

## Conflict Resolution and Peace Building: Exploring Perspectives of Different Faith Communities of Khyber Pakhtūkhwa

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### Abstract

Khyber Pakhtūkhwa is passing through sever crises where minorities are more prone to be under target. Islām gives the message of peace, harmony, respect of all human beings. However, Islām has been portrayed to be the reason of conflict and atrocities and Pashtuns are popularized to be extremists and terrorists. In this context, the present study is conducted to explore perspectives of different faith communities regarding conflict resolution and peace building in Khyber Pakhtūkhwa. The study uses quantitative method of research and questionnaire with close and open ended questions for data collection. The study is longitudinal in nature and data is collected from 180 members in five districts of Khyber Pakhtūkhwa in three different periods. It has been observed that respondents are considering women and youth role very vital in inter-faith activities, conflict resolution and peace building. The perception regarding media role has been improved during three successive surveys while at the same time media role is subjected to certain limitations i.e., media is required to promote harmony among different sects of the society, and not to float hate materials that can possibly provoke chaos in the society.

**Key words:** Conflict resolution, Peace building, Faith communities, Interfaith Activities, Media, Khyber Pakhtūkhwa.

### Introduction of the operating environment of the area

It is obvious to almost everyone that Pakistan is passing through a very difficult time as it is facing many challenges i.e. terrorism, law and order situation, political unrest, economic instability demographic problems, minority issues etc. These issues are prevailing in all over of Pakistan for years, but some regions and provinces are facing worst of it<sup>1</sup>. The Khyber Pakhtūkhwa, where this study is carried out, is included in that list.

It is pertinent to look back in history to trace the roots of this unrest on different levels. Khyber Pāss is used as gate way to almost all the invasions by

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warriors who entered South Asian continent. Being on the way and a strategic location, this region remained unstable since those invasions. British completed its journey to conquer this continent around 1849 by capturing this region<sup>2</sup> from Sikhs now known as Khyber Pakhtūnhwa.

Looking into the terrain of and tribal structure, this region is kept under different kind of rules and regulations from the rest of the country by British<sup>3</sup>. This division made it difficult for this big part of Pakhtūn region to develop western political, economic and education structure. When Pakistan came into being in 1947, the status of this region remained intact and the tribal built is given the name FATA. These political and administrative divisions have great impact on all aspects of life.

Next was the 1980s Afghan war in which people of this region were again actively involved<sup>4</sup>. This tussle between two super powers (US and USSR) was given the status of holy war and the people from this region fought it with same spirit along with people from other countries. At the end of this war irrespective of its results, the region developed Kalōshnikov culture where the people started to have more weapons than before<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, during this period non state religious seminaries are mushroomed in the region as parallel education system. The curriculum in this parallel education institutes is not same as in state run schools<sup>6</sup>. Difference in curriculum and instructions created two kinds of mentalities in this region.

More recently after 9/11 and US invasion in Afghānistan there has been a striking rise in domestic extremism, terrorism, ethnic fractionalization and sectarianism in Pakistan. In the wake of US attacks on Afghānistan and surrounding FATA built, and the resurgence of terrorists and Taliban, areas surrounding the Pāk Afghān border have suffered great destabilization. Since then Pakistan is in the grip of regular suicide attacks and has suffered high level of military and civilian casualties<sup>7</sup>. Swat one of the beautiful districts of Khyber Pakhtūnhwa was controlled and used as launching pad by the terrorists. Pakistani troops strived for regaining its control. During this period, camps, schools, churches, mosques, and private properties were targeted and destroyed by these extremist groups.

Sectarian violence, ethnic factionalism, suicide attacks were at peak in the project area, minorities are more prone to terrorism, and no one could escape the effects of terrorism. Terrorist groups operating in Pakistan are spread in all parts of Pakistan, however, primarily believed to be based in the

FATA and or Khyber Pakhtūnkhwa regions; these are areas where government control is tenuous at best as a result the rights and lives of minorities are at risk. All we need reinforcement of the capacity of our legal agencies to control and detect terrorist activities, groups and their supporters, and streamlining our efforts towards influencing the groups that directly or indirectly support terrorism through political intermediaries and civil society organizations. Although government has to take maximum responsibility in maintaining law and order, however, it is believed that government alone cannot get success if community members are not vibrant, mobilized, and focused. In the coming section, the status of minorities is described in light of constitution and Islamic discourse.

### **Constitutional provisions and Islāmic Discourse on the status of minorities**

The constitution of the Islāmic Republic of Pakistan defines and explains the minorities and their security through article 260(3-b) and 36 respectively which are reproduced as follows:

“Non-Muslim means a person who is not a Muslim and includes a person belonging to the Christian, Hindu, sikh, Budhist, or Parsi community, a person of Quādiāni Sect or the lahori group (who called themselves Ahmadis, or by any other name) or a Bahāye & a person belonging to any of the scheduled castes”.

“The state shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Minorities, including their representation in the federal and provincial services”.

In S. 5, A. 32, Allah says,

مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِعَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا<sup>8</sup>

“If a person kills another without any legal justification, it would be as if he killed the whole people.” {Meaning extracted}

Similarly, in another S. 17, A. 33, Allah says,

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَمَنْ قُتِلَ مَظْلُومًا فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا لَوْلِيهِ سُلْطَانًا<sup>9</sup>

“If anyone is slain wrongfully we have given his heir authority (to demand Qisās or to forgive).”

In explanation of the above and similar verses, Abū Bakar Jassās deduced that there is no difference between Muslim and Non-Muslim with respect to the application of the above law. Hence, a Muslim will face the same fate if he kills a Non-Muslim<sup>10</sup>.

Likewise, the right of religious freedom is equally applicable to all irrespective of their cast, creed, gender. In S. 2, A. 256, Allah Says,

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ<sup>11</sup>

“Let there be no compulsion in acceptance of religion.”

In similar context, in S. 18, A. 29, Allah says,

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ<sup>12</sup>

“Say the Truth is from your Lord. Let him who will believe, and let him who will reject.”

It is obvious that Islāmic discourse and principles do not allow anyone to force another through coercive means and duress to change his faith and accept the faith of actor. Human being is awarded with free-will to follow any of the religion/faith. However, Allah will reward the righteous and punish the wrongdoers.

The message of Allah revealed to this world through various manifestation in different time periods have the same extension of love, peace, harmony, and respect to all people irrespective of geographical location, color, creed, gender, and faith. Nevertheless, people due to their misunderstanding and or vested interests have violated and trespassed such norms and principles. Such violations resulted in social, economic, political and human losses that could be found in world history.

As revealed in the introduction section, that people's active involvement along with government support is essential in resolving conflicts and maintaining peace in turbulent areas and regional crises. Therefore, World Relief (WR) has supported and expanded the initiative of Diocese of Peshāwar to other districts of Khyber Pakhtūkhwa i.e., the formation of Peshāwar Faith Friends (PFF) by involving and connecting local people (of all faiths). Peshāwar Faith Friends group (PFF) consists of 30 dominant religious and community leaders. The primary task of this commission is to promote peace, and resolve conflicts among diverse faith groups before violence can erupt. In line with the above aim of the project, the present study is conducted to investigate the knowledge, attitude and practices of the target groups with regard to peace-building, conflict resolution and inter-faith harmony in Khyber Pakhtūkhwa in order to facilitate resolution of conflicts and promotion of peace among different faith communities.

## **Methodology**

This section describes the whole procedure and steps adopted for carrying out this research work. A survey tool was designed and checked through experts for its face and content validity. The already established faith friend groups were the target population of the selected five districts of Khyber Pakhtūkhwa province of Pakistan.

### **Study area**

Khyber Pakhtūkhwa, the most affected province of Pakistan was selected for the project. The reason of selecting this province was its peculiar status and location in the scene of extremism and terrorism. Initially six districts were selected for the project activities, however NOC issue restricted the project to five districts as Abbot Abād is excluded from the list. Therefore, the study is carried out in five (05) districts of the province. All the five districts were considered to be the vulnerable places in terms of risks for the inhabitants in general and minority groups in particular. Districts include Swāt, Mardān, Peshāwar, Bannū and Dera Ismā‘īl Khān.

### **Population and sample size**

The population of the study was faith friend groups constituted in all the five districts with the aim to evaluate if they could be more capable of working for peace in their communities. From among the total members of the faith friend groups 180 respondents both male and female from almost all the religious groups i.e., Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Sikh were selected. They were selected conveniently from the districts without taking into consideration their other characteristics like profession, union council, age etc. The only criteria for their selection were their membership in the FFG. However, it was purposively ensured that sample size be almost equally distributed on the basis of gender. Further, all the four religious groups were given representation in the sample without reference to their total population in the province or Pakistan.

### **Tool of data collection**

A comprehensive questionnaire covering demographic information, networking with faith communities, and conflict resolution was constructed with dominantly closed ended questions. However, few open ended and multiple answer questions were also designed in order to investigate the issue in detail. The questionnaire was designed and checked through experts in the field of survey and peace-building.

Data was collected through Peace Building Officers (PBOs) who were trained by the evaluation team on the tool as well as on basic principles of confidentiality, informed consent and interviewing techniques. The PBOs were

considered to be the most appropriate personnel for data collection as they have already established a rapport with the target population.

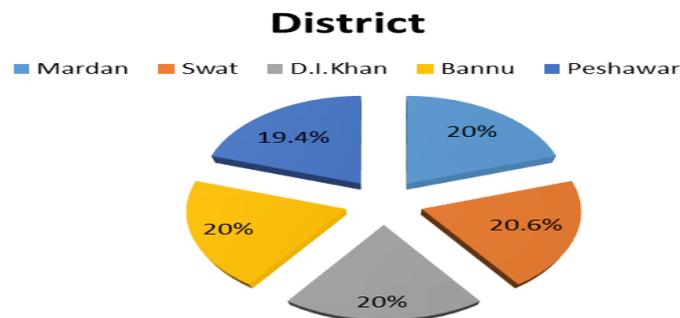
### Analysis of the data

The collected data was transformed to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) by the evaluation team. The data was analyzed by using simple frequency distribution and percentages. However, to understand significant variation in the results of all the three surveys a comparison has been made.

### Data Analysis

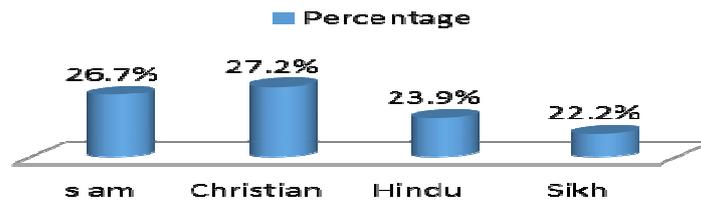
In this section all the three surveys are comparatively discussed in order to understand the situation on the ground and the transformational change ensured by the project investment on the respondents if any. The results are graphically presented followed by simple description. The survey mainly focused on the conflict, its level, causes, role and ability of community in resolving conflict, women, and youth and media possible role in conflict resolution. However, prior to all these, demographic information are presented in graphs and tables for understanding the characteristics of the respondents.

### Demographic Information

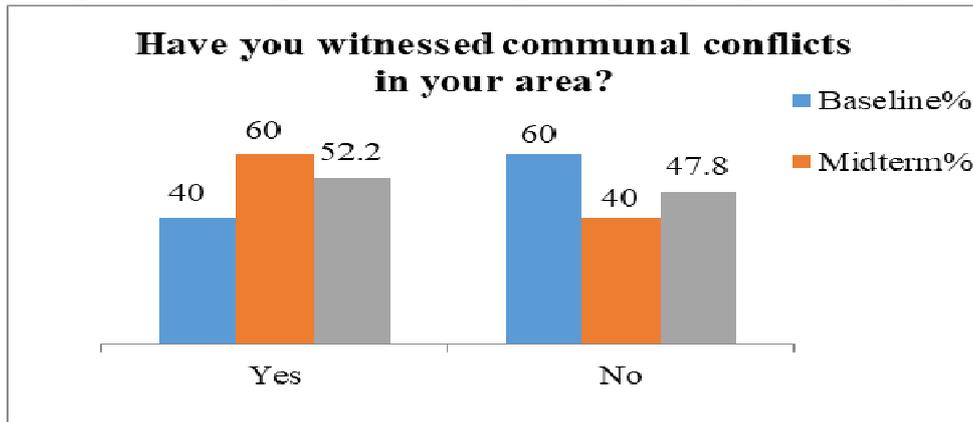


Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	93	51.7
Female	87	48.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100.0</b>

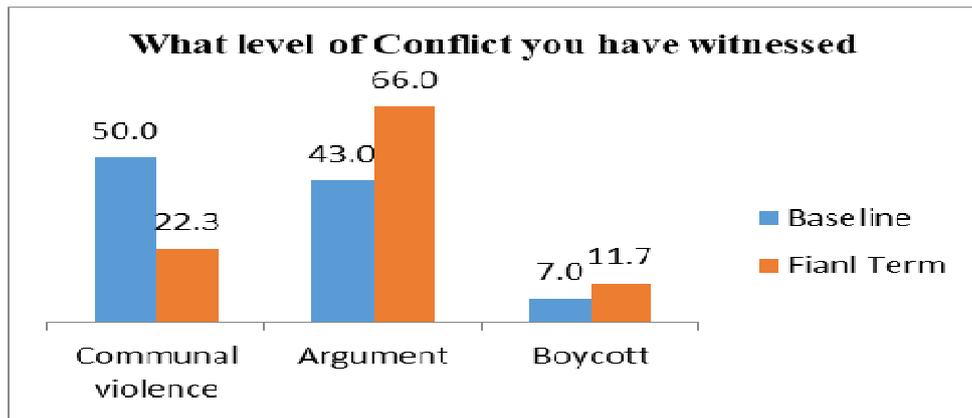
## Religion



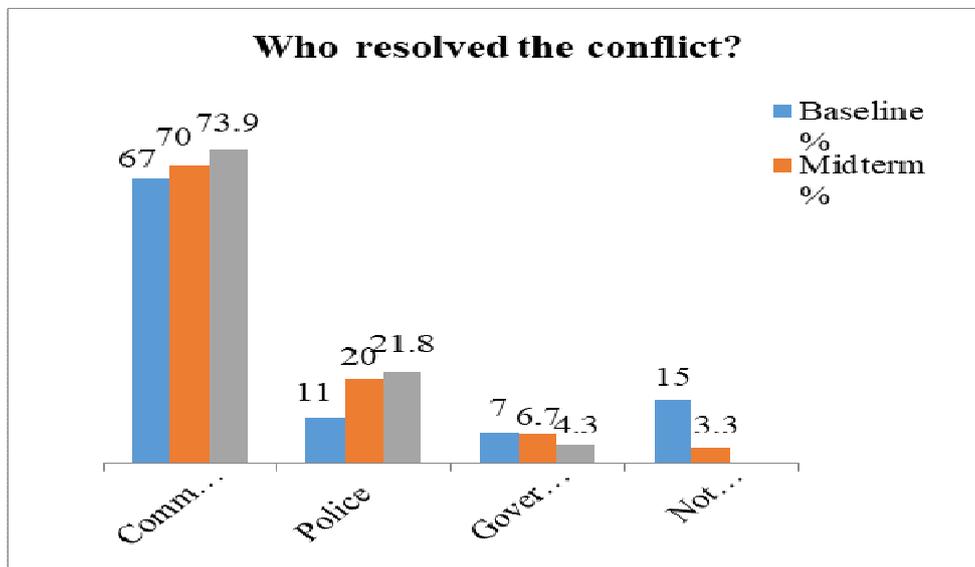
The above graphs show that data is collected from five districts of the Pakhtūnkhwa province with 51.7:48.3 percent male and female respectively. The respondents belong to all the four major religious groups of the region.



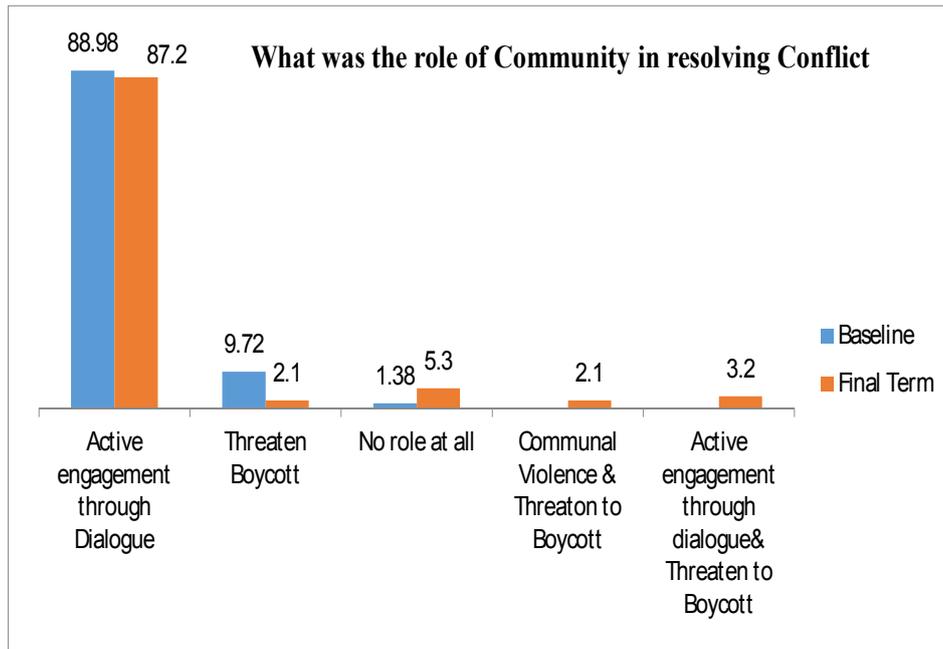
As demonstrated in the above figure, there is a variation in responses through all the three surveys. If we closely look into the figures, we will see that witnessing communal conflicts are increased by more than 12 percent from the base line through end line surveys. It could be deduced from the figures that during project period communal conflicts are increased in number. However, it could also be concluded that the project interventions have sensitized the respondents regarding faith communities and their issues including various forms of conflict; which resulted in increase in reporting communal conflicts in the area. The psychological dimension of the results could be interpreted as that project has sensitized the interfaith communities regarding conflicts which will ultimately add to their corresponding willingness and readiness for its resolution. Non-recognition and non-realization of the conflicts result into no response from the people. And such milieu, which is characterized as state of denial, is to be the most damaging one for any nation. Hence, this could be the contribution of the project by realizing them to not only recognize but also face such issues by taking steps to resolve them.



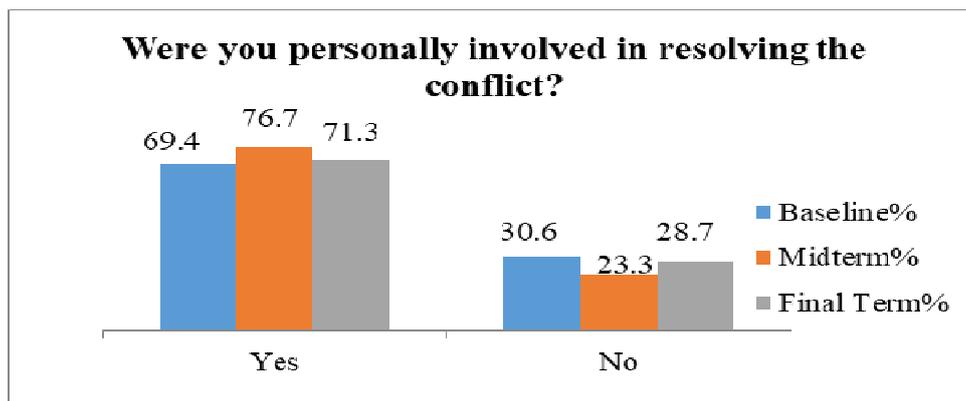
In the figure above, witnessing communal violence has been reduced by almost 28%, while argument and boycott has been increased by 23 and 3% respectively. These results could be considered positive as communal violence which is hard form of conflict is shifted to soft form of conflicts.



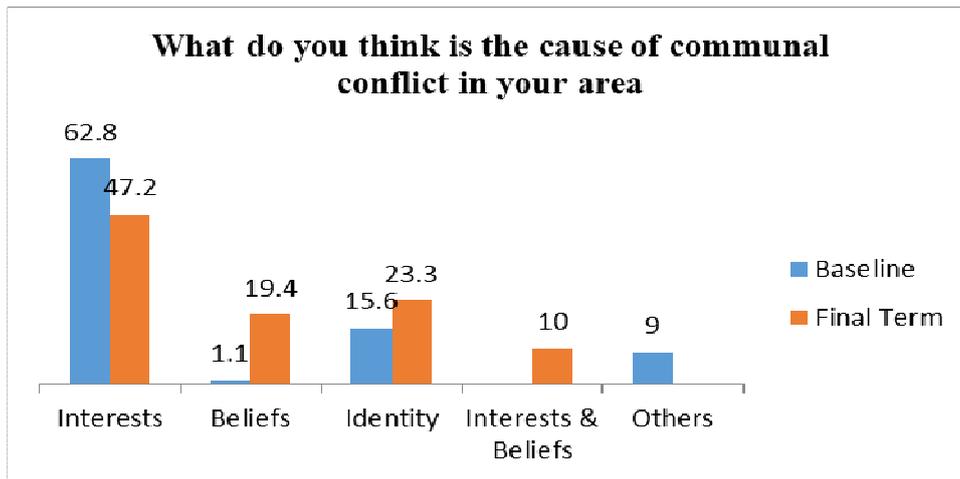
The figure clearly indicating that all the stockholders (i.e. community members, police and government department) are actively taking interest in resolving conflict. Their result ratio improved from one level to another level. While, on the other hand, a substantial decrease is reported in non-resolution of conflict from 15% to 3.3% in midterm and zero (0%) in the final term.



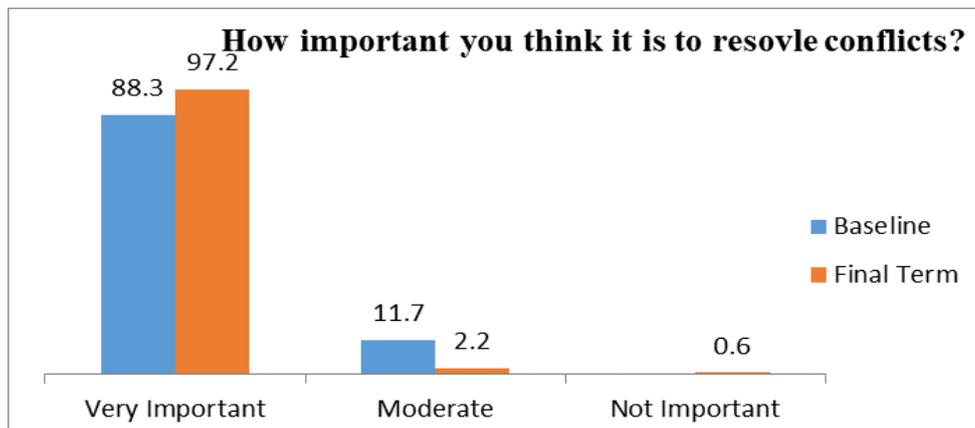
From the figure above, it is revealed in both the surveys, that resolving conflicts, community has played an active engagement role through dialogue which is considered to be the traditional capital of the study area.



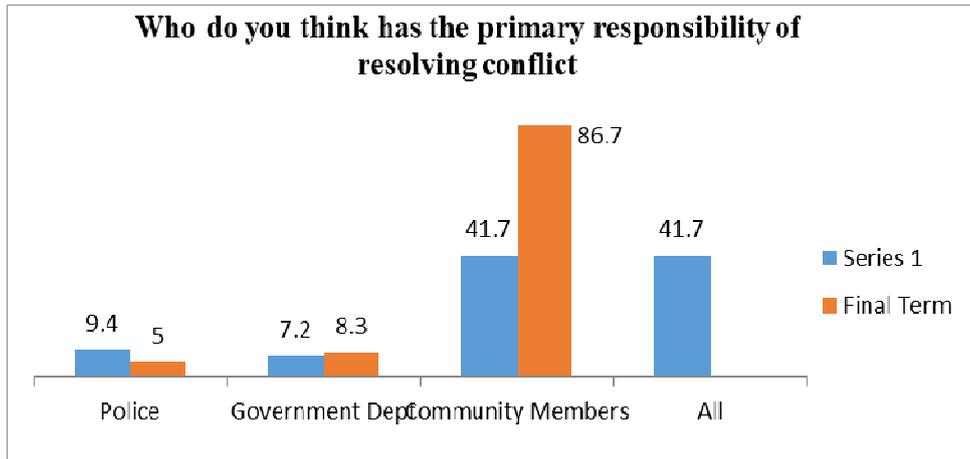
An investigation about respondents’ personal involvement in conflict resolution shows a change in upward direction. The results indicate a 7% increase in the personal involvement of respondents in resolving the conflict in midterm but however it is reduced to 5% in final term. Witnessing community conflicts increased by 12.2% from baseline to final term survey that is not matching 5% increase in personal involvement in conflict resolution but still this increase is noteworthy.



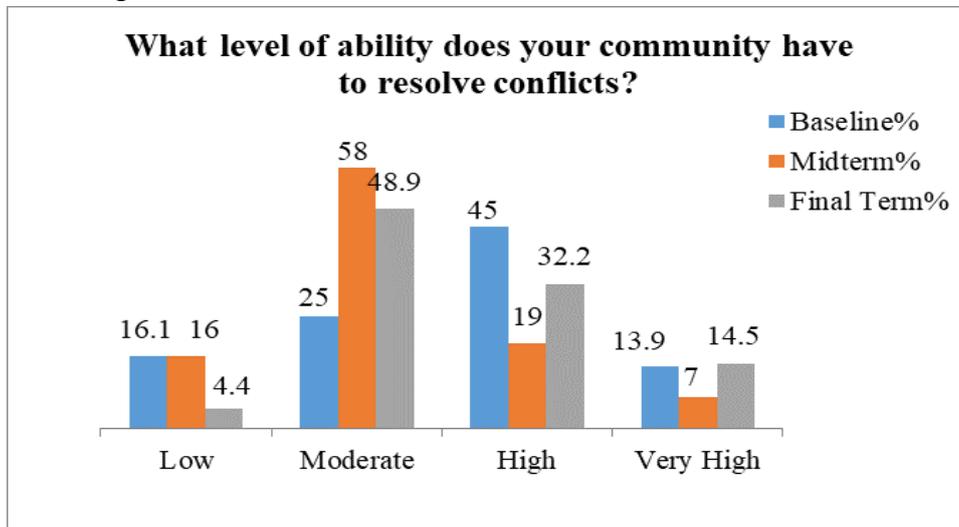
A considerable downward shift is observed in the opinion that conflicts are erupted because of interests. On the other hand, opinion about the conflicts caused by beliefs has been increased by 18.3%. An increase from 0 to 10% is observed in interest and belief simultaneously.



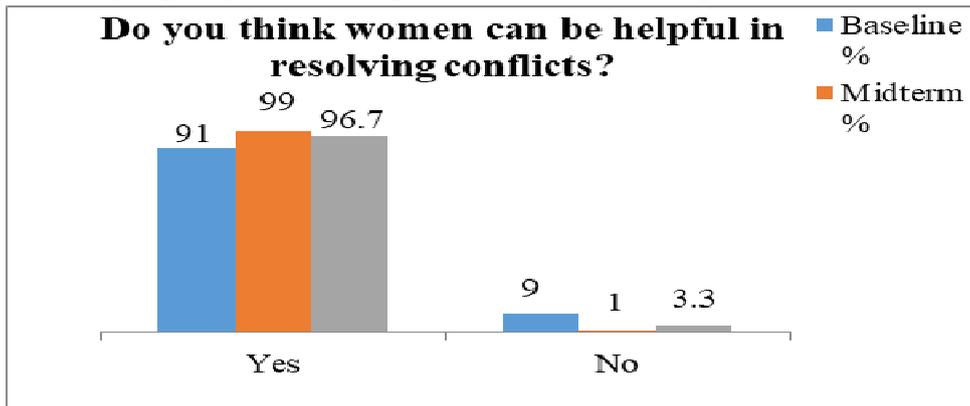
An increased awareness for the importance regarding conflict resolution is observed from baseline through final term survey. On the other hand, 9.5% downward shift is recorded for moderate importance.

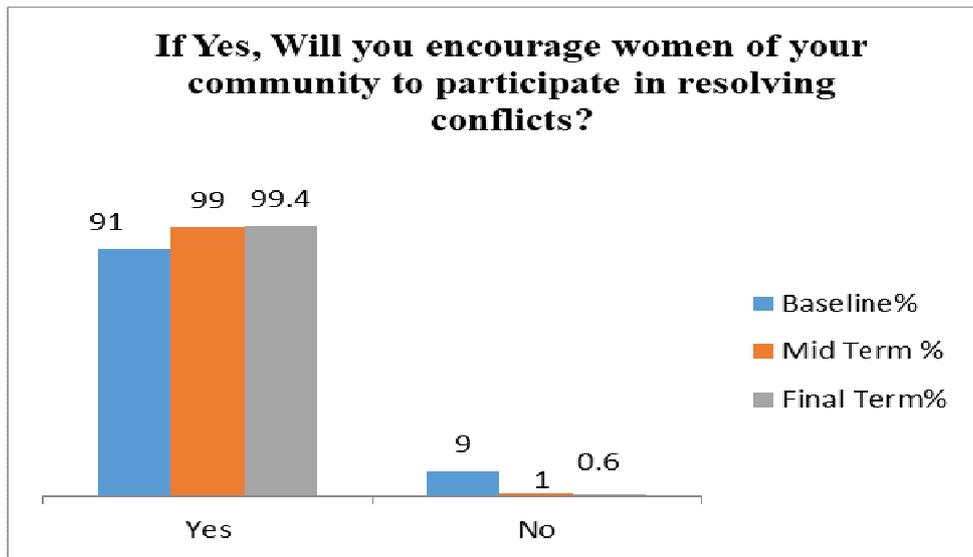


The figure demonstrates that community members are actively taking interest in resolving conflicts.

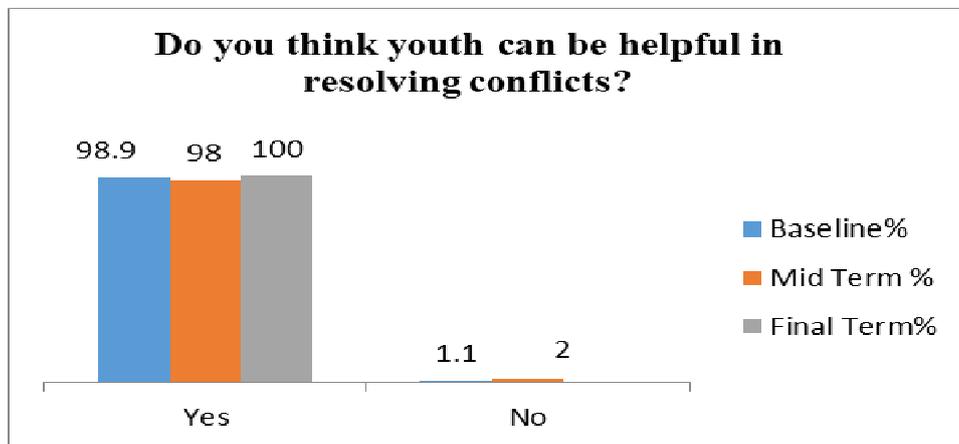


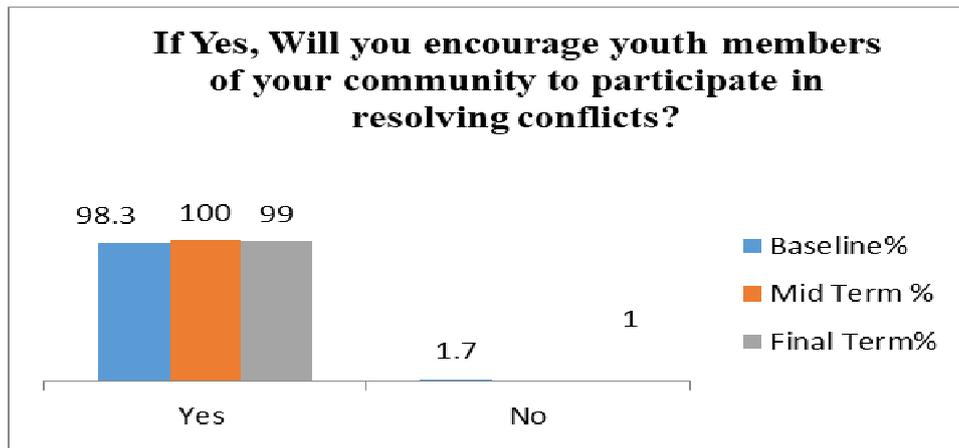
Encouraging results are depicted in the above figure where belief in community capacity of resolving conflicts is over all improved.



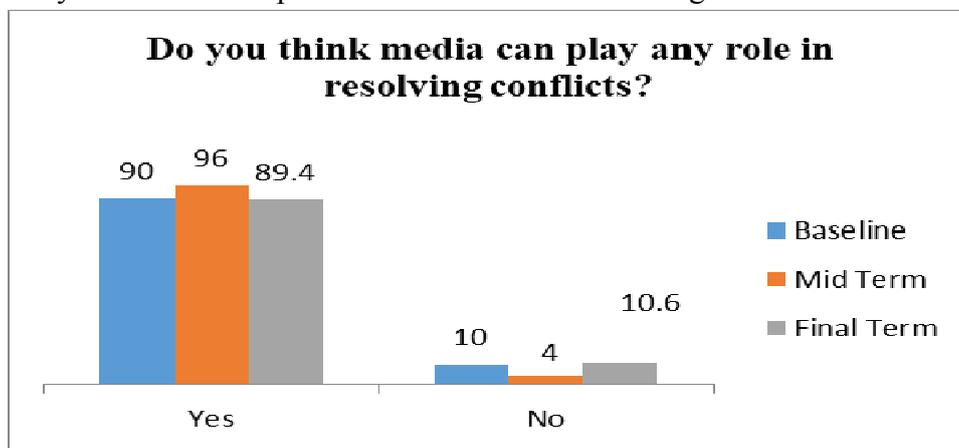


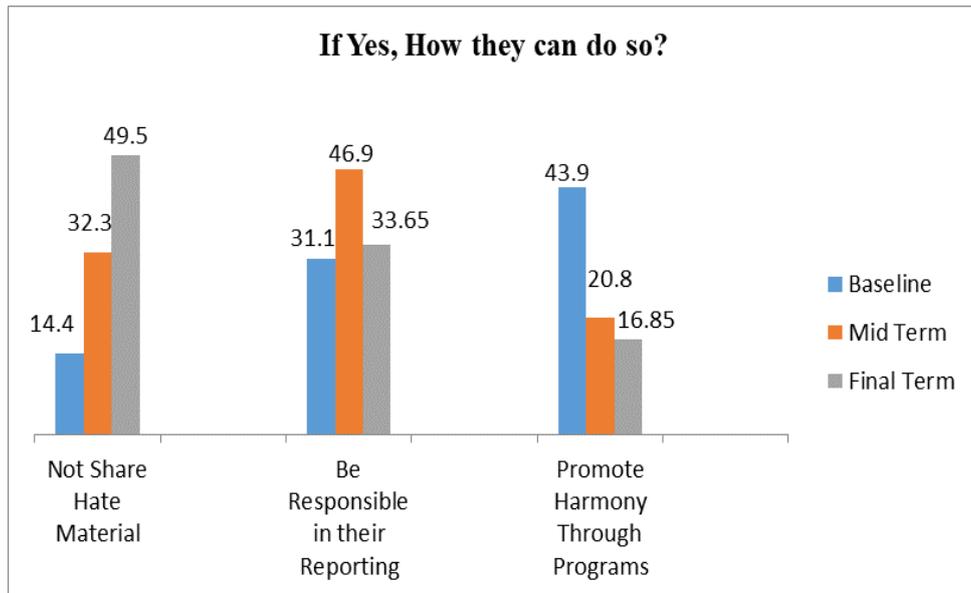
As reflected in the figure, a positive change in the belief and attitude of the respondents could be envisaged from the results. The results show 8% (midterm) and 6% (final term) increase from baseline believing that women can be helpful in resolving conflicts with similar increase of encouraging women by respondents. It is noteworthy that in baseline 15 male and 2 female respondents opted for “No” and in final term 6 respondents are of the view that women cannot be helpful in resolving conflicts and all of them are male. Similarly, 8% and .4% increase is depicted in the above figure with reference to encouragement of women in conflict resolution process.





As envisaged from figure 34 and 35, a change in attitude with respect to believing in youth helpfulness in resolving conflicts is observed by 1.1% from baseline through final term while 0.7% increase is observed in willingness to allow youth of their respective communities in resolving conflicts.





The results show that maximum numbers of respondents believe in the role of media in resolving conflicts. Notwithstanding this their response regarding how media can play role, is different in all the three terms, in baseline, majority of the respondents (43.9%) reported that media can play a role by promoting harmony through programs and in midterm review, majority of the respondents (46.9%) reported that media can play its role by keeping itself responsible in reporting while in final term review, majority of the respondents (49.5%) reported that media should not share hate material. This change in result might be due to participation in interfaith activities by the respondents where they gained firsthand information and experience about the members of other faiths which might have enlightened them of the normal human behavior and social life other faith members observe. Hence, they are pressing for not sharing hate material by and through media.

### Conclusion

Soft projects like the one completed which are targeting human knowledge, attitude and practices are time taking and slow in exerting impacts. One may not expect a very high and intense attitudinal change within two years of project interventions. However, project results show a change in the desired direction. Through interaction with project personnel and faith friend groups in the selective seminars, activities and training sessions, a positive change has been observed in the level of interaction between different faith groups. In initial sessions most of the faith groups were reluctant to share their

views. Moreover, these groups could have been easily identified because almost all members used to set with their own faith groups. In the latter stage of the project all the members including women and youngsters were observed to be open in sharing their views regarding interfaith harmony. The relationship among different faith communities is good and inter-faith activities have the potential to promote harmony and understanding among different faith-communities by providing opportunities of social gathering, establishing friendship, understanding and awareness. Respondents interact with other faith communities for better understanding and conflict resolution. Women and youth are considered vital for inter-faith activities and peace building processes in the community. The importance of inter-faith communities can be observed from the latest statistics that almost all disputes in the concerned areas were being resolved by communities. This could be the cause that considerable number of respondents is willingly volunteering for interfaith activities and peace-building in their communities. Such people are the key actors in bringing in sustainable peace by transforming communities from violent to peaceful coexistence.

The current study shows positive change in the attitude of respondents for considering women and youth role in inter-faith activities and conflict resolutions. Nevertheless, with the passage of time people are more likely to welcome women and youth participation in inter-faith activities and resolution of conflicts in their areas. The perception regarding media role has been improved while at the same time media role is subjected to certain limitations i.e., media is required to promote harmony among different sects of the society, and not to float hate materials that can possibly provoke chaos in the society. The Islamic faith and its pro-human principles has the potential to provide breathing ground to conflict resolution and peace building in Khyber Pakhtūnkhwa as majority of the people follow it. However, its true essence needs to be understood by common people through religious teachings by scholars and active community involvement.

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