

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF YOUTH AND MOTHERS/WOMEN FOR PEACE BUILDING AND SOCIAL COHESION



**Small Grants (SG) Project assigned to TOLANA Members
'To promote social cohesion among Communities for peaceful coexistence' through Interactive Street Theatre. SG-5**

Group Members: Muhammad Kabir (Group Leader), Muhammad Bilal, Ihtisham, Iftikhar Ahmad, Salman, Ismail, Jawad, Tahseen and Muhammad Talha

Project Duration : 1st Jan-15th Feb, 2016

Area: District Charsadda

Beneficiaries:
Direct: 500 Community members Including Youth, School and Madrassa Students
In-direct: 2,500 through IEC material dissemination

Background :

It is evident that for the last two decades Pakistan is facing waves of violent extremism which has immensely affected the lives of people in various ways. People have suffered human loss, live in constant fear, encounter hatred and intolerance among communities as a result of fiery sermons by religious leaders. The whole country is faced with the menace of violent extremism, but the situation in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa is the worst as this region has become the main target of violent extremism which has resulted in loss of thousands of lives including school and university students and women/men. There are thousands of helpless families, desperate children with no future, and widows with burden of large families living in these areas. Infrastructure has been ruined, businesses and properties have been destroyed and there is a negative change visible in the social behavior of the people as they have become self centered and have a selfish approach. Escalation of intolerant attitude in the society is visible and people are suffering

About PAIMAN:

PAIMAN started work in 2008 on an initiative "Lets Live in Peace" in the most affected region with the objective to empower communities to counter violent extremism in the region. PAIMAN trained a large number of selected youth and mothers (Women) as peace activists to bring a positive change at grass root level under different projects. These trained peace practitioners are called "TOLANA". TOLANA is a Pashto word which means "Together". It means group or collection of likeminded volunteers and activist for collective initiatives to bring positive change in society through addressing various aspects of prevalent violent extremism. The capacity of TOLANA members has been built as an ongoing process.

mental and psychological disorders specifically the youth. In district Charsadda people do not have access to many modes of entertainment. Survey results show that people would like more forms of entertainment introduced in the region. Performing arts such as stage and street theatres has a proven history of being the most effective forms of entertainment that have been used through centuries to convey intended messages to large audiences. Theatre performances are uncommon in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa compared to other provinces where there are dedicated Theatre halls and audiences well familiar with. Theatre is very powerful tool for raising awareness and to motivate people.

PAIMAN announced present small grant project, which was part of a project funded by ICAN with the objective to counter violent extremism. Many groups of selected TOLANA members including old members and newly trained TOLANA members were invited by PAIMAN for advance training. During the advance training the TOLANA's

capacity was built in proposal writing skills. After completing training the TOLANA groups put their skills to test and wrote project proposals and submitted them to PAIMAN. After review of the proposals, the shortlisted proposals were awarded grants. One of the proposals which focused on conducting street theatres for raising awareness in communities regarding social cohesion and peaceful co-existence was selected for the grant. Mr. Kabir from Charsadda led this group.

Interactive Theatre has always proven to be a communication technique to convey message effectively to targeted audience in simple, understandable and concise form. It also has an element of entertainment as well which attracts the interest of the audience. On the basis of these facts TOLANA group decided to submit project of creating awareness among communities of Charsadda through interactive street Theatre.

Project Objectives:

- To sensitize the communities of district charsadda through interactive street Theatre performances on social cohesion, tolerance, peace and interfaith harmony.
- To build the capacity of selected TOLANA members of Khyber agency in the art of theatre performances skills.

Themes: Three themes were selected around which theatre shows were to be performed. They were peace education, inclusion of women in building social cohesion as early warner's and social and religious cohesion.

Stages of The Project:

The Interactive theatre had three stages;

First stage:

The first stage was the preparatory stage in which stage and environment was set. People were invited to see the spectacle by beating drums.

Second stage:

During the second stage the theatrical performance was actually staged. Each character appeared on stage in full getup and delivered their part thus conveying the required message.

Third Stage:

The third stage was the last stage in which the audience were involved and asked to share their views and pledge to

live peacefully with each other.

Project Activities:

- Preparation for the project implementation include:
 - ➔ Selection of target beneficiaries for each of planned Theatre and performers.
 - ➔ Selection of venues (In different locations of the district) for Theatre performances.
 - ➔ Coordination with different stakeholders to seek support for project activities;
 - ➔ Contact with the local administration to inform them about theatre shows.
 - ➔ Contact several Schools and College Principals to seek permission for holding the Theatre performances in their respective institutes.
 - ➔ Training of team on use of audio visual aids and equipments.
 - ➔ Training on acting and performing skills
- Finalization of plan for interactive street theatres and coordination with stakeholders (influential, local authorities, target beneficiaries) and PAIMAN team.
- Preparation for street theatres (Costumes, audio visual aids etc.)
- Interactive street theatre performances were conducted as follows;
 - ➔ 3 performances in schools/colleges/institutes.
 - ➔ 3 performances in marketplaces.
 - ➔ 4 performances in public places including parks.

Summary of Theatre Performances :

S. N	Venues	Participation
1	Forward Children Academy) Mandani Tehsil Tangi District Charsadda,	120
2	Main bazaar -Mandani Tehsil Tangi District Charsadda.	130
3	Main bazaar of Tangi	170
4	Market -Saffo Killi Mandani	140
5	Hari-Chand village near Charsadda	80
6	Jendi Bazaar Charsadda at Motor Bike Mela	100
7	Bazaar of Dhakki in Charsadda	130
8	Lok Mela of Zaim Bazaar, the area is famous for tobacco markets.	90
9	Charsadda Institute of Technology	170
10	PIT Mandani	130
Total (10 events)		1250

In this way, in all ten events around 1250 students, teachers, community members, shopkeepers and other people participated.

Challenges:

- Due to current law and order situation it was difficult to get permission to do theatrical performances in schools, madrassas and even in open places.
- People were frightened and reluctant to be part of any gathering.
- It was difficult to talk about extremism in open places where extremists roam around.
- Mobility of team with peace banners was also a challenge because it endangered their lives.
- The people were strict in their attitudes and beliefs and are religiously very sentimental, so performing and speaking in public places on issues like social cohesion, tolerance, interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence was a challenge.



Voice of Communities:

Mr. Rahim Gul -Teacher from Forward Children Academy congratulated TOLANA members and PAIMAN team on presentation of such meaning full interactive Theatre to sensitize the students and teachers. He said that, **"hopefully this message will reach to all the households and communities of these children"**. He also suggested that a team of performers must visit the school at intervals for refresher of such issues. Mr. Rahim Gul also added that, **"Poverty and unemployment are basic issues supporting extremism in society. Government and NGOs must come up with a strategy to address these issues and root them out once and for all"**.

Niamutullah Khan-A retired Government official was of the view that, **"no doubt it is a unique and positive effort of youth group for reinstating interfaith harmony and tolerance in society, but it needs to be done at a large scale in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA to create an impact and with the participation of local community"**. He was hopeful that such activities will contribute significantly to countering violent extremism.

Faraz Khan-A shop Keeper in Dhakki Bazar commented that, **"he had never witnessed such a meaningful activity. According to him such activities can be very effective in sensitizing the people to play their role in countering extremism in societies"**. He added that it was a brave effort and created positive impact that the people can play a significant role in uprooting fear from society.

TOLANA member Ihtsham Khan commented that, **"initially we were frightened to do such activities in the open, but now we are confident and believe that these efforts will definitely contribute towards a positive change"**.



Conclusion and Way forward:

The project was implemented very successfully by the TOLANA team and it had very positive impact on the students, parents and general public who were directly involved as audience and they really encouraged the project team who had taken this challenge and conducted street Theatres in such security threatened areas. From the public following points of consideration came out;

- Such programs need continuity and large outreach to create impact.
- Community members should be involved in Theatre activities to create ownership.
- Youth income generation programs need to be implemented to overcome poverty and ultimately extremism.

Pictorial View:



PAIMAN Alumni Trust

PAIMAN House, Shahrah-e-Kashmir,
Near Islamabad Chowk, Gulab Nagar,
Sector H-13, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Tell: +92-51-250-6521, +92-51-250-6265
e-mail: mail@paimantrust.org
URL: www.paimantrust.org