



Remoteness

Basho valley is a rather remote area in the Western Himalayan mountain range. From Islamabad it is a two day drive by car. The first part of the journey follows the KKH along the ancient silk route to China, and later one turns east, following the gorge of the Indus river towards the disputed border with India.



About 40 km before one comes to Skardu, the administrative capital of the Northern Areas, Basho valley stretches from the south side of the river Indus at 2150 m.a.s. to the high pastures at 4500 m.a.s.

This is the bridge over the River Indus one has to cross to enter Basho valley.



The main livelihood of the villagers is farming. Most men, however, participate as well in casual labor on the construction of irrigation channels, some earn money as carpenters in local house construction, a few men and women work as shopkeepers.

Nazimabad, one of the 8 villages in Basho Valley.



People keep animals like cows, dzomo (mixture between cow and yak) goats and sheep mainly for milk production and for cash. Examples of crops they cultivate are cabbage, turnips, potatoes, peas, maize and wheat. Due to the high altitude no fruit trees are found in this upper village, but farther down they have almonds, plums and mulberries.

Some houses in Sultanabad, the highest village situated in the valley. The whole village has around 30 households.



School

The valley has several schools, the one in the highest village was opened in 1999. Both boys and girls attend this school.

When we went and asked them what they would like to become when they grew up, the answers varied between teacher and religious leader. In the older group, some wanted to become a doctor. I assume that pilots and fire men have not crossed their paths yet.



The position of women

Basho Valley is a very conservative place when the position of women is considered. Many have never left the valley, meaning they have never watched TV, driven a car or bike, talked on the phone, been to a city market etc.

Roles and responsibilities of the women are however changing, especially since more and more men leave the valley to find work in the city. Women take over responsibilities on the farm which involve many new challenges both for women and men.



Infrastructure

Since 1968 there is a road, suitable for jeeps and bigger vehicles, from the river all the way up to the last village in the valley. This road has made it easier to get goods into the valley but also out of the valley (see articles on deforestation). The valley has its own hydro-electric plant, providing enough electricity for some light bulbs.





Drinking water

Most villages have piped drinking water, sometimes even into the houses. Sultanabad was the last village in Basho to get piped water. The village was small and the establishment costs high. In 2005 the women's organisation in Sultanabad had finally saved enough money and the local water authorities were constructing a water basin and pipelines.



A man at his summer shelter in Thalley valley

People

The early origins of the people in Baltistan have an interesting place in history. Being in the path of ancient trade routes in the region, including the famous silk route, Baltistan has a mixture of people of different origins. The main group, however is of Mongolian descent which most likely was a result of early Tibetan settlers as well as a wave of control from Tibet in the east through Ladakh. The local language, Balti, is in fact an old Tibetan dialect.

For more information see PhD thesis from Ingrid Nyborg



People

In Basho, the people in the lower villages speak Balti as their first language, but in the upper villages people speak Shina. This phenomenon of Shina speakers in upper villages can be found along the entire stretch of Baltistan's southern range which borders Astore. One explanation is that migration occurred due to easy access from Astore over the Deosai Plains into the valleys of Baltistan. Others say the Shina were placed there by rulers to guard the valleys from attack from the mountain passes.

A father with two of his children



Natural resources

Hundreds of kilometres of man-made irrigation channels irrigate the agricultural land with melt water from the glaciers and snow.



Raja system

Until 1972 the Raja, or princes, ruled over the northern areas. After the abolishment of the princely states, peasants were liberated from work and rent obligations deriving from the princes' ownership of most of the land. The State, however, was hardly prepared to take over land registration, conflict resolution and different juridical, cultural and security services provided by the Raja system. Raja governing structures and former local officers still play an important part in many villages' institutional life. Rajas are still big landowners today, hiring out their land to peasants - often in a 50/50 share of crops.



Fortress of Shigar