

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

ICAN International
Civil Society
Action
Network
For women's rights, peace and security



Small Grants (SG) Project assigned to TOLANA Members

**'To promote social cohesion among Women for peaceful coexistence'
through Interactive Street Theatre.**

SG-6

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

Area: District Charsadda

Beneficiaries:

Direct: 1,245 Mother/Women, Community members Including Youth, School and Madrassa Students.

In-direct: 2,500 through IEC material dissemination

Background:

Pakistan is facing violent extremism since the last two decades. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA region have been prime targets of extremist activities resulting in great human and economic loss, degradation of social and cultural values and increase of intolerance, division of society on grounds of language, race, culture and faith. The whole scenario has destroyed the peace of the socially cohesive societies and institutes. People in these communities live under constant fear and uncertainty.

In Charsadda people do not have access to any form of entertainment especially women have no option due to cultural restrictions. Moreover, due to very low literacy rate it is also difficult for women to understand written messages which are normally disseminated from time to time in the form of IEC materials.

Interactive Theatre has always proven to be a communication technique to convey messages effectively to targeted audience in simple, understandable and concise form. In Charsadda women have very limited access to such entertainment opportunities.

About PAIMAN:

PAIMAN started work in 2008 on an initiative "Let's 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 Pushto 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.

PAIMAN invited proposals for small grants under ICAN short term project from groups of TOLANA members to work in communities to create awareness against violent extremism. PAIMAN also invited new youth and mothers for capacity building to Islamabad. After basic training some selected TOLANA members passed through advance training on proposal writing and project implementation followed by invitation to submit project proposals on the theme of countering violent extremism. Women TOLANA from Charsadda also submitted a proposal. After review the Charsadda women's group proposal was selected and



was awarded a grant.

The women group of Charsadda decided to raise awareness among community women through theatre performances (in closed compounds and institutions according to local social norms).

Project Goal:

The overall goal of the project was **'To promote social cohesion among communities for peaceful coexistence through Interactive Street Theatre'**.

Project Objectives:

- To build the capacity of selected Women TOLANA members of Charsadda to perform theatres in compounds.
- To sensitize communities of Charsadda through compound theatre performances on social cohesion, tolerance, peace and interfaith harmony.

Training on Interactive Theatre Skills:

PAIMAN conducted a training workshop for all groups who were to perform street Theatres. Charsadda women group also participated in that workshop. During this training the script was finalized and characters were allocated their roles and dialogues.

Project Activities:

- **Preparation for the project implementation include;**
 - ① Training of performers was initially carried out by an expert trainer.
 - ② Training of team on use of audio visual aids/equipment by PAIMAN trainers.
 - ③ Arrangement of video recording of project activities.
 - ④ Selection of target audience/direct beneficiaries for each performance. The audience were informed prior to Theatre performance.
 - ⑤ Selection of tentative venues (In different UCs of the district) for Theatre performances.
 - ⑥ Coordination with different stakeholders and local administration for performances in schools and colleges.
- Meetings with community influential, religious leaders of different sects to seek their Cooperation and support for theatres at identified places.
- Finalization of plan for interactive compound theatres.
- Preparation for the theatre performances. (Costumes, audio visual aids etc.).

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.

Summary Street Theatre Performances

S.N	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
1	Government girls middle school- Baba khel	120
2	Peeran Utman Zai	50
3	Government Girls School Majoki	200
4	Bacha Khan Middle School	130
5	Bacha Khan High School	125
6	Sair Shaheed School	150
7	Government Girls High School Aziz Khel	170
8	Khwaidad Khel	50
9	Government High Shool Prang Akhoond Khel	160
10	Al Madina Public School	90
	Total	1245

- The first compound Theatre was performed in Government Girl Middle School Baba Kheil in union council Prang, Tehsil & District Charsadda. At this place about 120 Women which include girls students, teachers and mothers participated. The students took keen interest in the Theatre performance and were highly amused.

A Teacher commented that, *"I am highly pleased that our girls are being given the message of peace, interfaith harmony, tolerance and co existence through medium of entertainment. The message will surely have a lasting impact on our young generation for a long time since it has been conveyed through a visual medium which was also entertaining"*.

- Second Theatre event was conducted in the village Peeran Utmanzai union council in a compound , where mothers from the community were invited to watch the Theatre performance. Local councilors were also invited at the event. The performance was witnessed by 50 mothers and elected representatives.



The local councilor congratulated the women TOLANA group on their outstanding performance and suggested that, **"If we want peace & harmony in our communities, we should make more of such efforts which infuse the spirit of living in peace"**. She encouraged the women's TOLANA to keep up the good work and conduct more theatre performances in other locales too so that more women can be sensitized on the issue.

- The third Theatre performance was conducted in Government Girls Primary School Majoki, where more than 200 students and teachers viewed the spectacle. The young children of the school really took keen interest in the Theatre and the elders also found it an effective means of communicating a very complex issue.

A girl student enthusiastically commented that, **"I really loved the performance, I want to study and be respected and I want peace in my neighborhood and I want all the extremists to go away and leave us alone"**.

- The fourth Theatre play was conducted in Bacha Khan Middle School main Nowshehra road Charsadda, where about 130 students and teachers witnessed the event. The teachers lauded the Theatre performances and suggested that, **"Such type of soft activities are beneficial for students in this crucial time to understand violent extremism and its impact on society"**.
- The fifth Theatre performance was conducted in Bacha Khan High School, Charsadda. Here the appreciation of the students and teachers was tremendous and they praised the women's TOLANA group and said, **"These Women are doing an incredible job by giving the message of peace & harmony in such a novel manner. We appreciate the role that PAIMAN trust is playing for promoting peace in the society"**.
- The sixth performance was conducted in Sair Shaheed Public High School in Charsadda. This performance was witnessed by more than 150 students and teachers along with parents. On this occasion one of the mothers commented,

"It is very encouraging to see women from Charsadda conducting a Theatre performance on such a sensitive issue. I think more women should come forth and play

their part in building social cohesion in communities. These women have proved that women can play an equally effective role in building peace as can men".

- The seventh role play was conducted in Government Girls High School Aziz Kheil Charsadda, here more than 170 students and teachers were present to watch the Theatre play. The students that were present recorded their comments after the role play and said that, **"Such types of theatre performances are not only entertaining but also convey a very important message which can be instrumental in building peaceful communities. These activities should be encouraged because they are the need of the hour and are immensely required for better and developed communities"**.



- The eighth Theatre performance was conducted in Khwaidad Kheil community. Here local counselors were also invited to view and comment on the performance. More than 50 females and elected representatives were present on the occasion. They all appreciated the performance of the team and shared that such types of healthy activities are beneficial for the society.

A local councilor showed her appreciation by saying, **"These performing women have touched upon a very sensitive issue and have rightfully presented the solution to the issue too. Inclusion of peace education in the educational institutions curricula will definitely help in cultivating a mindset which will have respect for others views and opinions and will value diversity. This will lead to more peaceful and socially cohesive societies"**.

The ninth Theatre Performance was conducted in Government High School Prang Akhoon Khel, where more than 160 students and teachers were present. Parents were also invited to watch the performance of the group. The students and teachers present were very pleased with the performance, and they expressed their views regarding the Theatre Performance and shared that,

"Complex messages of peace and tolerance are not easy to convey or understand but these TOLANA women have done justice to the content and conveyed the message in a very entertaining manner. As mothers, sisters and wives we should be vigilant and keep an eye on our men and prevent them from sinking deep into the quagmire of extremism".

- The tenth Theatre play was conducted in Al-Madina Public School Charsadda, where about 90 students and teachers were present. The students of the said school shared that such types of healthy activities are beneficial in this crucial time, and the message of peace can easily be transferred to the young generations through such performances.

At the end of each theatre performance a patriotic song was sung by each student group and students were motivated to be part of the theatre performance and were ready to take the candle of peace to every dark nook and corner of the society and enlighten everyone with the message of peace.



Challenges:

- As most of the school teachers and students were reluctant to be photographed thus it was difficult to take pictures.
- Security was another challenge in the prevailing situation in district Charsadda. It was difficult to convince parents and teachers to gather in schools and compounds.

- Mobility of women group was a big challenge and even permission from homes of TOLANA members was difficult to achieve.
- Teachers and parents were not permitting the TOLANA to take picture and make videos.
- Due to cultural constraints Theatre was not considered a respectable way of communication and is only considered as an entertainment tool.

Suggestions and observation from Communities:

- Parents and teachers praised the confidence of TOLANA and shared that it was surprising for them that women in Charsadda were performing Theatre.
- It was also shared by teachers that concept of violent extremism and role of women was displayed in a very effective manner for youth, and such events should be repeated at intervals for reinforcement.
- Principles of school said that the senior students of schools must be trained as groups to perform and no doubt girls are mother of future and if their role in countering extremism will be clear it will help to reduce extremism.
- A group of parents suggested that more women from community must be selected for training in PAIMAN so that message of peace and tolerance can be spread widely in community.
- Councilors also appreciated the efforts of TOLANA team and offered their cooperation for mobilization of communities.

Conclusion/ Way forward:

The project was completed successfully by the TOLANA team and its positive impact had been recorded in the form of views of the students, parents and general public who were directly involved as audience and they really encouraged the project team for a well coordinated ,informative, simple, understandable and effective message. Overall the events were attended by significant number of audience. Teacher and parents commented that such events should be a regular feature because fight against extremism need consistency. Some participants suggested that local youth should be included in performance teams as well as more youth girls must be trained like TOLANA members.



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