunza, dedicated to climate change awareness games, proof that talent from the mountains can build for the world, and build for good. By growing digital skills locally, NorthNine keeps young talent, and its earnings, rooted in Gilgit rather than lost to the cities.




northnine




northnine
ith Northnine &
usiness SOAR!
es:
ning
pment
eting
g/Accounting
opment
tch your business's Strengths,
Results (SOAR)



YASIN GARLIC

• Taus, Yasin Valley • Garlic Farming













At 3,000 metres in the Yasin Valley, the soil yields garlic with unusually dense, pungent bulbs, grown without chemicals, and harvested exactly when most of Pakistan's supply is being imported from China. Shazia Begum farmed this land for years before deciding, in 2021 with her husband, to turn subsistence into enterprise. Yasin Garlic became Ghizer's first commercial-scale garlic farm.

Its edge is a homegrown answer to imports: longer shelf life, lower transport cost than Chinese garlic, and a flavour intensity customers recognize at once. Before receiving growth-stage catalytic financial support from Accelerate Prosperity, Shakila Bibi cultivated garlic on 17 kanals of land. With that support, she expanded to 40 kanals, more than doubling her productive capacity in a single season. She now provides seasonal employment to 7 to 10 local women. The next chapter is already planned: a processing facility for garlic pickle and garlic paste after the September harvest, creating year-round revenue and additional employment.

> *"With the financial assistance provided, I have expanded my cultivation area to 40 kanals. This will create employment opportunities for local women, enabling them to earn an income and contribute to their families' well-being."*

— Shakila Bibi, Founder, Yasin Garlic

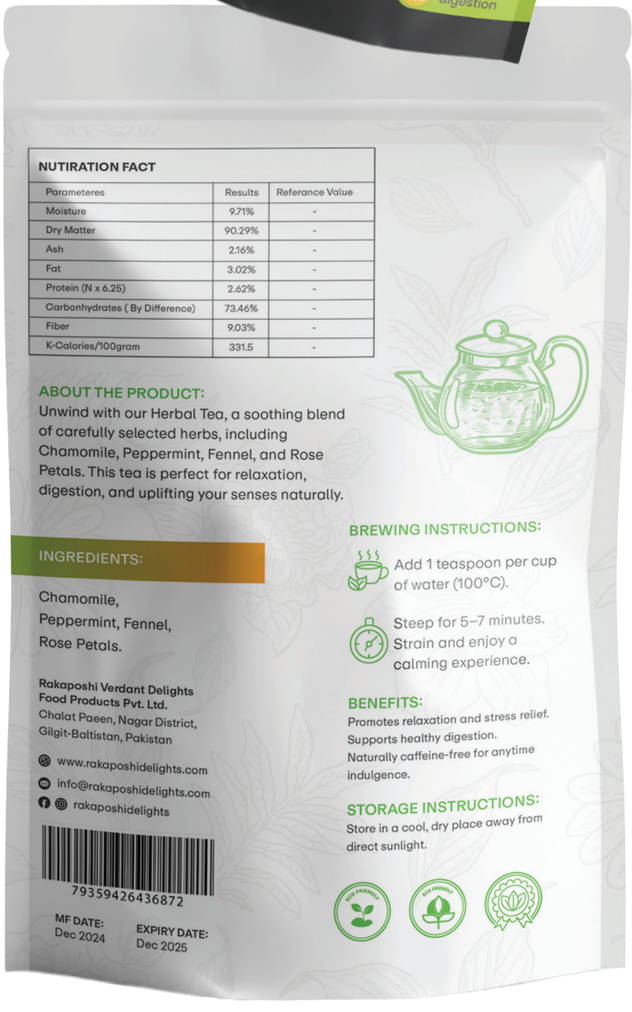
RAKAPOSHI VERDANT DELIGHTS

• Nagar • Food Processing

Rakaposhi Verdant Delights makes locally sourced fruit teas, herbal blends, and energy bars. Built around the idea of turning mountain-grown ingredients into healthier alternatives, the business connects Gilgit's farmers with health-conscious consumers across Pakistan. By transforming local produce into value-added products, it is creating new markets for farmers while promoting cleaner, more sustainable choices for everyday living.







WAKHMAT FARMING

• Hashupi, Shigar, Baltistan • Smart Agri

Wakhmat Farming is a fresh-tomato venture built to close a stubborn gap: in Gilgit-Baltistan, even a basic tomato often arrives tired, having travelled days from Punjab. Founders Shazia Begum and Muhammad Zaman set out to grow it at home instead. They started in 2024 with four walk-through tunnels and, in a single run, brought in over 6,000 kg of tomatoes.

The method is the advantage. Using hybrid seeds for higher yield and disease resistance, and growing under tunnels rather than trucking produce across the country, Wakhmat delivers tomatoes that are fresher, longer-lasting, and steadier in both price and supply than anything shipped in.

Growth has been quick. Five more tunnels went up in April 2025, taking the farm to 6,000 sq ft, with a plan to reach 16,800 sq ft and eventually add 20 tunnels across six kanals of land. The next market is bigger: Shigar's hotels and restaurants, still dependent on distant cities, become Wakhmat's customers close to home.







KUNGRAH RESORT

• Ghulkin, Gojal, Upper Hunza • Hospitality



Kungrah Resort began with three rooms, deliberately small, in traditional Hunza architecture, an authentic village stay offering local cuisine, fruit picking, cultural exchange, and guided treks to the glaciers on either side of Ghulkin. Each room has a stargazing balcony, turning a night's stay into a night beneath the Milky Way, paired with traditional food and dried fruit under the open sky.







HIMALAYAN PICKLE

• Sonikote, Gilgit • Food Processing







Founded in 2019 by Basnama and Rehmat Ali Shah, Himalayan Pickle makes homemade pickles from locally grown ingredients and has spent seven years refining its recipes.

Everything is local and deliberately simple: fresh fruits and vegetables, spices, salt, and pure olive oil, all sourced from area suppliers. The produce is washed, cut, and prepared by hand, then left to ferment and mature into its distinct flavour. What gives the pickles their signature are ingredients few others use: capers, quince, and wild herbs and vegetables gathered from the region. The result is authentic, consistent, and priced for everyday tables. Himalayan Pickle is setting up machinery to increase production to meet growing demand.

MIMI'S HERBAL BLEND

• Gilgit • Manufacturing

Mimi's Herbal Blend is a homegrown wellness brand built on one idea: what goes on your body and into it should be pure. Founded by Afsheen Baig, it began with a traditional herbal hair oil, infused the old way from high-quality ingredients, without the chemicals that fill most of the shelf.



The range has since grown to include Nutri Bites, a high-protein, highly nutritious snack carrying the same clean-ingredient promise from self-care to nourishment. Together they offer a premium local alternative to mass-market goods.

The market is answering. Customers trust it enough to keep referring new ones, and Mimi's already sells online and on Daraz.

THE LEVERAGE EFFECT

The $5.98 million in external financing leveraged by BEST4WEER's supported businesses is not a footnote. It is the clearest signal available that the programme built businesses capable of attracting capital, the hardest standard any enterprise development programme can meet.

External financing does not flow toward businesses that need support. It flows toward businesses that have demonstrated viability, built credibility, and earned the confidence of lenders and investors. The 77 businesses that raised external financing after participating in BEST4WEER's incubation and acceleration programmes are not simply success stories. They are evidence that the model works, that the combination of technical assistance, advisory support, peer learning, and catalytic financial support produces businesses that the broader financial ecosystem is willing to back.

Out of these 77 businesses, 34 businesses received investment from Accelerate Prosperity.



Inkeep Inn
Broghil, Chitral [Tourism] Catalytic

Aks-e-Zulikha
Gilgit [Creative Services, Media] Early-Stage

Cloudlem
Gilgit [ICT / Cloud Services] Early-Stage

Karakoram Floriculture
Gilgit [Agriculture] Catalytic

Zulfi Agrico
Chitral [Agriculture] Catalytic

Superior Milk Services
Chitral [Agriculture / Dairy] Catalytic

Kungrah Resort
Hunza [Tourism] Catalytic

Hosayni
Chitral [Consumer Goods] Early-Stage

Ainee Gul Khatoon
Skardu [Fashion] Catalytic

Blessed Solar
Gilgit [Environment / Energy] Catalytic

Mountain Munchables (Hunza Farms)
Hunza [Food] Catalytic

EasyDrop
Gilgit [Transportation] Early-Stage

Rural Architecture Studio (RAS)
Hunza [Construction] Early-Stage

Leading Star Montessori School
Gilgit [Education] Catalytic

Northern Nectar
Chitral [Food] Catalytic

Nawisht ECD and Daycare
Chitral [Education] Catalytic

Wakhmat Farming
Shigar, Baltistan [Smart Agriculture] Early-Stage

Kai Café
Chitral town [Food & Hospitality] Early-Stage

Natural Foods and Fruits
Chitral [Food] Catalytic

Step-Up Ademia
Gilgit [ICT / Digital Skills] Early-Stage

Rakaposhi Verdant Delights
Nagar [Food] Early-Stage

Bolain Kiya Chahiye (BKC)
Skardu [Delivery Services] Early-Stage

Hunza Theme Park
Gilgit [Tourism] Early-Stage

Royal Resorts & Fish Farms
Khaplu, Baltistan [Tourism] Catalytic

Earthalene
Chitral [Agriculture] Catalytic

Chinaar (Chinar House Resorts)
Chitral [Tourism] Catalytic

Makistan
Gilgit [ICT / STEM Education] Catalytic

PosturePro Care
Gilgit [Health] Catalytic

Himalayan Pickle
Gilgit [Food] Catalytic

Karim Fish Farm
Gupis, Ghizer [Fishery] Catalytic

Cosmos Scent
Shigar, Baltistan [Fashion / Fragrance] Catalytic

Spantik Looms (jeans.pk)
Gilgit [Fashion] Catalytic

Concordia Sports
Gilgit [Fashion / Sportswear] Catalytic

Meher-e-Khun
Yasin, Ghizer [Experiential Tourism] Catalytic

Yasin Garlic
Taus, Yasin [Smart, Experiential Tourism] Catalytic

THE HARVEST

BEST4WEER Impact at a Glance

734

Entrepreneurs provided with training and advisory across Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral

489

Women entrepreneurs, 67% of everyone BEST4WEER reached

349

Businesses supported through incubation programmes

$53.23K

Catalytic financial support disbursed (USD)

98

Businesses that received early-stage technical assistance funds and catalytic funds

114

Businesses taken through the acceleration programme

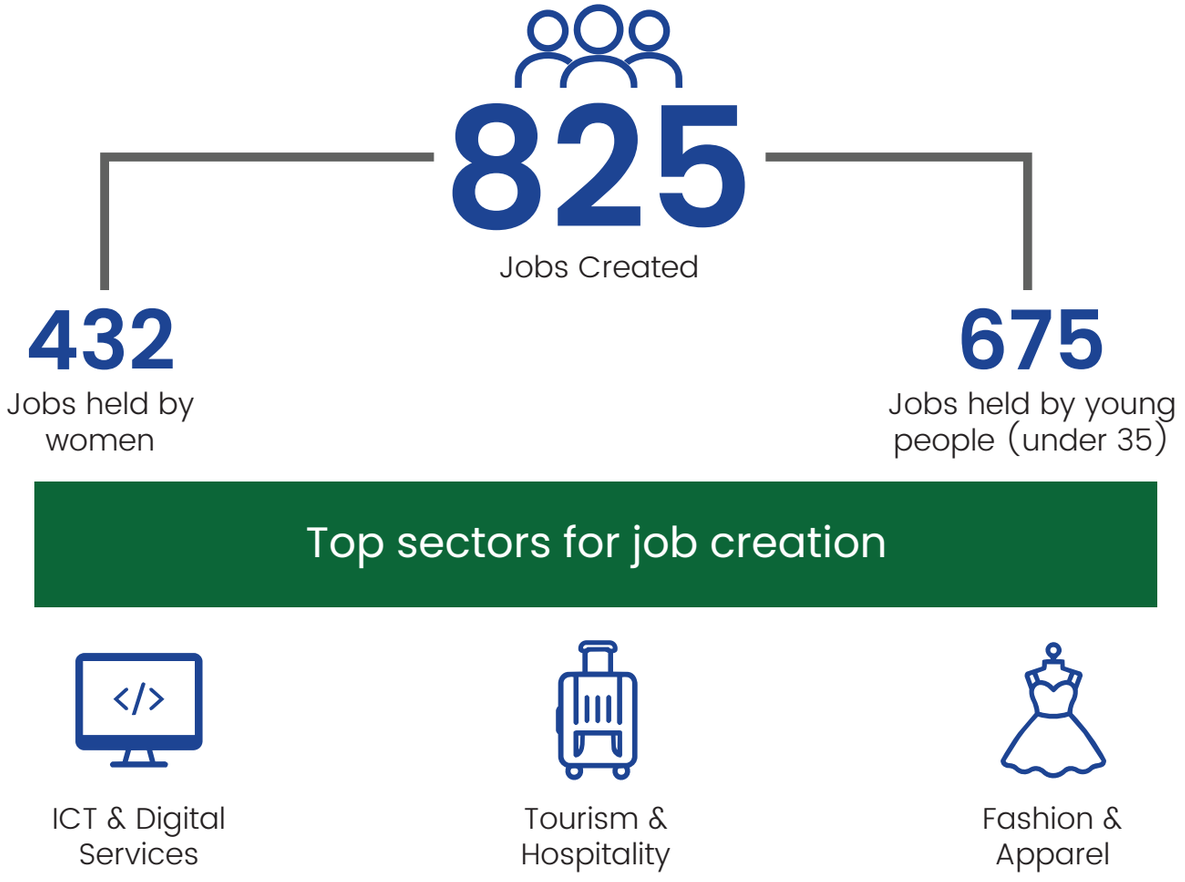
80–82%

Businesses reported positive impact on their performance (Incubation/Acceleration)

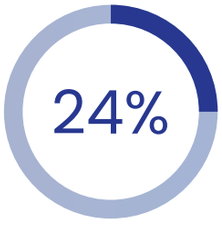
77

Businesses that raised external financing

Impact That Reaches Beyond Business



PKR 248.8M External Financing Leveraged

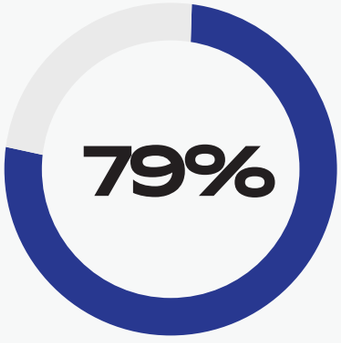


Of the total leveraged investment secured under the project was raised by youth-led businesses, while more established entrepreneurs attracted the remaining share.



Of the total leveraged investment secured under the project was raised by women-founded or women co-founded businesses.

GROWTH METRICS

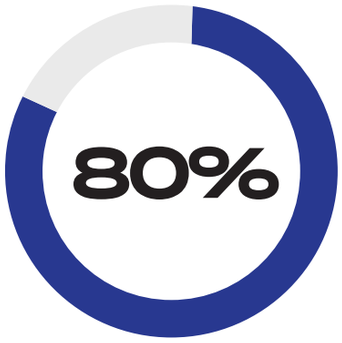


Nearly 8 in 10 Businesses Increased their sales after receiving programme support.

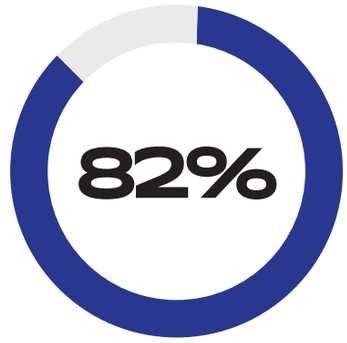
Young entrepreneurs emerged as the fastest-growing group, with 83% reporting increased sales, compared with 67% of entrepreneurs aged 35 and above.

84% of male-owned businesses reported revenue growth, compared with 74% of female-owned, highlighting both the progress achieved and the opportunity to further strengthen support for women-led enterprises.

906 Rural Producers Reached by Supported Businesses



80% of incubation programme businesses reported positive impact on business performance



82% of acceleration programme businesses reported positive impact on business performance

NATIONAL FOOTPRINT
(AS OF AUGUST, 2026)

4,013
Full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs created

149
Businesses financed

$3.74M
Total Investment

$18.32M
Total external investment leveraged

2,306
Entrepreneurs provided with training and advisory

OUR GLOBAL FOOTPRINT
(AS OF AUGUST, 2026)

10,395
Full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs created

729
Businesses financed

$18.09M
Total Investment

$64.62M
Total external investment leveraged

8,896
Entrepreneurs provided with training and advisory

The Accelerate Prosperity programme has played a significant role in the growth of my business. Through its training, mentorship, and expert guidance, I gained valuable knowledge about business planning, marketing, and financial management. The programme also strengthened the foundation of my brand, Reen's Tales of Hunza. As a result, I have been able to expand my business, reach a wider audience and move closer to achieving my long-term vision."

— Ambreen Liaqat, Founder,
Reen's Tales of Hunza



Accelerate Prosperity played a key role in helping us digitize our startup by providing practical guidance and valuable mentorship. Their support in marketing, financial management, and account maintenance helped us build a stronger foundation and grow our business with confidence. We truly appreciate their continuous support throughout our journey."

— Asim Ali, CEO, EasyDrop





Javeria Fayyaz

"Through its mentoring, financing, and learning opportunities, AP has helped my business grow in a short period of time. Its support in connecting me with like-minded entrepreneurs has strengthened my vision and confidence as a founder."

— Javeria Fayyaz, Founder, Earthalene



We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Accelerate Prosperity for their valuable financial support and the 5-day training programme they provided. The training helped us gain a better understanding of business management, planning, and market analysis. We learned important skills about running and growing a business effectively. Their support and guidance have played a significant role in the growth of our company. Thank you for your trust, encouragement, and continuous support."

— Shamshad Khan,
CEO and Co-founder, Leading Star

STORIES IN MOTION

PROOF OF POSSIBLE: THE PROSPERITY EFFECT

is a video series that brings to life the stories, experiences, and impact of BEST4WEER, showcasing how its work is expanding possibilities across the region.

1

LITTLE ANGELS DAY CARE CENTRE

Daycare, Education and Nutrition Under One Roof

2

UMEED SPORTS & ARTS CENTER

Creating a Space for Healthy Activity, Regardless of Age or Gender

3

BOLAIN KIYA CHAHIYE

How a Foodpanda Rider Revolutionised Delivery in Skardu

4

BIRENO FOODS

Shahab Left a Food Processing Job to Bring Ancestral Organic Food to Local Markets

5

RURAL ARCHITECTURE STUDIO (ORA)

Redefining Modern Living Through Ancient Architectural Wisdom

PODCASTS

INNOVATION IN ACTION

a podcast series featuring star entrepreneurs through deep, candid conversations exploring their journeys, ideas, challenges, and the innovations shaping the future.

1

Leading Star

Five women gave up their teaching jobs, took a bold leap of faith, and chose to build the dream they believed in most: their own Early Childhood Development initiative. Driven by purpose and passion, they are not only creating safe and nurturing spaces for young learners, but also transforming how early education is imagined and delivered in their community. Their journey is a powerful reminder that when women lead with vision, courage, and commitment, they do not just build institutions, they shape futures.

2

PosturePro Care Physical Therapy

Saleem Shehzad, a physiotherapist working in the city identified a major gap in Gilgit-Baltistan: patients often had to travel long distances for basic care, bearing physical, financial, and emotional burdens just to seek treatment in bigger cities. He decided it was time to bring care closer to home. His wife, Dilsoroor, joined him as a partner and co-founder, helping turn that idea into reality.

3

Rural Architecture Studio

Discover how ORA Studio (Rural Architecture Studio) is redefining modern living through ancient architectural wisdom. From rammed earth walls to stabilized mud blocks, they are building homes that are sustainable, cost-effective, and designed for real climates, not just trends.

4

Aks-e-Zulikha

Shakila Bano, founder of Aks-e-Zulaikha, saw a need in Gilgit that no one was addressing. In a male-dominated industry where women had limited access to professional event coverage they felt comfortable with, she recognized the gap and set out to change it. Starting as an editor alongside senior photographers, she built her skills, took a bold leap by investing her dowry savings in her first camera, and turned her passion into a profession.

5

Kai Café

In this inspiring episode, Abida Sharif, founder of Kai Café, shares her remarkable journey of resilience, determination, and entrepreneurship. From struggling to find a shop, overcoming societal barriers and criticism, to building a successful café brand, her story is proof that persistence can turn dreams into reality.

ROOTS OF OWNERSHIP

Accelerate Prosperity observed that women's participation in training sessions and business operations was strong from the outset, yet many lacked the confidence to claim legal ownership due to the informal nature of business structures. Following investment readiness advisory, women began asserting their legal shares, thereby strengthening their decision-making power and ensuring they were recognized as co-owners rather than employees within their own enterprises. This marked a significant step toward genuine economic independence.

RAIN REACHING NEW GROUND

The programme facilitated a shift in women's roles from passive contributors to active leaders, claiming their space in decision-making alongside husbands, brothers, and fathers. This reflects a cultural shift toward acceptance of women as independent entrepreneurs in male-dominated environments.

DIFFERENT SOILS, DIFFERENT GROWTH

We observed that younger women entrepreneurs increasingly competed on the basis of business ideas and models rather than gender quotas, and showed greater openness to professional partnerships with male colleagues. Their ventures in formal, scalable sectors such as IT, tourism, and fashion, supported by formal education, enabled them to operate professionally and pursue growth. Older women entrepreneurs, by contrast, remained concentrated in labour-intensive sectors such as agriculture and handicrafts, often within family or women-only structures. While these provided sustainability, scalability remained constrained by limited skillsets and exposure to standard business practices. This generational divide highlights both progress and the need for targeted support.

A CHANGE IN THE WEATHER

The most profound transformation observed was the shift from job-seeking to entrepreneurship. Youth entrepreneurs, particularly women, embraced risk-taking and innovation, moving away from dependency on traditional employment. Women who previously hesitated to assert themselves began negotiating financing and claiming ownership. Men increasingly recognized women as equal partners in business. Entrepreneurship thus became not only an economic pathway but also a means of reshaping identity and social norms.

AFTER THE RAIN

From our perspective, BEST4WEER has delivered measurable economic outcomes while catalyzing visible cultural and social change. Women are claiming ownership, youth are leading in scalable sectors, and entrepreneurship is increasingly defined by merit and innovation. The challenge ahead lies in bridging the generational gap, supporting older women entrepreneurs to overcome scalability barriers, while sustaining the momentum of younger entrepreneurs who are redefining the economic and social fabric of Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral.

WHERE THE RAIN MUST FALL NEXT

- Growth is uneven. Among the 734 entrepreneurs supported in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral, early-stage ventures need deeper roots: incubation, market access, and sustained advisory. Growth-stage ventures need acceleration: larger capital, investment readiness; access this terrain has long denied them.
- Scaled investment would not just grow businesses. It would build an ecosystem: local incubation capacity, an investable pipeline, a generation that builds here instead of leaving.
  The lesson is clear. Geography and gender constraints are not barriers to enterprise. They are conditions. BEST4WEER shows what the right conditions unlock.
- The soil is proven. What it needs now is not more rain but partners committed to the harvest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible by the dedication and courage of 734 entrepreneurs across Gilgit-Baltistan & Chitral, who opened their businesses, their stories, and their ambitions to this documentation.

BEST4WEER is funded by the Government of Canada and the Aga Khan Foundation in Canada (AKF-C) and implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation in Pakistan (AKF-P), through Aga Khan Rural Support Programme(AKRSP) and Accelerate Prosperity (AP).

Report Development

This report was developed by Sania Tahir, Marketing Lead, and Savaila Jamil, Data and Insights Lead, with valuable contributions from:

Eisha Zeb, Program and Technical Assistance Manager
Erum Fatima, Business Sustainability Lead
Madiha Baig, Assistant Manager Marketing

Photography

Landscape photography: Bilal Farooq Khan
Cover image: Muhammad Taqi Hyder

Bilal Farooq Khan and Muhammad Taqi Hyder are photography enthusiasts from the Accelerate Prosperity team.

Production Services: Rockwood Productions


accelerate
prosperity

