Community Peace Building Approach in the Context of Afghanistan

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Abstract

As peace building, we understand that it seeks to prevent violence and help people to recover from violence, mostly structural violence. It also helps people to conduct their relationships to promote sustainable coexistence (Schirch, 2004). Puzzle can be raise how we can strength community level peace building process to build structural stability besides peace keeping. I will talk about the community peace building sustained by traditional Afghan society and their own strategies. This is to represent the idea that "people are the best resource for sustaining peace" (Tadjbakhsh, 2005). Some practices of peace building definitely should rise where peace building can address state building as well in regard to the responses from local and international role players in dealing with the challenges of operating in an uncertain and weak structured country where vision for a sustainable change is not clear. I would like to show how nation state building process can be addressed with this local peace building activities which is merely called as community based development aimed for social coordination and civic involvement. Besides, problems with the top down approach of government and how other factors influence will also be discussed.

Introduction

Crisis in Afghanistan seems started after the Soviet invasion in 1979, yet the problems were rooted in their history of state building and reconstruction of identity of Afghan ethnic groups. Following the attack in America, communal conflicts have been sustained by several local and foreign led terrorist networks and warlords which affect the vastly diverse and traditional socio-political dynamics of Afghanistan (Caroline, 2014). Thus, the relation of state and civil communities is terribly affected. The Afghan conflict has gone through several layers. For example, old conflicts about regional tensions now moved to emerging conflicts about land and resources now have struck Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been characterized as complex geography, hierarchical society and of peace conflicts (Goodhand, 2002). Currently, after nine years of September 11, 2001, Afghanistan now is trying to be centralized as one government, one nation. Nonetheless, after the Taliban fall, post conflict rebuilding in now huge concern for Afghan government as Corruption, drug trade and military conflicts created so fragmented socio-political context in Afghanistan (Caroline, 2014). It makes the resolution among the communities and civilian groups complicated. Reported in an article by Aljazeera, it is being said that new central government of Afghanistan is unable to face the security challenges like attacks on district posts by indigenous Taliban groups as well as economic downturn like misuse of aid money following no job opportunities (Maim, 2015). Moreover, it has become a ground for guerrilla attacks which should be taken seriously by the government and regional players as well. However, government and international actors are mainly focusing at national level from a border range and using top-down approach which is not working effectively in Afghanistan (Waldman, 2008). Therefore, we need a different approach which should include people from bottom level.

Addressing 'what' problems in peace process of Afghanistan:

The problems of peace building should not be justified by its own procedures being politicized but also how it is actually addressed by the government (Goodhand, 2002). Emphasizing on top-down and more international interest driven peace building process rather bottom-up and local interest based community peace building process; has challenged the effectiveness of peace building in post war Afghanistan whether it will sustain for long or not. Two peace building experts put that in the contemporary conflicts in Afghanistan," community and sufferings occur" (Waldman, 2008).This quote support what International Crisis Group (ICG) reported in 2003 that local disputes often lead to violence and thus instability is articulated by warlords, criminals and militants(Waldman, 2008). Such diverse context needs to be understood while we are discussing about peace building. Whose vision needs to be promoted is a great concern in such context. Moreover, consolidating a coherent and effective peace building approach is appeared as a hard task as international and national parties fail to recognize the prior reasons of conflicts. Preferring to build a façade nature of peace rather addressing the underlining source of conflict, which is inter-ethnic violence, is producing a flawed and ineffective peace strategy. For example, Peacekeepers are not trained properly and no efficient command about how to use the money coming as aid (Caroline, 2014). Absence of adequate troops and sufficient resources and much reliance on air power also affects. I had interviewed local people and former activists who similarly said that while Afghanistan is a diverse and traditional society, laws and peace methods are designed by outer actors where local level peace building is neglected entirely (Amiri, 2015). There are organizations like Plan for Peace, Peace Commission and Justice and Reconciliation but they limit their

focus to national level only which is declining their effectiveness (Waldman, 2008). Another critic is that little attention to Nation state building governance and development are given as it seems government is given much importance over addressing inter-ethnic conflicts. However, in the nexus of strategic peace building defined by scholar Lisa Schirch, we would see that human development and social reconstruction have given importance along with military issues like disarmaments and security issues. While addressing the problem solving approach for peace building, she talks about horizontal capacity for peace building to address peace process issues. To intervene in this situation, horizontal level peace building which works for mostly developing a vision and capacity for root level people is potentially can sustain the process (Schirch, 2004).

Why community peace building is needed
For proposing a peace process entirely focused on local people, can be justified with the concept of human security. A discussion can be drawn on how it is justifying the alternative peace building vision which can include violence reduction, addressing justice system and promoting citizen engagement all along. To define human security, scholar Tadjbakhs says that it is primarily absence of insecurity feelings (Tadjbakhsh, 2005). However, Bajpai defines it as "people centric security" which seeks to widen the concept of security by including non-traditional issues like human rights, human development, economy etc. (2003). He also mentions that it considers collective groups as referent rather than state. For example, tribal, ethnic and national populations are prioritized more than state (Bajpai, 2003). Therefore, protecting individuals or groups is the main focus of human security. UN secretary Kofi Annan specified it by focusing on threats of violence as human should be protected from internal violence (Bajpai, 2003). It also can collaborate with state security that can address threat to a nation. Regarding this, State and international actors, both should look into local level peace process to articulate the post conflict peace building in Afghanistan as human security requires the people to be involved as agent of bringing change not the state (Bajpai, 2003).

How the community peace building should be introduced:
Scholar Lisa Schirch thinks that exclusion of key stakeholders, for example, the diverse communities, are the reason for the failure of peace processes in Afghanistan (2011). Also, providing financial incentives for reintegration at bottom level is ineffective to a greater extent due to misuse and flawed distribution of aid (Schirch, 2011). For better governance strategies, we need to identify the main actors here. For sustainable peace process, communities or individual who act as reformer and preserver, their involvement is very important. For example, human rights group, women rights group and ethnic leaders as well**.**
Three main actors of Afghan community peace process:

Image:1

Role of civil societies in community peace building:
Government led peace process is strongly questionable because lack of citizen participation in the strategic process which hampers mutual accountability of government to the citizens. For example, all three of my interviewee told that Afghan government is not representing the national unity as sharing power is mostly a majority game of Pashtun. Afghan society diverse and hierarchical; we can categorize them within two levels:
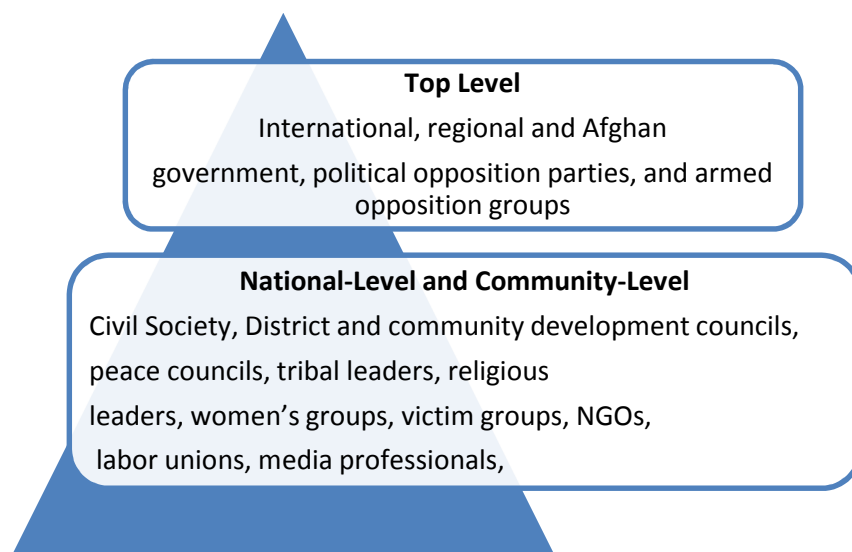
Image:1.1 (Figure: Schirch, 2011)

This diverse civil society has to be included in this peace process as it excluding relevant stakeholders will weaken the peace process as the key actors will lack the political will to implement the peace procedure designed for them(Schirch, 2011). Successful community peace building requires both armed and civil groups to participate. For example, in this pyramid above, the bottom level groups like civil society, tribal leaders need their representation of their interests in the top level like government and political parties to ensure a comprehensive peace process (Schirch, 2011). Civil society organizations (CSOs) are better actors in organizing dialogue and negotiations. For example, Sultani finds their government strange because it is called "National Unity Government" where domination of certain groups exist and government does not represent national unity at all. He thinks mutual respect among the ethnic groups can solve the current conflicts as it will help them to prosper as one nation(2015).Interviewees also support this idea that these groups should be given a voice to resolve the common issues. Definitely, to promote the local peace building from bottom to top, engagement between government and communities is very important.

Securing the communities is a huge requirement for local peace building . However, another critic of top-down peace process is that rules and regulations which are for Afghan society are designed by the international actors . Therefore, these laws or rules are not implemented effectively as Afghan people do not recognize them. People mostly follow the laws which are mostly conducted by the elder ethnic leaders, Jirga's and Sutras**(Katsumi , 2007)**. Definitely, the local judiciary system can play an important role in providing internal relations which can help government to mediate conflicts, internal ethnic issues and thus increase citizen participation in the government as well. For example, one tribal leader says that the idea of uniting civil society with a strong judiciary system is not new to them as Afghan traditional societies have been lived with *Shuras, Jirgas* and councils of elders for generations (Theros & Kaldor, 2005). Ethnic leaders are playing an important role in North and South Afghanistan where tribal justice system exists (Amiri, 2015). Regarding warlords also, Amiri thinks reconciliation program for warlords still not a practical idea, yet we can work on constructing a new identity for them to get them involved in social coordination and help them via institutional (2015).

INGO operated programs supported by aid agencies
For a sustainable peace process, several aid agencies has already taken community based initiatives. For instance, community based organizations and local actors can be engaged in redistribution of aids and aid policy formulation (Tadjbakhsh, 2005). Amiri talked about USIP (United State Institute of Peace), (NRC Norwegian Refugee Council), (TLO The Liaison Office) and Checchi Consulting who are working on this community building (2015) . These NGO and INGOs' are dependent mostly on foreign aid. Afghanistan s' economy depends on most aid and donation so among all other approaches, how economic and development is happening matters. Foreign aid by INGOs is also playing a role here as we see in UNDP report, the aim of PEACE initiative was to "contribute to the restoration of peace in Afghanistan through poverty alleviation, good governance building and community empowerment…" (Dabo, 2011). As Human security requires more than military protection issue and such process tracks through individual to communities and then state. We can use it as a lens for foreign aid impact in Afghanistan as well (Goodhand, 2002). Although, the applicability of foreign aid in peace building has been questioned a lot, where political will (at the national and international level) for a negotiated settlement of armed conflict is low, aid organisations are expected to fill the gap through their programming (Dabo, 2011) . CAR

consultations mentioned about negotiating conflicts through arranging dialogue among traditional communities, mediation. Besides armed peace keeping, such social outreach and positive attitude creating programs can strength the local peace building rather outside influences at national and international level(Waldman, 2008). For example, inter-community dialogue involving local leaders among themselves are arranged by the NGOs(Caroline, 2014). This remarks their presence at bottom level which is strongly required to create a coherent society in context of Afghanistan.

Role of the government: We should define first whether such community driven peace building is suitable in Afghan society that will help to create a further domestic realm to foster nation state building process. This nation-state building process which was discussed from Machiavelli to Thomas Hobbes, Max Weber and so many can be implied in Afghanistan context too(International Dialogue on Peace building and State building, 2010). Weber defined this nation-state process in 1918. In Afghanistan, since 1980s', this process of nation-state building became important for the donors, security and peace procedures within government and different interested groups(Goodhand, 2002). To state how nation-state building can be addressed in peace building process, we can talk about Dili Declaration which was announced on 8th April, 2010 by G7 statement (OECD, 2010). In details. It has been emphasized in Dili Declaration that government is responsible to prioritize the needy people in order to avoid any threats raised from civilian dissatisfaction to national peace. It will also help them to improve their capacities for reconciliation and peaceful existence (OECD, 2010). Afghan government's peace program, called as Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Program (APRP), has been playing a role criticized by civil communities and other professional groups. They have been criticized by saying that instead addressing the core problems of peace process, they are using money to bribe the insurgent groups that later fuel the insurgency as Schirch cited that "financial incentives address the symptoms of the disease but not the disease itself" (Schirch, 2011). She thinks that APRP would be more successful if it would prioritize local level peace building than buying insurgents with money (Schirch, 2011). Ethnic tensions can be manipulated by the political and social elites to provoke armed conflicts. Respondents said that the civil war was fought for personal interests but given coverage of religious and ethnic tensions though people at bottom level do maintain stable relationships (Mahmood, 2015).

Community peace building resolution for the peace process:

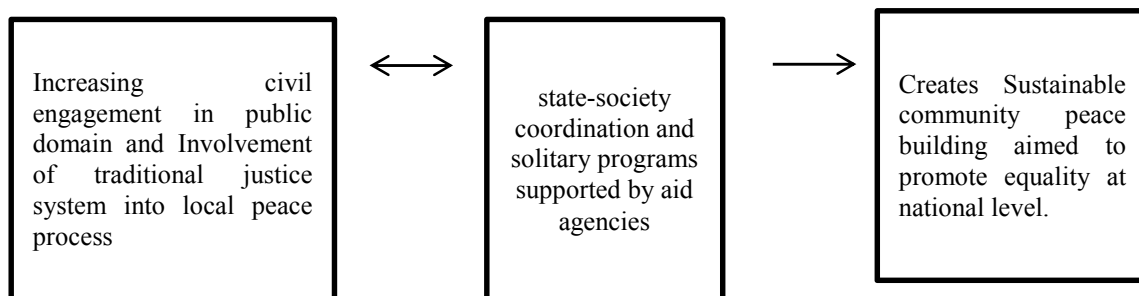| Increasing civil engagement in public domain and Involvement of traditional justice system into local peace process | ⟷ | state-society coordination and solitary programs supported by aid agencies | → | Creates Sustainable community peace building aimed to promote equality at national level. |

Image:1.2

Main problem rise when the government does not approve such kind of peace building important for peace process. former activist Amiri also mentioned such insecurity clashes (2015). Similarly, state building at local level should be maintained in a way that traditional legitimacy should be prioritized. However, highly centralized political system allows president Karzai to have a strong grip over the power holders in the government. Besides, government use such jirgas to increase participation in the election which is criticized a lot. For example, June 2010 Naional Consultative Jirga was questioned as authority controlled the selection process as well as their attendance so that Karzai can use them for his own intention(Theros & Kaldor, 2005). Thus, he can maintain this unbalanced power sharing domain without any input from locals. One respondent says that "Kabul is like a statue to us; it neither hears nor attends to our needs" (Theros & Kaldor, 2005). Polarizing the issues of civil society is another problem community peace building face where the candidates for elections become only toy of their parties without caring the problems. Such intimidation from politics creates ethnic problems as well. An idea of nation state building is unstable where a wave of conflicting social system works due to community leader's support to Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces. Such issues need to be addressed through reconciliation and solidarity programs and aid agencies are required to help in this level.

Conclusion

Nearly all the respondents say that reconciliation program should be started locally first. Essentially, Afghan government and its partners need to recognize the lacking of current peace building. While most Afghans believe that local disputes can be solved by local justice system rather government system, community level peace building has a great chance to reach to national level successfully. Nonetheless, these local institutions need to increase their capabilities and avoid imitation from political groups and government as well. Peace building at community

level can work on coherent goals of peace through reducing local violence and enhancing local resistance to political corruption and militant conflicts. To secure national peace, better governance and citizen engagement in security and policy making system are very important. Such local level peace building will help to promote state-society relationships. The capacity of Afghan societies, their strategies to solve the dispute is ignored to the top level despite its possibility to sustain peace. Issues like poverty, land scarcity also bring insecurity in post conflict areas. Therefore, building peace from bottom level is a contemporary criteria for the peace building of Afghanistan to be successful.

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