Religions and Development (R&D) Project

Report on

Policy Implication, Formulation & Implementation Workshop

Organized by

LUMS, Lahore
&
The Researchers, Islamabad

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Introduction

The purpose of this workshop was to share the findings of three research projects carried out in Pakistan as part of the Religions and Development research programme: “Religion, Politics and Governance in Pakistan”, “Sectarian Conflict and Post-Conflict Transformation” and “Values and Beliefs and their Relationship with Key Development Concepts”. As part of the programme’s communication and dissemination agenda, the aim of the workshop was to reach out to stakeholders from the government, elected representatives and donor community. Fifteen invited representatives attended, and were provided with an opportunity to provide feedback on the research findings and to consider their implications for policy and practice.

Proceedings of the Workshop

SESSION I:
Values & Beliefs and their Relationship with Key Development Concepts

Ms. Rubina Saigol presented findings from her research, which focused on the relationships between religious values and beliefs and key development concepts and tools such as poverty, debt, and women’s education. Similar research has been conducted in India, Nigeria and Tanzania. The study was carried out in two cities, Lahore and Peshawar. It sought to identify the ways in which selected Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) interpret religious discourse relevant to key development concerns, and to interview followers and students of the selected organizations to ascertain the extent to which messages passed on by leaders correspond with the perspectives of the followers to determine the level to which religious discourses are internalized and interactions between public utterances and private action. Four Sunni and three Shi’ite organizations were selected for study in Lahore, namely: Jamaat-e-Islami, Minhaj-ul-Quran, Al-Huda, Jamaat-ud-Daa’wa, Jamia Minhaj-ul-Hussain, Jamia Al-Muntazar and Imamia Students Organization. The organizations selected for study in Peshawar were the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (F) and Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (S). Followers of a Shi’ite community belonging to Arif Al-Hussaini in Peshawar were also interviewed. The aim of the study was to find out whether there are any systematic sectarian, class, gender and regional differences in the manner in which modern, secular development concepts are understood and applied in these contexts. Gender was a cross-cutting theme across organizations, sites, sects and classes. Ethnographic methodology was used, especially in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, materials analysis, attendance at Friday sermons, and classroom observation of lectures and sermons. For the purpose of comparison, a
cross-section of secular individuals were interviewed to find out whether there are any systematic differences between sacred and secular worldviews.

The presentation summarized the causes of and remedies for poverty identified by religious and secular individuals, examined their views on micro-credit and women’s education as development strategies, and suggested some possible policy implications.

- While religious individuals attribute poverty to the unjust distribution of wealth; the adoption of a class-based, capitalist, feudal system instead of an Allah-based system; a Western banking system they regard as exploitative; failure of the rich to share their wealth; indifference on the part of the Pakistani military, government and bureaucracy; failure to implement poverty reduction policies; consumerism and greed; a limited sense of social responsibility; and the role of international financial institutions and multi-national corporations. Secular respondents share many of the same views: they attribute poverty to the capitalist, feudal economic system; exclusion from mainstream development; Pakistan’s failure to develop a production base, industrialize and generate wealth; failure to tax the rich; government’s use of its revenue for unproductive purposes such as arms; and increasing population and urbanization.

- For religious people, the most obvious remedy is to establish an Islamic economic system, including the use of zakat, ushr and sadqa to prevent the concentration of wealth; sharing resources with the poor; government provision of services; the exercise of social responsibility by private sector enterprises; and the promotion of simplicity rather than consumerism. Secular respondents similarly believe that the state must play a central role. In their view, government should take responsibility for all citizens, leading it to improve the distribution of wealth, including land, and to develop business and industry (although also it should question the free market model); take action against corruption in order to ensure an efficient and honest bureaucracy; and invest in education, including on the need to restrict family size.

- Ms Saigol suggested that these views suggested considerable support from both religious and secular individuals for government to address poverty through active policies to redistribute land, foster industry, spend less on the military and more on social services, tax the rich and make better use of revenue derived from zakat etc, and curb corruption.

- Religious people have strong views on the impermissibility of interest and believe that current approaches are exploitative, although they also believe that properly designed microcredit schemes would be permissible and able to reduce poverty. Secular respondents, although less concerned about the permissibility of interest, were much more sceptical about the contribution of micro-credit to the provision of micro-credit to poverty reduction, arguing that it merely brings poor people into the capitalist system and may actually exacerbate poverty because of the high interest rates charged. It is, of course, possible that these different views reflect differences in the socio-economic characteristics and experiences of the respondents. Although the research project did not examine the outcomes of any actual micro-credit schemes, respondents had various ideas about how they could be improved.
• Secular respondents unconditionally support equal access to secular education for women: they regard it as a fundamental right, believe that it should cover the same subjects as education for boys and men (and should exclude domestic science), support co-educational schools and strongly condemn the bombing or torching of girls’ schools. While most religious respondents also support education for girls and women, they view it in instrumental terms as ‘good for the family’ and ‘good for the nation’; believe that it should concentrate on domestic science, Islamic studies and training for motherhood; and should only be provided in single sex schools. The implications of these different views for policy include the need to devote more resources to ensuring that all girls can attend schools with well-trained teachers; to continue single sex education post-puberty for the moment; and to ensure that girls’ schools are safe and secure.

Discussion
Ms. Yasmeen Rahman, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for the Ministry of Women Development of the Government of Pakistan observed that in Pakistan, religion has been used to create a nexus of interests shared by the military and the mullahs (religious persons), to provide the former with a source of legitimacy to govern. During repeated periods of military rule, religious ideas have permeated the curriculum. Government policies over the years have failed to establish sustainable systems, as policy has been based on a short-term perspective. She stressed the value of the research to the government.

Ms. Helen Appleton, Senior Gender Advisor from DFID, Pakistan, commented on the failure of policy to address the high school dropout rate. She argued that much research done by DFID shows that micro-credit can work effectively to reduce poverty and empower women, noting that while the Grameen Bank might have some problems, it has been instrumental in broadening opportunities for the poor.

Ms. Ayesha Tammy Haq stressed that micro-credit brings a number of benefits for women: it not only empowers them financially but is also associated with a number of positive changes in their lives, such as an increased say in reproductive issues. In addition, she argued that the typical 22 per cent interest rate charged for micro-credit is not high when with the 100-200 per cent interest rate that money lenders charge for loans to poor people. However, she acknowledged that the current system needed some changes.

Mr. Javed Malik from DFID was of the view that no governments in Pakistan had taken education seriously, but threw doubt on whether reformers (secular groups and radical Islamic NGOs) would make much difference until they could bridge the ideological divisions between them.

Mr. Aazar Ayaz from The Researchers also highlighted the flaws in the micro-credit system. He mentioned that the Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) and other micro-finance institutions charge 23 per cent or more as a service charge and highlighted the lack of links between skills development and micro-credit, because the former is mainly connected with community infrastructure projects. He also suggested that although micro-credit is taken in the names of
women, in most cases it is utilized by men. In order to tackle this, Mr. Ayaz suggested that the provision of micro-credit should focus on women-headed and women-managed households.

Mr. Zafar Ismail highlighted the dilemma that, although excellent policy recommendations are formulated, insufficient attention is given to implementation. He also pointed out that neither religious nor secular educational institutes provide vocational education and suggested that it should be mandatory at primary school level in order to produce a skilled workforce.

Mr. Sarwar Bari of Pattan Development Organization pointed out the links between micro-credit, education and land reform and stressed that without improving the political system, issues of education and health cannot be addressed. He also expressed concern that if religious elements respond well to the popular demands of the masses (e.g. by providing free education in religious schools), they might not only influence the provision of education but also take over political control, with implications for the achievement of development objectives.

Dr. Mohammad Waseem shared observations he has made while conducting research on the topic, noting that religious elements orient their answers according to their perception of an interviewer and their assessment of which audience the research is addressing. He stressed the need for careful interpretation of the meaning behind what respondents might say, pointing out that radical groups quickly adopt popular terminologies, for example Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has adopted the terminology of women’s empowerment.

Ms. Rubina Saigol, responding to comments on her presentation, agreed with Dr. Waseem that there is a tendency among religious organizations to adopt the rhetoric of the west, giving the example of JI which, when it fought elections as the Pakistan Islamic Front (PIF), adopted the entire rhetoric of the left during its campaign. She stressed the general concurrence of beliefs among secular and religious groups on the issues of poverty, wealth and the state’s responsibility for poverty alleviation, noting that the main divergence in their thinking emerged with respect to women’s education.

Though both groups approve women’s education, she argued that religious organizations want to educate women in order to exert greater control over both what is taught and women themselves – their motivation for educating women is to make them good wives and mothers. She agreed that educate has not been a priority for any Pakistani government, as demonstrated by the budgetary allocation for education never exceeding 2 per cent of GDO. She identified unemployment as another reason for children dropping out from school, stressed the need for technical and vocational education to be accompanied by ‘social education’, and argued that it is the responsibility of the bureaucracy and government to ensure that policies are implemented.

Responding to the comments on micro-credit, she noted that it is rejected by many practitioners and parliamentarians, who fear that the provision of credit to the poor might bring about a financial crisis in third world countries in the same way as it triggered the crisis in the United States. She did not agree that the interest rates charged by micro-finance organizations could be justified because
they are so much less than those charged by money lenders, instead asserting that it is unjust to
charge interest of around 22 per cent when its purpose is poverty alleviation.

The group suggested that:
- There is a need to deepen and connect development work with policy research, especially
to understand and address poverty
- The impact of micro-credit in Pakistan should be evaluated.
- Social protection measures should include consideration of religious giving, to increase
transparency on the use government makes of the revenue generated from it.
- Skills development should be emphasized, to strengthen the workforce
- Access to education should be improved, especially for girls.

SESSIONS II & III:
Religion, Politics and Conflict

Dr Waseem presented his findings from two research projects: first on religion, politics and
governance in Pakistan, and then on Sectarian conflict and post-conflict transformation.

Religion, Politics and Governance in Pakistan
The research aimed at understanding and evaluating the relationships between Muslim
organizations, politics and governance, including the formulation of development policy. The
question at the heart of the inquiry was whether religion can play the role of a driver for change in
terms of pro-poor policy and practice. The study analyses the nature and direction of the latent
force and dynamism of the Islamic establishment, especially in its organizational setting, both in
government and in opposition. It shows that the state in Pakistan has typically pursued a policy of
exploiting the functional uses of Islam as a source of legitimacy in the absence of, or in
combination with, a mass mandate. In so doing, Dr Waseem argued, it has played on the turf of
Islamic groups by seeking to control the production and spread of the religious message, co-opting
the ulema and managing religious affairs, ranging from levying Islamic taxes to the management of
shrines, policies towards madrasas and a role in sectarian conflict.

However, he also argued that it is necessary to go beyond a purely instrumentalist explanation of
how religion is used by the state to understand the structural dynamics of Islam as a constant,
pervasive and intense force that includes, but at the same time transcends, the manipulations of
the ruling elite. The genesis of Pakistan lay in the partition of India on the basis of religion, which
therefore assumed a role with no parallel in recent history except in Israel. This, however, needs to
be put in perspective in view of two countervailing forces: a secular constitutional state based on
the Westminster model and the cosmopolitan, Westernized, liberal and secular character of the
elite both in and outside the state. On the one hand, the state has all along struggled to define
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religion as part of its political discourse. On the other hand, the ulema have relied on the supreme legitimizing potential of religion to hold the state to its promise to establish Sharia in the country.

The present study regards Islam as an oppositional force that has consistently been engaged in carving out a niche for itself in the system, shaping the political discourse in the process. It focused on the role of religion in governance, with reference to development policy formulation and public administration. This role was analysed in the context of North West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), where an alliance of religious political parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), was in power between 2002 and 2007. The MMA government immediately set out to Islamize the province by passing the 2003 Sharia Act. However, based on an in-depth study of three districts, the research also shows how the Islamic government had problems because of its dependence on central government and donors and therefore had to adjust in order to survive in office. As a result, despite their initial concerns, donors played ball with the regime. However, it did not develop partnerships with NGOs, which it regarded as anti-Islamic (especially women’s NGOs). The research reveals that the extent to which the MMA government was able to translate its ideological objectives into development outcomes was limited, especially noting that it suffered from the usual maladies of governance in Pakistan: corruption, nepotism and inefficiency.

**Sectarian Conflict and Post-Conflict Transformation**

Dr. Waseem also presented findings from a study of Shia-Sunni conflict and the post-conflict restoration of peace, which adopted comparative and historical dimensions. The study focused on two ‘contested cities’ Jhang and Gilgit:

- Jhang has a Sunni majority, while Gilgit has a Shia majority.
- The former is on the periphery of the centre; the latter is at the centre of the periphery.
- The former experienced a process of Sunniisation of local power dynamics, the latter experienced the state’s attempt at Sunnification of a Shia stronghold.
- In Jhang, a militant sectarian party, Sipah Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), operated as the agent provocateur, while in Gilgit, the state itself orchestrated attempts to change the demographic, social and economic balance in favour of Sunnis.

The historical progression of the sectarian conflict has four stages:

1. The pre-conflict peace was characterized by an established social hierarchy, defined by a recurrent pattern of feuding and the settlement of issues within the context of a hegemonic social framework.

2. The genealogy of conflict can be located in the social, political, ideological and demographic changes wrought by the partition of India. The spatial reconfiguration of the new state led to Sunni-majoritarian nationalism, which sought to de-territorialize the identities of religious and sectarian minorities. In this process, the state played a partisan role, as opposed to the constitutional provisions for non-discrimination on the basis of faith and for equal status of all citizens. The two jihads in Afghanistan and Kashmir, in the 1980s and 1990s respectively,
cultivated a profile of violence as a legitimate means to a perceived noble end. Institutionalization of sectarianism in the society was expressed through: Sunni-oriented educational curricula; Islamic laws and courts; the emergence of separate residential areas for different sects; public discourse that upheld supposed Shia apostasy; and breakdown of inter-sectarian social relations. In this way, the religious agency challenged the existing patterns of domination.

3. The violence itself emerged from the dichotomization of worldviews between rival groups of activists engaged in identity politics. The story of sectarian violence in the two cities was of a mega-event, which reverberated in the public memory, distinguishing the new sectarianism from the old. The new sectarianism was marked by an increase in the frequency of violence (acts of murder, street riots and attacks on holy places and processions of the other sect), and also its character (occurring in multiple locations across the cities but also more widely in the surrounding districts, provinces and nations). The violence erected barriers to social integration, redrew boundaries between communities, and thus exposed the failure of the state’s institutional mechanisms for conflict resolution.

4. In considering the aftermath of the violence, the research addressed four questions: What was the short as well as long-term impact of the violence? What is the character of the new normalcy? Has conflict transformation occurred? Did Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) play a meaningful role in creating peace and social harmony? Our observations pointed to the fact that the immediate fallout of the conflict was destructive of the social order, leading to the displacement of people, breakdown of their local support systems and brutalization of social attitudes in general. Over time, people have settled down to lives in separate faith-based neighbourhoods and have adjusted to a new pattern of normalcy, but they carry bitter memories of their suffering and uphold more belligerent identities.

Our case studies show that no FBOs or even NGOs played significant roles before, during or after the conflict. Gilgit boasts a well-established FBO/NGO, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), which has an Ismaili sectarian identity and is engaged in development activities in the rural areas. However, it played no role in the conflict between the other two communities, Shias and Sunnis, or in efforts at conflict resolution. All along, the state operated along two tracks. On the one hand, it opted for withdrawal from an active role in stopping the violence, providing relief or bringing criminals to justice. On the other hand, it eventually exercised its residual authority to contain the violence, re-establish its writ, and restore inter-communal peace at a functional level. However, the study concludes that the absence of an all-encompassing normative value system based on pluralism, equal citizenship and separation between religion and politics, as well as the presence of crass majoritarianism and a persistent crisis of governance, have and will continue to pose formidable roadblocks in the way of building bridges across the sectarian divide.

Discussion

Dr. Khalid Masood, Chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology, elaborated on the history of ethnic conflicts in Jhang, which has been a conflict-prone district. Early on, conflict occurred between
Mohajirs and locals, then there was a conflict between Ahmedis and Sunnis and now there is Shia-Suni conflict. He agreed with Dr. Waseem that in the past Shias and Sunnis lived in harmony, and that this conflict has occurred because the minority is influential and the majority deprived.

Mr. Mujeeb Khan, ADB consultant, appreciated that the study identifies the roots of conflict and the role of State. He argued that there is a bigger issue that looms behind all these issues, which has led to the larger conflict in the region. An ex-District Commissioner in Jhang, Mr Khan pointed towards prominent non-state actors operating within the state. He also drew attention to the problems caused by the unequal size of provinces, arguing that the fundamental design of the federal system needs to be addressed.

Ms. Fauzia Yazdani inquired about the emerging ethnic scene in Gilgit-Baltistan, which currently has autonomous status but may soon become a province. She asked whether it would become a Shia-majority province, questioning whether the MQM will have an opportunity to cash up in Gilgit-Baltistan as well as in Punjab. She also asked about the line of action that development stakeholders need to take up in order to deal with such sectarian conflicts, in particular what type of policies the government needs to adopt.

Ms. Ayesha Tammy Haq observed that economic differences are a major cause of sectarian rifts and questioned whether religious problems are being dealt with at the same time as economic problems or religion is being used to deal with economic problems.

While replying to the questions and observations, Dr Waseem further elaborated the sectarian conflict in Jhang, noting that in order to create more space for Sunnis, the number of legislative seats for Jhang in the National Assembly has been expanded from one to six. He suggested that the presence of SSP in Jhang can be traced to the activities of the ISI and the military agenda to combat newly-gained Shia power and provided an historical account of Shia Islamization in Iran and Sunni Islamization in Pakistan during the 1980s. He also talked about America joining hands with Pakistan in order to counter Shia influence from Iran. He asserted that Sunnis were the perpetrators of the conflict, because of their declaration that Shias are not Muslims, and noted that while Sunnis have killed larger groups of Shias, for example, during processions, Shias have done target killings of individuals. He also highlighted the role of non-state actors such as ISI operatives in sectarian conflicts, claiming that they have financed, as well as colluded and conspired with, sectarian activities, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s.

Commenting on the structure of the federation, Dr. Waseem agreed with Mr. Mujeeb Khan’s point that it is unbalanced and that this should be addressed. For example, he noted that, although Punjab has 22 per cent of Senate seats and other provinces have 78 per cent, because the Senate is relatively powerless, this does not offset Punjab’s domination. He strongly rejected identity politics, because of its negative implications in third world countries like Pakistan, arguing that it destroys the agenda of both political parties and Parliament.
Dr. Waseem talked about the new identity of Gilgit-Baltistan in detail, noting that Gilgit-Baltistan was the only area in Pakistan that lacked a legislature or legislative representation, resulting in extreme frustration among the people of the region. He also claimed that people in Gilgit-Baltistan are pro-federation and are not interested in a merger with Azad Kashmir, because they want a separate identity from Kashmir. He noted that nationalism in Balochistan has given rise to a desire for separation, but in the case of Gilgit-Baltistan, he asserted, it seeks integration with the federation, although with a degree of autonomy – for example, it now has a Governor and Chief Minister. About the political future of MQM in Gilgit-Baltistan and Jhang, Dr. Waseem said that in his view the PPP is in a much stronger position in areas where there are minorities.

The group recommended that:

- More policy research is needed on economic and social issues that give rise to larger governance dilemmas.
- ‘Non-state actors’ are rapidly being redefined as constituting a public sphere in which vested interests pursue a cause, their political interests or social issues.
- There is a need for research and a debate on the need and potential for redefining the structure of the Federation, for example with respect to the number and size of provinces.
- There is a need for an improved understanding of political trends and practices in terms of vote banks and issue-based politics in order to assess their impact on governance.
- The studies need to give concrete suggestions that are ‘do-able’ for political actors and government, in terms of understanding and addressing the issues of conflict and governance.