Search for Common Ground Pakistan

Perception of Conflict Amongst Youth and Local Leaders

Key Findings

October 2012
Executive Summary

The baseline study provides an in-depth analysis of people’s perception on the role of youth and policy makers in peace building in the Khyber Pakhtunkhawa (KP) and FATA regions. The report is based on the review of literature covering prior studies carried out by different national and international organizations in the KP and FATA regions, and a field visit. This report is designed to outline research methodologies and analytical tools and presents a review of the field study to comprehend the extent of people’s understanding about the nature and dynamics of peace and conflict in KP and FATA, and also about their roles in conflict resolution and peace building.

Overall assessment suggests that conflict is perceived to be essentially a conflict of opinion, but it extends to the presence of violence and intolerance. The reasons for conflict in Pakistan were perceived to be quite diverse and included political, economic, social, legal, institutional as well as external factors. The Afghan war was perceived as a major factor in the deterioration of the region. Internally, poverty and inequality, poor governance, weak law and order, corruption and religious fundamentalism were perceived to be the most critical reasons of conflict. The impacts of conflict were also perceived to be reaching nearly every population segment and socio-economic sector of the society. Youth, women and children were amongst the most disadvantaged or victimized by conflict. The economic and business sectors have also been impaired due to chronic outbreaks of conflict and violence. Given the circumstances, respondents shared the view that many of the current government initiatives, particularly the use of force or governance reforms, have not borne much fruit. However, some of the traditional methods such as arbitration by Jirga have proven to be successful in many conflict occasions and should be improved upon. Furthermore, the existing roles of youth and policy makers have not been very significant in peace building. Potentially, the youth could help resolve conflicts by spreading awareness about peacebuilding, engaging in public discourse on peace, facilitating dialogue between conflicting parties and contributing to the general wellbeing of the community through a positive and productive attitude. The policy makers and other community leaders could also make a positive contribution in consensus-building and enhancing the role of youth and other stakeholders in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The role of media was perceived to help support of the actions of youth and other peace builders, by spreading awareness and playing a general watchdog role.

Recommendations for improving the methods for peacebuilding and for advancing the role of youth and policy makers as successful peace builders have also been discussed in this report. A policy emphasis must be made upon mediation and dialogue, and youth mobilization for peace building. For sustainable peace, political and legal reforms must be made in KP and FATA creating a strong democratic culture with provisions for accountability of position holders, transparency in decision making, representation of marginalized groups and participation by youth, in particular. A sustainable development and human rights-based approach must be adopted that tackles the underlying causes of conflict.
Key Findings

Perceptions on the Nature and Reasons of Conflict

- A majority of policy maker and youth respondents believed that conflict exists between groups. A few believed that conflict exists at the individual level too. However, there was consensus among respondents that conflict exists between both individuals as well as groups, depending on the nature of conflict.

- FGD respondents and KIs from most districts identified individuals, and not groups, as the main actors in conflict due to personal property disputes, greediness, family disputes, illiteracy, ignorance, social or financial frustrations and unemployment.

- Most community members, KIs, youth and policymaker respondents suggested political parties as the primary actors in local conflicts.

- According to both groups of respondents, the most significant reasons of conflict in all districts are poverty, lack of education, intolerance, over-zealous sentiments for religion, motivation by fundamentalist religious leaders and political leaders, political conflicts and lack of economic opportunities, especially for youth.

Perceptions on the Impacts of Conflict

- According to both groups of respondents, the most significant impacts are depression/stress, frustrations, crime and financial instability. Impacts on social disintegration, attitudinal changes and destruction of infrastructure were not considered relatively significant. There was not enough variation between policy maker and youth responses.

- In some districts, the impacts were perceived to be stronger. These included Dir, Hangu, Lakki Marwat, Malakand and Swat.

- Youth was considered the most impacted segment of the society in all districts, followed by children and women. In Bannu and Lakki Marwat, respondents also ranked government personnel and workers as amongst the most impacted segments.

- Both group of respondents also thought that the most impacted sectors were government institutions, education, law and order, and the judicial sector. Sectors perceived to be less affected include the economic and production sectors, and the infrastructure sector.
Perceptions on the Best Potential Initiatives/Methods for Peace:

- The best potential method for peace building according to both youth and policy makers is through dialogue in the form of community dialogue or Jirga in which the local leaders or Jirga would act as mediators.

- The key competencies for conflict resolution and conducting dialogue include good communications skills, active listening, being influential and wealthy and supported by government.

Perceptions on the Status of Existing Peace Initiatives/Methods

- The existing initiatives in Khyber Agency, Peshawar, Bannu, Hangu and Malakand is Jirga while in Swat, Dir, F.R. Kohat, Kohat, Mardan, Lakki Marwat, army or use of force is the existing method.

- In case of Khyber Agency, Peshawar, Bannu, Hangu and Malakand, the existing initiatives have been taken by the community itself. While in case of Swat, Dir, F.R. Kohat, Kohat, Mardan and Lakki Marwat, the army or law enforcement agencies were involved.

- These methods are proved to be effective according to both youth & policy makers in Peshawar, Swat, Dir, Kohat, Buner, Hangu and Mardan.

- As far as the current operational condition of these initiatives are concerned, the youth and policy makers vary in their opinion. According to policy makers, the methods/activities are still workable in Charsadda, Hangu, Dir, Kohat, Malakand, Mardan, Swat and Peshawar. And the reasons of discontinuation in other districts are absence of right people and unwillingness of parties to sit together.

- The youth on the other hand pointed out that the activities are only workable in Dir, Hangu, Kohat, Peshawar and Swat while in the remaining districts the activities are no longer operational due to the same reasons highlighted by policy makers.

Perceptions on the Roles of Youth and Policy Makers in Peace Building

From the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews, the perception of locals about the existing and potential roles of youth and policy makers in peace building:
**Existing Role of Youth**

- Perception of the policy makers were that youth’s role in peace building in the society has been very limited. They are aggressive and are not interested in non-violent resolution.
- Youth show no respect for any sort of authority. Despite attempts by the community leaders to guide them and persuade them away from fighting, they do not listen to them.
- Community members and KIs perceived that youth lack motivation and energy, and social deprivation has deepened their sense of isolation from their community and nation.
- In some districts such as Buner, Peshawar and Lakki Marwat, youth are actively contributing by helping to reduce street crimes, spreading awareness about peace and volunteering for social work. They are also active in peace committees.
- According to majority of respondents in both groups, youth has been made part of local peace building efforts. Though their involvement has been minimal and dissatisfactory.
- Their involvement is relatively high in six districts: Bannu, Dir, Hangu, Kohat, Malakand and Swat.
- In these districts, they have played major roles in community mobilization, opponent mobilization and spreading of awareness.

**Existing Role of Policy Makers**

- KIs and participants in the FGDs suggested that policy makers have not made any substantial contributions towards the betterment of the local communities. They are either corrupt and only work to serve their own political interests, or are too scared to stand up against social and legal injustices. They often lack the positive attitude, charisma and leadership skills.
- In the more troubled regions such as Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Peshawar and Mardan, policy makers rarely make public appearances and when they do, it is mostly to garner votes. They reside in the main cities such as Islamabad and hope to remotely control the situation from there.
- There is no effective implementation and monitory and evaluation strategy for peace or development policies by policy makers.
- Target killings and assassinations are the biggest threats to policy makers. This is a big concern in Hangu.
- Some of the roles and authorities of policy makers are being exercised by non-elected officials such as the army or the Jirga leaders. They have been effective in dealing with many conflict situations, but they are also not accountable and representative. In Noshera, Peshawar, Charsada and Malakand, people are more supportive of the work of police and army than the politicians.
Around 60% of policy maker respondents and 40% of youth respondents believed that policy makers have been involved in local peace efforts. Most involvement was observed in Buner, D.I. Khan, Dir, Hangu, Lakki Marwat and Malakand.

In these districts, policy makers played roles in community mobilization, opponents’ mobilization and spreading awareness.

Potential Role of Youth

- FGD and KI participants advised that youth has a lot of potential in bringing social and economic change. They are more energetic, passionate, initiative and more efficient in getting things done.
- Overall perceptions in KP and FATA seemed that the role of youth only come secondary to those of the army, policy makers and the Jirga leaders.
- Youth’s potential is constrained due to the lack of access to education and economic opportunities, insecurity and sense of social isolation.
- Youth can play several potential roles in peace building. They can play a role in conflict resolution, bringing together opponents and in mediation.
- According to both policy maker and youth respondents, the major potential difficulties faced by youth in peace building include security threats, convincing political opponents to sit together, complications in mediation and biasness. These difficulties are significant across the districts.

Potential Role of Policy Makers

- Policy makers are perceived to be highly influential, regardless of whether respondents perceive their role as positive and effective. Most positive reactions were seen in Bannu, Swat, F.R Kohat, Malakand and Peshawar. Most negative reactions to the role of policy makers were seen in Hangu, Mardan and Lakki Marwat.
- Both group of respondents believed that policy makers can effectively end violence if they properly use their power and authority. They can help in creating inclusive peace strategies. They can help in mediation and bridging gaps between political opponents. They can provide capacity-building programmes for youth and other segments of the population.
- They can be effective because they are authoritative, have wisdom and experience in dealing with conflict situations, and can efficiently deploy measures to counter sudden outbreaks of conflict.
- For effective policy making, there needs to be a system of accountability, transparency and participation in decision making processes.
- Both group of respondents agreed that policy makers had a bigger role to play in conflict resolution, followed by helping to bring opposing parties together and then in mediation.
• With regards to potential difficulties faced by policy makers in improving the situation of the area, policy maker respondents suggested that most of their efforts are weakened due to security threats (31% response) and potential difficulties in convincing political or religious opponents to sit together and reach a peace agreement (30.7%). Youth responses also indicated that the aforementioned two factors were the biggest constraints (34.5% and 31.5% respectively). Difficulties in mediation and discrimination and biasness were considered as less relevant or significant by both groups of respondents.

• On a district level, life threats are considered the biggest problem in F.R Kohat, Hangu, Kohat, Lakki Marwat, Malakand and Swat. Difficulty in facilitating peace discussions is the biggest problem in Buner,Charsada, D.I Khan, Khyber Agency and Peshawar. Mediation is the biggest difficulty in Bannu and Dir. And finally, biasness is considered most problematic in Mardan and Noshera.