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Peacebuilding through Development Aid Projects: Critical Analysis of South Waziristan, Pakistan

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Noor Elahi and Abdul Waheed*

ABSTRACT

Post-conflict peacebuilding is not a direct path to achieving prosperity; however, it has become a highly significant issue in the merged districts of Pakistan, particularly in South Waziristan, following years of militancy, terrorism, and military operations by Pakistani forces. In this context, the role of development aid projects has gained broader acknowledgment in post-development peacebuilding, where organisations and implementing partners have filled the gap through development assistance projects. The objective of the study is to explore the effectiveness and weaknesses of development aid projects toward peace and prosperity in the merged districts of South Waziristan. A mixed-method approach was employed, involving interviews with 50 respondents, including 12 government and NGO officials. The findings reveal that development projects engaged local communities in the peace process by delivering essential social and economic services to the affected population, contributing to sustainable peace and development. However, limited professional capacity among both government and non-governmental officials hindered the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives. The influence of local elders also notably shaped project objectives. Institutional fragmentation and gaps in peacebuilding efforts remain critical challenges that require reassessment to foster lasting peace in the region.

Keywords: Development Aid Projects, Peacebuilding, NGOs, Post-Conflict Development, Conflict Transformation.

JEL Classification Codes: I01, M02, L03, R04, R41, R42, R43, R44, R45, C5

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1. INTRODUCTION

Former tribal territories in northwestern Pakistan (earlier known as Federally Administered Tribal Areas-FATA), now called Newly Merged Districts (NMDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have been the theatre of deadly violent conflict for the past two decades (Shakirullah et al., 2019). Development aid, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding have become pressing issues in ex-FATA following the US-led invasion of Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks (Chaudhry and Wazir 2012). The Twin Tower attacks triggered a series of profound social, economic, and security challenges in Pakistan's tribal belt, as all tribal agencies, except Orakzai Agency, share a border with Afghanistan (Sadiq and Naeem 2016). Among these, South Waziristan has remained a focal point of terrorism and violent conflict throughout the first decade of the 21st Century, experiencing extensive social, private property, and infrastructural destruction during the War on Terror. The region also endured mass internal displacement, with returning populations facing social, political, and economic obstacles during post-conflict reconstruction and resettlement (Daur 2014). In the pre-conflict phase, religious sentiments were exploited as a means of societal control (Robeela and Ahmed 2011; Aziz and Erum 2021). Compared to other areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Waziristan faces an added layer of strategic security risks, closely tied to Afghanistan's security dynamics (Chaudhry and Wazir 2012).

In response to these challenging conditions, aid agencies, supported by national and international humanitarian organisations, swiftly launched peacebuilding initiatives to address the post-conflict landscape (ICG 2012). These efforts aimed to facilitate grassroots community engagement, promote lasting peace, and drive economic and social development. Development aid played a pivotal role in peacebuilding and became one of the most vital external financial inflows to fragile conflict zones, including the merged FATA areas. Major international donors, including the United Nations (UN), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), Peace Innovation Fund (PIF), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), contributed substantial aid to Pakistan. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were also actively involved in development activities to support conflict transformation in the NMDs (Javaid 2016; Hameed 2015).

In South Waziristan, aid was strategically utilised to enhance community cohesion and mitigate inter-communal conflicts (Sarwar et al., 2015). Development aid projects played a crucial role in addressing humanitarian crises in the region. Local implementing partners introduced a range of innovative peacebuilding initiatives, including business training programmes, *'Musalihat-e-Anjuman'* (peace discussion boards), social and emotional learning groups, and peace-themed poetry gatherings (*mushaira*) to foster reconciliation and stability in their communities (Orakzai 2013; Shah 2018). Meanwhile, international

development agencies focused on smaller-scale interventions, such as conflict-sensitive planning training and gender mainstreaming in post-conflict recovery efforts (Elahi et al., 2015). Sports galas and peace festivals were also organised to promote social harmony and reinforce a culture of peace.

The Pakistan Army, in collaboration with political agents and local elders (*maliks*), has undertaken several peace initiatives to restore stability in the war-torn areas of South Waziristan. These efforts have included district dialogue forums, peace training sessions, youth seminars promoting dialogue, the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Unit (RRU) for FATA, and radio talk shows aimed at raising peace awareness following prolonged unrest (Shah and Shahbaz 2015). In addition, the former FATA administration conducted a damage needs assessment survey of government-owned properties in Wana and other sub-divisions of South Waziristan to guide reconstruction efforts (Ayaz 2012). Meanwhile, the international community engaged in focused discussions with the Pakistani government on broader institutional reforms in FATA's governance to establish long-term political stability (Nawaz 2009).

These initiatives created a foundation for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), NGOs, political parties, and mainstream government agencies to implement reforms and anti-extremism policies (Novelli and Cardozo 2008). In essence, post-conflict development aid projects and peacebuilding efforts in South Waziristan have reinforced the legitimacy of actions taken by the hybrid government (provincial and federal) and their allied organisations, including NGOs, in promoting human rights and facilitating the rehabilitation and restoration of war-affected communities.

Peacebuilding is a multidimensional process aimed at fostering harmony. Scholars have explored it through various frameworks, often presenting conflicting perspectives, as the concept of peace evolves with the academic development of conflict studies (Galtung 2000). At its core, peacebuilding seeks to address the grievances of conflict-affected societies by promoting development, monitoring human rights violations, fostering participatory governance, and enhancing dialogue and reconciliation (Galtung 1996).

As a key component of the United Nations' conflict resolution and post-conflict management policies, the concept of peacebuilding was formally introduced in 1992 by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in *'An Agenda for Peace.'* Traditional approaches such as peacekeeping and peacemaking have often proven inadequate for managing post-conflict scenarios (Curtis 2007), necessitating a strategic shift to strengthen the UN's peacebuilding agenda. Ultimately, peacebuilding is shaped by conditions that facilitate the transition from conflict to coexistence, contributing to lasting peace and sustainable development.

Development aid plays a crucial role in rebuilding the social fabric, promoting inclusivity, and empowering marginalised groups, fostering a sense of ownership and participation. This is particularly significant, as peace is just one component within a broader strategy for the government to enhance human security, education, healthcare, and overall public welfare in the region (Chaudhry and Wazir 2012). However, studies assessing development efforts across the tribal belt reveal substantial shortcomings in the design, efficiency, and implementation of these initiatives, highlighting critical gaps that need to be addressed for sustainable progress (Shah 2018; Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas 2019; ICG 2012).

This study empirically examined the role of post-conflict development aid in promoting peace in South Waziristan's merged districts. The findings provide valuable insights for the Government of Pakistan and policymakers to design more effective peace project implementation strategies. The study also contributed to the broader theoretical debate on post-conflict development by identifying challenges faced by stakeholders in reconstruction efforts. The research will help policymakers and aid agencies refine development initiatives to sustain peace in conflict-affected regions across the country and neighboring areas. The next sections include a literature review, methodology followed by the study findings and concluding thoughts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflicts, often rooted in factors such as poverty and inequality, highlight the necessity of effective post-conflict development programmes that address both the underlying causes of instability and the path to sustainable peace. Chaudhry and Wazir (2012) elaborated that post-conflict situations are rarely straightforward, as it is often difficult to determine when a conflict has truly ended. New challenges frequently emerge during the post-conflict recovery phase, complicating peacebuilding efforts.

Peacebuilding projects serve as critical milestones in preventing further uprisings, mitigating violence, and laying the foundation for functional state institutions (Galtung 2000). Key indicators of progress include peace agreements, rehabilitation efforts, return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), reconciliation initiatives, integration of social and religious groups, and economic recovery programmes which help mobilise communities toward peace. However, Sarwar et al. (2015) noted that post-conflict recovery does not always result in a uniform peace triumph, as outcomes vary across different regions. To ensure long-term stability, development aid cooperation must prioritise structural stability as a foundation for economic sustainability and human capacity development.

The effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives through development aid in conflict-affected regions like South Waziristan has been widely examined, with various theories addressing post-conflict peace processes and practical approaches to peacekeeping. The liberal perspective on peacebuilding emphasizes reintegration as a key element of sustainable

peace. In the context of ex-FATA, this study is best understood within the framework of Johan Galtung's peacebuilding theory.

A well-structured peacebuilding model relies on thorough conflict assessments and active community consultation (Last 1999). Without a comprehensive assessment or meaningful engagement with local communities, development aid projects risk being reduced to merely condemning conflicts rather than effectively addressing their root causes (Galtung 1996). However, post-conflict situations rarely follow a linear cause-and-effect trajectory. Given their complexity and rapid evolution, peacebuilding initiatives must incorporate conflict timelines and mapping to adapt to shifting dynamics. This necessitates a higher degree of flexibility in planning compared to conventional development or humanitarian projects (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas 2019).

Daur (2014), in his book *'Cheegha: The Call from Waziristan'*, describes the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a turning point between peace and war for the bordering regions of North and South Waziristan. This invasion introduced radical sentiments into the once-peaceful valleys of northern Pakistan, particularly South Waziristan (Sadiq and Naeem 2016). Following the end of the Cold War between 1989 and 1990, the narrative of the Afghan *Jihad* against the Soviet Union shifted dramatically with the events of 9/11. In response, American forces and NATO troops invaded Afghanistan to dismantle the Taliban regime (Zeb 2006). As a result, Al-Qaeda and Taliban factions crossed into Pakistan, particularly North and South Waziristan (Shakirullah et al., 2020).

Three decades of war transformed the region, leading to immense devastation, loss of thousands of lives, and the destruction of a once-thriving society (Tahir 2017). Waziristan, once known for its cultural pride, descended into chaos, suffering politically, socially, economically, and culturally. The prolonged conflict has inflicted severe damage on the lives of innocent people, turning Waziristan and other parts of FATA into battlegrounds of destruction. Ultimately, militancy brought the tribal areas into the global spotlight, creating an urgent need for development aid to support peacebuilding and rehabilitation efforts in ex-FATA. International donors began assisting the government through various development projects and peace initiatives aimed at re-establishing state authority in the conflict zones.

3. METHODOLOGY AND STUDY AREA

South Waziristan shares a strategic border with Afghanistan and is predominantly mountainous, serving as a key transit point for trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Ayaz 2012). Following the War on Terror, the region underwent an initial phase of transformation through foreign aid, marking an important aspect of Pakistan's diplomatic engagement with donor agencies. However, the prolonged conflict in Afghanistan over the past two decades has drastically altered the area's social and political dynamics. Ongoing

military operations and instability have contributed to weak administrative control, making South Waziristan one of the most fragile regions of the former FATA.

Peacebuilding is a multifaceted subject closely linked to social, economic, and political development. In Pakistan, post-conflict zones face significant challenges, but each peacebuilding process requires a distinct analytical framework due to variations in conflict dynamics, donor policies, and socio-cultural contexts (Newman et al., 2009). Given these complexities, relying on a single theoretical approach, research design, or data collection method is insufficient. The diverse nature of societies and conflicts necessitates a more comprehensive methodological approach.

Considering the sensitivity of the study area, this research employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The study focused on the period from 2012 to 2020, a time when numerous domestic and international NGOs were actively involved in conflict transformation efforts in Swat and conflict-affected regions of FATA.

Purposive sampling strategies were exercised for primary data collection to select 55 respondents from the target population. Community members were chosen as respondents from locations where post-conflict peacebuilding activities have been implemented. The researchers had discussions with local elders (*maliks*) and peace committee members, employees of NGOs such as the Tribal NGOs Consortium (TNC), Foundation for Integrated Development Action (FIDA), and Mehsud Welfare Organization. Additionally, government officials from the Relief & Rehabilitation Settlement Department, Post-Crisis Needs Assessment (PCNA), Provisional Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), Rehabilitation & Reconstruction Unit (RRU) were also interviewed in order to explore different experiences and perspectives of aid application for peacebuilding.

In addition, university students and academicians belong to Waziristan but residing in various parts of KP province and Islamabad were engaged for formal and informal questionnaire-based discussion. In total, ten Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with local community members and representatives of NGOs and concerned government officials who had knowledge of peacebuilding and development projects. They were selected from different parts of the NMD of South Waziristan such as Wana, Spinkai, Shawal Valley, and from Tank.

Secondary data for this study was collected from a range of sources, including published materials, academic journals, policy papers, e-journal articles, and annual reports from both governmental and NGOs. However, there is a notable lack of data on this subject, as the study's focus region has been largely overlooked in social research.

Primary data was analysed using MS Excel, with quantitative results presented through frequencies, percentages, graphs, and tables. Meanwhile, qualitative data was examined

through a thematic analysis approach, categorising information into key themes such as development projects, aid and peacebuilding, community participation, and NGO project effectiveness. These themes provided a structured framework for interpreting the study's findings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents respondents' perspectives on the role of development aid projects in conflict transformation and peace promotion in the newly merged district of South Waziristan. The findings are derived from fieldwork data and project reports from post-conflict settings, offering insights into the effectiveness and challenges of aid-driven peacebuilding initiatives in the region.

4.1   Aid and Peace

Initially, the international community invested a significant amount of money in social security and emergency recovery. Development aid was directed via partner agencies toward the transformation of the entire ex-tribal region. Crisis prevention, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding were the key objectives. Post-conflict interventions by national and international organisations aimed to improve peace and stability in the region using peacebuilding and value chain development strategies. Some of the major interventions included the repatriation and resettlement of IDPs, youth engagement in peacebuilding, food security initiatives, promotion of professional education for youth, and capacity-building programmes aimed at empowering communities to address social conflicts through non-violent means within civil society. CSOs provided disaster response services and capacity for humanitarian assistance and contributed to rebuilding infrastructure and damaged homes and schools (Shah and Shahbaz 2015). All these interventions had a direct or indirect impact on communities by fostering peace and development. However, public perceptions of the contributions of these development projects varied, reflecting differences in local experiences, expectations, and the effectiveness of implementation.

Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of government agencies regarding community engagement and peace education, indicating a preference for activities conducted by non-governmental groups. According to NGO respondents, the United Nations and collaborating donor agencies primarily concentrated their efforts in areas near the Afghan border, swiftly addressing urgent needs such as food, medication, education, and shelter.

Education and training programmes have provided essential pathways to steer the younger generation away from activities that could undermine peace during the early post-conflict phase. Within the education sector, donors and implementing partners prioritised infrastructure reconstruction and rehabilitation, along with scholarships awarded to tribal

students—a measure supported by approximately 90% of community respondents. These initiatives brought notable improvements to the educational system, widely regarded as vital for promoting peace until lasting stability can be achieved. Social development through education ensures access to quality schooling, enhances educational infrastructure, and imparts essential skills, literacy, critical thinking, and tolerance, thereby contributing significantly to the peacebuilding process.

During the war, South Waziristan's housing sector experienced severe damage, with more than 50% of houses and public properties destroyed, primarily due to bomb blasts, missile strikes, and aerial bombardments. Consequently, within one year after the return of IDPs to their homes, donors substantially increased funding for housing reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. Development patrons and collaborative organisations were involved in the rehabilitation of damaged private and government properties. The respondents were not satisfied with the compensation given for the damaged houses and shops because the cost estimated by the government and NGOs was much less than the damage. However, lump-sum payments of up to PKR 500,000 were provided to affected populations, enabling communities to quickly undertake immediate reconstruction and repairs of their homes. Similarly, trade and small businesses were destroyed due to the closure of the whole region for a long period. Respondents from the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) highlighted that South Waziristan's economic development had been severely hindered by trade restrictions along the Afghan border. Indirect military engagement also had a considerable negative impact on the local economy. To address the impact on trade and businesses, the international community, particularly the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), actively participated in supporting the KP government's economic policies, aiming to reorganise and strengthen the regional economic system. Currently, although trade and business activities have resumed to some extent, they remain heavily restricted. The local community expressed dissatisfaction with these limitations and demanded restoration of free trade and expanded business opportunities comparable to the pre-conflict era.

4.2   Peace Awareness Projects and Community Engagement

To prevent prolonged difficulties, a variety of peace awareness projects were initiated like sports galas, cultural music nights, peace poetry awareness (*mushaira*), Peace festival, social and emotional learning groups etc. The collected data showed that 70% of the respondents underlined that government and NGOs had begun peace awareness projects for social cohesion. Human rights and peacebuilding workshops were conducted in some areas for local conflict resolution among opposing parties. These workshops created opportunities for youth to reduce anti-state perceptions and grievances. The purpose of these social developments was to encourage a foundation for peace after a long period of

havoc. The government negotiated multiple peace treaties with the Taliban and local committees, promoted reconciliation efforts, integrated social and religious groups, and launched various economic recovery initiatives. These actions were largely effective in mobilising communities towards peace. However, approximately 30% of respondents, particularly students, remained neutral, arguing that peace awareness projects were either absent or not visible at the community level. They shared that while such projects might exist in official documents, ground realities differed considerably.

The difficulty with projects was the expectation that education and social development would bring about political consciousness in the region, which does not currently exist. Non-governmental groups have previously used these strategies to promote a narrative linking education with political awareness as a central part of peacebuilding efforts. At the community level, it was commonly assumed that individuals lacked political and social awareness due to exclusion from mainstream political structures under the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). The merger of FATA into KP now provides opportunities for political engagement and education, highlighting that integrating the territory politically is even more critical than infrastructure development alone. This merger has introduced a new governance framework aimed at effectively addressing local issues through closer integration with the KP government.

Public participation helps peacebuilding missions effectively identify and respond to community vulnerabilities, while also supporting locally-driven strategies for addressing post-conflict challenges. The study explored perspectives from NGOs and government organisations regarding community involvement in peace-related initiatives. When asked about the level of community participation, most respondents highlighted that:*'Early consultation and agreement with elders (Malik) in the community were the most difficult challenge mainly due to their efforts to protect personal interests. Thereafter, engagement of community in planning, meetings and implementation procedures was widely accepted but was largely limited to men from specific groups.'*

Initially, obtaining approval (a No Objection Certificate) from the Pakistan military was mandatory for entry into the merged districts. The next step involved coordination with influential local council members (*Maqami Hujras*), typically composed of *Jirga* members who could identify active *Tanzeem* (organisation) members. Subsequently, these active members were engaged to organise rehabilitation and peace-related initiatives through local committees. Aid agencies, including the Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP), actively encouraged volunteer groups to register formally as local committees in various parts of South Waziristan, particularly in Wana, to conduct social and developmental activities aimed at developing a culture of peace.

Prior to the conflict, communities operated solely through informal *Jirga* systems. However, post-conflict experiences have led residents to recognise the importance of

formal, community-based registered committees for effective collaboration with aid agencies. These committees have also provided an alternative to the traditional power structure dominated by *Maliks* and *Jirgas*, which previously made decisions based primarily on personal interests. Both NGOs and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), along with donor-supported agencies, focus on forming local agreements, as these are essential for successful post-conflict peacebuilding and development activities, ultimately contributing to the restoration of peace (Zaum and Cheng 2011).

4.3   Role of NGOs in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

NGOs and their ties with government actors and dedicated agencies provide investments, initiatives, and expert groups in post-conflict reconstruction. Furthermore, at a policy and ground level, financial institutions, government agencies, and non-governmental groups coordinate and cooperate to deliver social services to affected populations. The UN assists conflict-affected regions by supporting government agencies' on-ground operational interventions and provide supportive entities with legal commitments to define a country's key allocation and development requirements (Tahir 2017). Peacebuilding projects are diverse in nature, supporting ceasefire arrangements through peacekeeping efforts and mediating between conflicting parties to facilitate lasting peace both during and after a conflict.

Calame (2018) claims that NGOs may be classified as part of the post-conflict transformation, rehabilitation, and peacebuilding process. The success or failure of post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives is largely determined by the quality and form of conflict analysis. In many examples of peacebuilding, failures turn peaceful tactics into violent ones such as those in Somalia and South Africa (Witt and Balfe 2016). In many cases, such as Africa, peace experts deploy unarmed or lightly armed personnel. The respondents agreed that NGOs had contributed to motivating communities towards tolerance and sustaining peace in society through their direct interaction with the local population. However, Goodhand and Sedra (2009) warn that social development or conflict transformation remains insignificant in the absence of a political settlement.

4.4   Effectiveness and Weaknesses of Peace Projects

Several formal and informal organisations attempted to restore and reinforce structural peace in South Waziristan. However, survey findings clearly indicate a low level of effectiveness in achieving peace outcomes. Firstly, community involvement in project management and implementation was limited, typically restricted to influential elders rather than inclusive of the broader population. Although many residents were aware of rehabilitation initiatives and participated in public meetings with NGOs, genuine engagement across all community groups remained limited. Secondly, women's

participation was particularly inadequate; female involvement, even among organisational staff, was significantly lower compared to their male counterparts.

The provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, supported by international interventions, provided the capacity to implement fundamental laws and establish governance structures. These efforts were part of a broader integration and peacebuilding strategy aimed at recovery and stabilisation in post-conflict regions, including South Waziristan.

Figure 1: Weaknesses in Projects' Effectiveness
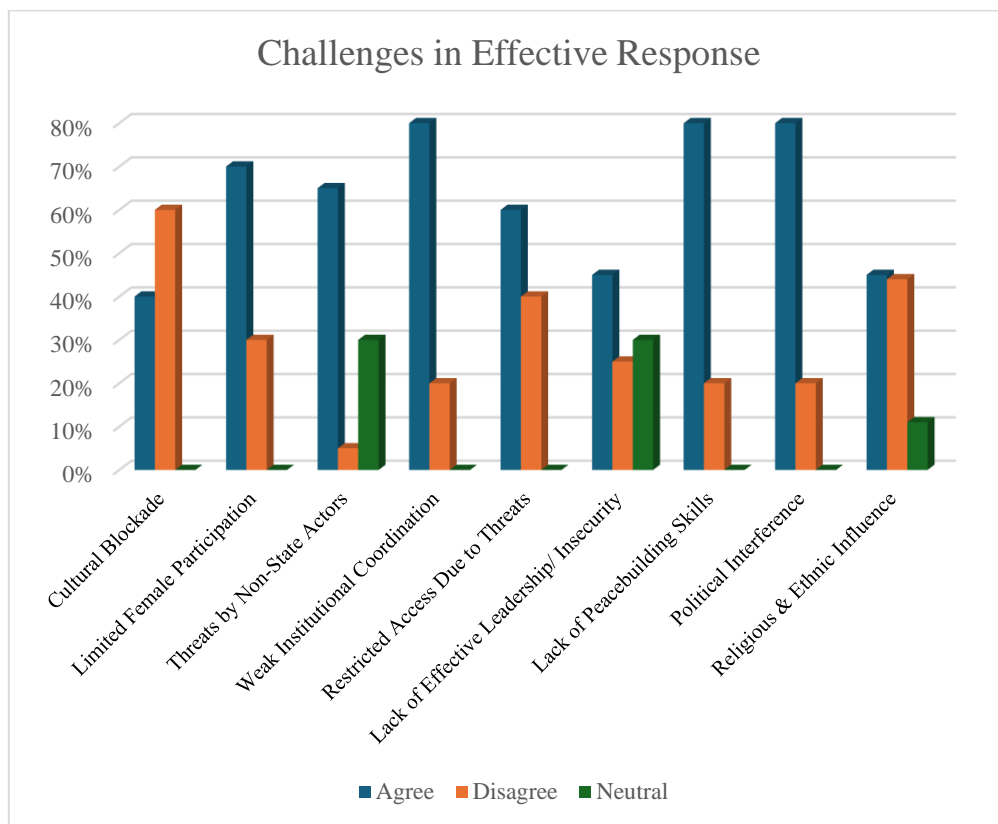
Source: Study findings.

Regarding cultural barriers to humanitarian responses, approximately 40% of respondents recognized cultural traditions as significant obstacles, while 60% disagreed. These mixed perceptions highlight dual dimensions, both positive and negative. Pashtuns strongly adhere to their cultural traditions, notably *Pashtunwali* (the Pashtun code of conduct), which includes hospitality, respect, love, peace, and devotion. While Pashtunwali embodies valuable social principles, its traditional structure can also act as a barrier, limiting broad community participation in humanitarian and peacebuilding activities.

Notably, around 70% of respondents agreed that women's participation in social development and peace initiatives carried out by NGOs in the NMDs was severely limited due to cultural constraints. Despite efforts grounded in universal principles of fundamental rights for all, regardless of cultural background, certain local practices in South Waziristan continue to restrict inclusive peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery.

Moreover, most respondents indicated that the conflict had eroded community trust in both social institutions and the state's capacity to address issues effectively, creating widespread insecurity and mistrust. This has led to psychological impacts, particularly among vulnerable populations such as women and children, who continue to experience heightened insecurity in the region.

Threats from non-state actors pose another critical challenge to project implementation, as indicated by approximately 65% of respondents. Local Taliban insurgents exert pressure on humanitarian and development organisations through suicide attacks, threatening letters, and religious decrees, particularly at a time when many parts of South Waziristan urgently required reconstruction and development assistance. These insurgents, inspired by extremist clerics such as Maulana Fazlullah and other influential radical leaders, aim to drive NGOs out of the region.

Non-state armed groups have severely undermined human security, creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that directly impacts peacebuilding initiatives, organisational planning, and even community meetings with NGOs. Consequently, most respondents agreed that both NGOs and government agencies face severe limitations in accessing certain regions and communities due to persistent security threats.

NGO representatives indicated that institutional coordination in South Waziristan was notably weak due to the absence of effective coordination mechanisms between government institutions, including the military, and NGOs working towards peacebuilding. This reduced the impact of peace initiatives. The limited professional expertise of staff involved in peacebuilding was also identified as a critical challenge. Employees engaged by various organisations often lack adequate skills in community mobilisation, cultural understanding, and the overall peacebuilding process. Similarly, external NGO staff frequently fail to comprehend local cultural contexts and ground realities.

Despite these challenges, the efforts of organisations operating in South Waziristan under difficult circumstances are commendable. To enhance institutional coordination, respondents suggested more inclusive policies ensuring active stakeholder participation in planning and implementation phases of development projects. Collaborative efforts involving civil authorities, the military, political actors, and civil society are essential for achieving effective implementation, ownership, trust-building, and improved relationships among stakeholders.

Personnel from the region, serving within government bodies, NGOs, and civil society organizations, hold substantial responsibility. Given the complexity and sensitivity of conflict-affected regions, it is vital that these officials receive specialised training in peacebuilding, community mobilisation, cultural sensitivity, and conflict resolution before deployment.

4.5   Community Suggestions for Future Development and Peace Projects

When local community members and NGO officials were asked about the prospects for future peace and development, most respondents expressed concerns regarding governance, stating: '*The current government structure has proven ineffective in safeguarding the constitutional and political rights of tribal communities. As the global community actively participates in political and diplomatic peacebuilding processes, Pakistan's national and provincial governments must urgently bridge the gap between the public and the state.*'

Similarly, the military has maintained a large presence in South Waziristan due to strategic and security concerns linked to Afghanistan. Concurrently, it has supported conflict resolution, reconstruction, and livelihood initiatives alongside government and NGOs, as previously discussed.

The study found that many community members believe conducting local body elections and empowering newly elected representatives could enhance development and peace efforts. Respondents suggested that newly elected representatives would likely play a more constructive and inclusive role compared to traditional *Maliks*, who were viewed as controversial and self-serving within local social network.

Survey participants also proposed that organisations should ensure merit in every project and must hire local professionals for project implementation. Respondents specifically highlighted the importance of avoiding political and religious interference, stressing that benefits from rehabilitation and development projects must reach the entire community rather than specific individuals or groups. Young respondents particularly expressed the view that peacebuilding, training, and skill development programmes should focus explicitly on youth. Furthermore, respondents suggested that government authorities should prioritise economic initiatives and promote tourism in South Waziristan, recognising the region's untapped potential. Such initiatives could develop community trust, contributing to sustainable peace in the long term.

5. CONCLUSION

Development initiatives are globally recognised as essential components of sustainable peace. Internationally, scholars and practitioners point to the transformative power of targeted projects in education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and social cohesion.

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The process of peacebuilding is a multidimensional one that promotes the transition from a situation of conflict to co-existence, thus contributing to sustainable peace and prosperity. In post-conflict societies, implementation measures are meant to diminish grievances of the conflict-affected population in the shape of development, monitoring of human rights violations, promotion of participatory order, rehabilitation, and enhanced social cohesion.

In South Waziristan, national and international developing partners were engaged in a variety of peacebuilding and development programmes aimed at reducing tensions, build trust and promote harmony. Given the complex situation, a wide range of strategies and approaches were used for the promotion of peace. Development organisations supported affected people in the form of rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration of IDPs and building state institutions.

Although, the analysis revealed various opportunities and constraints for peace and development. Negotiating with *Maliks* (local elders) for project implementation was found to be a major limitation, which increased the risk of escalating conflict among different tribes and ethnic groups. However, the results indicate sociocultural groupings like the *Jirga, Hujra* and Aman Committees as better opportunities for the government and development organisations to coordinate for peacebuilding initiatives in the region. Implementation of development interventions through participatory methods would not only address immediate needs of the affected population but would also lay the foundation for peace through their support and acceptance.

Policy measures must prioritise capacity-building and skill enhancement for both government and NGO staff prior to their assignment to conflict-sensitive areas. Aid agencies and other humanitarian and development actors must have local contextual knowledge and organisational flexibility in order to gain the trust of the local communities and government institutions. Policymakers and practitioners can use this knowledge and analysis to adequately and efficiently manage development aid through involvement of relevant stakeholders in planning and implementation. Nevertheless, major constraints remain in effectively implementing participatory mechanisms. Policymakers must therefore prioritise integrated, inclusive, and context-specific community development strategies to achieve lasting stability and sustainable peace in conflict-affected and culturally sensitive regions.

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