

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



Small Grant (SG) Project assigned to TOLANA Members

### 'Capturing impact of Violent Extremism and efforts to address it through Eye of Camera' in District Charsadda.

SG-7

**TOLANA Members:** Shahab Alam (Group Leader),  
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**Project Duration:** 1st Jan-15th Feb, 2016

**Target Area:** District Charsadda

#### Beneficiaries:

**Direct:** 500 TOLANA and Community members

**Indirect:** About 4,000 including the families of direct beneficiaries and general communities of the target area

#### Background :

Violent extremism in Pakistan has resulted in immense loss of human lives which in turn has affected people emotionally, mental and psychologically in such a way that they fear and distrust each other. The social, economic, educational aspects of human life have been pushed into an abyss of uncertainty. The basic elements of a civilized society like tolerance, brotherhood, interfaith harmony, peace, love for others, and respect for human life have diminished altogether. The whole country is in despair but Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been the prime target of violent extremism for the last two decades. The prevalent extremism in the country has resulted in the loss of millions of lives and nobody feels safe in their houses, schools, markets, workplaces and gatherings. Thousands of families have been left hopeless and there is an increase in desperate children with no future, widows with burden of large families, ruined infrastructure and destroyed businesses and properties. The attitudinal change in people has rendered them self centered and selfish. People have become intolerant towards each other and no one is ready to accept the other. There is hatred and distrust among people on religious, sectoral and ethnic grounds. Women and specially children are so highly traumatized that their mental growth, confidence and education is affected.

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.

Charsadda is one of the most affected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa faced with violent extremism. The situation of violent extremism has resulted in physical, intellectual, emotional and financial destruction. Charsadda was economically a developed area of the province with fertile lands. Charsadda contribute a significant amount of produce to the agricultural markets and as such was a thriving district. Unfortunately, due to violent extremism people of Charsadda had to face a crisis situation in the form of large scale human and financial losses. This resulted in increase in unemployment and radicalization of youth etc.

The small grants project '**Capturing impact of Violent Extremism and efforts to address it through Eye of Camera' in District Charsadda** was awarded to a TOLANA group as a part of the project 'Strengthening the role of Youth and Mothers/Women for Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion' funded by PAIMAN/ICAN.

The project was based on the assumption that the impact of violent extremism in our society is visible all around. PAIMAN and TOLANA members are striving to sensitize communities and are making efforts for development of peaceful societies. Both these aspects needed to be captured for awareness of communities and stakeholders.

### Project Goal:

"To sensitize the communities on the issue of violent extremism through the eye of a camera".

### Project Objectives:

- To build the capacity of PAIMAN volunteers-TOLANA members to identify incidents of violent extremism in district Charsadda and record their impact through the eye of the camera.
- To sensitize the general public about effects of extremism in society and inform them about the efforts PAIMAN and TOLANA volunteers are making to address the issue through different non violent means.

### Activities progress:

#### Preparation for the project implementation;

Once the project grant was awarded the group leader coordinated with other team members to gauge what skills needed to be capacitated. It was decided that the team members photography skills needed to be built to an expert level so that they could capture quality pictures.

Cameras were provided to group members and selected areas were assigned to each sub group to capture the images. In the first phase the groups visited Charsadda and Shabqadar areas to identify and capture the impact of violent extremism. They visited affected areas which were badly hit by militancy and collected the required images of persons, building, places along with narrative details. Capturing images in different areas of Charsadda was very difficult, especially in those areas which were badly hit by militancy. Coordination was also done with local administration to brief them regarding the activity and inform them about the visits of TOLANA members to affected places for photography. In most of the

conflict ridden localities people were reluctant to be photographed and law enforcement agencies were not permitting entry or take pictures.

The following activities were conducted to accomplish project goal;

- The TOLANA group coordinated with stakeholders including CBOs, government officials, media, community influential, religious and political activists as they wield power in their locales and without their blessing it would have been impossible to work to collect images.
- For quality output it was essential that the members of group have training on usage of digital cameras for capturing the images. All 6 group members were trained in the skill of photography in the first phase of the project by an experienced photographer.
- To capture the activities of other TOLANA groups working on different projects was an important task. For this purpose strong coordination with other small grants project groups was done so as to record their activities as positive images. The group was divided into different teams to cover all activities going on simultaneously across the district.
- Capturing of 1000 images showing impact of Violent Extremism (Negative Images) was a challenging task and for that visits were planned to each and every corner of district Charsadda. Images of the hardest hit areas were also captured. Shabqadar was the worst hit area of District Charsadda in terms of physical and financial damages. There were more than 50 fully and partially damaged schools in Tehsil Shabqadar.



- For collection of 1000 positive and redressal images activities of TOLANA members and

S. No	Activities	Targets
1	Capturing 1000 Images of Peace activities by TOLANA or peace images	1000
2	Capturing 1000 Images of Violent Extremism impacts (Negative Images)	1000
3	Selection of best 100 images with caption for display	100
4	Development of case studies of selected images	100
5	Auto Rikshaw rally for sensitization of community about peace	50
6	Wall chalking on selected walls Peace walls at promonant places	4
7	Peace walk and press conference	1



PAIMAN were captured. These images show case the efforts that are being made by TOLANA and PAIMAN to attain sustainable peace through non violent and constructive ways.

- Case studies (100) were also a very important component of our project. For that a group member was assigned the responsibility of collecting case studies. It was a challenge to collect 100 case studies because many people were reluctant to share their stories probably out of fear or distrust.
- Of the 2000 captured images, 200 pictures have been selected and captioned for display.
- An awareness rally was organized and 50 Auto Rickshaws took part in that rally. All the vehicles were covered with posters with different peace and educational messages along with Pakistani and Peace flags. The rally moved across the main roads of Charsadda and was witnessed by a large number of people as it passed through the busiest areas of Charsadda during business hours.



- A Peace wall and wall chalking was another method adopted for community sensitization. For this purpose four prominent places were selected for peace wall presentations. All the wall messages will serve as peace messages for thousands of



people daily.

- Peace walk was arranged by the group in which PAIMAN staff members and Male & Women TOLANA members of Charsadda along with the general community participated. The objective of peace walk was to create awareness among communities to fight against extremism in society and to raise their voices and pressurize the government to seriously act on the National Action Plan (NAP). Participants of the walk held banners of demands to work against extremism. At the end of the walk, the executive director of PAIMAN, Ms. Mossarat Qadeem held a press conference in Charsadda press club and



demanded that the government disclose the progress on national action plan and also demanded that the reasons of the slow progression must be analyzed and improved to achieve the targets of the NAP.

### Challenges:

**It was an innovative project but faced many challenges and hurdles during its implementation. Some hurdles also affected the quality of the results which are as follows;**

- The first and foremost challenge was capturing images of those locations which were affected directly by conflict, because the security agencies and the locals were reluctant to allow anyone to take pictures as the fear that the images and information might be used against them.
- The second challenge was recording case studies. People were afraid of sharing data, and they were reluctant to share their stories.
- Mobility in conflict ridden regions like Shabqadar



along the border with Mohmand Agency was also a challenge for the team.

- Another challenge was the security situation of the district during the project period; because after the attack on Bacha Khan University it was extremely difficult for the team to move with cameras or get permission from the education department to capture images and videos with cameras as positive images of school going children.
- Due to cultural constraints images of women were hard to capture.

#### Voice of communities about the project impacts:

- Mr. Rehmat Khan (A business man) in Charsadda bazaar also participated in peace walk and rally. He commented that, ***"It is a great effort by PAIMAN and its volunteers to create awareness among communities about the danger of extremism"***. He further shared that such events are important and it is the need of the hour to mobilize communities. He praised the efforts of young TOLANA volunteers in this regard.
- Mr. Shabbir Khan (A school teacher) from Charsadda expressed that, ***"the Rickshaw rally was an effective and innovative way of creating awareness in general public"***. It will be remembered for a long time and was an effective way of raising awareness for countering violent extremism and hate speech.
- Mr. Amanullah Khan (police Officer) who also escorted the rally, was of the view that, ***"PAIMAN has surely created a young and enthusiastic force in the form of TOLANA to work against extremism through non violent means"***. Their efforts for creating tolerance in society are commendable and all credit goes to PAIMAN.
- Mr. Raheem Gul (Local Councilor) said that, ***" wall chalking is an effective way to sensitize people and no doubt it is the need of the hour"***. He also offered his services to participate in PAIMAN programs at district level.
- TOLANA member Muhammad Abbas commented that, ***"initially we were fearful about implementing the project, but now we are not only confident but we also believe that youth can play an important role in community peace building process"***.
- Mr. Ikram Khan (father of TOLANA member who got livelihood skill) was happy to share that, ***"Skill development program is an effective tool to engage youth in positive activities as well as increase income opportunities of poor people"***.

#### Way forward:

Keeping in view the findings and results of the project it can be recommended that

- Youth has potential to implement projects if provided with an opportunity and guidance. In future such projects should be implemented with more resources so that the project can be outreached at grass root level.
- Local leadership should also be involved with young volunteers to design and implement projects.
- Livelihood skill development programs should be integral parts of all projects, as such programs are very useful for engaging vulnerable youth at local level.

#### Pictorial View



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