



**Youth Development
Foundation**

UNIVERSITY & MADRASSAH (RELIGIOUS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES) ENGAGEMENT COMING TOGETHER

FUNDED BY: USAID / CRA

DURATION: 12 MONTHS

PROJECT BACKGROUND:

It is well documented that VE groups in Pakistan use divisive narratives in order to gain support. Narratives often exploit, or even create, a sense of victim-hood among population groups including youth, often along ethnic, linguistic, sectarian and even social lines. Youth radicalization in Pakistan has become a pervasive concern for all levels of society. The lack of opportunities for youth of one background to interact with those from other backgrounds perpetuates stereotypes and creates an environment for Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) to prey upon divisive ethnic or sectarian narratives. Students from religious educational institutes and universities, rarely interact, leading them to live with distorted assumptions about the 'other.' Research indicates, "hostility between groups is perpetuated by unfamiliarity and that inter-group contact can challenge negative stereotypes and generate more positive inter-group attitudes and relationships." As a result, these individuals are less susceptible to these divisive narratives and to the influence of VE groups. A 2018 study by Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) on thinking pattern of seminary students, found that students of seminaries show little interest in critical thinking subjects like logic, philosophy, and jurisprudence, which are part of their curriculum. Students tend to appreciate a single, precise answer to a query, at the cost of more nuanced observations. Interestingly, a similar tendency is observed in university students, especially those of applied sciences. This exactness is traced to radicalizing thoughts of not only seminary students but also university students. Apparently, these students rarely interact with each other, thereby denying them the opportunity to listen to other views. Hence, at least one source of building nuance in their thinking is closed. Subsequent research by PIPS shows that seminaries instill sectarian worldview among students, in part because they are supposed to register with one of the several sectarian boards. Their less interaction was responsible for their stereotypes about each other. Youth Development Foundation (YDF) engaged over 600 youth from diverse backgrounds (University, Madrassah, and community) in diversity camps and then supported them in implementing Social Action Projects (SAPs), promoting acceptance and tolerance and Positive youth engagement. YDF has worked with MNSUAM (Muhammad Nawaz Sharif University of Agriculture Multan), University of Education and Bahauddin Zakriya University Multan. For the support of religious seminaries, YDF signed MOU with more than 10 Religious Educational Institutes (Madrassahs) out of which 2 were Female institutes.

YDF organized 17 diversity camps at Lahore and Murree where each camp was of 3 days. For ensuring female participation from female religious educational institute, keeping their religious/ethnic values YDF organized 4 all-female diversity camp where participants, trainer, management team all were female. After diversity camps, the participants executed their Social Action Projects in their local community forming groups among madrassah and university students fostering their communication and acceptance towards each other. Many Madrassah youth invited university students to spend time at their seminary and vice versa. The Social action projects further amplified the message of peace and harmony but also empowered youth to take lead and practice their leadership qualities. More than 130 social Action projects were organized by these youth at Madrassahs, Universities and Universities.



¹CMM THINC Matrix, USAID documented in Punjab Clusters Draft Document –

²A former chairperson of Council of Islamic Ideology, Dr. Khalid Masud, in a workshop of PIPS, termed this phenomenon as "exactness" of knowledge, the tendency of seeking one specific answer, without any conditions.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

The overall objectives in its implementation areas could be stated as

- To increase acceptance of diverse backgrounds in targeted communities
- Enhance tolerance within and across communities

OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT:

Based on the activities devised to attain the maximum proximate of the objectives, the project's successful outcomes have been:

- Increased interaction among students and teachers of diverse backgrounds
- Enhanced leadership skill among youth of diverse backgrounds
- Increased number of initiatives from youth of diverse backgrounds
- Increased interaction among youth of diverse faiths.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES:

- YDf organized 17 organized residential diversity camps promoting acceptance, with 30 students and 2 teachers in each camp in Lahore & Murree.
- Out of 17 diversity camps, 4 all-female diversity camps were organized to ensure female participation.
- A training module on peace building, conflict mitigation, team building, communication skills, role of dialogue and social action plan was instructed during 3 days residential camps comprising of multiple group activities ensuring maximum participation.
- 130 social action projects were organized at community, madrassah and universities out of which 30 SAPs were faculty led that all totally engaged more than 10,000 masses on ground.
- The project was concluded with Youth Tolerance summit, organized at PILAC Auditorium Lahore, attended by youth, women, religious leaders, academia and dignitaries. The Summit was chaired by the then Minister of Human Rights and Minorities Affairs Mr. Ejaz Alam Augustine who also awarded excellence shields to youth activists among diversity camps and SAPs who outshined during project. The summit was also widely attended by Media and acclaimed accolades across civil society.
- For sustainability, YDF organized several meetings of university management/academia with academia or Religious educational institutes/Madrassahs. Due to this continuous engagement, faculty of MNSUAM (MNS University of Agriculture Multan) invited many Madrassah students especially females to join short summer courses without any fee.



PROJECT

BENEFICIARIES

Coming Together, the project directly engaged more than 600 youth from diverse faiths/socio/educational backgrounds. More than 40 faculty members from universities and madrasah, attended the diversity camps. Through Social Action Plans, the project reached to more than 1300 community members. For the conclusion, more than 200 people including dignitaries from Government of Punjab, Madrasah, Universities, and civil society attended were reached.





YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Youth Development Foundation (YDF) is a not-for-profit and non-governmental youth-led organization working on interfaith harmony, social inclusion, local government, preventing and countering violent extremism (CVE) since 2010. YDF brings together youth from diverse cultural, religious and geographical backgrounds to prevent and counter growing trends of extremism through innovative ideas that lead to demonstrable solutions. As a result, YDF has been able to bring positive cultural changes in three Pakistani provinces by directly engaging more than 12,000 young people in the last 12 years. Due to its contribution to positive social change in Pakistan, YDF had the opportunity to present youth contributions in conflict mitigation at UN Minority Forum 2013, Geneva, UNAOC Global Forum 2016, Baku, and NEXUS 2016 York. In addition, YDF has had the privilege to work with USAID, European Union (EU), UKAID, USIP, UN agencies, World Faith, and the Swiss Mission Office and Government of Punjab and Sindh. YDF works with multi-stakeholders, including District, Provincial and Federal governments, to promote youth-oriented policies and strategies that celebrate cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

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