

Language and Governance in Gilgit-Baltistan: Introduction, Background and Issues
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Abstract

As the Chair of the panel on “Language and Governance”, my paper introduces the panel topic, provides contextual and scholarly background for the panel and identifies common themes and issues addressed by the panel. The panel includes local graduate student scholars of three languages of Gilgit-Baltistan; Burushaski, Balti and Shina. The papers center on questions of identity and indigenous knowledge systems and their interaction with larger social and political structures operating in Gilgit-Baltistan. The fluid political status of Gilgit-Baltistan within Pakistan and as disputed space between Pakistan and India focuses state and regional pressure on Gilgit-Baltistan’s ethno-linguistic communities that tends to obscure their own self-representations. Their responses to homogenizing state and regional pressures, as discussed in the panel papers, highlight the role of indigenous peoples’ knowledge and practices in the discourse on participatory governance and contribute to an understanding of the relation of local representations of legitimacy in a disputed territory with the processes of policy making in and about Gilgit-Baltistan. The panel as a whole addresses the important question of collaborative integration of multiple knowledge systems into processes for improved decision-making and problem-solving toward the promotion of sustainable self-determination and human rights, or, to put it simply, the sensitive topic of law and governance in a disputed and multi-cultural multi-lingual territory.