

Perspectives on Community Resilience to Violent Extremism: Challenges in the Times of COVID-19

Amid the reported increase in various forms of Violent Extremism (VE) in different parts of the country owing to multiple reasons whether linked to religion, belief or ethnicity, the government and civil society is now more active in taking action to counter it. The Government of Pakistan under 'Paigham-e-Pakistan' - a counter narrative for peace and harmony - has launched a number of programmes and campaigns, including '*Hum Pakistani*' (We Pakistanis) to build an inclusive society with the concept of equal citizenship rights for every citizen of the country irrespective of caste, creed, belief, and gender. 'Safe charity' campaign is another initiative of the government so that charity should not go to VE groups. The results of these initiatives have started coming in.

The Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), as a contributor to these initiatives, has developed a research network of academia and researchers from Pakistan's capital city Islamabad as well as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh provinces under the name 'Community Resilience to Violent Extremism Research Network.' Under this initiative, 30 researchers are currently undertaking studies on various aspects of community resilience to violent extremism.

This panel discussion will look at community resilience to violent extremism in the challenging time of COVID-19. The network members and other academics will present their perspectives and address the following questions:

- What is the state of violent extremism and how has it impacted community resilience?
- What could be the push and pull factors for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)?
- What policies and practices have the government and civil society put in place in terms of executing the CVE activities and programmes?
- How has COVID-19 impacted community resilience in the context of incidence of violent extremism and left behind certain marginalised groups and minorities in humanitarian aid during the COVID-19 lockdown?
- How did social activists and philanthropists extend support to communities facing VE and socio-religious discrimination besides bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 lockdown?

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