

ASSESSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH TO SUSTAIN POST-CONFLICT PEACEBUILDING PROCESS IN SWAT

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Abstract

This research is focused on exploring opportunities for the youth of Swat in the post-conflict peacebuilding scenario for the sustainability of the peacebuilding process. This work is based on the quantitative and qualitative data gathered using purposive sampling from 100 respondents comprising of the youth of Swat including male and female youth, their parents, politicians and journalists, youth activists from the NGO sector, civil and military administration, and the Village Defence Committee member utilizing the structured and semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. This is a pilot study on the youth of Swat since the commencement of the post-conflict peacebuilding process and aims to explore the existing opportunities provided to the youth of Swat at various levels i.e., cultural, political, social, and economic. The evidence from this research has suggested that youth have a very positive role and approach towards the post-conflict peacebuilding process but there is no concrete policy adopted to engage the youth of Swat for the sustainability of the peacebuilding process. However, the

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youth is excelling in the promotion of peace at the individual and societal level on their own despite various constraints imposed by society.

Keywords: Culture of peace, peace process, youth inclusion, youth empowerment, post-conflict peacebuilding.

1. Historical Overview

Swat Valley was the only state in the Indian subcontinent that was not a production of the imperial power or any individual but it came into existence as a decision made by the jirga of the Swat Valley to rule over their areas after doing away with the rule of Nawab of Dir (Rome, 1999). The state was, though known as an internally independent state having its own laws and judicial system, budget and taxes, administration and police, army, and its own flag, but remained dependent on the British Indian Government for foreign affairs, currency, electricity, and post, and this dependency shifted to Pakistan after the independence of Indian Subcontinent (Rome, 2006). In 1949, the Wali-e-Swat – Miangul Abdul Wadood who had been administrating the state since 1917, nominated his son Miangul Jahanzeb as the Wali and abdicated the throne in his favor. The new Wali gained popularity among the masses due to his development works and schemes but after some years, he had to face some internal challenges from the Khans and Khattaks. Meanwhile, there was a group of intellectuals and businessmen who demanded the democratization of the state to enjoy political stability and a flourishing economy.

This group consists of the people desiring to have a say in the politics of Swat but could not accomplish their desire because of Wali's firm control and widespread popularity. The pressure of political reforms was kept building by various stakeholders but the Wali managed to delay such reforms being Ayub Khan's son-in-law (the then President of Pakistan during that period and thus neutrality was observed on Swat's business by the state of Pakistan which gave Wali help to widely exercise his powers without any serious repercussions. General Yahya, after coming into power, declared the integration of three princely states of Chitral, Dir, and Swat. The states of Dir and Swat were incorporated into the Malakand Division's administrative structure which remained under the jurisdiction of the NWFP provincial government (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) (Rome, 1999). The Judicial system was functioning in the same manner elsewhere in Pakistan until 1974. In 1975, despite being part of NWFP, Swat was administrated under the PATA regulations where the authority lies within the political agent of Malakand Division in collaboration with the commissioner of Swat (Hussain, 2011).

2. Militancy in Swat and Impact on Youth

The eruption of militancy arose in the valley of Swat with the rise of the Taliban during the era of civil war in Afghanistan which became the prime reason for the destruction of peace and tranquility of the region instigating infringement of human rights,

challenging the authority of the government, and defying rule of law (Elahi, 2015).

In 2008, the implementation of contentious ‘Nizam-e-Adl’ regulations by the provincial government transferred the control of Swat to the hands of ‘Mullah Fazlullah’ under the banner of Tehrik-i-Nifaaz-i-Shariyat-i-Muhammadi (TNSM). The control of Swat was been given in the hands of Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammad (TNSM) under the leadership of Mullah Fazalullah after the disputed ‘Nizam-e-Adl’ regulations by the government in 2008 (Shams, 2011). Swat drew significant media limelight due to the TNSM’s ruthless behavior towards locals of Swat, and the establishment of TNSM’s strong connections with the terrorist networks in the neighborhood resulting in its growing military influence, and its proximity near the federal capital of Pakistan (SDPI, 2012). As a reaction, a military operation was launched because of the decision taken by the newly elected government to curb the growing threats posed by the militants. For this purpose, over two million people living in Swat were internally displaced in May 2009. The TNSM militants faced substantial human and material losses by military operation till its success in June of the same year. The return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to the valley marked the commencement of the rehabilitation process in the aftermath of a successful military operation – *Raah-e-Raast* (Elahi, 2015).

The displacement scenario has a long tale of misery experienced by the population of Swat but the youth was profoundly impacted by the militancy during and in the aftermath of the Swat Conflict. Though the era of militancy has triggered the radicalization among the youth of Swat, but in the post-conflict rehabilitation process, youth is depicted as a crucial element contributing towards the peacebuilding process and instigating change in the society as this segment of the society possesses great potential but directed guidance is required. Ironically, the peacebuilding strategies are limited to the enforcement of Community Policing initiatives, and establishing and reinforcing the Dispute Resolution Council (DRCs) and Village Defence Committees (VDCs). The sustainability of the peacebuilding process carries significant and contrasting long-term implications considering the inclusion or exclusion of the youth. The meaningful inclusion of youth and channeling their energies and skills towards conflict management and resolution effectively impact the peace process. Their engagement in the peacebuilding process as leaders and significant stakeholders holds the potential to fortify the human rights structures, foster development, drive social change, and ensure the sustainability of the peacebuilding process. Contrary, the exclusion of youth from the peacebuilding process, there are chances of misusing their potential by the reunifying militant forces in the region, fostering linkages with the negative social elements, and increased chances of their involvement in violent

activities. Unfortunately, the absence of a clear strategy for youth engagement in the peacebuilding process poses a long-term threat to the peace initiatives in the valley. This research focused on exploring the available opportunities to embrace youth in the post-conflict peacebuilding process, therefore contributing to the sustainability of the peace process.

The research employed a blend of semi-structured and structured interviews along with the utilization of questionnaires to gather primary data from one hundred respondents belonging to the ten villages across Union Council Landaykass and Rang Muhallah. The respondents were categorized into six segments of the individual unit of analysis for the research. i.e. *Youth* (forty male youth and twenty female youth); *Parents* (twenty including four females); *NGO Representatives* (President – Khwendo Jirga, Member/Lawyer – SRLP, Senior HR Officer – Lasoona, Coordinator – HUIJA, President – Swat Youth Front, and Regional HRD Officer – SRSP); *Politicians* (a former Member of Provincial Assembly, District Nazim, Village Councilor, and two youth councilors); and *Military & Civil Administration* (A Major and a Captain ranked officers from Military Administration, Deputy Commissioner Swat, DSP – Head Quarters, from Civil Administration); and *Journalists* (four from electronic and print media); and the Chairman Village Defence Committees – Malakand Division which were interviewed.

3. Theoretical Framework of the Study

The extensive and comprehensive literature review provides a clear picture of the nature and scope of the study. This research focused on the youth in the post-conflict peacebuilding process in Swat and is characterized as exploratory and follows the Liberal School of Thought. The 'Culture of Peace Theory' is adopted as the theoretical framework of the study in this research which falls under the '*Attitudes toward Peace*' – the 2nd family tier within the framework of 'Theories of Change'. The core of the Culture of Peace Theory is on planning and executing mechanisms founded on specific pre-conditions that aim to alter people's behavior toward peace and change by presenting them with the advantages of tolerance and the cost of violence. The theory anticipates that the people are motivated to accept the peaceful solutions to the conflict and struggle mobilization towards violence as a result of these interventions.

4. Youth as Peacebuilders

Since the last decade, youth have gotten the attention of the world community due to their increasing demography and skills, as an important actor to achieve the global development agenda and bring peace to the world. The youth is considered as "the most highly educated generation in human history", which has the potential and recognition as the agent of change and peace whether positive or negative forced by conflict and economic unpredictability (Altiok et al, 2020). This is the reason for the

increased recognition of youth as crucial social actors whose skills and energies can be utilized to achieve sustainable development and peacebuilding outcomes effectively. The term 'youth' is still vague as different people and institutions define it differently. In the study of peace and conflict, youth is represented in two contradictory ways: they are either termed as the trouble makers and victims of violence and conflict or the peacebuilders. They can threaten security and adopt means of violence being a trouble maker and can be a victim of such violence and can be passive victims if they are ignored and marginalized by their communities in the post-conflict period. Youth, in the present era, are considered peacebuilders due to their creativity, imagination, and motivation for peace in the world. The results of one construction whether troublemaker/victim or peacebuilder will result in drastically different policy implications from the other.

4.1 Youth and Cultural Peacebuilding

The sociocultural perspective of peacebuilding provides grounds for the implementation of certain interventions especially the formal and informal educational interventions as the key medium for social reproduction and cultural production (Robertson, 2013). The cultural recognition of various aspects of peacebuilding not only happens at the grassroots level of the community but is driven by international policies, national political discourses and ideologies, and local perspectives and

history. Peace and conflict research has badly neglected the youth living in peace within the conflicting zones and despite the hostile, dangerous, and constraining environments around them, they have been demonstrating their resourcefulness towards peace (Hilker, 2009). Such demonstration of resourcefulness by the youth in conflicting zones should be built and recognized as an act of heroism (De Certeau, 1984). The youth, in some contexts, feel themselves collectively stigmatized (Berents, 2014). This happens when the efforts and contributions of many youths towards peaceful social transformations are spoiled by the violent activities of some youths. The violence caused by the youth resulted in the imposition of certain restrictions on participation and engagement in social transformation and reconstruction activities. Such alienation has a long-lasting effect on the youth due to the presentation of the destructive image in front of the political and economic forces thus resulting in the marginalization of the youth becoming the victims of the conflict (Izzi, 2013).

The youth possess great potential and deserve great attention in the reconstruction of culture while considering the possibilities for long-lasting peace. Puritt (2013) states that there is a need to provide consideration of how the day-to-day affairs of the societal segments particularly the youth can be designed to enhance and harness the peacebuilding process. Such realizations can be very helpful in recognizing, understanding, and adopting

the indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in conflict transformation and peacebuilding measures (Ensor, 2013). The capacities of youth can independently limit the violence around them by endorsing and promoting the peaceful structure prevailing in society (Nordstrom 2006).

4.2 Youth and Political Peacebuilding

The youth has been marginalized from the formal political processes and peacebuilding practices as highlighted by several scholars and hence they have no voice and representation in these processes (Helsing et al., 2006). This often happened due to the age limitations and devaluing of the potentials of youth impacting positively on peacebuilding through political processes. It has been assumed that youth are very least interested in political activities especially the young women thus creating a vague space of their engagement and this gap dominated the chances of the inclusion of the youth having a political nature in conflict (Leonard, 2013). It is an important consideration about youth that they are contributors to the present process of peacebuilding as well as the leaders of the future. The elimination of the sources of the grievances including social marginalization and economic inequalities in the long run can play a decisive role in the success of the peace process. Similarly, youth are tomorrow's leaders and thus their participation in the political processes should be ensured and their perspectives, ideas, and voices should be heard (McEvoy- Levy, 2001). There are limitations to such approaches

as the political and social participation of the youth are often hindered by social norms, hierarchies, and cultural barriers thus limiting the participation of youth in the political process and often resulting in the alienation of youth based on gender, family and socioeconomic conditions (Dunne et al, 2014). Thus, socio-cultural recognition and political representation have a very close connection when it comes to the engagement of youth in the peacebuilding process. Effective and active youth citizenship is an important means for addressing the causes of inequality, strengthening democracy, making governments accountable and thus contributing to their role in the sustainability of peace. The potential and effectiveness of active citizenship of youth is self-evident but still, there are uncertainties regarding the promotion and connection of the political agency of youth with peacebuilding processes (Davies, 2004). The youth should be provided the civic and political education and should be indulged in positive political conflict by providing them space to negotiate, motivate, compromise, and learn to use the effective and responsible use of freedom of speech, and recognition of the rights and claims (Davies, 2011). These skills should be practiced by the youth in the post-conflict era to equip their youth with peaceful questioning, reasoning, critique, and the ability to reach compromise thus practicing the 'interruptive democracy' while perceiving the injustice or wrongdoings (Davies, 2011).

The conflict changes the behaviors of both youth and the old and in the post-conflict scenario, reintegration is an important aspect of the peacebuilding process but it should not only be limited to certain training rather it should be seen as the long-term process with a high focus on the political aspect of peacebuilding (Smith Ellison, 2014). The denial of the voices of youth in policy-making forced them to communicate their voices in the post-conflict scenario through online platforms and social media. Youth can utilize these tools either to project their political protest against the policies or actions of the government, promotion of advocacy for human rights, or peace promotion, and on the other hand, can be misused to perpetuate violence, propagation, and hate speeches (Gray, 2014). It has been believed that the youth have a great position to push for change in society in contrast to the adults who are more interested in the status quo (Helsing et al., 2006). This approach can present the over-idealist image of the youth as Galtung (2006) pointed out youth segment of society has open-minded characteristics and is thus more open to accepting the changes in social patterns. Those youth who are contributing their role towards the peaceful transformation of the conflicts and bringing positive changes in the societies should not be neglected and presented as the models to break the existing destructive image of the youth as trouble makers, peace spoilers, irresponsible, lazy and self-centered (Helsing et al., 2006). Thus, in the post-conflict peacebuilding setting, there is a need to

provide the opportunities for engagement of youth in the political processes but should not be overlooked as the agents of change in the society rather it should be understood by analyzing the socioeconomic environment, they are living in.

4.3 Youth and Social Peacebuilding

The social and cultural activities can provide a wide range of norms and values practiced in daily routes and rituals to establish structural peace and stability (Khoury- Machool, 2007). Sports have a very important contribution in bringing people together and developing certain skills and attitudes that can be exercised to contribute to healthy community relations (Kidd, 2008). Thorpe (2013) highlighted the utilization of sports by youth to use it as a medium to voice their economic and political priorities as well as satisfy their psychological needs. Apart from the role of sports in the general well-being of youth and stress relief, it motivates different networks of youth to express their frustrations regarding unemployment, political marginalization, no participation or powerlessness in decision making and so more. Thus, such cross-cultural and social dialogues can enhance and strengthen the sense of solidarity among youth while contributing to cross-cultural peacebuilding. Thus, youth should not be seen as the victims but rather recognized as the social and political actors having awareness and information about indigenous local cultures and valuable local knowledge (Sugden, 2010). On the other hand, arts and music have played a vital role in the socio-

cultural perspectives of peacebuilding. According to Pruitt (2011), the provision of opportunities for interaction of the youth from different communities to share, common interests, experiences, music, and art of their culture can nurture the attitudes and behaviors of the youth contributing towards peacebuilding. It has been experienced that such interactions among youth networks help to eradicate certain negative perceptions and stereotypes about each other. Art and music have a multidimensional nature impacting the creativity, imagination, and emotional cognition to nurture the peacebuilding potential of youth. Shepler (2010) argued that the youth can express their social and political views through music making and art making and can use it as a critique and protest on political and social issues in case of marginalization from participation in the political process. The provision of certain opportunities of formal and informal inter-group contact programs for youth by bringing youth from conflicting communities to dialogue to develop mutual understandings, developing tolerance towards the differences and respecting each other's positions, and reducing anger, hostility towards each other and mutual prejudices under certain initiatives thus enhancing their abilities of peaceful co-existence and contributing in peacebuilding (Bargal, 2004).

4.4 Youth and Economic Peacebuilding

The economic approach of youth in peacebuilding identified youth as agents of economic development. The importance is

given to ensuring the provision of their access to economic opportunities and recognizing it as a critical element of their personal growth (UN- IANYD 2014). There are certain interventions in the peacebuilding processes especially the technical and vocational training programmes which aim to enhance the capabilities of the youth by linking education with employability and thus achieving the objectives of provision of employment opportunities, active citizenship, and community participation. The elements of unemployment and unequal distribution of resources resulting in increasing economic grievances among youth are the leading causes of youth involvement in the conflict, so the adoption of such measures of the provision of employment opportunities directly contributes to the peacebuilding process and potential to support the youth inclusion the post-conflict political and economic processes (Walton, 2010).

The provision of economic incentives especially the skills trainings engage the radicalized youth in healthy and peaceful activities and capitalizes the training by opening up individual initiative and contributing their role in community rebuilding and facilitating the social reintegration (Paulson, 2009). There is a need for the provision of technical and vocational training by keeping in view the local market dynamics through micro-economic planning (Kane, 2009). The focus should also be given to the structural approaches for the improvements in

organizations' capacity building through productivity enhancement training and adopting certain amendments in the labor market policies (Filmer et al., 2014). Moreover, the economic aspect of peacebuilding cannot be effective and fruitful without coordination among all the stakeholders including NGOs, donors, the private sector, and national government. All the activities focusing on the economic aspects of peacebuilding must be designed on the realistic analysis of market dynamics. One thing that should be kept in consideration is that certain expectations should not be developed among youth that are not possible to provide as the incompatible expectations can become a reason for the youth's involvement in conflict rather than the absence of jobs itself (Batmanglich, 2014). There is a need for extensive evaluation of the need-based assessments for the provision of economic opportunities and reliable data following the peacebuilding process outcomes (Johnson, 2009).

5. The Perspective of Swat in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Scenario

After the extensive review of the literature and toilsome fieldwork in the light of the preselected methodology, the whole data was compiled according to specific classifications to draw valid research inferences. The important discussions and aspects which have been covered are as follows.

5.1 Youth and Cultural Aspect of Peacebuilding in Swat

The youth possess great potential and deserve great attention in the reconstruction of culture while considering the possibilities for long-lasting peace. Pashtun Culture is a culture of having foundations on peace, love, generosity, respect, and sacrifices which promote peace to its followers. This incorporates an inclusive code of ethics called “Pakhtunwali” being implemented through certain traditions, values, and norms like patriotism, respect, generosity, sacrifices, and equality across the social structures. This code of ethics promotes respect for elders such as Masheeraan, clerics, and religious leaders, and social cohesion through communal gatherings within Masjids and Communal Hujras. These are some of the practices in the local culture that are contributing to the development of peace in the society.

The Pashtun culture plays a crucial role in peace promotion through the traditional practice of Jirga having the potential to resolve cases peacefully even those concerning murders. The option of courts is considered as the last resort and often discouraged due to their lengthy and costly process. The Wali of Swat officially abolished the jirga tradition in 1969 and after the merger, it was replaced with the formal judicial setup. The jirga tradition persists as an informal institution for resolving the conflicts among families at the societal level. In the post-conflict rehabilitation process, an alternative institution of VDCs is introduced by the Pakistan Army at the village level serving as a

source of resolving local conflicts of a minor nature and also for monitoring of peace situation in the proximity. Furthermore, the peace situation is reviewed in weekly meetings usually held on Fridays in villages of Swat. In the sensitive areas, no outsider is allowed to settle in the area as they believe that if they do not protect themselves, no one will protect them. The youth of Swat has been more attached to their culture after the conflict thus bringing the peace on the route utilizing their cultural traits.

Most respondents from Civil/Military Administration, NGO representatives, politicians, and, journalists' segments were of the view that the Pashtun Culture has facilitated the youth in the decision-making process and jirga, but the inclusion of youth depends upon the level and nature of the jirga. Most of the time, it is necessary for youth to belong to a noble and reputed family to be included in decision-making or included in the absence of elders. Mostly youth play the role of monitor, reporter, or observer and have very limited role in decision-making.

They are assigned the responsibility of field work depending upon the activity. Youth can seek to provide their opinion and point of view logically on a certain decision. But nowadays, youth is self-sustaining in decision-making. Contrary, most respondents from the youth (male), youth (female), and parents' segments express that the youth has been deprived of their inclusion in the decision-making process due to cultural barriers and family setup. Moreover, the youth (male and female) were of

the view that the decision-making power has not been given to this segment of the society due to their perceived immaturity and youth has been made part of decision-making in very rare cases which are mentioned above. Parents were concerned about the safety and security of the youth if they were included in the decision-making process because of the development of enmity in case of a decision against one conflicting party.

5.2 Youth and Political Aspect of Peacebuilding in Swat

The Critical Youth Empowerment Theory recommended the inclusion of the youth in the political process in the post-conflict peacebuilding process to bring change in sociopolitical processes, norms, and structures. The inclusion of youth in the political process is perceived as healthy and needed in the society by majority of the respondents but they need to be enlightened regarding political matters and should be promoted but there is a need to disinfect the unethical and disrespectful political environment. Some respondents consider it negative and of the view that youth should not be involved in politics before maturity.

The local body elections of 2015 and then in 2022 provided space to youth in the political spheres by the inclusion of 'Youth Councilors'. Keeping in view the responses of the respondents regarding the inclusion of youth councilors in the local government setup, most respondents from all the segments except

parents considered it as a healthy and positive step towards the empowerment of youth as Youth Councilors know the actual community issues and thus, they should be promoted, strengthened and setups should be established to make them focus of attention.

Youth representatives can highlight and present the issues of youth but no concrete steps have been taken yet to empower the youth councilors. Moreover, the Civil/Military officials and VDC Members were concerned that they should be kept away from the company of the other politicians and there is a need for their capacity building and awareness so they do not follow the footsteps of existing political leadership. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents from the parents' segment considered the inclusion of youth councilors in the government setup as negative and unhealthy for the youth and mentioned that their education and career development should be their priority.

There were very diverse responses from the respondents regarding the provision of authority of decision-making by youth for the resolution of community-based conflicts. Some were of the view that it should be given to the higher level; some pointed out that such authority should only be given to the educated and mature but with accountability. This model should introduce a vote of confidence, especially in the case of youth. Some were of the view that they should have very limited decision-making power but should have a say in decision-making. Some

responded that it should not be given to the youth due to their immaturity.

5.3 Youth and Social Aspect of Peacebuilding in Swat

The Culture of Peace Theory highlights the need to execute various interventions that bring the transformation in the attitudes and behaviors of the youth to contribute to the peacebuilding process. In this regard, the social values of Swat Valley i.e., respect, sacrifices, kindness, generosity, patriotism, equality among different segments, social cohesion, gatherings, Hujra, etc. have been positively impacting the peace process. At the Social Level, free legal aid provision to needy people, school constructions, infrastructure development, hospital upgradation, vocational and technical training, social gatherings, awareness workshops, and seminars by the Army, Government Institutions, and NGOs'. Youth has played an important role in the enhancement of social aspects of peacebuilding by participating in the social dialogues among different communities and all the social events organized by the civil and military administration like the sports festivals and the celebration on the national days.

Certain NGOs/INGOs and the civil and military administration are providing technical and vocational training and workshops to the youth to enhance their capabilities and development of peace skills. But, on the other hand, the conflict has changed certain social values like parents are now afraid of their kids due to their

emotional behavior and nature not in terms of the threat of physical violence.

5.4 Youth and Economic Aspect of Peacebuilding in Swat

The Culture of Peace Theory emphasizes on implementing certain economic interventions by the implementing stakeholders of the peacebuilding process. The respondents were of the view that the employment of youth will have a great impact on the sustainability of the peace process which should be done on a priority basis. It will boost the energies of youth towards peace and keep them away from negative elements and activities. The reason for the engagement of neglected youth in militancy was the funds possessed by the militants. If they were employed, doing business, or having money they must never fall into the hands of militants.

5.4.1 Relation between Investment in Human Capital and Peacebuilding

While deliberating upon investment in Human Capital and peacebuilding, the majority of the respondents from all the segments except parents considered the relation between investment in human capital and peacebuilding as positive. They expressed that the investment in human capital is the need of the peacebuilding process which engages the youth in peace activities. The absence of such investment can drag the youth towards negativity and conflict. Moreover, this investment should

be done after the need assessment according to the demand of the market so that youth should be engaged in such productive activities after getting the required training.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents from the parents' segment and a few of the respondents from youth (male), youth (female), and journalists and politicians opted to be neutral by expressing that investments usually done in human capital are vocational training which has no markets and there is lack of effective administration to provide further benefits to the trainees. It was perceived as a waste of money and resources thus investment should be done after proper administration, and establishment of systems and markets. While 25% of parents considered such relationships unhealthy and negative by saying that investment in human capital and peacebuilding has nothing to do with each other.

5.4.2 Impacts of Socio-Economic Conditions of Youth on Peacebuilding

The elements of unemployment and unequal distribution of resources resulting in increasing economic grievances among youth are the leading causes of youth involvement in conflict, so the adoption of such measures of the provision of employment opportunities directly contributes to the peacebuilding process and potential to support the youth inclusion the post-conflict political and economic processes (Walton, 2010).

In this regard, the majority of the respondents from all the segments strongly agreed with the idea that the socio-economic conditions of youth impact the peacebuilding process. They were of the view that the youth were made part of the militant forces due to their socio-economic deprivation. The poor socio-economic conditions of youth have dragged them towards negativity while the improved socio-economic conditions of youth will have a positive impact on the peacebuilding process.

On the other hand, another majority of the respondents from the youth (female) and parents segment disagreed with it by expressing that the youth is mostly dependent on their families or doing their business.

5.5 Role of NGOs in Youth Empowerment in the Context of Swat

The Theories of Change along with all the other related theories especially the ‘Individual Change Theory’ and the ‘Culture of peace Theory’ revolve around the role of NGOs, INGOs, and civil society in the implementation of certain interventions for the engagement and empowerment of youth to sustain the peacebuilding process. In the Swat district, more than 10,000 CBOs, Village Organizations, and Local Support Organizations are functional having the majority involvement of youth. CBOs and NGOs target youth and provide a great platform to youth as these organizations provide innovative youth forums, seminars,

exposure trips (need-based) Decision Making, and awareness programs (like REAT's Human Rights Defenders). Six NGOs i.e., HUIRA, SRSP, SRLP, Swat Youth Front, Lasoona, and Khwendo Jirga (Sister's Council) have been selected for data collection and to investigate their contributions to the sustainability of the peacebuilding process. The HUIRA had completed "Citizen's Voice Project (CVP): Increasing Citizen Engagement with State Institutions" funded by USAID which focused on the meetings with MPAs, MNA, political parties' workers, and media briefings. This project is focused on electoral reforms and training for the capacity building of successful candidates in LG elections. HUIRA, in association with SRLP, completed "Community Policing Project (CPP)"; and completed the REAT Project which engaged non-Muslim communities. SRLP is a project of UNDP and HUIRA as an implementing partner to provide free legal support to needy people despite the nature of the case, the establishment of 'Legal Aid Clinics' for the awareness campaigns at the community level, and workshops and training of the 'Paralegals' as the legal first aid providers from the community.

SRSP has been engaged in the 'Alif Elan' project which is targeting non-school-going children and providing them with education. Moreover, it has been engaging youth in competitions, thalassemia day, tree plantations, spring festivals, self-awareness programs, and organizing the Malam Jabba tournament along

with the Army. SRLP also worked on “Women Economic Empowerment & Market Development” which aimed to sustain the living standards of marginalized rural populations by fostering local economic development through promotion and strengthening the low-income rural markets and offering diversified and lucrative economic prospects to the rural population.

Swat Youth Front (SYF) completed ‘Reviving of Indigenous Cultural Heritage (RICH) in collaboration with ‘The Directorate of Culture, KP’ in which the organization provided free Rubab coaching classes, poetry sessions, youth exchange visits in different tehsils, and organization of musical nights. SYF developed the “Sports for Peace Network” and completed Sports for Culture of Peace, and Sports for Peace projects under which basic sports equipment was provided to the team members of 36 Volleyball Teams, 24 Football Teams, and 36 Cricket Teams with opportunities to play in a friendly and peaceful environment. SYF believed that the revival of sports activities is an essential aspect of peacebuilding in overcoming the traumas of violent conflict, and in recognition of the success of this project, an award was presented to SYF by The Common Wealth Foundation and U.S. Consulate Peshawar.

Lasoon has been working along with German donor ‘Diakonie Katastrophenilfe (DKH)’ on the value chain, Disaster Risk

Reduction (DRR), and peacebuilding. A project has been completed in 2020 titled “Enhancing Disaster Resilience of Vulnerable Rural Households” Lasoona has also been contributing to peacebuilding by conducting seminars, trainings, and workshops. Lasoona has completed “Building Resilience of Communities to Climate Change, Natural Disasters & Health Hazards” in 2019; and “Enhanced Resilience through Inclusive Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM)” in 2017 funded by Norwegian Church Aid (NCA).

Khwendo Jirga (Sister’s Council) provides advocacy for women's rights, awareness, and controlling women trafficking, and early-age marriages and has contributed to establishing Women Jirga and Women Police Reporting Center at Mingora. The founder of Khwendo Jirga has been awarded “The U.S. Secretary of State’s International Women of Courage Award” in 2015; “Nelson Mandela-Graca Machel Innovation Award” in 2016; and also nominated for “the 2021 Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity”.

As far as satisfaction with the capacities of the social sector and NGOs is concerned, there were about 10,000 NGOs’, CBOs, Village Organizations, and Local Support Organizations working in Swat since the end of military operations but the number has decreased to 25 now. The majority of the respondents from the youth (male), parents, journalists, and politicians showed their

satisfaction with the capacities of the social sector and NGOs regarding the promotion of peacebuilding activities. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents from the Civil/Military administration and VDC members showed their dissatisfaction about the CBOs and NGOs by expressing that they have a very negative role in the peacebuilding process as they present a negative image in front of the international community for funds acquisition. They criticized the social sector on the behalf that they implement the objectives of donors and work as an agent of donor agencies. Moreover, these organizations are criticized as they try to mobilize women and aim to create a mixed culture of men and women which is against the culture of Pashtuns. Moreover, the projects done by CBOs and NGOs are not sustainable or aimed to bring any change, and very least part of the funding was spent on society and development.

5.6 Effectiveness of Institutions and Stakeholders

The Critical Youth Empowerment Theory advocates the critical reflection of youth on societal forces, power relations, and active community participation. A majority of the respondents from all the segments except youth (females) were of the view that the traditional jirga which is now limited to the resolution of conflicts at the family level is an effective institution for the resolution of conflicts where the decisions made by the elders and Masheeran were binding on all the conflicting parties and these decisions are respected too thus ultimately contribute in the peacebuilding

process. Whereas, the majority of the youth (females) considered traditional jirga as an institution which is negatively impacted their lives as they became the victims of the decisions of traditional jirgas in most of the cases.

Most of the respondents from the youth (male), politicians, and journalists' segments considered the Village Defence Committees as an ineffective institution in the peacebuilding process by terming it as the spoiler of peace. They were of the view that the VDC members usually fake reports to the civil/Military administration to satisfy their enmity and thus they were killed by their enemies and people consider these target killings as the attacks of militants. Contrary, the VDCs were praised for their effectiveness in the peacebuilding process in Swat by the Civil/Military Administration as they made lots of sacrifices for the peace process and everyone should acknowledge their sacrifices. Though the concerns of the people about fake reporting by the VDC members are right it doesn't mean that we believe it and react accordingly. Thus, emphasized on an effective monitoring mechanism for this reporting, and ensured that the response is done if the reporting is right.

The effectiveness of community policing is rated by the majority of all the respondents as average due to the lack of effective measures adopted by the police and civil administration to strengthen the relations between the community and the police.

Community policing was much better before the conflict where police regularly conducted the open courts (*Khuli Kutheri*) in various areas of Swat but in the post-conflict peacebuilding scenario, this important aspect of community policing is not in practice.

The activities of NGOs/INGOs for the promotion of the peacebuilding process were rated at the average by the majority of the respondents from youth (male), parents, journalists, and politicians by expressing that their projects are not according to the needs of the peacebuilding process rather they focus on the objectives of the donor institutions. While, the majority of the respondents from youth (female), NGO representatives, and the Civil/Military Administration and VDC members rated at lowest due to their presentation of a negative image of Swat for funds acquisition and working as an agent of donor agencies.

5.6.1 Maintenance of the Accountability of Stakeholders and Institutions

Accountability of the stakeholders of the peacebuilding process is a key element in the sustainability of the peacebuilding process. Unfortunately, Swat lacks the important aspect of the peacebuilding process and respondents from all segments were of the view that there is a need to establish of Independent Monitoring and Accountability mechanism; a third-party mechanism at the national level providing sharing of decision-making by all decision makers, having coordination with all the

respective institutions, which should be backed by strong judiciary and rule of law. Our society should have values and norms of accountability of their leaders which should be strictly followed. Some respondents were of the view that accountability is difficult to maintain.

5.6.2 Strengthening & Reforming Local Institutions to Sustain Peacebuilding Process

Most respondents from parents, journalists and politicians, and NGO representatives' segments strongly agreed to strengthen the institutions, especially both formal and informal local institutions of Swat to sustain the peacebuilding process while expressing that these institutions are providing the foundations of the cultural and social aspects of peacebuilding process in Swat. The local institutions for conflict resolution should be strengthened after the keen need assessment of the reforms in these setups. Moreover, the traditional jirga should be brought under the umbrella of formal local institutions including VDCs, DRC, and community policing to further strengthen the local capacities for conflict resolution.

5.7 Barriers to Youth Inclusion in the Peacebuilding Process

From the perspective of Swat, various barriers are hindering youth engagement in the peacebuilding process including insufficient awareness, non-involvement in social activities,

social fears, cultural hindrances, uncertain future, a widening gap between youth and security stakeholders, little interest in social issues due to their irresponsible attitude, inadequate capacities and skills, non-supportive government policies due to traditional mindset of the politicians. One important barrier is the limited acceptability of youth in the existing models of decision-making in Swat as it does not prioritize the youth as the core element for the sustainability of the peacebuilding process. Apart from the declared role of youth by stakeholders and their undue marginalization in certain aspects, youth are still showcasing their dedication toward the sustainability of the peacebuilding process.

Conclusion

It is imperative to consider the youth of Swat as the agents of peace in the post-conflict peacebuilding process in Swat as they have the potential to serve as the ultimate force to suppress militancy and eradicate violence from the region. The inclusion of youth in the broader mechanisms of peacebuilding is the crucial element to achieving this milestone. This inclusion must adhere to the interventions of defining the role and responsibilities of youth, ensuring effective policy initiatives, and guaranteeing targeted activities to bridge the trust and communication gap among youth and security stakeholders. This research concluded that youth must be recognized as an integral

part of both the present as well as the future of peace development. The motivations, skills, and energies of youth must be acknowledged and utilized for their productivity and meaningful engagement. Such policy initiatives will boost determined efforts toward the sustainability of the peacebuilding process. This research highlights that considering the political, social, cultural, and economic challenges, it is up to the policymakers and stakeholders to collectively decide whether to utilize the visionary approach, creativity, and skills of the dynamic youth of Swat as agents of peace or risk leaving this youth vulnerable to be harnessed as spoilers of peace by the militants and extremist elements.

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