

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 Communities for peaceful coexistence' through Interactive Street Theatre.

SG-2

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

Area: Khyber Agency

Beneficiaries:

Direct: 1,000 Community members Including Youth, School and Madrassa Students

In-direct: 2,500 through IEC material.

Background:

Khyber Agency is one of the most affected agency's of FATA where Christians and Muslims have lived together for centuries without any problems. Due to absence of a strong government and security network in the area and its rough, mountainous terrain, the area became a hotbed of the insurgents and over 90 percent of the agency came under their control in 2007.

In spite of the fact that insurgency was controlled to a large extent, it still remains an affected region and incidents of terrorism occur on and off.

In the agencies people do not have access to many modes of entertainment. PAIMAN's Survey results show that people would like more forms of entertainment be 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. Theater performances are uncommon in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa compared to other provinces where there are dedicated theater halls and audiences well familiar with. Theater is very powerful tool for raising awareness and to motivate people.

PAIMAN initiated its peace program "Let's live in Peace" in the most affected region with the objective to empower communities to counter violent extremism. PAIMAN trained a large number of selected youth and mothers (Women) as activists to bring a positive change at grass root level through different small projects. These trained peace practitioners are called "TOLANA". TOLANA is a Pashto word for "group". TOLANA is collection of likeminded volunteers and activists for joint initiatives to bring positive change in society through countering violent extremism. The capacity of TOLANA members is being built as an ongoing process by PAIMAN.

The said project proposal was submitted by TOLANA group to PAIMAN from Khyber agency on invitation of proposals for small grants under PAIMAN short term projects funded by ICAN. After reviewing the project proposal the project was selected by PAIMAN for award of small grant.

The idea was new as it entailed around the concept of raising awareness through Theatre performances at public places.

Project Goal:

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

Project Objectives:

- To sensitize the communities of Khyber Agency through 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 Agency) 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 :

Venues	Dates
Theme-Peace Education	
Gulab Cricket Ground	23-1-2016
Hujra -Mirdad Khel	31-1-2016
Tatara cricket ground	25-1-2016
Neki Khel Ground (Takiya)	10-2-2016
Theme-Gender Response and Early Warning	
Shinwari English language center	14-2-2016
New Islamia Public School	9-2-2016
Hujra Shagai	6-2-2016
Theme-Social and Religious Cohesion	
New Tatara Public School	11-2-2016
Muslim Public School	13-2-2018
Madrassa Farooqia Landi Kotal	30-1-2016



Media Visibility:

Interactive Theatre s were covered by media. This was an achievement as the message got conveyed to masses through media and the TOLANA teams were also introduced to the people.

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.



Voices of Communities:

On Peace Education:

People commented that peace education is the only solution to prepare the young generation against violence. Some people said that no doubt peace education is important but girls education is more important and needs serious attention of the government. It was also pointed out that in Khyber agency girls schools are far lesser and are widely spread out. Further they also said that a large number of students have left school during the phase when there was a serious threat to the people and the educational institutions and the security situation was very tense.

Picture Gallery: Interactive Theatre at different venues in Khyber Agency



Gender Response and early warning:

A large number of people were of the view that women can play an important role in countering violent extremism if sensitized and made aware properly. An onlooker also mentioned that in the Agency areas womens movement and their active participation in social activities is difficult. However he was very hopeful and positive as he strongly believed that women can play an important role in guiding their children and protect them from extremism in society.

Social and Religious Cohesion:

When asked to comment on the need for social and religious cohesion, people shared that for sustainable peace, social and religious cohesion is very important. They were of the view that hate speech is the basic cause of extremism in society. To reduce hate speech, religious leaders must be trained to abstain from making any such speeches which fire up the emotions of the people towards people of other religions and sects. Community members were of the view that religious leaders can play a vital role because they influence and shape the beliefs of all those who follow them. Apart from that religious leaders are held in very high esteem and people give a lot of importance to what they say.

Conclusion and Way forward:

Since the experiment has been a very successful one therefore the TOLANA teams have decided to conduct more of these performances in other locales of the agency so that the message can be conveyed far and wide.

The need of the hour is to support such positive activities in the affected areas which convey the universal message of peace and social cohesion. It is important for sustainable peace to ensure that people begin to trust each other once again as they use to do so in the past.



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