

Thrive Impact Foundation

Community and Institutional Consultations in Upper Hunza

Consultations Report 2026

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1. Executive Summary



Thrive Impact Foundation is developing a solar-powered facility in Ghulkin, Upper Hunza, to produce cold-pressed oil from sea buckthorn, the Golden Berry, with women at the centre of collection, processing and leadership. As part of its continuing engagement in the area, Thrive has held a series of consultations with the families providing the site, with local experts and with the community institutions through which much of Upper Hunza organises its collective life.

Three messages came through consistently. First, the proposed site in Ghulkin can accommodate a compact processing facility, provided it is designed around a reliable three-phase solar system rather than the local grid. Second, communities and experts expect any initiative involving local resources to demonstrate, clearly and early, that its value will remain in the region. Third, Upper Hunza already has strong institutions, including the Gulmit Organization for Local Development (GOLD) and the Shimshal Nature Trust, through which engagement, data collection and participation can be organised.

The consultations also highlighted practical constraints that the project must plan for: land ownership and the status of land reform, the permissions required from the Deputy Commissioner's office, the difficulty community producers face in reaching wider markets, and the need for a fair, incentive-based system for buying berries from collectors.

This report summarises what was heard, sets out the key findings, and identifies the actions Thrive will take as a result.

2. Introduction and Context

Sea buckthorn grows wild across Gilgit-Baltistan, yet most of its value has historically left the region or not been realised at all. Thrive's proposed facility seeks to change this by buying berries directly from collectors, most of them women, and processing them locally using renewable energy.

A facility of this kind depends as much on social foundations as on physical ones. Its success will rest on the trust of landowning families, the support of community institutions, the knowledge of local experts and the willingness of households to take part. Thrive has therefore prioritised consultation before design, and continues to engage with stakeholders in Ghulkin, Nagar, Gulmit and Aliabad through its project lead in Ghulkin, Ms. Zahida, and its site office in Gulmit.

3. Objectives of the Consultations

The consultations summarised in this report had four objectives:

1. To assess the technical and operational feasibility of the proposed facility site in Ghulkin, including its layout and energy supply.
2. To understand local perspectives on sea buckthorn and on externally initiated projects in Gilgit-Baltistan.
3. To identify the community institutions through which engagement, participation and data collection can be organised.
4. To learn from existing community-based enterprises about value addition, market access and fair procurement.

4. Site Assessment in Ghulkin



4.1 Site and Layout

The proposed site, offered by Mr. Waziraman and Ms. Zahida, measures approximately 80 by 30 feet. It was assessed with Thrive's solar energy consultant, Mr. Muhammad Saeed, with particular attention to the placement of the building and solar panels in relation to the available area and sunlight. The assessment concluded that the site can accommodate the following functional spaces:

- A reinforced machine hall
- Separate storage for raw material
- Storage for finished oil
- An office
- A bathroom and a changing room



Mr. Waziraman in the orchards of Ghulkin.

4.2 Energy Supply

The local electricity supply was tested on site. Following the assessment, it was agreed that the facility will be planned around a three-phase solar system, which can run the processing machinery reliably and reduce dependence on an unreliable grid. Technical specifications for the solar and processing set-up will be finalised following further assessment.



Testing the electricity supply in Ghulkin.

5. Local Expertise and Community Perspectives

In Nagar, Thrive representatives, accompanied by Mr. Waziraman and Ms. Zahida, consulted Mr. Faizi, a botanist familiar with the region's plants. The proposed initiative and its community-focused approach were presented.

Two issues were emphasised. The first was the need for greater local awareness of the potential of sea buckthorn. The second was a concern that external projects in Gilgit-Baltistan have at times generated value without sufficiently benefiting local communities. The discussion underlined the importance of meaningful community participation and visible local benefit.

Mr. Faizi expressed willingness to assist where required, while retaining some reservations about implementation. Thrive regards these reservations as a useful test of its approach and will continue the dialogue as plans develop.

6. Working Through Community Institutions

6.1 The Institutional Landscape in Gulmit

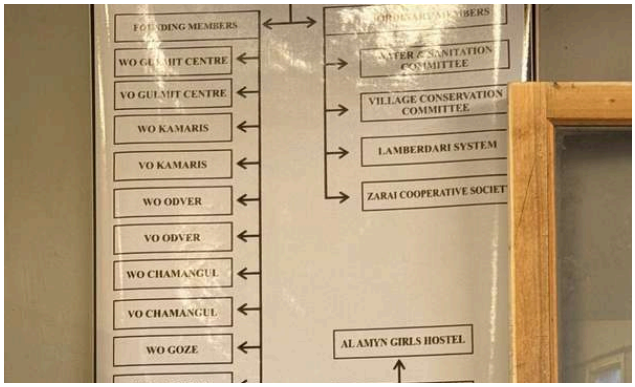
Thrive met Mr. Afzal, President of the Gulmit Organization for Local Development (GOLD). GOLD brings together village organisations, women's organisations, youth and student bodies and the Zarai Cooperative Society, among others, and provides a recognised channel for community engagement in Gulmit.



The Thrive team with Mr. Afzal, President of GOLD, and hosts outside GOLD's office in Gulmit.

6.2 Land and Resource Considerations

Land ownership and the current status of land reform in Gilgit-Baltistan were discussed as important factors for implementation. A meeting with the Zarai Cooperative Society was proposed, in view of its relationship with local landowners. The availability and quality of sea buckthorn between Attabad Lake and the Chapursan Valley were also highlighted. Existing private-sector engagement in the region, including PepsiCo's work with potato growers, was noted as a relevant precedent.



GOLD's organisational network, displayed at its office in Gulmit.

6.3 Communication and Engagement

Participants stressed the need to communicate the project's purpose, vision and goals clearly. It was proposed that Thrive prepare a presentation setting out its objectives, the project vision, the proposed community model and its intended outcomes, for circulation to other committees and societies through GOLD.

7. Lessons from Community-Based Enterprise

In Aliabad, Thrive consulted Mr. Karim of the Shimshal Nature Trust on community-based conservation and economic initiatives in Hunza, particularly in Shimshal, and on the role of local trusts in conservation, tourism and community development.

7.1 Value Addition and Market Access

The opportunities and challenges of producing value-added products from local resources, including jams, oils, powders and herbal products, were discussed. Market access emerged as the principal constraint: community producers find it difficult to reach markets beyond the region. Market linkages and exhibitions for medicinal herbs and berry products, including potential markets in China and Saudi Arabia, were identified as areas to explore.

7.2 Participation and Procurement

The discussion covered community participation, including the role of women in collection and production; organisational structures and household participation; data collection; partnerships; and registration and permissions. Incentive-based mechanisms for procuring berries were discussed as a way of encouraging collection while ensuring fair returns to collectors.

8. Key Findings

Key findings from the consultations

Site feasibility
The Ghulkin site can accommodate a compact facility; a three-phase solar system is required.

Local benefit
Communities and experts expect clear evidence that value will remain in the region.

Institutions
GOLD and community trusts offer established channels for engagement and data.

Land
Land ownership and land reform must be addressed early, working with the Zarai Cooperative Society.

Markets
Market access, not production, is the main constraint for community producers.

Procurement
A fair, incentive-based buying system is central to participation.

9. Next Steps

Action	Purpose
Finalise the facility layout for the Ghulkin site and design the three-phase solar system	Complete technical planning
Prepare a presentation of Thrive's objectives, vision, community model and outcomes	Engage committees and societies through GOLD
Follow up with the Zarai Cooperative Society	Strengthen links with communities and landowners
Collect household and pasture data	Establish the evidence base for planning
Obtain the required permissions from the Deputy Commissioner's office	Meet regulatory requirements
Design an incentive-based berry procurement system	Ensure fair returns and encourage collection
Explore market linkages and exhibitions for berry and herbal products	Address market access
Observe harvesting during the September to November season	Understand collection on the ground
Continue engagement with Mr. Faizi and other local experts	Draw on local technical knowledge

10. Conclusion

The consultations confirm that the proposed facility is technically feasible and that Upper Hunza has the institutions, knowledge and community networks needed to support it. They also make clear that the project's legitimacy will depend on how visibly and fairly its benefits reach local people. Thrive will continue to work through local institutions, keep communities informed and build the project with, rather than for, the people of Upper Hunza.



The Thrive team with hosts in Upper Hunza.

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