

2011 PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL FREEDOM & UNDERSTANDING IN INDONESIAN PESANTREN

Search for Common Ground and the Indonesian non-governmental organization Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat (P3M) completed the implementation of “Promoting International Freedom and Understanding in Indonesian Pesantrens” during a two year span in 2010-2011.

The purpose of the project was to promote religious freedom, pluralism and understanding of differences through youth-centered educational activities in pesantrens, in areas vulnerable to religious intolerance and violence in Indonesia. The project had **three key objectives**:

1. Pesantrens are more aware of and better able to think critically on issues related to religious freedom, pluralism and understanding through debate competitions.
2. Communal conflict is prevented and religious understanding is advanced through the utilization of media, including “intended outcomes” comic books.
3. Programming that promotes religious freedom, pluralism and understanding is institutionalized within pesantrens.

The project targeted 15 to 17 year old students (Class 2 and 3 of Senior High School) in nine pesantren and one public school in various locations across Indonesia. The project consisted of two phases implemented consecutively. Phase I consisted of English language debate competitions within all 10 target locations culminating in a national debate final in Jakarta for the best teams from each location. Phase II consisted of workshops and study groups facilitated in all 10 locations of two 6-part series of specially produced comic books from May to September 2011. The content of both the debates and the comic books were issues relating to the values of tolerance and pluralism within Indonesia.

Throughout the lifespan of the Pesantren Project, religious freedom and tolerance in Indonesia have continued to endure persistent challenges, including some that have been violent and violated the rights of citizens—predominantly minority groups. This unfortunate persistence underlines the continuing need for initiatives, like this project, which aim to enhance common understanding and promote pluralism and religious freedom, especially among younger Indonesians.

Based on a desk review, field visits to beneficiaries, administration of student questionnaires and focus group discussions, and analysis of the results, this evaluation found a significant project impact. The project produced quality learning materials that can be re-used in Indonesia and other locations. More project time was spent in producing comic books and manuals than was disseminating and facilitating the understanding them; a follow-up project would allow for more time to be spent utilizing these materials amongst a larger amount of beneficiaries.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS | RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN PEASANTRENS

A quantitative survey revealed that the attitude and understanding of more than 7% of students improved during the course of the activities:

The number of students who believed that religious tolerance amongst the people was something to be grateful for rose from 85% to 93%.

The number of students who congratulate other religious denominations on their respective holy day rose from 60% to 70%.

The number of students who agreed that discussion in the classroom was very helpful in enabling the students to practice tolerance rose from 65% to 78%.

The number of debating students who thought their competency in critical thinking increased rose from 15% to 41%.

A total of 245 students and 62 teachers participated in the debating phase of the Project. A small number of these students who remained at the school in the next academic year also participated in the comic book phase of the project. Approximately 4,800 sets of each comic book series were distributed amongst the 10 target schools. As the total number of students at the 10 schools was 26,850, the potential total readership amongst the student body is very high. It is safe to say however that at approximately 1,000 students nationwide both read the comics and participated in the reading groups. Furthermore, 126 teachers participated in *Training of Trainers* workshops in order to facilitate a critical reading of the comic books.

It can be concluded that the project achieved its first objective: 'Pesantrens are more aware of and better able to think critically on issues related to religious freedom, pluralism and understanding through debate competitions'. While at this stage it is difficult to measure the extent to which 'communal conflict was prevented' through the project, there is no doubt that 'religious understanding' was 'advanced through the utilization of media, including "intended outcomes" of the comic books.' (Objective #2) Finally, the project also assisted 'programming that promotes religious freedom, pluralism and understanding' being 'institutionalized within pesantrens'. Further follow-up with pesantren would invest in sustaining the institutionalization referred to in Objective #3.

RELEVANCE | PLANNING | IMPLEMENTATION

Good selection of locations... SFCG and P3M's intervention is both a well-timed and a well-targeted beginning that addressed the need to build sustainable peace in key areas of the country. The project's selection of target locations was very relevant as it consisted of a broad cross-section of socially, economically and demographically different settings. This included areas that: had previously seen high level conflict or intolerance like Palu, Lombok and Depok; have a large Muslim majority like Sukabumi, Madura and Jombang; have a small Muslim minority like Bali; have a middle-class student body like in Yogyakarta and Sukabumi; and have a more working-class student body like Lombok, Bali, and Palu. This broad cross-section exposed the different life experiences of students, which resulted in different understandings and attitudes towards interacting and tolerating differing religious, ethnic or gender groups.

...But, too many implementation methods. As noted in the previous section there was concern about the language used for debates and also with the ultimate objective of the debate. This raises the question over the relevance of using too many vehicles (in this case both English and Debating) to carry the main message of tolerance values. SFCG staff informed us that the reason for having both vehicles was to take a soft approach to passing on sensitive messages. In hindsight this soft approach was not necessary as most of the target groups had previously knowledge of the key issues and did not feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive issues more thoroughly. It would have been more relevant and effective to use just one vehicle – the debate - in Phase one. This would have freed up time and resources spent on understanding the English language component to focus more on facilitating student and teachers comprehension of the key issues of rights, tolerance and pluralism.

Use the results framework. Project implementation would have been more focused and efficient if project staff had utilized the results framework more frequently. M&E staff should also attempt to set targets alongside the expected outcomes column so that project staff had clearer aims of what each activity was trying to achieve. In this project this would have helped key project implementers to remain focused on combating intolerance while also improving students debating skills. Moreover, the insertion of risks and assumptions into the framework would assist project staff to mitigate risks and challenges preemptively.

Spend more time on training. As has been discussed already the design and production of the projects main technical tools – training manuals and comics – used up a disproportionate amount of time and resources compared to time spent on face-to-face implementation with beneficiaries. While unavoidable, this imbalance between technical and non-technical elements detracted from the project's potential impact.

CHALLENGES | LIMITATIONS

While significant, the impact of the project was not maximized to its full potential, fundamentally because of time and funding limitations but also due to human resource problems and planning shortfalls. With a competitive jobs market fuelled by a rapidly growing private sector and decent salaries in government positions, human resource challenges are par for the course for smaller international NGOs operating in Indonesia. However, impacts from the debating phase of the project could have been enhanced if the projects planning and design process had been bolder in allocating more resources towards reaching key objectives. Instead, the project took ‘the path of least resistance’ and allocated resources and focus towards the skills needed (debating and English language) to gain the key objectives of improving attitudes towards pluralism and understanding. Enhanced multi-media dissemination and sharing of materials, ideas, and results would further enhance efficacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS | EXPLORE AND EXPAND

The evaluation team suggests **three key recommendations**:

SFCG should maximize the many positive results and indicators of the project to mobilize additional funds from donors and ultimately **expand the reach of the existing materials** to a wider audience;

Towards this end SFCG should **further utilize the quantitative results** of the Final and Initial Questionnaires;

SFCG should **explore expansion possibilities of the project with partners** including local governments and faith based organization.

This project has shown how a relatively small amount of resources can be mobilized in a short time period to make a significant impact, effectively improving the attitudes and understanding of young students. If such activities are scaled up and mainstreamed into local or national level state policy and practice, then the challenge of reducing religious intolerance and violence in Indonesia can be universally addressed.

Source: This document is a summary of and taken directly from the external evaluation report “Promoting International Freedom & Understanding in Indonesian Pesantren.”

A copy can be acquired at <http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/indonesia.html> or by contacting Nick Oatley, Director of Institutional Learning at Search for Common Ground: noatley@sfcg.org.

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