

Sustainability in Changla Gali

Giving back to the community:

Mountain School Trust

The Mountain School Trust (MST) was established in 2007 in Changla Gali as a non-profit initiative, by four individuals, who are deeply committed and dedicated to the pursuit of helping others. Though initially, the primary focus was to provide free education for the children of Batnara (a small village in lower Changla Gali), the MST also initiated various other community projects with an aim towards sustainability. The details are as follows:



(Left) Approach to Hamza Public School, Changla Gali. (Right) Playground and classrooms, Hamza Public School, Changla Gali – Photos credit: Saleema Hamid

1. Hamza Public School:

- **Information** – The aim: to provide free education entirely (to children who previously never had an opportunity to go school), including school books, complete uniform and any other required educational material. The villagers provided land for Hamza Public School (HPS) which was funded and constructed by the MST. Currently there are a 120 students between Nursery to Grade 8, seven teachers and one care taker of the premises. Earlier numerous batches appeared for the SSC exams, but this could not be sustained due to shortage of resources. For many years, the school’s funding was raised through donations enabling it to operate without charge. In 2006(?) in light of deteriorating economic conditions a token charge of Rs10 per student was imposed.
- **Affiliations** – The Trust is affiliated with: • *Ministry of Social Welfare & Special Education* • *Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF)* • *Association for Academic Quality*, and • *Nestle` Pakistan*
- **Adoption by Silver Oaks** – In the need to improving HPS’s educational standard, the MST reached out to the well-established Silver Oaks Schools and College institution. Senior educationalists visited HPS on a pro-bono basis in June 2022, and drew up a comprehensive [report](#), detailing recommendations for academic improvement, adding on additional tertiary skills and suggesting a more appropriate allocation of space. The MST is very grateful to Silver Oaks for generously offering their support for teacher training as highlighted below:



(Above and below) Classrooms at Hamza Public School, Changla Gali. Photos Credit: Saleema Hamid

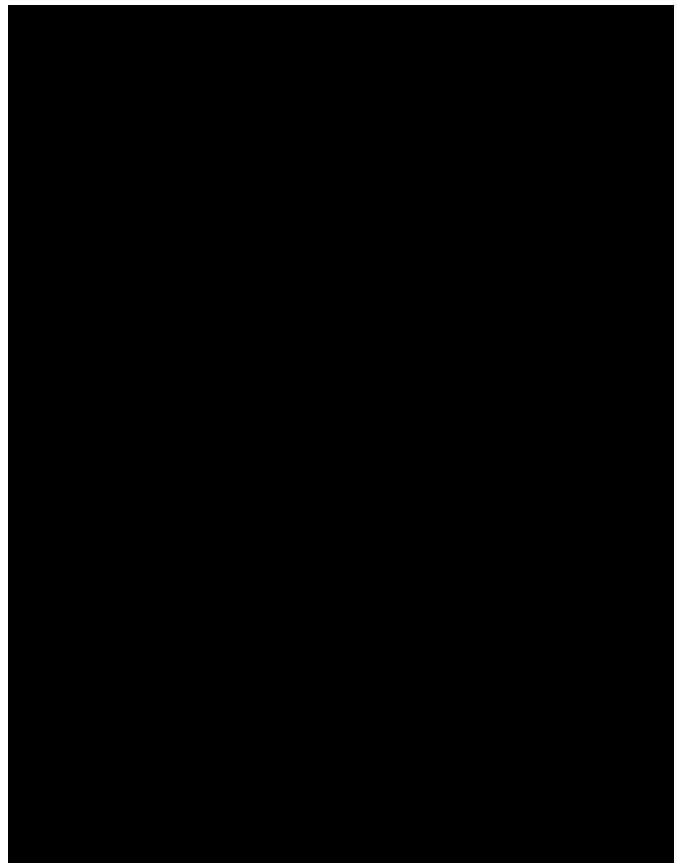
“Silver Oaks hereby offers to adopt Hamza Public School for hybrid in-person workshop based combined with virtual teacher’s training contributing 36 in-person training hours (2-day visits 3 times a year – 36 hours) followed by 36 hours of virtual re-enforcement training and online support.” - Silver Oaks Schools and College

- Sewing Center:** A sewing center with 6 sewing machines was established to empower local women with stitching skills enabling them to earn and for their households to benefit from additional income. A three month long course is taught for machine stitching.



(Left, right above and right below) Sewing Center at Hamza Public School, Changla Gali – Photos Credit: Saleema Hamid

- Tree Plantation:** Aligned with previous individual efforts, the MST also purchased and freely distributed 1500 fruit plants (peaches, apricots, pomegranates and apples) over a span of three years, to local families. This two-fold endeavor was aimed at improving the environment as well as benefitting residents through fruit yields – for their personal use and for an additional income stream.
- Water Reservoirs for Spring Water (locally known as chashmay ka pani):** – This is the only free source for cleaning drinking water for the community. However, environmental degradation, altering weather patterns, reduced precipitation and uncertain snow levels, led to a dire need for repairing old reservoirs and the need to build new ones. The MST constructed reservoirs for three natural water springs - two along the road side used by residents, tourists and local hotels; and the third supplies water into the large water tank (also constructed by the MST) within the school premises. This tank also serves as a water supply for the nearby village.
- Healthcare:** For three years, the MST arranged for free health camps. These camps were set up once a month and provided the much needed basic healthcare facilities without any charge.



(Above) Water reservoir supplying water to the school and the nearby houses in the village, lower Changla Gali. (Below) Tree plantations don
Photo Credits:

Together we thrive and prosper:

Strong communities thrive and prosper together. Every individual has talent, but the lack of opportunity impedes its development. We have learnt that to induce real change with a goal towards sustainability, it is imperative to create equal opportunity through education, provide for and maintain healthcare, connect with experts, and have access to skills.

Every child deserves the opportunity to learn and has a right to education. Going to school provides them with hope of a future filled with abundant opportunities ensuring better lives. Despite difficulties, dedicated parents continue to send their children to school, devoted teachers carry on to impart knowledge, but above all, young dreamers persevere every day eager to learn. It is only when our communities thrive, our societies will prosper.

The MST is a non-profit initiative, and its efforts together with the local community, have been sustained through donations. Over the last many years our donors - regular and one-time - have helped and encouraged us with their generous donations. You may also like to visit our Trust website at <http://www.themountaintrust.org> for further details.

Please consider giving your one-time or monthly donations, zakat and sadqah for any of the options listed below:

- * School uniform
- * School work books
- * Salaries of teaching staff
- * Canteen / food support for children
- * Upgradation of school
- * Sewing machines
- * Sewing material
- * Volunteering time (workshops, teaching skills, training)

The following short video highlights the activities at HPS:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/13q21vcEmo2BXmp9l979G0tC6JRARPh0x/view>.

The location of the school is given below: **Image of location to be added**



An Urdu teacher conducting a test, Changla Gali – Photo Credit: Saleema Hamid



A third grade student at Hamza Public School, Changla Gali.
Photo Credit: Saleema Hamid

Others community efforts:

Changla Sourdough at The Round House:



Bagels made in the Changla Sourdough brick oven.
Photos Credit: Umar Aslam

Ayeza, a practicing nutritionist and founder of *Changla Sourdough*, has a small team employed from the local community for her bread baking company – which operates from The Round House in Changla Gali. This exclusive bed-and-breakfast (listed on Airbnb) is popular amongst expats and vacationers from all over the country. It has many unique features – such as: the centrality of the hearth; stunning views of the valley; rainwater harvesting for sustainability; and a self-constructed brick oven which bakes scrumptious delights – including the *Changla Sourdough*. This nutritious whole wheat bread is served to the guests at The Round House and also delivered fresh to customers in Islamabad.

“We are working to build a connection to the place through bread and aim to develop a new local craft”

– Ayeza Umar, master baker and founder of Changla Sourdough

Ayeza hopes to expand her bread baking business in the future, by setting up similar ovens in the village and engaging more locals from the community. She believes that teaching of skills will create more job opportunities, and thereby providing other avenues of additional income for the people of Changla Gali.

Saleema’s Workshop:

“Art helps me make sense of this world. It's meditative and yet it's a visual narrative to communicate and connect with.”

– Saleema Hamid

Saleema is a near-native of Changla Gali, whose intrinsic love for the mountains, steers her uphill in all seasons. She spends her time hiking with her dogs, making art, and being engaged with the community in various capacities. Currently she is planning skill building workshops, where she intends to collaborate with the locals in art and wood projects, with the aim of community enhancement through art.



Figgo in Saleema's Workshop, Changla Gali – Photo Credit: Saleema Hamid



When not in her workshop, Saleema is found hiking in the mountains of Changla Gali
Photo Credit: Mohammad Nawaz

“My workshop is a traveling one as I am consumed by wanderlust and creativity. I collect driftwood from the shores of Lake Superior to the raging rivers of the Himalayas and the Karakorum. What eventually transpires with these driftwood pieces is unknown to me at the time but there is as much pleasure in wandering the wilderness collecting treasures, as there is to work with them and make art.”

– Saleema Hamid

Changla Gali and my connection

Nestled within the Himalayas at an elevation of [2522m \(8274 feet\)](#), Changla Gali's immeasurable beauty begets a silent, spiritual wonder from travellers fortunate to visit this paradise. It is situated in the Galiyat region of Pakistan between Khaira Gali and Kuza Gali.

My family's connection to this region dates back to the early 1950s. My grandfather, Retd MG Syed Shahid Hamid's love for the mountains led him to discover Changla Gali, which he then frequented every summer with his family. On one trip, stopping for tea and asking the locals for a picnic spot, the family was led uphill on a pathway then edged by potato beds. It was this very location, where our second family home - using the buried remains of a pre-WWII hotel - was built and has been lived-in through generations.

In times of British Raj the Galiyats had Cantonments, which were residential settlements for families of British Officers. Providing respite from heat of the plains and mosquitoes, these hill stations kept illness at bay. Post partition, the army transferred these settlements to the Galiyat Development Authority (GDA) and later with more road development accessibility increased, steadily multiplying the number of travellers to the mountains. This has certainly brought prosperity to the region, but simultaneously endangering the natural habitat as well.

My grandfather's love for this place has passed down generations. My father, Syed Hassan Hamid, who I consider very much a 'local' has spent years of summer, along with numerous winter trips at his second childhood home. A dwelling that embraces all with endless love, freeing them of worldly worries, allowing souls to 'just be' while absorbing the splendor of Changla Gali. Following in ancestral footsteps, my father, has regularly collaborated with locals in the effort to give back to the community. From planting hundreds of trees yearly, primarily Bankoar (the local chestnut) extending 2 to 3 miles either side of Changla Gali, to repairing and constructing water reservoirs on various chasmas (the natural spring waterways) for easy accessibility to clean drinking water, he eventually realized his dream of starting the first school in Changla Gali with the help of like-minded friends.



Sunset splendor (Changla Gali) – Photo Credit: Saleema Hamid



Our family home in Changla Gali – Photo Credit: Saleema Hamid



(Left) My father's love of gardening, flowerbeds around the house. (Center) Abba (my father) in his favourite spot inside the house. (Right) Sunset across the Changla garden. Photo Credits: (Left and center) Suraiya Anvery; (Right) Saleema Hamid