

COMBATING RADICALIZATION TENDENCIES IN THE PROVINCE OF PUNJAB

A Research, Education and Dialogue Project



Center for the Study of Gender & Culture
(Society for Arts, Gender and Education)

and

Heinrich Böll Stiftung Pakistan



December 5, 2009 to February 28, 2010

END-OF-PROJECT REPORT

1. BACKGROUND

The Center for the Study of Gender & Culture (CSGC) and the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS) partnered for the project “Combating Radicalization Tendencies in the Province of Punjab” based upon funding provided by the Auswärtiges Amt (AA)- German Federal Foreign Office. The brief project, intended as a pilot, was undertaken from December 5, 2009 through February 28, 2010, including all project planning and mobilization.

The project built on an earlier project entitled “Contesting Fundamentalism- Conserving Democracy through Culture & Education”. This earlier project (January 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009) was implemented by the team through the Department of Communication & Cultural Studies, National College of Arts (NCA), also in partnership with HBS. This project had worked toward an overall goal of “enabling a democratic culture in Pakistan by sensitizing students and policy makers to the role of culture for democracy.” The project had been successful in producing all planned outputs, as well as beginning to open and explore a space to contest rising fundamentalism through sound academic research and education activities. A number of lessons were also learned (documented in the end-of-project report), principally that there was a significant demand for such activities, which were widely considered unique. There was also an expressed demand to develop an independent space to interact with students and academics from various institutions, beyond NCA, and to operate more efficiently than the complex and cumbersome procedures of NCA as a government organization.

Building on these lessons, and its own extensive experience, the project team established an

independent institution: Center for the Study of Gender & Culture (CSGC). With its mission to develop cultural theorization through research, education and dialog, the Center is a legally established component of the registered non-profit Society for Arts, Gender and Education. CSGC engages a distinguished panel of international academics in leading universities globally, and is now engaged in multiple program and project activities (see www.csgepk.org for more details). Continuing the earlier project through NCA, the Center partnered with HBS to propose and implement the new project, Combating Radicalization Tendencies in the Province of Punjab. With the new institutional base, and activities extending beyond only one educational institution, this project was supported by AA as a pilot to lead into future activities.

2. MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

The project team managed to **deliver all outputs** successfully, as planned.

PROJECT OUTPUTS

- Policy Brief: “Public Policy and Strategies for Counter-Terrorism in Pakistan” printed, disseminated and uploaded on project website.
- Policy Brief: “Academic Research and Counter-Terrorism in Pakistan” printed, disseminated and uploaded on project website.
- Project webpage developed, designed and uploaded on CSGC website, including downloadable versions of project publications (www.csgepk.org/combating-radicalization.html).
- Double-session seminar on “Gender, Culture & Violence in the Context of Extremism in Pakistan” conducted with 27 students from 5 different institutions; seminar report printed and disseminated, and uploaded on project website.
- Individual meetings conducted with 12 leading experts, intellectuals and activists in Lahore on “Ideas, Culture & Terror”; collated Expert Views Report printed and disseminated, and uploaded on project website.

The aim of the brief pilot project had been to demonstrate the positive potential to open an academic space to contest growing radicalization in the country, including in Punjab province, and to begin employing such a space by engaging students, academics, intellectuals and some policy makers on cultural issues underpinning growing radicalization. The project team **achieved these objectives** through the outputs.

Through the above outputs the project team reached out to **all targeted stakeholders**. The **seminar on “Gender, Culture and Violence”** involved 27 students belonging to five different universities/ institutions of higher education. The response was overwhelming, since the Center had only advertised 20 seats but was over-subscribed, with the participants distributed across

gender, field of study, institutions, and geographical origin. The diversity among students resulted in rich discussions. Instead of a single seminar session, as initially planned, the Project Director conducted two back-to-back sessions due to demand by students. At the end of the seminar, the students expressed appreciation for the seminar discussion and the extensive handout packages, noting that this had been a unique activity which they would be interested in participating further. They also related instances of numerous peers who would have also like to be involved, and expressed interest in becoming future resource persons for the Center's activities. A complete report of the seminar was produced and disseminated to key stakeholders, and is available on the project webpage.

Likewise, the **meetings with experts on “Ideas, Culture and Terror”** was a significant activity. Initially, the Center had planned on inviting leading academics, intellectuals and professionals to one meeting on the topic. However, the various schedules and short timeframe meant that the project team would have to sacrifice level of expertise for the sake of organizing a single meeting. Instead, the team decided to approach the experts individually, according to their schedules. In the event, all 12 experts (political analysts, academics, architects and artists, journalists, human rights' activists) gave freely of the time at their disposal, including one detailed set of responses by email. The collated views highlight key historical trends leading to present radicalization across the country, as well some of the dangers in the future. The experts also pointed to the ideologies underlying radicalization in Pakistan, and to inadequate efforts in combating these rigid ideologies. All experts agreed on the need for critical scholarship to counter radicalization in a “battle of ideas”. A report summarizing the views of these renowned experts was prepared and disseminated, and is available on the project webpage.

Based in part on these activities, and in part on the project team's academic work, **two policy briefs** were also produced. One focuses on the need for, and scope of, a public policy regarding counter-terrorism in Pakistan, which does not yet exist despite governmental promises. The brief reviews key developments internationally in this regard, and suggests the process to produce such a policy and its implementation through a political strategy and a security strategy. The second brief addresses the role of academic research in culture to counter radicalization (as compared to political reporting and analysis). This brief also reviews some international trends and proposes outlines of academic research. Both briefs have been printed and disseminated to key stakeholders, and are available for download on the project webpage. The **project webpage** itself was created on the website with downloadable documents, which will be hosted there for at least three years. The project engagement also allowed the team to establish and update the Center website, with other related materials and information.

3. LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANNING

Besides delivering all planned outputs, the brief project proved to be a useful pilot. It demonstrated not only that there is a relative **vacuum of academic research-based work to counter radicalization**, but also that there is a demand for more academic work to combat radicalization. In reaching out to stakeholders, the project also demonstrated some channels for how to employ that space. Most of all, as the Expert Views' Report summarizes, there is very little engagement in present in the "battle of ideas" to combat radical ideologies, and the Center's efforts are a small beginning.

One of the important lessons in the project implementation was that **research-based** activities are welcomed and can create impact, **particularly among college and university students and faculty**. The absence of such relevant, local research was frequently pointed out, especially at the intersection of Islam, culture and gender. Another lesson, pointed out by most students and experts, was that **one-off activities** tend to remain isolated and cannot connect to the broader discourse. For instance, one expert noted that once the current report emphasizes a historical analysis of the problem, there is a need to follow up with solutions.

A third lesson regarded the policy briefs. While the briefs were distributed appropriately, the response has not been very high. Initial reflection indicates that most Pakistani decision makers are too engaged in day-to-day issues regarding radicalization, with little time left for longer-term **policy formulation** or attention. Furthermore, the constant political instability and terrorist attacks deter relatively abstract attention to policy, although some decision makers met with informally agreed with the need for such attention in principle. Finally, it is evident that academic research is necessary but insufficient to effect policy. While policy influence requires such academic research (which the Center can attend to), additional expertise (possibly among private sector consultancies) is required to engage the relevant stakeholders in a process, communicate effectively, and create the necessary momentum.

Based on this pilot experience, the Center is **planning** further, integrated activities on the same theme of countering radicalization. *First*, the Center intends to develop research-based course materials for extended involvement of postgraduate students in an educational module (whether related to their credit courses or otherwise) around this theme. *Second*, the team is planning further academic research on popular radicalization in Pakistan and how to counter it through enquiry into gender and culture. *Third*, the Center is partnering with other, similar-minded organizations to engage more effectively in policy formulation. *Finally*, the project team is networking with academics and institutions in Europe to bring this discourse to an international

level, and facilitating more global scholarly engagement on issues of culture and religion.