

PART 4

External Actors' Promotion of FoRB: Ideology and Political Will

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Chapter 8

International Assistance and Impoverished Religious Minorities in Pakistan^{*†}

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1 Introduction

Pakistan is among 20 countries where the bottom poorest one billion people live (Von Braun and Gatzweiler 2014: 8). At least a quarter of the population in Pakistan suffers from extreme poverty. The high level of unemployment and low gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate, rising levels of ethnic and religious strife, natural calamities, capacity constraints, and exclusion of the poor and women from the decision-making process are cited as major hurdles to economic growth. To tackle extreme poverty, the World Bank is investing heavily in Pakistan, with the ‘twin goals of poverty reduction and shared prosperity’ (World Bank 2014b: 13). Though most religious minorities are among the extremely poor population, research conducted on a World Bank project shows that this prosperity is not shared by non-Muslims.

Non-Muslims account for about 4 per cent of the total population of 210 million people. A recent study titled *The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan* (Aqeel 2020) identifies that Jews lived in Pakistan at the time of its creation, but the majority of them later migrated to other countries. Only a few hundred Parsees (Zoroastrians) and Buddhists are left in Pakistan (Aqeel 2020). According to the National Database and Registration Authority, there are about 33,000 Baha’is and 6,146 Sikhs in Pakistan (Ghauri 2012). Across the globe, ‘ultra-poverty is especially high among minorities and marginalised people’ (Von Braun *et al.* 2009: 8) and the same is true for Pakistan, particularly among Christians and scheduled-caste Hindus.

If the percentage of non-Muslim groups were applied according to the 1951 census, then Christians and scheduled-caste Hindus would make up roughly 80 per cent of religious minorities. Missionary sociologist Wayne McClintock believes that the ‘majority’ of Christians are of Dalit origin, while Elizabeth Koepping (Koepping 2011: 9) writes that ‘four-fifths’ of Christians are of this origin. Yet, the author of this chapter, based on everyday interaction, believes that the number of Dalit Christians must be higher than 90 per cent. Scheduled-caste Hindus were clearly a separate religious entity in the census and government records until 1947. For some reason, during General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq’s dictatorial rule,

scheduled-caste Hindus were lumped together with upper-caste Hindus in the 1981 census. The 1998 census separated them again, but now the clear distinction is blurring, though it remains clearly evident in political, cultural and economic settings. These two minority groups also suffer from enforced labour in menial occupations and social exclusion, stigma and name-calling because of their so-called 'untouchable' caste status (McClintock 1992).

Although the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equality of fundamental rights to everyone, it segregates people and privileges based on the binary dichotomy of Muslim and non-Muslim; hence, it promotes inequality and exclusion based on religious identity. The constitutional bar delimits minorities from becoming president or prime minister of the country, prescribing them as second-class citizens. In the political system, for three decades, non-Muslims could not vote for Muslims but had to elect their own co-religionists, which excluded them from mainstream politics. Since 2002, they have been able to vote or contest elections, but hardly any non-Muslims get elected to general seats (this does not include Ahmadis, who only vote for their co-religionists).

Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has witnessed several outbreaks of violence against religious minorities. Blasphemy laws have given rise to their persecution and a disproportionately high number of blasphemy cases relative to the size of their population are registered against Ahmadis and Christians (Aqeel 2020). Minorities report: religious bias in textbooks; abduction and forcible conversion of their minor girls; encroachment of their graveyards; being dubbed as sympathisers of India and the West; burning and ransacking of their places of worship; and unfair treatment at the hands of law enforcement agencies (Aqeel 2020).

Pakistan has committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which commit to achieving 17 goals by 2030, including ending poverty, zero hunger, inclusive and equitable education, clean water, economic growth and reduced inequalities for everyone, and 'leaving no one behind' (Government of Pakistan 2019). But this commitment cannot be fulfilled without including smaller group entities, such as pariahs and religious minorities, in development programmes.

The project under consideration, titled Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund III (PPAF-III), was implemented at the time the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were turning into the SDGs. The World Bank, which is the major player in Pakistan on poverty reduction programmes, recognises that exclusion based on gender, race, caste, ethnicity, disability or religious identity is at the heart of the poverty of these groups; therefore, their inclusion matters for inclusive development (World Bank 2013a). This chapter uses key informant interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) analyses of the World Bank's US\$250m project, which was implemented from July 2009 to March 2016 through PPAF-III, including groups that had been 'otherised' based on their caste and religious status in the design and implementation of the project.

Our research shows that inclusion of women and people with disabilities was a high priority of the project, but not inclusion of religious minorities. Women were included from beneficiary to executive member levels of the three-tier organisations (TTOs). It was found that people with disabilities

as beneficiaries were the second-highest priority in terms of inclusion but not in decision-making in TTOs, except in Sanghar district. Confirming our findings, PPAF's own research on 850 TTOs in 2014 found that only 7 per cent had representation of at least one person with a disability on the executive board (Khalid *et al.* 2019).

The first reason for exclusion of religious minorities is that the PPAF has categorised all districts of Pakistan from high-priority districts, which are extremely poor, to low-priority ones. Most Christians live in Punjab in districts that are on the PPAF's low-priority list, but Christians live in ghettoised neighbourhoods that are the epitome of generational poverty and neglect. In this PPAF scheme of tackling poverty, at least, Christians living in these districts are ignored and left out. Scheduled-caste Hindus, who are mostly bonded field labourers, suffer the same fate in several rural areas of Sindh province.

The second reason is that the population of religious minorities varies in each district. For example, in the districts where the research was conducted the population of minorities varied from 1 per cent to 27 per cent. There were minority populations in at least three districts but not in the union councils (UCs)³ where PPAF-III was conducted. FGDs with local support organisation (LSO) office bearers showed that most of the UCs selected for implementation of the project were the same as where the PPAF had conducted earlier projects. This meant minorities had been neglected in earlier projects, as they were in this project despite the proposal design requiring their inclusion. Furthermore, in each UC where there were no religious minorities, it was found that in adjacent or nearby UCs there were religious minorities who could have been included in the project, but no attempt was made to include them.

Only in one district out of the five where the research was conducted, Sanghar, were religious minorities included in the implementation of the project as beneficiaries, and on the board or as executive members of locally established organisations. It was found that the PPAF implementation partner organisation (PO) in Sanghar was sensitive towards minorities. However, it is possible that the size of the non-Muslim population in the district (27 per cent) could have significantly affected the decision to include non-Muslims in the project.

2 Background

Historically, Pakistan has had a rich and diverse cultural and religious heritage. About 44 per cent of the population living in the lands that became Pakistan in 1947 was non-Muslim (American University 1965: 38). Partition with India took place on the basis that Hindus and Muslims were essentially dissimilar in their politics, religion, culture and language, and hence could not live together. After partition, at least 15 million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were uprooted and crossed borders to be in the state of their religion. Partition was 'accompanied by a death toll credibly estimated at between 200,000 and 2 million' (O'Leary 2012). Therefore, since the country's inception, religion has been part and parcel of statecraft.

Today, the 4 per cent non-Muslim population in Pakistan consists of Christians and Hindus (both upper caste and scheduled caste) and other smaller religious identities, such as Ahmadis (a sect which considers itself

Muslim, but is constitutionally declared non-Muslim), Baha'is, Sikhs, Kalash people and Parsees (Zoroastrians). Most Christians and scheduled-caste Hindus come from untouchable Dalit backgrounds. Under British rule, untouchables were identified as 'depressed classes' and special quotas in education, jobs and assemblies were allocated for them. The names of these depressed classes were added to a schedule of the Act of India in 1935 and since then they have been known as the scheduled castes.

In the traditional system of four mutually exclusive caste groups based on social stratification, Brahmans (priests) were at the top and Sudhras (menial servants) were at the bottom. There was a fifth group, the 'outcastes' or untouchables, who were not allowed to live inside villages, acquire education or participate in any social, religious or political activity. They were assigned occupations that were considered 'sinful' and insulting (Aqeel 2018b).

After Pakistan was created, there was strong support to root out caste prejudices. Article 20 of the 1956 Constitution of Pakistan stated: 'Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form forbidden and shall be declared by law to be an offence.'⁴ But this ambition was gradually lost in the following years as Pakistan became more Islamised. At the Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2008, Pakistan rejected the practice of untouchability, saying: 'It is a Muslim country and does not have the concept of *dalit*... it is free from such kind of prejudices, and the existing norms do not contain discrimination on the basis of caste or creed' (Aqeel 2014). But the fact is that caste prejudices are the primary reason for slavery in South Asia and Pakistan ranks eighth in the Global Slavery Index (Global Slavery Index 2018). Most of the bonded labourers in the brick kilns of Punjab are Christians, and most of the bonded peasants in Sindh are scheduled-caste Hindus (Ercelawn and Nauman 2001).

About 60 per cent of the Pakistani population lives in rural areas and 80 per cent of the poor live here (Ahmed 2018). The poverty headcount, using the national poverty line, fell from 64.3 per cent in 2001 to 24.3 per cent in 2015 (Redaelli 2020). The main scheduled castes in Pakistan are *meghawars*, *kohlis* and *bheels*. Some of the scheduled-caste Hindus are insulted with the term *dhed*, 'carion eater'.⁵ Those living as bonded landless peasants mostly belong to the *kohli* and *bheel* castes in Sindh. Similarly, Pakistani Christians predominantly come from the most downtrodden Dalit caste, *chuhras* (sweepers), which is now a highly pejorative term. Many of them live in illegal urban settlements in cities and work as sanitation workers or do other menial jobs. They suffer extreme poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. The PPAF's overall approach excludes religious minorities in its implementation.

The PPAF in 2013 divided all districts of Pakistan into five zones based on poverty headcount: Extreme Poverty Zone – 1, Extreme Poverty Zone – 2, High Poverty Zone – 1, High Poverty Zone – 2 and Low Poverty Zone (Naveed, Wood and Ghaus 2018). Most of the Christian population (PPAF 2019) live in either the Low Poverty Zone districts or High Poverty Zone – 2, which are low on PPAF's priorities.

The demography of Hindus is different in Sindh province from the Christians in Punjab. Though the population size of districts in Sindh is comparatively smaller than that of Punjab, in a few districts the Hindu

Table 8.1 Christian concentration in districts

Serial	District name	Province	Total population	Christian population	Percentage of total district population (%)	PPAF priority zone ranking
1	Lahore	Punjab	11,130,000	550,000	5	Low Priority Zone
2	Karachi	Sindh	14,910,000	360,830	2.42 (Hasan and Mohib 2003)	Low Priority Zone
3	Faisalabad	Punjab	7,873,910	322,830	4.1	Low Priority Zone
4	Sheikhupura	Punjab	3,460,000	203,500	4.5	Low Priority Zone
5	Gujranwala	Punjab	5,014,000	220,624	4.4	Low Priority Zone
6	Sialkot	Punjab	3,894,000	155,760	4.0	Low Priority Zone
7	Kasur	Punjab	3,455,000	152,020	4.4	Low Priority Zone
8	Rawalpindi	Punjab	5,406,000	113,518	2.1	High Priority Zone – 2
9	Toba Tek Singh	Punjab	2,190,000	81,030	3.7	Low Priority Zone
10	Sargodha	Punjab	3,904,000	85,878	2.2	Low Priority Zone
11	Islamabad	Capital	2,006,572	82,269	4.1	Low Priority Zone
12	Sahiwal	Punjab	2,518,000	78,044	3.1	High Priority Zone – 2
13	Khanewal	Punjab	2,922,000	70,127	2.4	High Priority Zone – 2
14	Okara	Punjab	3,455,000	57,743	1.9	High Priority Zone – 2
15	Narowal	Punjab	1,710,000	56,421	3.3	High Priority Zone – 2

Source: Authors' own, compiled from Mehdi (2015) and Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2017).

population is even close to half of the total population. Like Christians, they also live in their separate neighbourhoods in villages and cities.

3 Literature review

Poverty among Pakistani religious minorities, especially those from a Dalit background, has received virtually no academic attention. Since the founding of Pakistan, prominent people in the country, such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah (Grote and Röder 2012: 183) and his fierce hardline critic Maulana Abul A'la Maududi (A'la Maududi 1960), the founder of Islamist political party Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, have considered religious minorities as one of the most complex constitutional questions. Religious minorities are always presented in a binary dichotomy of Muslim and non-Muslim, where the latter are discussed in the context of protection, religious freedom, rights and citizenship status, and Pakistan's foreign relations with India and other countries as an 'Islamic state'.

It is probably against this backdrop that scholars such as Farahnaz Ispahani and rights activists such as Asma Jehangir (Dean 2018) define

Table 8.2 Hindu population in Sindh province

Serial	District name	Total population	Hindu population	Percentage of total district population (%)	PPAF priority zone ranking
1	Tharparkar	1,649,661	668,112	40.5	Extreme Poverty Zone – 1
2	Umarkot	1,073,146	510,817	47.6	Extreme Poverty Zone – 1
3	Sanghar	2,057,057	411,411	20.1	High Priority Zone – 1
4	Badin	1,804,516	359,098	19.9	Extreme Poverty Zone – 1
5	Mirpurkhas	1,073,146	350,918	32.7	Extreme Poverty Zone – 2
6	Hyderabad	2,199,463	263,935	12.0	Low Priority Zone
7	Sukkur	5,538,555	182,772	3.3	High Priority Zone – 2
8	Nawabshah	5,282,277	153,186	2.9	Extreme Poverty Zone – 2
9	Karachi	14,910,352	128,229	0.9	Low Priority Zone
10	Rahim Yar Khan (Punjab)	4,814,006	110,722	2.3	High Priority Zone – 1
11	Ghotki	1,646,318	110,303	6.7	High Priority Zone – 1
12	Khairpur	2,404,334	69,725	2.9	High Priority Zone – 1
13	Jacobabad	1,006,297	36,226	3.6	Extreme Poverty Zone – 2
14	Dadu	1,550,266	31,005	2.0	High Priority Zone – 1
15	Thatta	979,817	28,414	2.9	Extreme Poverty Zone – 1

Source: Authors’ own, compiled from Mehdi (2015) and Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2017).

religious minorities as one homogenous out-group that indiscriminately suffers: ‘[d]iscrimination, harassment and violence’ (Ispahani 2017: 156). These authors and activists, however, often do not examine the socioeconomic aspects of minority communities. Factually, not all religious minorities suffer the same degree of terrorism, mob violence, forced conversion, charges of blasphemy, etc. (Aqeel 2020). The Minority Rights Group International report on Pakistan recognises the diversity and different challenges of minorities (Malik 2002). Parsees and Baha’is reportedly hardly suffer violence. Only Christians and Ahmadis have suffered suicidal terrorist attacks on their places of worship. Ahmadis, Parsees and Baha’is report no forced conversion of their minor girls. In the same vein, caste-based untouchability, social exclusion and stigma are only suffered by Christians and scheduled-caste Hindus (Aqeel 2020).

The reason for the disproportionate number of Christians’ working in sanitation is because members of the untouchable *chuhra* caste (McClintock 1992) were converted en masse in Punjab province through the efforts of US and European missionaries from the 1870s to 1920s. Missionaries

took a special interest in the poor economic status of these converts. In the 1930s, missionaries conducted research that showed that 70–92 per cent of Christian families in various districts were in debt (Davis 1939: 67). The Christian missionaries set up separate villages for the converts to initiate educational and economic revival. In later decades, the interests of academic missionaries shifted to chronicling the religious phenomenon and analysing social and political settings in which the mass conversion took place (see, for example, Stock and Stock 1978).

John Webster explains how the ‘Second Great Awakening’, which ended in 1840, brought thousands of Christian missionaries from the US and Europe to evangelise the world. Many of such missionaries came to Punjab province, which was annexed by the British in 1849 (Webster 2002). Historian Professor Jeffery Cox has examined how missionaries often had a love-hate relationship with the British Raj in their evangelical, educational and medical activities in Punjab (Cox 2002). Both of these scholars considered social and political dynamics, rigours of caste and transformational processes. Irish priest John O’Brien goes even deeper into the ethnography of these people, covering their history of dehumanisation, poverty and exclusion over millennia (O’Brien 2006). The focus of these scholars was on the Christians in pre-partition India.

Pieter H. Streefland was the first to see that conflict between Christians and Muslims was taking place both at religious and caste levels in the 1970s (Streefland 1979). Around this time, Miriam Adeney noted that to be a Christian in Pakistan meant ‘cleaning up other people’s urine and bowel movements for the rest of one’s life’ (Adeney 1984: 51):

He [the Christian] might empty cesspools with a bucket, pouring the contents into a tank towed by a tractor. Or he might be a latrine-cleaner, in charge of public toilets. Or he might be privately employed by families to tug their toilet boxes out of the compound wall and empty them. Or, if he is skilled, he might be a *kundiman* [sewer man] who unclogs pipes – but is threatened by sewer gas when he crawls beneath the streets to do his work.
(*ibid.*)

Contemporary authors and academics in the past three decades have mainly focused on Christians in the context of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, violence and ‘religious persecution’ (Fuchs and Fuchs 2020).⁶ Likewise, Sara Singha discusses the persecution of Christians in her dissertation, but also caste, ritual impurity and outcomes of social exclusion such as their poor socioeconomic status and segregated residential neighbourhoods (Singha 2015). The most pertinent observation in recent times comes from a UK Home Office report: ‘While a small number of Christians are relatively prominent and prosperous, Christians are typically among the poorest in Pakistani society’ (Independent Advisory Group on Country Information 2018).

Unlike the Pakistani Christians, literature on Hindus is almost non-existent, probably because Hindus are synonymous with India, which is considered the arch-enemy of Pakistan. In this dearth of literature, the only – yet nonetheless most fascinating – account is the book *Hinglaj Devi* by Jürgen Schaflechner (Schaflechner 2018), adapted from his dissertation.

The book is about the pilgrimage of the Hinglaj temple but captures how visibility of Hindus has increased in the past two decades, their relations with Muslims, and inter-caste struggles between upper-caste and scheduled-caste Hindus over control of the temple and spiritual narratives.

On scheduled-caste Hindus, the only noticeable work is the report *Long Behind the Scheduled* (Shah 2007) that challenges the perception that untouchability is non-existent in Pakistan. Scheduled-caste Hindus are extremely poor, have very low literacy rates, live in segregated residences and often do not have national identity cards. The report notes that more than 90 per cent of bonded labourers in Sindh are scheduled-caste Hindus who are 'served food and tea in separate crockery at hotels and restaurants'. As their women wear distinctive garb, they are sometimes refused a seat on public transport (Shah 2007).

Sufi Hussain in his doctoral dissertation had discussed how discontent among scheduled-caste Hindus is growing out of their marginality as Hindus and as scheduled castes (Hussain 2019). Upper-caste Hindus dominate business and politics in Pakistan despite being very small in number (Aqeel 2020). The Pakistan Hindu Council, supposedly the representative body for all Hindus, does not have any scheduled-caste Hindus in its body. Several networks, which upper-caste Hindus fiercely criticise and discourage, are asserting their Dalit identity (*Dawn* 2020).

Caste is one of the most important social identity and status markers in Pakistan. However, it is academically the least researched subject in Pakistan and its existence in the country is officially denied. Sociologically, caste is defined as a 'closed form of social stratification', determined by 'birth' (Robertson 1977: 217) 'intimately connected' with division of labour (Dumont 1979: 35) and has survived among non-Hindus; for example, Christians and Muslims (*ibid.*: 91). It is not merely guaranteed by 'conventions and laws, but also by rituals' (Weber, cited in Gerth and Wright Mills 1946: 188), as Max Weber explains: 'caste is considered as making for a ritualistic impurity and to be a stigma which must be expiated by a religious act' (*ibid.*). It is unique to the Indian subcontinent and has been in existence for millennia. A few revisionist anthropologists, such as Nicholas Dirks (in Reich 2018) describe it as a colonial artefact. However, genetic studies show the institution has been practised for millennia (Reich 2018: 145) and men, especially, are locked into the endogamous family system (Wells 2017: 177). Transformation of four-class caste-based social stratification into ethnocentric groups called *qoum/zat* (caste) in Pakistan is well documented in Ahmed Usman's doctoral dissertation (Usman 2011). Usman's research finds that caste-based occupational endogamy is found in rural Punjab (Usman and Amjad 2013) and there is a relationship between voting patterns and caste hierarchies (Usman 2016). Usman, however, concluded that caste-based commensality rules and untouchability were 'virtually absent in [the] caste system practiced in Pakistan' (Usman 2017). It is true that the Brahmanic religious tinge of caste, referred to by Weber, has eroded in Muslim-majority Pakistan as Usman (2011) argues. However, the Brahmanic untouchability and refusal of commensality⁷ patterns towards Dalit castes have survived, particularly in the context of Christians, and have been 'rearticulated' in Islamic 'religious overtones' (Aqeel and Gill 2019: i). A number of Muslims believe that Christians are born for

this work. For example, to briefly elaborate this, a June 2019 recruitment advertisement for the armed forces invited only ‘Christians’ to apply for sanitation jobs (OpIndia Staff 2019).

As Pakistan is in complete denial about the existence of caste-based disabilities such as untouchability and refusal of commensality, explanations for the relationship between caste, poverty and inequality are looked for in Indian society. Specifically, caste creates ‘unfree economic order’ and a segregated market that restricts ‘ownership of property’, ‘mobility of capital and labour’ and ‘acquisition of skill and education’ (Thorat *et al.* 2016), which are observed in the case of scheduled-caste Hindus and Christians in Pakistan.

Economic inequality in relation to the caste-based divide has been well researched in India and not in Pakistan. It has been found that caste ‘restricts occupational mobility’ and determines ‘one’s economic and social status’ (Kumar and Yazir 2017: 95). The ‘overarching conclusion’ of research by Borooah and colleagues (2014) was that ‘households’ outcomes with respect to their position on distribution ladder, or with respect to their chances of being poor, are dependent in large measure on their caste’. The researchers found a relation between illiteracy and poverty. While controlling for the variable of illiteracy, the researchers found that ‘caste significantly affects the possibility of being poor’ (*ibid.*).

Poverty is the lack of insufficient command of productive resources (material, cultural and social) (Pantazis *et al.* 2006) The poor generally have ‘common features, such as a lack of assets and education, but they also often belong to certain social groups – typically groups distinguished by race, color, social origin (caste), religion, or geographical location’ (Von Braun and Gatzweiler 2014: 205). Social exclusion of such groups is forced on them and pushes them to the ‘margins of social, political, economic, ecological or biophysical systems, preventing them from access to resources, assets, services, restraining freedom of choice, preventing the development of capabilities, and eventually causing (extreme) poverty’ (*ibid.*: 3).

Pakistan is among the countries where there is a high prevalence of poverty despite a ‘high economic growth rate’ (Von Braun and Gatzweiler 2014: 6). The 2013 World Bank report titled *Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity*, notes that: ‘Excluded groups are significantly less likely to receive the benefits of development investments’ (World Bank 2013a). We have learnt that ‘a growing economy by itself is no solution to the problem of poverty’ (Royce 2011: 11) and ‘a rising tide does not necessarily lift all boats’ (World Bank 2013a: xv). Literature shows that this understanding of inclusion has trickled down in the context of gender. For example, Muhammad Azeem Afzal, an associate professor at Hunan University, argues for inclusivity but it is limited to areas ‘such as gender equality, women’s empowerment, human rights’ (Ashraf 2017: 56). However, inclusive policies leave out religion- and caste-based exclusion and stigma. In the present case, we will look at the World Bank’s PPAF-III to see if it put in place measures for the inclusion of Christians and scheduled-caste Hindus.

4 Methodology

The PPAF-III project design described religious minorities as an ultra-poor and vulnerable group that needed special consideration during the

implementation of the project. Therefore, rather than looking for the impact of the project on religious minorities, the inquiry was about determining the level of inclusion of religious minorities in the project implementation process. In order to guide the study, the following broader research questions were formulated:

- 1 Do the districts and UCs selected by the PPAF for the project implementation have any religious minority population?
- 2 If there are Christians and scheduled-caste Hindus in the chosen districts, then do they need the type of assistance provided through PPAF-III?
- 3 Were any religious minority members included among the beneficiaries and/or the executive body of the TTOs?
- 4 Was overall inclusion of marginalised groups ensured in the implementation (i.e. inclusion of women, people with disabilities, minorities or any other groups on the margins)?

To answer these questions, the original research plan dedicated 2–4 weeks for deskwork and roughly 40 days for fieldwork. This included key informant interviews by phone; obtaining basic data from the PPAF and Bureau of Statistics offices in Islamabad; deciding on the scope of the research and the survey design; and selection of suitable research methods and data collection tools. The research team had done some deskwork and had met PPAF and Bureau of Statistics officials in Islamabad for the data when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out and Pakistan was completely shut down. The Bureau of Statistics was exceptionally kind and cooperative. No help from the PPAF could be received due to procedures and time constraints, which was a limitation in designing the research methodology. During a short break in the lockdown, the fieldwork was conducted over 23–31 May 2020, and the methodology and data collection tools were modified and restricted to key informant interviews and FGDs with semi-structured interviews.

To gather data from the field in the short period of nine days, two target populations were identified: minority community leaders and office bearers of LSOs that were set up during the project implementation period. In each district, the team first conducted the key informant interviews and FGDs with minority communities and then interviews/FGDs with TTO members/office bearers.

The first and second research questions are related to religious minorities, which are concealed populations. To answer these questions, persons from our existing contacts in the selected districts were identified. A total of ten individuals were key informants: five of them were Christian, four Hindu and one Muslim. Only one of them was a woman and all of them were politically or socially active in their communities. The non-Muslim key informant interviewee was a journalist closely connected with the Hindu community in Ghotki district.

Based on the data provided in key informant interviews, issues were clarified. These interviewees helped the team understand the dynamics of Christian and Hindu populations living in five districts: Muzaffargarh, Bahawalpur, Ghotki, Sanghar and Layyah. Apart from providing essential information, the key informant interviewees helped identify minority

neighbourhoods and important people in these areas for FGDs. A total of ten FGDs were designed with 6–10 people in the five districts. However, in two FGDs, held in Bahawalpur, the number of participants unexpectedly increased to 30 in one meeting and to 150 in another, which is why the discussions were more in the form of people speaking in front of an audience than FGDs. The FGDs were held in minority neighbourhood settings and women's participation varied from 40 per cent to 60 per cent on average. The following queries were framed for them:

- Do Christians/Hindus/minorities live in segregated residential areas?
- If yes, then are these neighbourhoods regular or illegal settlements?
- What basic amenities, such as clean water, sanitation and electricity are available in these neighbourhoods?
- What is the livelihood of the minorities residing in the district in general; and if there are minority neighbourhoods, then what do most of their men and women do for their livelihood?
- If there are minority neighbourhoods, then are they provided any uplift support in the shape of microcredit, skill training, asset transfer or construction of infrastructure by the government, church or any non-governmental organisation (NGO) (the type of activities done under PPAF-III)?
- Do they know about the PPAF and the work done by it in their district?

In order to collect data to answer the third and fourth research questions related to the work done by the PPAF, a total of ten FGDs were conducted with TTO members and/or office bearers. In the process of identifying the TTO members and/or office bearers and arranging an FGD with them, several NGO members, local politicians and social workers from the area helped the research team. The size defined for the FGDs was 6–10 persons. In Bahawalpur, the size could not be maintained because in three meetings only 1–2 TTO officer bearers took part. In Sanghar district, the number of TTO members exceeded 15. In Punjab, FGD participants were mostly men. In Sindh, they were mostly women.

The following queries were framed for the FGDs:

- What was the year when the PPAF made the intervention in the UC for the first time?
- When were the structures of community organisation (CO), village organisation (VO) and LSO created in the UC?
- What activities were conducted under PPAF-III?
- What were the number and type of the beneficiaries and their selection criteria?
- What was the number of general body members and executive members in the CO, VO and LSO?
- What was the number of women, people with disabilities, and non-Muslims in the CO, VO and LSO?
- Which is the nearest minority neighbourhood in the case that no religious minorities existed in the UC?
- What is the overall impact of PPAF-III in the UC?
- Is the TTO still functional?

4.1 Selection of districts for the research

Several considerations were taken into account for the selection of provinces and districts. The security situation, travel restrictions during the Covid-19 outbreak, and the demography of minorities in the districts identified in PPAF assessment reports were major factors in choosing provinces and districts for conducting the inquiry. Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces have relatively small numbers of minorities. Balochistan was also left out because of the security situation in the province. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the PPAF worked with the Kalash community, 'an indigenous minority, [that] practices an ancient religion', number about 4,000 (PPAF 2017: 7), and who are now celebrated. The PPAF prepared an Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework to work with this small community (PPAF 2015: 17), as an indigenous community and not as a religious minority. Hence, this work does not help us ascertain if the project put an overall mechanism in place for the inclusion of religious minorities. With these limitations, we decided to focus on the broader picture, while selecting districts in Punjab and Sindh provinces, which have the largest number of Christians and Hindus: Christians are mainly located in Punjab and Hindus in Sindh.

The selection of districts in the two provinces chosen was also an uphill task. There are 154 districts in Pakistan. PPAF-III initially envisioned implementing the project in 119 districts but later contained itself to 101 districts (PPAF 2016: 6). The declassified PPAF-III project proposal documents do not name the districts or UCs where the project was to be implemented. We relied on project assessment reports, produced during and at the end of the project, to identify districts and UCs. These reports name only selected districts and UCs where project assessment was done.

From the identified districts, we did not want to go to Umarkot and Tharparkar where Hindus only account for about 50 per cent of the total population of the districts. Religious harmony is strangely very high in these districts (Raza 2015). The inclusion of these districts in the programme resulted because of extreme poverty, as the PPAF's own district preference shows. Inclusion of minorities in a district where they account for half of the total population does not help us understand if the project ensured their overall inclusion; hence, these districts were dropped.

With these considerations, in Punjab Layyah, Bahawalpur and Muzaffargarh districts were chosen because sizeable Hindu and Christian populations live there; and they also fall within the PPAF-III programme and are identified in project assessment and audit reports. In Sindh, Ghotki and Sanghar, districts were chosen where Hindus are the main minority population, but a small number of Christians also live there. For the identification of UCs in these districts, again the PPAF assessment and audit reports were used.

5 Researcher's positionality

The lead researcher may not come from the same socioeconomic class, but shares the same Punjabi Christian background on his mother's side. Although positioned as an insider, his childhood was not in a Christian neighbourhood and his paternal side is not Punjabi. He is among the very few members of the Christian community who come from an Urdu-speaking background. This unique position provided him an opportunity

to closely monitor caste and culture from an outsider's perspective. At the same time, the researcher shares several of the challenges at personal and social levels that the rest of the Punjabi Christian community face.

6 PPAF-III explained

World poverty dropped from 37.1 per cent in 1990 to 9.6 per cent with the shift in development organisations' agenda in 2015 from the MDGs to the SDGs (World Bank 2016a: 4). The World Bank estimates that poverty has steadily been decreasing for the past 25 years but 'for the first time in a generation, the quest to end poverty has suffered its worst setback' due to Covid-19, conflict, and climate change (World Bank 2020b), which means life will be harder for most marginalised sections of society; hence, it requires more than ever looking at marginalised groups during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The World Bank has a long-term commitment to helping Pakistan achieve development objectives of 'education, energy and its support for rural infrastructure, and its engagement in policy dialogues' (World Bank 2013b). The World Bank, which aims to 'end extreme poverty and promote shared prosperity' (World Bank 2020b), established the PPAF in collaboration with the Government of Pakistan in 1999 as an autonomous company. Its first two projects were PPAF-I, which ran from August 1999 to December 2004, and PPAF-II, which ran from December 2006 to June 2011. The World Bank from 2000 to 2013 provided US\$885m, mainly through the PPAF, to alleviate extreme poverty. Because of this substantial support, the poverty headcount measured using the national poverty line fell from 64.3 per cent in 2001 to 24.3 per cent in 2015 in Pakistan (Redaelli 2020).

From June 2009 to September 2015,⁸ the PPAF implemented its third megaproject, PPAF-III, worth US\$250m.⁹ The project benefited approximately 10 million marginalised and vulnerable people, half of them women (World Bank 2014a). It provided microcredit, built community infrastructure, supported health and education schemes, and strengthened social mobilisation and livelihoods. About 350,000 beneficiaries received microcredit; 125,000 children were enrolled in 896 supported schools; 6.5 million patients received treatment; and 407,700 were trained in different skills. The scale of the work was achieved by dividing the project into five components, which are described in the following section.

6.1 The five components of the project

Component 1 – Social mobilisation and institution building (US\$38.5m)

In this component, the PPAF worked through partner organisations (POs) and set up TTOs at UC level. The province is the largest administrative unit of the federation of Pakistan. There are four provinces in Pakistan – Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh – and the federal territory of Islamabad. Each province is divided into divisions, which are further composed of several districts. In each district there are several towns, which are called *tehsil* in Punjab and *taluka* in Sindh. The *tehsil/taluka* are further divided into UCs, the smallest administrative unit.

Roughly, a UC is composed of dozens of villages in rural settings. Often, individuals and families in a village prefer to live in their own communities, which is why a residential area in village is often divided based on caste or

kinship. The POs created the first-level organisation at community level, namely COs. Then VO were created at village level. Two members from each VO formed an LSO at the UC level.

The objective of the inclusive COs was to empower the poor by creating networks at the UC level. The design approach was to build synergy with POs that created platforms for rural people to access ‘financing, skills, infrastructure, health, education, development of their own communities, and for interaction with government’ (World Bank 2016c) and act as an effective ‘interface with local government bodies, other development programs and markets’ (World Bank 2009b).

The PPAF’s POs worked with COs to identify the poor and the ultra-poor and ‘incubate community institutions which demonstrate a potential to grow through sequential steps corresponding to the lifecycle’ and performance of the COs, VO, and LSOs (World Bank 2009b). The expected outcome was that ‘inclusive COs of the poor’ formed and their clusters mobilised ‘to manage their own development, and access services through improved linkages to local government, other development programs and markets for sustainable service delivery’ (World Bank 2009b).

After the COs, VO and LSOs had been created, the National Poverty Score Card with 13 questions was used to assess the poverty level of households at the UC level.

Table 8.3 shows the poverty score range matrix.

Component 2 – Livelihood enhancement and protection (US\$85.3m)
 This component was intended to improve ‘the capacity, opportunities, assets and productivity of community members to reduce their vulnerability to shocks, improve their livelihoods initiatives and strengthen their business operations’ (World Bank 2009a: 2).

Table 8.3 Poverty score card

Category of poor	Subdivision	Score range	Project intervention
Absolute poor	Extremely poor/ultra-poor	0–11	1 Asset transfer
	Chronically poor	12–18	2 Skill training
	Transitory poor	19–23	
Transitory poor	Transitory vulnerable	24–34	1 Microcredit 2 Skill training 3 Sometimes asset transfer
	Transitory non-poor	35–50	1 Training
Non-poor	Non-poor	51–100	2 Sometimes microcredit

Source: Author’s own, based on PPAF (2018).

Component 3 – Microcredit access (US\$40m)

The objective of this component was to improve the access ‘of the poor to micro-finance to enhance their capacities, productivity and returns from livelihood initiatives’ (*ibid.*: 6).

Component 4 – Basic services and infrastructure (US\$80m)

The objective of this component was to improve basic infrastructure, such as irrigation channels, and existing health and education facilities in villages and UCs.

Component 5 – Project implementation support (US\$6.2m)

This was for project implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The project’s development objective was to ensure that the ‘targeted poor are empowered with increased incomes, improved productive capacity and access to services to achieve sustainable livelihoods’ (World Bank 2009a: 2). The outcome indicators set by the World Bank were:

- Community institutions that are inclusive, viable and sustainable.
- An increase in household assets and/or incomes.
- Improved access to municipal and local services.

(World Bank 2009a: 7)

According to the PPAF, it initiated work on vulnerable groups after an earthquake devastated many parts of Pakistan in 2005. Inclusivity, it claims, is among the PPAF’s core values and includes religious minorities: ‘Recognizing demographic diversity – women, children, elderly, persons with disabilities, indigenous groups and religious minorities – and connecting different views, experiences, issues and vulnerabilities as a methodology to reducing poverty’ (PPAF 2020).

In line with this aspiration, the World Bank Project Appraisal Document of PPAF-III notes that the ‘key aim of PPAF is provision of livelihood support, productive services and facilities in an inclusive manner to ultra-poor and poor, particularly to women, youth, disabled and minority groups who are at a disadvantage’ (World Bank 2009a: 22). The project proposal recognises religious minorities as ‘ultra-poor’ and includes them among vulnerable groups (*ibid.*: 23):

- Widows having no male child over the age of 18.
- Women with disabled husbands.
- Divorced/abandoned/women/unmarried women who are no longer of marriageable age and are dependent on others.
- Disabled people (physically or mentally).
- Unaccompanied minors (i.e. orphans and abandoned children).
- Unaccompanied elders (over the age of 60).
- Landless people.
- Minorities.

In this context, the 65,400 COs and 5,600 VO were created in 380 UCs across the country. One of the expectations of the POs was that the project proposal mentioned was ‘Mobilizing community groups including

Table 8.4 PPAF-III components and budget allocation

Serial	Component	Amount (US\$)	Nature of expenditure
1.	Social mobilisation	38,500,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incubating TTOs at neighbourhood, village and UC levels • Through these organisations, identifying the poor and ultra-poor using the poverty score card and then implementing the entire project
2.	Livelihood enhancement and protection	85,500,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and supporting innovative microenterprises • Facilitating and promoting linkages with private and public sectors • Supporting community members to build up their savings capacity
3.	Microcredit access	40,000,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving access of the poor to microfinance to enhance their capacities, productivity and returns from livelihood initiatives
4.	Basic services and infrastructure	80,000,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing and upgrading basic services and infrastructure to serve the poor, including improved health and education facilities
5.	Project implementation support	6,000,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating governance, implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation, learning and quality enhancement efforts in the project

Source: Author’s own, based on information compiled from various PPAF documents.

women, youth, disabled, minorities, marginalised etc. and training them in skill enhancement, marketing, etc.’ (World Bank 2009a: 13). But, no PPAF report showed if any policy was in place to make this happen. The *Directors’ Report* for the year 2016 noted that:

A key achievement of PPAF III has been the inclusion of the ultra-poor, women, youth and persons of disability through this component. This was achieved through proactive policies, use of quotas and utilisation of a monitoring system that collected data disaggregated by gender, age and poverty scores for active course correction. (World Bank 2016b: 9)

The Project Implementation Completion and Results Report notes that: ‘Furthermore, the project ensured the inclusion of women, youth and persons with disabilities through specific quotas and targeted activities’ (World Bank 2017: 51). Hence, neither report mentions that any PPAF policy measures were put in place for religious minorities.

It is also important that religious minorities live in their own neighbourhoods, which are often irregular or illegal settlements. Apart from

Ahmadis and Baha'is, the religious minorities racially and often ethnically stand apart from other people. Because this scheme of things excludes minorities, it may have barred the PPAF from achieving one of its higher objectives: 'better identification of and responsive program interventions for ultra-poor' (World Bank 2017: 6). The final PPAF report, titled *User/Beneficiary Assessment Survey, Phase-II*, states that PPAF-III could not work with the ultra-poor, the category religious minorities fall into. The report notes that: 'Overall loans and grants are skewed towards the transitory vulnerable, transitory non-poor, and non-poor' (Apex Consulting 2015: 10).

7 Research findings

The five districts – Muzaffargarh, Bahawalpur, Ghotki, Sanghar and Layyah – are rural, with populations ranging between 1.5 million and 5 million. They vary in size, language, ethnic composition, religious harmony and political administration. On average, each district has 73 UCs and the PPAF chose 2–6 UCs in each district. During the research, the team went to 12 UCs in the five districts where the intervention was implemented under PPAF-III. The mean population in each UC is 40,000 people.

It was found that in most of these districts, the PPAF had already conducted several microcredit projects. In PPAF-III, the main areas of focus were capacity building through skill training and asset transfer, microcredit and infrastructure construction. The work of the PPAF was significantly observable in the UCs of the five districts where the intervention was implemented. In those UCs, youth centres were set up where young people were given skill training in motorcycle, refrigerator and cell phone repair, and fashion design and sewing skills. The required tool kit was also provided so that they could start their own business. Others received cows, sheep, goods for starting a grocery shop and so on.

Those who received training in rearing livestock were provided a buffalo or a cow. At the women's skill centre, women were trained in making handbags, detergents and how to sew. A digital hub was also set up with a computer and an internet connection for email and web browsing facilities. A photocopier was also placed in the hub. In Bahawalpur, we came to know that in the absence of the photocopier machine, people had to travel 8km (5 miles) to get a page photocopied. People with disabilities were given skill training and devices such as wheelchairs, glasses and artificial limbs. To improve infrastructure, streets were brick-lined, school buildings were renovated and crossings over watercourses were built. Lastly, a number of persons were provided microfinance to start a small business.

7.1 Socioeconomic conditions of Christians and scheduled-caste Hindus in the five districts

The population of religious minorities in the five districts ranges between 1 per cent and 26 per cent. In all five districts, the team first went to minority neighbourhoods and later to the UCs where the PPAF had implemented the project. Christians, because of their association with sanitation work, were undervalued. They were so despised that in some instances, the scheduled-caste Hindus also did not like to associate with them.

In Ghotki, when asked which community or caste was working in sanitation labour, we were told they were ‘Christians’, meaning sanitation worker and Christian are synonymous for them. In Mirpur Mathelo town, a major industrial hub, 34-year-old Muhammad Musa, a journalist working for a Sindhi language newspaper, was our team guide: “There are Muslim sanitation workers here, too. However, we generally call sanitation workers “Christian”.¹⁰ It seems the Christian identity was confused with the abhorred sweeper/sanitation worker occupational identity as it is in many other parts of the country.

One common theme about Christians in all districts was that they were either children or grandchildren of those who had migrated from central Punjab after the creation of Pakistan. They are still unsettled; living in a decent house and doing a decent job are a dream for these hundreds of thousands of Christians who mostly live in temporary settlements. For example, there are four Christian neighbourhoods in Bahawalpur city. One was founded by the Catholic Church, while the other three are illegal settlements, having no clean water supply, no paved streets, no streetlights and no sewer systems.

Katchi Abadi (which literally means ‘illegal settlement’), one of the four settlements, has 550 houses. Almost all the men there are sanitation labourers and the women work as domestic help. ‘They provide sanitation to others but themselves are deprived of it. As there is no drainage of sewage, residents often quarrel over the drainage of sewage. The tap water because of the broken and rusty pipelines gets mixed with sewage,’¹¹ said 40-year-old Lazar Allah Rakha, a human rights lawyer from the Christian community in Bahawalpur. ‘Life for these residents is like drinking your own pee.’

A similar situation among Christians was observed in Sanghar district where the team went to Padri Jo Goth village. Rasheed Masih, a 28-year-old social worker, told the team that the village was without sanitation facilities. ‘People treat Christians as untouchables and migration to Karachi is the only option for getting rid of poverty.’¹² He said that some of their youths have opted for nursing but mostly were working as unskilled labourers in the Muslim landlords’ fields, while some were sanitation labourers in the nearby city.

Obtaining education without financial resources and with the sanitation stigma is an uphill task for Christian children. Rasheed Masih said that girls are more interested in education than boys. Lazar Allah Rakha himself has struggled through this hardship and believes that hatred is the root cause. ‘Other students in school hate to sit, eat, drink or shake hands with you and then call you names: “*chuhra*” [sweeper]. How can you survive and excel in education in this hostile setting?’, He asked. ‘Even those who attain intermediate level education are only offered jobs in sanitation and the lucky ones who manage to get a better job are called by their co-workers “*chuhra*” to degrade them and convey that they don’t deserve to be here.’¹³

In the Punjab districts, only scheduled-caste Hindus were present, but in Sindh the Hindus were divided into upper-caste and scheduled-caste Hindus by their literacy rate, geography, means of livelihood, landownership, availability of worship places and political participation. Scheduled-caste Hindus were located in rural areas. They were mostly

illiterate and landless, worshipping at home rather than a place of worship, and working as peasants on the fields of Muslim landlords. These peasants have no choice who they can vote for and only follow the instructions of their landlord.

Upper-caste Hindus were located in urban areas. They were educated and worked in business. In Ghotki, they are known as *dewan* and in Sanghar as *thakur*, both titles of huge respect. In Mirpur Mathelo, Dr Darshan was elected to a minority seat in the National Assembly. He is a medical doctor, but runs several businesses apart from being involved in politics. ‘Almost all major businesses in the district are owned by the *dewans*,’¹⁴ Muhammad Musa told the team. He was of the view that Muslims could be divided into local Muslims and those who migrated to Pakistan after 1947 and were identified as ‘*muhajir*’ or migrants. ‘We, the local Muslims, are not interested in business while the migrant Muslims have been in competition with the *dewan* Hindus, which is why religious tensions have been on the rise in the district.’¹⁵

In recent years, Ghotki has become a flashpoint for religious conflict. Islamist cleric and political figure Mian Abdul Haq, custodian of the Bharchundi Sharif shrine and commonly known as ‘Mian Mithu’, is infamously associated with forced conversion of minority women in Sindh province (*Naya Daur* 2019). Mob violence in the name of religious or blasphemy laws is a phenomenon of Punjab province. In September 2019, mobs ransacked three Hindu temples and several shops on the pretext of blasphemy in Ghotki (Shahid 2019). In another such incident, in 2016, 17-year-old *dewan* Satish Kumar and his friend Avinash were shot at on the pretext of blasphemy. Kumar later succumbed to his injuries, while Avinash survived (Samoon 2016).

The *meghwarhs* in Ghotki are one scheduled-caste community that in the past 20 years has excelled and defied all bondage. They are located in urban areas, obtaining an education and working in business. In Mirpur Mathelo, the team met with Seeru Ram who is the head of the *meghwarh* community in Ghotki. Seeru Ram is also chief priest in the Sain Malang Baba temple. He was exceptionally hospitable, presenting traditional gifts to the team and taking them to the temple to pay homage. The annual festival draws thousands of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. When returning to his house, the team wanted to meet a few Christians – or, more appropriately, sanitation workers – on the way. Seeru Ram was reluctant and found it somewhat below his dignity. So, he went his way and the team its way. After meeting some Christians, we reached Seeru Ram’s house. ‘About 90 per cent of our community lives in cities, owns houses and is in [the] cloth business, as my sons are,’¹⁶ Seeru Ram told us and it seemed as if different economic status was the guiding principle as to whether they could meet Christians.

Scheduled-caste Hindus from *bheel* and *kohli* communities are *haris* (landless bonded peasants). There are no upper-caste Hindu *haris*. The overall landlessness among scheduled castes is most obvious and at its worst in Bahawalpur. Around 200,000 of their population live in the town of Yazman. Landlessness, drinking water and conversion of their minor girls were reported as their major challenges. While the team was in Yazman, about 15km (9 miles) away, the shanties of scheduled-caste *bohria* were being demolished in 51/DB.

‘Once our people make an area habitable and cultivatable, powerful people, using the state machinery, snatch the place,’¹⁷ 47-year-old Sham Lal told the team as he accompanied them in Bahawalpur. ‘The *bohria* are a wandering tribe struggling to settle down. They hunt boar, porcupine and the Indian spiny-tailed lizard for food, while their women raise livestock.’ It is a long time that Sham Lal has been working for the water and land rights of scheduled castes in Yazman. There are at least 50 government-approved scheduled-caste Hindu neighbourhoods across Yazman. Strangely enough, they have all been named Jinnah Minority Colony by the government. ‘None of us have the ownership of the houses. In all these colonies, there is no drinkable water provided. We bring water from adjacent Muslim colonies.’¹⁸

The team visited more than a dozen minority neighbourhoods where they asked residents if they had received any assistance from NGOs. Padri Jo Goth in Sanghar and Yousaf Colony were set up by the Catholic Church. The residents of Islami Colony in Bahawalpur said that only Jamaat-e-Islami had provided them relief in the shape of electricity poles. Apart from this, no government, political party or civil society organisation had helped improve their living conditions.

Some of the settlements had been set up by the government but still lacked basic amenities. Kashif Masih, a 40-year-old resident of Christian Colony in Bahawalpur told the team that Christians came here after 1947 and started living on government land. ‘In [the] 1970s, late prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto ordered to transfer the land to squatters and these people were given ownership rights. We get some support from local politicians but not from non-government organisations.’¹⁹ None of the members of minority communities knew about the PPAF work in their district in any of the five districts visited.

7.2 Selection of UCs and inclusion of minorities

The census data shows that religious minorities are present in all five districts the team visited. As their condition shows, they are in need of a PPAF-III-type intervention to disrupt the vicious poverty web they are stuck in. However, during our visit of minority neighbourhoods we found that minorities were not present in all UCs. It was also revealed in interviews with LSO office bearers that several UCs did not have minority communities. Most of the UCs were where the PPAF had worked before implementing PPAF-III. If the PPAF did not choose new UCs that included religious minorities, then at least a certain number of minorities from nearby UCs could be added.

For instance, the PPAF worked in Khanpur UC in Ghotki, but there are reportedly no minorities there. Next to Khanpur UC is Mithri UC, where the team met with Shish Paal, who belongs to the *bheel* scheduled caste. Shish Paal told the team that there were 25 houses from the *bheel* community in the UC. ‘All of us work in the fields of Muslim landlords as peasants. We are treated as untouchables and people usually keep a distance from us. Our children only get education to the primary level.’²⁰ For worship, these families meet at someone’s home. Shish Paal confirmed that the PPAF had not involved any of their members in any development project.

7.3 Inclusion of minorities as beneficiaries and in TTOs

Overall, inclusion of disability and gender were visible themes in the project's implementation. Most of the LSOs had at least 40 per cent representation of women. Apart from executive body members, beneficiaries were largely women. But sometimes these arrangements only appear to be cosmetic. For example, in Muradpur Jhandani UC, in Bahawalpur district, the LSO had 20 members, with only one male among them, who was the president, while the women members were only there to showcase the percentage of their representation, not to participate. In Khanpur UC, in Ghotki district, there was another way of dealing with mixing gender. All LSO members were women, which meant that men were excluded from the implementation plan. But this did not mean that women were the ones who were in charge. When the team met with the three office bearers, two of them had their husbands accompanying them.

People with disabilities were also given special attention in the project design. Most of the UCs implemented the livelihood enhancement and protection component. Under this initiative, the ultra-poor and others were provided skill training and related toolkits worth 50,000 Pakistani rupees (c.US\$300). In this component, people with disabilities were beneficiaries in large numbers. Hundreds of them also received devices such as hearing aids, glasses, artificial limbs and wheelchairs. However, the PPAF studied the participation of people with disabilities in organisational structures and found that 'only 7 per cent of TTO[s] across the country have at least one member with disability in their Executive Body' (Khalid *et al.* 2019), which shows that their inclusion at beneficiary level was ensured, but not at decision-making level.

In the overall research, it was found that religious minorities were not among the beneficiaries, nor were they part of the TTO structure. It was particularly evident in the districts where their population was 1–2 per cent. For example, the minority population in Bahawalpur is about 2 per cent. In this district, Marhi Sheikh Shijra UC is still in effect functioning despite the project having closed five years ago. Out of 20 LSO members, 18 were women and 2 were men, one of whom had a disability, but there was no member from the minority population. An interview with 42-year-old LSO President Muhammad Saleem revealed that there were around 1,000 people from the minority community in the UC, mainly scheduled-caste Hindus. Muhammad Saleem said that, 'these people are the poorest of the poor in our UC. People do not like to associate, shake hands, eat or drink with them'.²¹ It was also not obvious if any of the minority persons were among the beneficiaries.

The population of non-Muslims is about 7 per cent in Ghotki. In Khanpur UC, inclusion of religious minorities in the project was considered unacceptable. The team met with LSO President Khanzadi, Vice-President Mai Halima and general body member Shahnaz Bibi. When asked if religious minorities were included in the project, Shahnaz strongly responded they could not be included. For a second there was pin-drop silence after her statement. Realising that it was an embarrassing situation, Khanzadi intervened and said that there were no minorities living in the UC. But Shahnaz again jumped in and said that: 'Even if there were minorities, we would not have included them.'²² It showed us that they were

not sensitised overall on the inclusion of marginalised sections of society and they, as women, were suffering the same exclusion. In our interviews in another UC, Bhaitoor, the LSO office bearers said that there was one general body member from the minority community in the LSO, but they could not provide more information (their name, etc.) about the member beyond this claim.

Sanghar was the only district where we could visibly see minorities included from the beneficiary level to the decision-making level in the TTOs. The overall population of religious minorities is around 26 per cent in Sanghar. This level of inclusion could be partially because of their high population rate, but also because of the implementation PO's inclusive approach. The PPAF's project implementation PO in Sanghar was the Sindh Agricultural Forestry Workers and Coordinating Organisation (SAFWCO). A presentation on the project implementation at the SAFWCO office revealed that the organisation was sensitive towards minorities.

During the visit to Piru Faqir Shoro UC and Hoat Wassan UC a complaint box was observed, which was not seen in any of the LSO offices in the other four districts. Also, a chart of the government's UC development plan was placed on the wall and activities were aligned with those of the government. Among many other things, during the project cycle, the LSO office bearers got several scheduled-caste villages registered with the government. Without this registration, a village does not get official recognition or any financial or other support from the government; and is not included in any development plan.

The five members of the general body of the Hoat Wassan LSO were scheduled-caste Hindus, as were the LSO general secretary, Naichal, and the member of the general body, Gian Chand, in Piru Faqir Shoro. The Sindhi scheduled-caste Hindus were quite comfortable with the presence of the research team, despite linguistic and religious differences. A scheduled-caste Hindu participant, who could not be identified by name, in a TTO in Piru Faqir Shoro said, 'I feel the fragrance of the team as of my own' (an expression which meant that he felt we belonged to him).²³

8 Conclusion

The goal of inclusive societies cannot be reached without considering religion as an important marker of social exclusion, especially in countries such as Pakistan. The research shows that religious minorities were evidently sidelined in the development process and World Bank staff either did not notice it or were unwilling to achieve the project indicator.

This study necessitates that the multi-layered marginality of certain religious minorities be recognised. All non-Muslims, in general, suffer social and political exclusion to a certain degree, but the severity of social exclusion dramatically increase if it is coupled with caste, disabilities, poverty and stereotypical stigmas.

Caste, a marker of exclusion and group formation, is one of the least researched aspects in Pakistani academic circles and so is missing from development programmes. Having existed for millennia on the Indian subcontinent, it is impossible to imagine that caste is non-existent in the country, as Pakistan's official policy states. Dalit caste status contributes to poorer socioeconomic status, which is why Christians and scheduled-

caste Hindus are treated as untouchables, pushed into ghettos from rural to urban settings, refused commensality and only offered jobs in sanitation. This requires the PPAF to work especially with these communities, who face multi-layered exclusion.

The PPAF staff and the implementing POs were clearheaded about women and people with disabilities but not about religious minorities. The people with disabilities were also well taken care and quota systems were in place for women and the people with disabilities. However, no such mechanism was put in place for religious minorities. There was no obvious minority participation except in Sanghar, which shows that the PPAF and the POs did ensure the minority participation, despite being identified as a vulnerable group in the project proposal.

Keeping in view the high level of religiosity in the country and crippling intersecting marginalities of religious minorities, including Christians and scheduled-caste Hindus, the project implementers of the World Bank, the PPAF and POs should have adopted robust policies and mechanisms for their inclusion. Because the inclusion of minorities did not happen, it is necessary to conduct an audit of the PPAF and the implementing POs to see if an adequate representation of religious minorities is present on their boards and among their staff members. If the PPAF and partners do not allow inclusion of minorities among their own rank and file, then expecting them to make village networks inclusive of minorities is not realistic.

International aid agencies that provide help also should not shy away from building robust mechanisms to better include religious minorities in their societies. The monitoring World Bank team should have rectified this project implementation flaw at the time instead of allowing it to continue. As religious minorities are ignored in countries such as Pakistan, it is also the responsibility of international aid agencies to put in place policies that do not allow them to be ignored as the PPAF was able to ignore them throughout the project cycle.

9 Recommendations

- 1 Religious minorities are not a homogenous group. In terms of social exclusion, they widely differ in marginality and extreme poverty. The poorest religious minorities must be taken care of so that no one is left behind.
- 2 Article 36 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan states that: '[The] State shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the Federal and Provincial services.' As an autonomous body working on the behalf of the Pakistani people, the PPAF must ensure religious minority representation so that real inclusivity starts from within.
- 3 Board members and project staff of implementing POs and the PPAF should be scrutinised to check there is adequate representation of religious minorities. Without this, networks created by them cannot be inclusive and tolerant of minorities.
- 4 International development agencies such as the World Bank should also ensure that their own regional and country offices have adequate representation of minorities, so that partner organisations like the PPAF follow their lead.

- 5 Development practitioners and organisations need to be trained on social exclusion and the marginality of religious minorities at the lowest level of their respective organisations.
- 6 In the same way that the PPAF ran a special programme for 4,000 Kalash people, it should run an extensive programme for Christians and scheduled-caste Hindus living in urban ghettos, even if these minority pockets fall in the PPAF's low-priority urban areas.
- 7 One criterion for selection of districts and UCs should be the presence of a sizeable number of impoverished religious minorities. If they are not present, then minorities from adjacent UCs should have been involved.
- 8 To be on a safe side, a quota should be put in place for religious minorities that suffer social exclusion at multiple levels.

Notes

- * This book has been produced as part of the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) programme, funded with UK aid from the UK government. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views or official policies of our funder or IDS. This is an Open Access book distributed under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence** (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited and any modifications or adaptations are indicated.
- † The World Bank was contacted for comment on this chapter but no response was received.
- 1 Asif Aqeel, journalist, researcher and activist, Pakistan.
- 2 Mary Gill, Executive Director, Center for Law & Justice, Pakistan.
- 3 There are three administrative tiers of government in Pakistan: federal, provincial and district. The district administration is divided into towns (*tehsil*), which are further divided into union councils. So, the UC is the lowest administrative unit of governance in Pakistan.
- 4 This statement was included as Article 26 in the *Interim Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* (Government of Pakistan 1972: 8).
- 5 In the Indian caste system, food is ranked: 'vegetarianism is distinctly the highest; then come eggs, fish, chicken, mutton, port, beef and, last of all, carrion'. The untouchable castes are those that eat beef, and even worse, carrion', wrote Belgian anthropologist Robert Deliège (Deliège 1999).
- 6 Contemporary scholars on Christians include, for example: Ali (2006), Gabriel (2008), Julius (2017) and Sookhdeo (2002).
- 7 The practice of eating together.
- 8 An additional six months were given to ensure completion of all activities.
- 9 An additional US\$5.8m was gained through the exchange rate.
- 10 Interview with Muhammad Musa, Ghotki, 29 May 2020.
- 11 Interview with Lazar Allah Rakha, Bahawalpur, 24 May 2020.
- 12 Interview with Rasheed Masih, Padri Jo Goth village, 25 May 2020.
- 13 Interview with Lazar Allah Rakha, Bahawalpur, 24 May 2020.
- 14 Interview with Muhammad Musa, Ghotki, 29 May 2020.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Interview with Seeru Ram, Mirpur Mathelo, 29 May 2020.
- 17 Interview with Sham Lal, Yazman, 24 May 2020.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Interview with Kashif Masih, Hasilpur town, 24 May 2020.
- 20 Interview with Shish Paal, Mithri UC, 29 May 2020.

- 21 Interview with Muhammad Saleem, Saddar town, 24 May 2020.
 22 Interview with Shanaz Bibi, Khanpur UC, 25 May 2020.
 23 Interview with anonymous participant, Piru Faqir Shoro, 25 May 2020.

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