

Conflict, livelihoods and local perspectives of peace building in post-9/11 north-western Pakistan.

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Abstract

This study advances knowledge on a particularly under-researched area: it focuses on conflict, livelihood and local perspectives of peace building in north-western Pakistan. In doing so, it examines mainstream perspectives on the region, liberal peace building in relation to humanitarian and development interventions, and understandings of livelihoods in postconflict and post-disaster contexts. The study comprises an introductory chapter and four individual research papers. The introductory chapter introduces the context of north-western Pakistan, and develops an understanding of the socio-economic and long-term development challenges of the area. It provides a conceptual and theoretical understanding of perspectives outlined for this study.

The four research papers address the main objectives associated with this study.

Paper I

investigates mainstream discourses of Pakhtuns by deconstructing events across Pakhtun history in relation to Pakhtun identity and social structures. The paper develops an understanding of discourse and historicist modes of inquiry. It assesses how Pakhtun communities perceive the present conflict and view mainstream accounts and vice versa, as well as how Pakhtuns perceive mainstream discourses as influenced by geo-strategic considerations. Through accounts from Pakhtuns key informants it identifies how the current mainstream perspectives of the conflict do not subscribe to those as understood by local communities in the region. The paper charts the changes in Pakhtun social structures during the last three decades, and how Pakhtuns attribute these changes to international and external power relations and the impact of the conflict in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Paper I thus establishes a background understanding of the context of north-western Pakistan, its inhabitants, and the conflict in the area.

Paper II

deals with responses to the conflict in north-western Pakistan that aim to achieve peace building through humanitarian and development interventions. It develops an understanding of how liberal peace building relates to conflict-affected contexts, and then, based on

empirical evidence from conflict-affected communities in north-western Pakistan, the paper identifies the weaknesses in implementation of these strategies and response plans.

Moreover, it locates institutional factors and weaknesses in liberal peace in relation to how the interests of international actors, including the United States, are often a mismatch with the peace-building needs of local communities. The paper identifies how these mismatches are part of a larger problem that signifies contradictions in the liberal peace agenda, which often lead to undermining local agency, creating dependencies, and decreased institutional capacities.

Paper III

investigates the case of the Swat district in north-western Pakistan, which experienced a protracted conflict and a disaster in the form of a major flood. The paper explores how important needs outlined by locals, including livelihood and long-term considerations, remained unaddressed by peace-building programmes. It identifies how peacebuilding responses were tailored to short-term goals and failed to incorporate long-term development concerns. In addition, the paper identifies the mismatch between strengthening the livelihoods of communities in Swat and actual practices, which in some cases, related to food distribution. It outlines the weaknesses in impact targeting of livelihood programmes related to institutional contexts, where the UN and large NGOs impose their own agendas, particularly in post-conflict situations. This was evident in the case of Swat, because long-term development actors, who had greater expertise and remained better suited to meeting the long-term needs of communities, remained largely absent.

Paper IV

explores the post-disaster earthquake context of northern Pakistan in relation to sustainability and impact targeting of livelihood programmes. The paper analyses this context by considering how livelihood programmes attempted to target their beneficiaries. It identifies the structural aspects and working strategies of four different types of livelihood schemes, and explores how beneficiaries of these schemes were able to meet their livelihood needs through support from these programmes. The study identifies how households in two villages availed themselves of opportunities to move towards favourable livelihood outcomes. Findings from a comparison of the post-disaster situation in northern Pakistan and that in conflict-ridden Swat (north-western Pakistan), suggest that impact targeting of livelihood programmes remains a challenge in contexts where liberal peace-building agendas are implemented. Moreover, in post-disaster contexts such as northern Pakistan, the institutional context supported adequate targeting of livelihood initiatives that resulted in sustainable livelihoods for local communities.