

Conflict-Prevention through Protection of Religious Minority Rights for Promoting Peace Tolerance and Equity

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Abstract

A project carried out by the EIDHR (European Initiative for Democracy & Human Rights) & WESS (Water, Environment & Sanitation Society) has endeavored to empower the religious minority groups to protect their rights and promote understanding for peace, tolerance, and equity for conflicts preventions. The project intervened through different activities; training programs, workshops, seminars and exposure tours for the empowerment of the minorities' communities to protect their rights. At the end of the project, an evaluation was sought through this study to assess the interventions of the project in terms of its impact on the beneficiaries. All the stakeholders were taken on board to raise their awareness, particularly raise awareness of the minorities, encouraging them to organize into groups enabling them to protect the violation of their rights. The project endeavored to mobilize the minority communities for socialization with majority population. The assessment results show that the project succeeded in raising the awareness of the minorities as well as of all stakeholders through different training programs, workshops, and seminars. All the training programs, workshops, and seminars were identified as useful in raising the awareness. The stakeholder's representatives and minorities groups have endorsed the interventions' usefulness for awareness raising, peace building and conflict management. Almost all the interventions have been applauded by the beneficiaries and stakeholders of the project, however, weaknesses were observed in few areas such as; no practical demonstration of gained knowledge & discipline, no appropriate linkages were developed by the minority communities with organizations of other areas and failure of the minorities into lobbying.

Key Words: Conflicts Prevention, Minority Rights, Peace, Tolerance, and Equity

1. Introduction

As per Wikipedia, the term minority rights embodies two separate concepts; first, normal individual rights as applied to members of racial, ethnic, class, religious, linguistic or sexual minorities, and second, collective rights accorded to minorities groups. The term may also apply simply to individual rights of anyone who is not part of a majority decision. Civil rights movements often seek to ensure that individual rights are not denied on the basis of membership in a minority group. The first minority rights were created by Diet of Hungary in 1849. Minority rights as applying to ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities and indigenous people are an integral part of international human rights law. Like children's rights, women rights and refugees rights, minority rights are a legal framework designed to ensure that a specific group which is in a vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalized position in society, is able to achieve equality, and is protected from prosecution. Minority rights cover protection of existence, protection from discrimination and prosecution, protection and promotion of identity, and participation in political life. To protect minority rights, many countries have specific laws and / or commissions or ombudsman institutions. Countries that have special provisions for minorities are; Canada, China, Ethiopia, Germany, India, Poland, Romania, Russia, and the UK². In Pakistan, altogether, the religious minorities represent about 5% of Pakistan's population. The population of the major minority groups is 2.6 million; 1.3 million Christians (2%), 2.0 million, Ahmadis (1.3%), 1.1 million Hindus (0.7%) & 0.2 million Sikhs (0.1%)³. Minority Rights Group International, a watch dog organization based on the feedback of Christians, Sikhs & Hindus list Pakistan as seventh of the most dangerous countries for minorities, after Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Congo.

In Balochistan, the minorities are comparatively safer and over the decades, no big incident of victimization has been observed. According to one minority's rights safeguarding activist, 'Balochistan is a heaven for minorities as compared to the rest of Pakistan'. However, it is a realization that due to the current wave of terrorism, the situation of harmony is being affected slowly and gradually where the minorities feel a threat. Is the duty of all Balochistanis, individuals and their organizations to think about how they care for the life and security of all living in Balochistan, including the minorities at our country and provincial levels? We should not allow a few extremists who have no knowledge of Islam in real sense to jeopardize the law and order situation in the province of Balochistan. Those should not be allowed to create terror in the minds of the minorities in Balochistan as well as Pakistan who have been given the right of protection by Islam and by the law of Pakistan. The project titled "Minority Communities' Empowerment to Protect their Rights & Promote Understanding for Peace, Tolerance and Equity for Conflict Prevention" funded by European Commission - European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights and implemented by WESS (Water, Environment & Sanitation Society) has rightly and timely endeavored to empower the religious minority groups to protect their rights and promote understanding for peace, tolerance, and equity for conflicts preventions. This is the dire need of the time to address the minorities' issues through such practical initiatives to strengthen minorities' communities to protect their rights. This study is an attempt to assess the degree of success of such pioneering work in the province of Balochistan. The study has been divided into sections where the current section is about introduction, Section-2 deals with the rationale of the study, Section-3 deals with the objectives, and Section-4 deals with methodology. Section -5 is a detailed section which deals with the discussion and analyses which elaborates all the indicators of impact evaluation while the last three sections deal with findings, recommendations, & conclusion respectively.

1.1. Rationale of the Study

To protect the rights of minorities through awareness rising of minority communities and majority population as well as of other stakeholders by their sensitization was the crux of the project. The whole paradigm of getting the stakeholders together to unite and stop violation of minority rights was based on the planned activities of the project. The project ended with the tasks entrusted and then the need arose of looking behind what is there on the ground. This study basically has attempted to divert the attention of the project implementers to see what is there on the ground and with what degree of success. The assessment of the project planning and implementation strategies and gauging the success degree of the project is always the desire of the project authorities. The need of this study was felt to test the capability and efficiency of the project in terms of its plans and related strategies to achieve the project objectives and contribution to the overall goal of empowering the religious minority communities to protect their rights and promote understanding for peace, tolerance, and equity for conflict prevention.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted under the following specific objectives;

- To evaluate the impacts of the project activities mainly in terms of empowerment of minority communities to protect their rights, promote understanding for peace, tolerance and conflict prevention.
- To assess the degree of beneficiaries and stakeholders participation in the project in availing the interventions; training workshops, seminars, exposure tours etc. and achieving the results.
- To assess the technical soundness, relevance, and appropriateness of the project interventions to empower the minority communities with the support of the majority population to protect minority rights, promote understanding for peace, tolerance & equity for conflict prevention.

1.3. Methodology

The impact assessment of the WESS project, empowerment of the religious minorities community has been carried out through a methodology described as under;

1.4. Area of Study

The area of this impact evaluation study is District Quetta where adequate population of minority community resides and where the project interventions were introduced. Six areas within Quetta city and its suburbs were selected which are predominantly the religious minorities' areas.

1.5. Selection of Respondents

A stratified random sampling technique has been applied to have a sample size that represents the population of the targeted religious minorities as well as key representatives of the majority population in Quetta city. Rather than having a sample size of large number merely for the purpose of qualifying the statistical significance, a stratified random sample drawn from the population representing mainly the religious minority groups scattered over places within the provincial capital.

1.6. Sample Size

Due to interviewing 8 stakeholders' representatives through an interview guide and holding 4 focus group discussions with minority communities, an individual questionnaire was designed to interview the minority community respondents individually. The number of respondents to be individually interviewed was confined to 30,5 from each of the six locations within Quetta city for information collection. The random respondent selection successfully helped to have respondents from different walks of life such as; teachers, students, government employees, nurses, journalists, house-wives& drivers. The other stake holders have been approached through direct interviewing few of the representatives of the stake holders.

1.7. Data Collection Tools

The data has been collected by using the different data instruments to capture the information addressing the different dimensions of the assessment. The tools used comprise; (a) Questionnaire, b) Group Discussions and c) Interview Guide.

2. Discussion and Analyses

2.1. Male/Female Ratio of Respondents

The male/female ratio of respondents in sample areas is gender balanced and even a higher number of female respondents as compared to males have been included in the survey. In sample areas like cantonment, spiny road, TB sanatorium the respondents approached randomly were pre-dominantly women. This means that women are actively participating in working towards the solution of problems faced to minorities including the violation of minorities' rights. Table -1 presents a situation of male female ratio for all six sample areas where on average male respondents were 43.3% and female 56.7%.

Table1: Male/Female Ratio of Respondents in Sample Areas(In %)

Area	Male	Female
Basti Panchayat	60.0	40.0
Cantt.	0.0	100.0
Essa Nagri	80.0	20.0
Shahzaman Road	80.0	20.0
Spiny Road	20.0	80.0
TB Sanatorium	20.0	80.0
Average	43.3	56.7

2.2. Education Level of Minorities

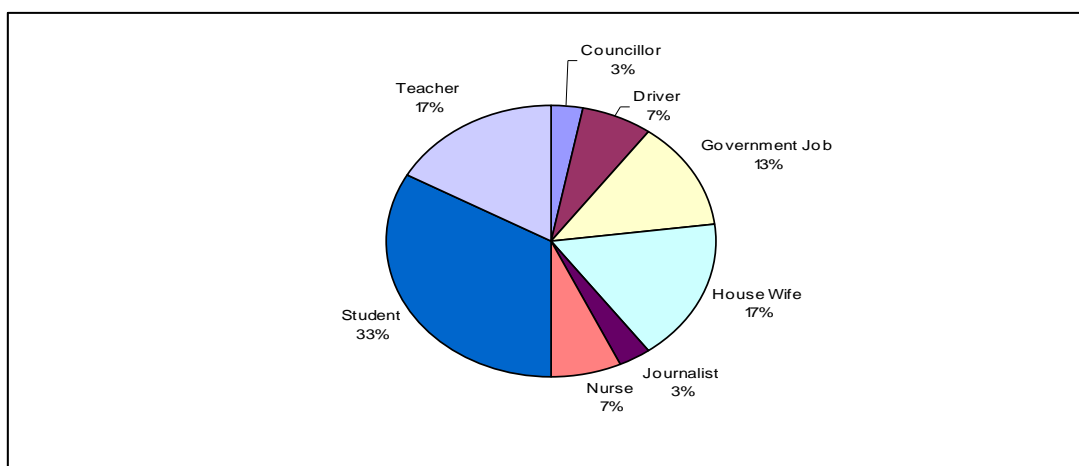
The educational level of the minorities represented by the respondents selected at random indicates that the situation is not bad. The highest number of persons was found to be with matriculation and graduation qualification, 26.7% and 23.3% respectively. A higher percentage of population was found to be above matriculation. This indicates that the ground for work is fertile. It is not difficult to prepare the population to struggle for their rights and is easy to sensitize them for a move ahead due to a high literacy rate and prevalence of required educational level. A comparatively higher population of 16.7% is even with Masters Degree.

Table2: Education Level of Respondents in Sample Areas(In %)

Area	Middle	Matric.	Diploma	Intermediate	Graduate	Masters
Basti Panchayat	20.0	20.0	0.0	20.0	20.0	20.0
Cantt	20.0	60.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	0.0
Essa Nagri	0.0	0.0	20.0	40.0	0.0	40.0
Shahzaman Road	40.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	20.0
Spiny Road	0.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	0.0
TB Sanatorium	0.0	20.0	20.0	0.0	40.0	20.0
Average	13.3	26.7	6.7	13.3	23.3	16.7

2.3. Profession of Respondents

The respondents belong to different professions as indicated by the pie diagram (Figure-1). As indicated the highest number (33%) was that of students, followed by next higher category of teachers & housewives (17% each), and government employees 13%. The highest number of students (60%) as respondents was from sample area of Quetta Cantt. And TB sanatorium, while highest number of teachers at Spiny Road (40%) and housewives (40%) and government employees belong to sample areas of Basti Panchayat and Shah Zaman Raod respectively. The rest of the detail can be seen from Figure-1 given below.

Figure-1: Profession of Respondents in Sample Areas

2.4.Changes in Awareness of Minorities about Rights of Minorities

The training as an effective tool has been used by the project for awareness. The impact of the training by using the techniques and knowledge imparted has been positive. All of the respondents (100%) unanimously agree to the usefulness of the training for raising awareness level of minorities. They have placed the usefulness either in category of highly or moderately useful. The respondents are confident that such trainings are useful for awareness raising related to the minorities' rights.

Table- 3: Usefulness degree of Trainings Imparted for Awareness Raisingby the project (In % or otherwise stated)

Area	No. of Trainings Aailed (Ave.)	Usefulness in raising awareness		
		High	Moderate	Low
Basti Panchayat	3	60.0	40.0	0.0
Cantt	3	40.0	60.0	0.0
Essa Nagri	4	40.0	60.0	0.0
Shahzaman Road	3	60.0	40.0	0.0
Spiny Road	3	40.0	60.0	0.0
TB Sanatorium	2	40.0	60.0	0.0
Average	3	46.7	53.3	0.0

As mentioned above the respondents were found agree to the usefulness of the training for raising awareness but to be more pragmatic the response of the interviewees were sought to know their personal experience. Majority of the respondents (53%) expressed their views that they feel their awareness level has risen to a great extent and 47% were of the opinion that they have gained through not highly. If we explore the level of knowledge about minorities rights as compared to past, a high majority (63%) is of the opinion that their level of knowledge related to minorities rights as compared to past has risen significantly. This speaks of the raise in knowledge level through trainings imparted by the project.

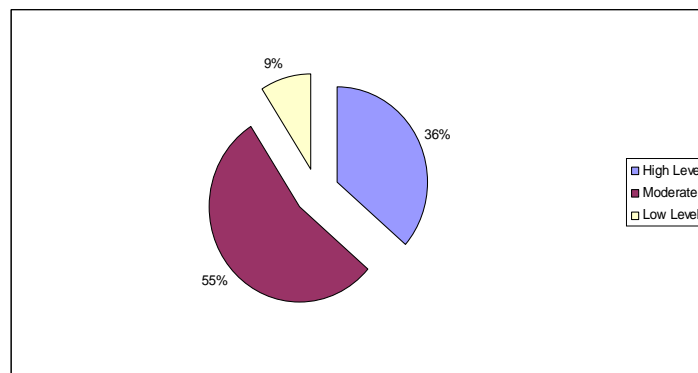
Table-4: Comparison of Awareness & Knowledge Level at Present & Before The Project Intervention (In %)

Area	Awareness raised by Training			Knowledge level at Present compared to the Past		
	Great Extent	Some Extent	Not at All	A Bit Higher	Much Higher	The Same
Basti Panchayat	80.0	20.0	0.0	20.0	80.0	0.0
Cantt	20.0	80.0	0.0	20.0	80.0	0.0
Essa Nagri	60.0	40.0	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0
Shahzaman Road	60.0	40.0	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0
Spiny Road	40.0	60.0	0.0	20.0	80.0	0.0
TB Sanatorium	60.0	40.0	0.0	80.0	20.0	0.0
Average	53.3	46.7	0.0	36.7	63.3	0.0

2.5. Success in Peace Building & Conflict Resolution

The project organized workshops and seminars for peace building & conflict resolution & their rating. Again the respondents who attended these workshops and seminars are positive about its appropriateness for peace building and conflict resolution. Some 36% beneficiaries of these workshops have marked these workshops and seminars of high value, while, majority 55% though deem these useful but not of high level. On the average, the leverage is on the positive side which speaks of confession of the respondents.

Figure2: Rating of Workshops and Seminars Organized for Peace Building & Conflict Resolution



2.6. Increases in Awareness of Stakeholders Including Minorities

Awareness building through workshops and seminars related to peace building & conflict resolution has clearly gone up indicated by the fact that 61% of the respondents have endorsed the idea, while another significant number of 39% though have not quoted about the high rise but have supported the notion that these workshops have raised the awareness for peace building & conflict resolution of the stakeholders including minorities.

Table5: Assessment of Workshops & Seminars Raising Awareness & Initiative for Peace Building of Stakeholders (In %)

Area	Awareness Raised through W/S			Example of Initiative for PB & CM ¹	
	Great Extent	Some Extent	Not at All	No	Yes
Basti Panchayat	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0
Cantt	66.7	33.3	0.0	100.0	0.0
Essa Nagri	25.0	75.0	0.0	75.0	25.0
Shahzaman Road	60.0	40.0	0.0	75.0	25.0
Spiny Road	100.0	0.0	0.0	66.7	33.3
TB Sanatorium	40.0	60.0	0.0	100.0	0.0
Average	60.9	39.1	0.0	86.4	13.6

1 PB: Peace Building & CM: Conflict Management**2.7. Socialization of Minorities with Majority**

The project through interventions attempted to prepare the minorities to have frequent positive interactions with majority population so that an atmosphere of social harmonization is created. In order to assess that ability, the perception of the respondents as a whole, was sought to see how they term their ability of interaction and with what response. Some 60% of the population was of the opinion that the interaction level is average with average response, while 40% considered the interaction satisfactory. In other words, the interaction level was on low side that needs improvement. The social harmony requires better interaction that will give strength to the population, particularly minorities.

Table 6: Interactions of Minorities with People & Status of Social Harmony(In %)

Area	Excellent	V. Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Bad
Basti Panchayat	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cantt	0.0	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0	0.0
Essa Nagri	0.0	0.0	80.0	20.0	0.0	0.0
Shahzaman Road	40.0	40.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Spiny Road	0.0	60.0	20.0	20.0	0.0	0.0
TB Sanatorium	20.0	40.0	0.0	40.0	0.0	0.0
Average	10.0	30.0	36.7	23.3	0.0	0.0

Contrary to the interaction of minorities, perception of individual interaction was assessed through query of individual social interaction with the rest of population in the result of project sensitization. Interesting, the individuals explained their interaction highly positive with others particularly, majority Muslim population. All the respondents (100) marked their interaction above average. Keeping in view the prevailing situation, it is hard to believe the information given but at least, the increase in interaction can be believed.

2.8. Gaining Strength through Developing Linkages

Linkage development was one of the intervention areas of the project. No evidence could be found to certify that the project has implemented taken serious steps that promote development of linkages. Even the respondents could not certify any type of linkages developed with organizations working for the rights of minorities in other areas of the country or outside the country. This information was gained from focus group discussions rather than individuals. Linkages development helps in strengthening the voice of the voiceless.

2.9. Putting Knowledge Gained into Practice

The minorities along with other stakeholders to support minorities to check any violation of their basic rights were given awareness and capacity building trainings and also workshops and seminars were organized for the said purpose. The impact was essential to be seen in the context that whether all these efforts have resulted to activate them or not. Very little success was visible and no breakthrough was noted. Putting theory into practice is very important and practicality of minorities was not observed. Very minor issues, particularly street level issues less related to minority's rights have been tackled.

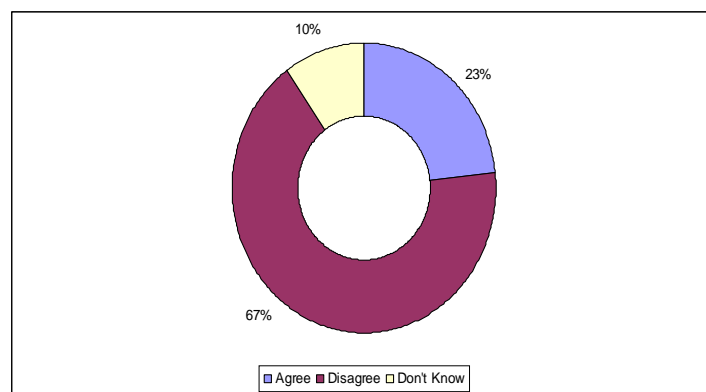
Table 7: Response of Residents from all Six Areas about Initiative Taken for Mitigating the Violation of Minorities Rights (In %)

Type/Nature of Initiative	Basti Panchayat	Cantt	Essa Nagri	Shahzaman	Spiny Road	TB Sanatorium	Activeness of minorities' groups on Average
Approched MPA	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1 out of 6
Agitation for Water Problem	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1 out of 6
Articles in News Papers	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1 out of 6
Domestic Disputes Resolution	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	3 out of 6
Specific Initiative for Minorities' rights	Slightly	No	Slightly	No	No	No	

2.10. Developing Pressure on Elected Representatives in Protecting Minorities Rights

The disciplined, organized and people with awareness watch their representatives who are a part of the legislative process. They being watched and encouraged by the groups of minorities who have awareness to look after the interest of the minorities. Whenever, laws are framed in assemblies those are in contrast to the interest of the minorities, they have to raise voice against. The perception of the minorities about their leaders is given below in figure-3 where only 33% respondents agree that their elected representative take active part in legislation process. They are not confident that their elected representatives can ensure the protection of their rights.

Figure3: Perception about active Participation of Elected Representatives in Legislation Process



2.11. Appropriateness of the project interventions

The appropriateness of the project interventions can better be judged by the learning from techniques those were trainings, workshops, seminars, exposure tours etc. No doubt these packages or call these techniques were implemented successfully to a greater extent. This could be termed as appropriate because activities were implemented and the content and coverage and raising the level of awareness was endorsed by the beneficiaries and this is what can be done in 18 months duration. However, if we see that the beneficiaries could demonstrate their ability with a single or a couple of cases, then it hints at limitation of a desired cycle of activities in day to day life.

3. Findings

- Assessing the usefulness of the trainings for raising awareness of the minorities, almost all of the respondents (100%) unanimously agree to the usefulness of the training for raising awareness level of minorities.
- Majority of the respondents (53%) expressed their views that they feel their awareness level has risen to a great extent and 47% were of the opinion that they have gained through not to a high level.
- If we explore the level of knowledge about minorities rights as compared to past, a high majority (63%) of the respondents is of the opinion that there level of knowledge related to minorities rights as compared to past has risen significantly.

- Awareness through workshops and seminars related to peace building & conflict has been quoted by most of the respondents indicated by the fact that 61% of the respondents have endorsed the idea, while 39% of these workshops have raised the awareness for peace building & conflict resolution of the stakeholders including minorities moderately.
- All the respondents (100%) marked their interaction above average. Keeping in view the prevailing situation, it is hard to believe the information given but at least, the increase in interaction can be believed
- Some 60% of the population was of the opinion that the interaction level is average and the response from the majority is average, not too good and not too bad, while 40% considered the interaction satisfactory. The interaction level was on low side that needs to be improved in order to have better social harmony.
- No evidence could be found to certify that the project has taken serious steps in order to promote linkages. The impact was essential to be assessed to see the results of the efforts. Very little success was visible and no breakthrough was noted.
- If we explore the level of knowledge about minorities rights as compared to past, a high majority (63%) is of the opinion that their level of knowledge related to minorities rights as compared to past have risen significantly. This speaks of the raise in knowledge level through trainings imparted by the project.
- Putting theory into practice is very important and practicality of minorities was not observed. Very minor issues, particularly street level issues less related to minorities' rights have been tackled. Very little success was visible and no breakthrough was noted.

4. Conclusions

The project intervened through different activities; training programs, workshops and seminars, for the empowerment of the minorities' communities to protect their rights. All the stakeholders were taken on board to raise their awareness, particularly raise awareness of the minorities, encouraging them to organize into groups enabling them to protect the violation of their rights. The project endeavored to mobilize the minority communities for socialization with majority population. The overall purpose of this study was to assess the interventions of the project. The assessment results show that the project succeeded in raising the awareness of the minorities as well as of all stakeholders through different training programs, workshops, and seminars. All the training programs, workshops, and seminars were identified as useful in raising the awareness. The stakeholder's representatives and minorities have endorsed the interventions' usefulness for awareness raising, peace building and conflict management. Almost all the interventions have been applauded by the beneficiaries and stakeholders of the project, however, weaknesses were observed in few areas such as; no practical demonstration of gained knowledge & discipline, no appropriate linkages were developed by the minority communities to organizations of other areas and failure of the minorities into lobbying. A main constraint to full success was perhaps the short duration of a difficult project.

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Note:

¹ CIA World Fact book

² Minority group-Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority_group)

³ UCANEWS.com, Union of Catholic Asian News October 7, 2009

⁴ Kathy Gannon (2009), May 31, 2009: *Pakistan's religious minorities report violence*.