

Nov 04, 2016 by **APDS Bloggers**

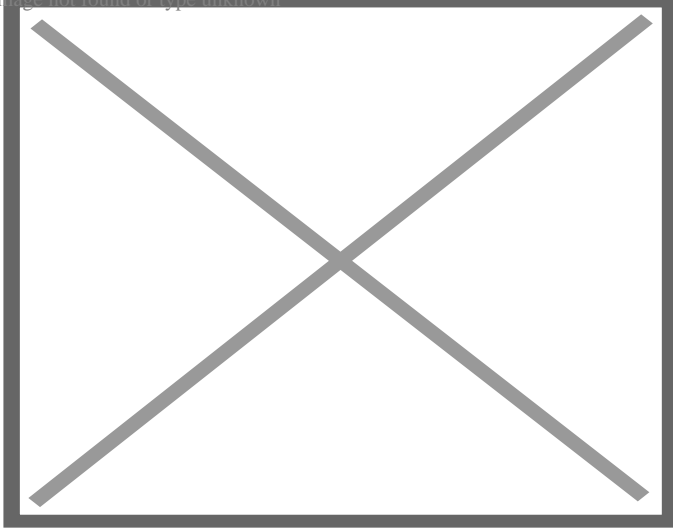
India Blog Series: Citizens in Action ^[1]

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As mentioned in the recent article by fellow India: Inside Out teammate Aparajitha V., one of the main problems with India's government public diplomacy efforts is the lack of manpower. Citizen efforts can have the ability and potential to meet the government's needs. One area in particular where citizen diplomacy can have a huge impact is in India-Pakistan relations.

While in India, our team had the opportunity to meet with many groups conducting citizen diplomacy to help improve India-Pakistan relations. These groups varied in their scope of approaches from being deeply involved in conflict transformation, to not directly taking a stance on the issue at all. The following are some of the organizations we met with and their efforts in citizen diplomacy:

- Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) is an outstanding Delhi-based organization working on multi-track diplomacy in the India-Pakistani conflict. Their efforts include annual conflict transformation workshops that get women involved to redefine masculinity and the role of women in conflict transformation. The group targets future leaders of both countries and seeks to build trust between Indian and Pakistani peers. After the 2008 Mumbai attacks, WISCOMP helped create an agreement with Pakistanis and Indians during a time of mistrust and unease. The range of projects and programs in which WISCOMP participates in helps transform Pakistani-Indian relations from a wide range of perspectives and angles.
- The India Future of Change project is a project that aims to determine perceptions of India from abroad by holding design, art, essay, and business plan contests, and touts the success of having submissions come from Pakistan. The project seeks to generate interest in India around non-political topics, and having submissions from Pakistan shows that perspectives from Indian and Pakistani citizens about India do not reflect the tensions and mistrust held by the governments of both nations.
- Sesame Workshop is the nonprofit arm of the American *Sesame Street* franchise, and chooses not to deal with the Pakistan-Indian issues directly because they are so sensitive. Instead, the programming focuses on organic integration of different religious groups and coexistence as a whole, generating a new generation of citizen diplomats. The programming teaches children to have respect and understanding for people unlike themselves. While this type of programming does not specifically tackle India-Pakistan tensions, it has the goal of making this young generation of Indian children more tolerant of people unlike themselves, and to grow up embracing differences.



Meeting with Sesame Workshop in New Delhi

These organizations are just a fraction of the breadth of work being done in India with citizen diplomacy.

While there are many approaches to dealing with Indian-Pakistani relations, one thing remains clear: the potential for citizen-led efforts to make a difference is huge and can help change attitudes between communities. The work that these groups and others like them have done and will continue to do can make up for the lack of people-power in the Indian government that hinders their public diplomacy efforts.

Are you part of an organization that participates in citizen diplomacy in India-Pakistan relations? Weigh in with your thoughts in the comment section below.

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