Community Peacebuilding in Afghanistan

The Case for a National Strategy

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Contents

Endorsement

The following 15 Afghan organisations, each of which works in the field of peacebuilding, have provided their endorsement of this report:

Afghan Civil Society Forum (ACSF)

Afghan Defence of Women's Rights of Balkh (ADWRB)

Afghan Development Association (ADA)

Afghan Organization of Human Rights and Environmental Protection (AHOREP)

Afghan Peace and Democracy Act (APDA)

Afghan Women Education Centre (AWEC)

Afghan Women's Skills Development Center (AWSDC)

All Afghan Women Union (AAWU)

Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR)

Cooperation Center for Afghanistan (CCA)

Co-operation for Peace and Unity (CPAU)

Education Training Center for Poor Women and Girls of Afghanistan (ECW)

Sanayee Development Organization (SDO)

Training Human Rights Association (THRA)

Tribal Liaison Office (TLO)

Summary

Existing measures to promote peace in Afghanistan are not succeeding. This is not only due to the revival of the Taliban, but also because little has been done to try to ensure that families, communities, and tribes – the fundamental units of Afghan society – get on better with each other. War has fractured the social fabric of the country and, in the context of severe and persistent poverty, local disputes have the potential to turn violent and to exacerbate the wider conflict. But there is no effective strategy to help Afghans deal with disputes in a peaceful and constructive way.

The nature, causes, and effects of insecurity in Afghanistan vary widely, and there is a corresponding variation in the most effective means by which insecurity can be addressed. Often a range of steps are required in different degrees, such as to strengthen the rule of law, build professional security forces, reduce poverty, or improve governance.

Peacebuilding is one important means of addressing insecurity, yet most of the peacebuilding work in Afghanistan has been at a political level, where there are links to warlordism, corruption, or criminality, or it has been target-limited, such as the disarmament programmes. Other initiatives, such as the Action Plan for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation and the Peace Commission, are significant, but lack clarity and are primarily concerned with peace and reconciliation at a national level.

With sufficient resources and political will these initiatives have the potential to improve security, but they only marginally, indirectly, or partially concern the *people* of Afghanistan. The capacity of Afghan communities to resolve their own disputes, and build and sustain peace, has largely been neglected.

The recent deterioration in security, particularly in the south and south-east of Afghanistan, is evidence that 'top-down' approaches are by themselves inadequate without parallel nationwide peace work at ground level. Moreover, insecurity in Afghanistan often has local causes.

Decades of war have not only undermined social cohesion at local level, they have also exacerbated poverty, which is itself an underlying cause of insecurity. Nearly 20 years of Oxfam programme experience in Afghanistan, interviews with peacebuilding practitioners, and a recent Oxfam Security Survey of 500 people in six provinces, show that local disputes are often related to resources, particularly land and water; to a lesser degree, they also relate to families and women, or to ethnic, tribal, and inter-community differences. This is aggravated by a range of factors such as natural disasters, refugee flows, badly delivered aid, corruption, abuse of power, or the opium trade.

In many cases, local disputes lead to violence, and while the strength and importance of family and tribal affiliations in Afghanistan can be a source of stability, they can also lead to the rapid escalation of disputes. The resulting insecurity not only destroys quality of life and impedes development work, but is also exploited by criminal or anti-government groups to strengthen their positions in the wider conflict. Perceived security threats also impact on local security: such threats are diverse and configured differently in different localities. The Taliban are not the only threat, as is sometimes portrayed, but warlords, criminals, and international and national security forces are also perceived as posing significant threats.

The Oxfam survey shows that predominantly local mechanisms are used to resolve disputes or address local problems. In terms of formal mechanisms, those most often used are the police, for immediate purposes, and district governors, while the courts are approached comparatively infrequently. The type of mechanism used for the resolution of any given dispute depends on local factors and on the nature of the dispute, but the most favoured mechanism, particularly in rural areas, is the community or tribal councils of elders (known as *jirgas* or *shuras*).

There is a clear need for community peacebuilding, which has been undertaken with much success in other developing countries. For example, Oxfam's long-standing peacebuilding programme in

northern Kenya has helped to sustain many years of peace there, and it may be helping to contain the violence which has followed the recent election.

This is a participatory, bottom-up approach, based on the premise that people are the best resources for building and sustaining peace. Such an approach aims to strengthen community capacities to resolve disputes peacefully; to develop trust, safety, and social cohesion within and between communities; and to promote inter-ethnic and inter-group dialogue. The means of achieving this is through building the capacity of communities, especially *jirgas* and *shuras*, to resolve disputes through mediation, negotiation, and conflict resolution; supporting civil-society involvement in peace and development; and promoting peace education. It is not a fixed or defined activity, but adapts to local circumstances and seeks to incorporate peacebuilding values, skills, and techniques into broader governance and development work.

Local peacebuilding in Afghanistan has been fragmentary and inchoate, with extremely limited coverage; however, a number of organisations have successfully implemented such programmes, including two Afghan non-government organisations (NGOs): Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU) and the Sanayee Development Organization (SDO). Independent evaluators concluded that 'this is a creative initiative at the forefront of enabling and supporting what is truly wanted by Afghan partners and communities'. Local peacebuilding has had a range of positive, often interconnected outcomes: increased resolution of disputes; lower levels of violence, including domestic violence; greater community cohesion; stronger resilience to external threats or events; the expansion of development activity; and the successful reintegration of returnees.

Given that existing community peacebuilding has such a significant impact on peace and development, yet benefits only a fraction of the population, there is a powerful case for greater donor support for NGOs engaged in peacebuilding, as well as the development of a national strategy.

The strategy could be developed through convening a national conference, attended by NGOs and experts from Afghanistan and overseas, as well as government officials, parliamentarians, religious leaders, United Nations (UN) representatives, and others. This meeting would aim to establish a framework for a national strategy for community peacebuilding, and a national steering group, followed by a series of parallel provincial conferences to elaborate local strategies.

Key elements of the national strategy could be endorsed by the Afghan government and national assembly, and supported by an alliance of NGOs and civil-society actors that carry out peacebuilding work. The strategy would not detract from a bottom-up approach: indeed, it would be configured precisely to support this and allow for local flexibility. Potential components of a national strategy could be:

- phased capacity-building throughout the country, which is participatory, inclusive, and flexible;

- measures to ensure that peacebuilding is taught in all schools and is fully incorporated into teacher training;

- awareness-raising initiatives, at national and local levels;

- mainstreaming peacebuilding in relevant sectors of government and in national programmes;

- mechanisms to monitor the consistency of *shuras'* decisions with the Afghan constitution and human rights; and, separately, to ensure reporting, research, information collation, and monitoring of peacebuilding activities; and

- measures to clarify links between peacebuilding work and state institutions, in particular the relationship between informal justice and the courts.

There are significant challenges to developing and implementing a national strategy. Not least, the impact of peacebuilding is difficult to measure, and there needs to be government involvement but not ownership. Other challenges include: ensuring the full and meaningful participation of women;

dealing with potential spoilers; managing with a lack of human resources; and introducing sufficient flexibility. However, existing programmes in Afghanistan have developed means of overcoming these challenges, and there is every reason to believe that the success of these programmes could be replicated nationwide. Current programmes are being implemented in insecure areas of the country and, using established techniques, they could be introduced incrementally to the south and south-east.

It is essential for the Afghan government and international community to recognise the inadequacies of existing peacebuilding initiatives. For the vast majority of Afghans, disputes have local causes, and people turn to local institutions and individuals to resolve them. Yet little work has been done with communities, especially *shuras*, to enhance their capabilities to resolve these problems peacefully. Peace work at a community level strengthens community cohesion, reduces violence, and enhances resistance to militants. It is an essential and complementary part of a wider strategy to secure a lasting national peace, including concerted measures to promote better governance; rural development; and the professionalisation of police and security forces. A national strategy for community peacebuilding is already five years too late: with increasing levels of violence, there is no time to lose.

Governmental and international responses to insecurity

Existing initiatives

The 2001 Bonn Agreement, which set out a framework and timetable for the establishment of a constitution and democratic institutions in Afghanistan, was intended to 'end the tragic conflict in Afghanistan and promote national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability and respect for human rights'.

Building on this, the Afghanistan Compact of January 2006 recognises that 'security remains a fundamental prerequisite for achieving stability and development in Afghanistan'. It states that security cannot be provided by military means alone, but requires 'good governance, justice and the rule of law, reinforced by reconstruction and development'. Therefore, in a sense, the Compact as a whole is intended to address the problem of insecurity.

Measures which aim more directly to address insecurity are set out in Annex I to the Compact. In particular, the presence of international forces and provincial reconstruction teams, combined with the expansion of the Afghan national army and a national and border police, are intended to promote peace and stability.

While there is no doubt that such measures promote stability, they are intrinsically limited in their capacity to consolidate peace. In a society with a well-founded mistrust of foreign interference, and in which local and tribal affiliations are powerful, foreign and government forces may be in a position to *enforce* peace in some areas, but have limited capacity to *strengthen* it.

The Compact also provides for the 'disbandment of all illegal armed groups', but so far only limited steps have been taken to implement this, and as the Bi-Annual Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB)[1] has observed, 'rearming…has taken place in some areas in response to the perceptions of a growing security threat'.

The Afghanistan Action Plan on Peace, Justice and Reconciliation is the measure which most directly aims to strengthen peace. It contains a programme for the acknowledgement of the suffering of Afghan people; reforming state institutions and purging them of human-rights violators and criminals; truth seeking and documentation; promotion of national unity and reconciliation; and the establishment of mechanisms for accountability.

This programme has significant potential, but was only formally launched in December 2006 and is notably absent from the Afghan government's paper 'Afghanistan: Challenges and the Way Ahead' of January 2007. It is only briefly referred to in the JCMB Annual Report of 1 May 2007.

Variable progress has been made on institutional reform, and the proposal for mechanisms of accountability has been brought into question by recent moves on the part of the national assembly to grant legal protection to former *mujahadeen* and others who have committed war crimes. The Action Plan covers the inclusion of peace and reconciliation messages in the national education curriculum but contains little which will have a direct impact on ordinary Afghans.

In addition, the government of Afghanistan has established an Independent Commission on Strengthening Peace, to promote dialogue with combatants, and through which current and former combatants can renounce violence and engage in lawful political activities. International organisations and foreign diplomats have also engaged in such efforts. Separately, the Afghan government has also facilitated a peace *jirga* involving tribal leaders from both southern and south-eastern Afghanistan, and northern Pakistan.

Limitations

With the necessary resources, political will, and commitment to implementation, many of these initiatives have the potential to improve security. But it is crucial to recognise that they only marginally, indirectly, or partially concern the *people* of Afghanistan. The capacity of Afghan communities to resolve their own disputes, and build and sustain peace, has largely been overlooked.

The deterioration in security in Afghanistan, particularly in the south and south-east, is evidence of the minimal impact of high-level and target-limited initiatives, without parallel nationwide peace work at ground level.

As two peacebuilding experts have put it, 'in contemporary conflicts, the community represents the nexus of conflict action. It is at the community level where contending claims for people's "hearts and minds" are fought and where most of the physical violence and suffering occurs'.[2] As the International Crisis Group (ICG) concluded as early as 2003, local disputes often lead to violence (discussed further below), and the cumulative impact is an environment of insecurity which is readily exploited by warlords, criminals, and militants. [3]

Understanding conflict dynamics requires an understanding of local conditions and causes.[4] The following section outlines the diverse causes and consequences of insecurity at a local level in Afghanistan. It indicates why, in conjunction with other measures to improve security, development, and local governance,[5] a national programme of community peacebuilding could help to lay the foundation for a lasting peace.

Disputes and insecurity

Current security situation

Despite considerable regional variations, there is no doubt that the overall security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated significantly: the UN estimates that the frequency of attacks, bombings, and other violent incidents in 2007 was up 20–30 per cent on 2006.[6] In one of Afghanistan's largest public opinion surveys from 2007, conducted by the Asia Foundation, one-third of respondents said that security was quite bad or very bad in their area. At least as many respondents said they have some fear in participating in the resolution of community disputes, voting in an election, joining a peaceful demonstration, or holding a public office.[7] Forty-nine per cent of people say that they sometimes or often fear for their own or their family's safety – up nine per cent on 2006.[8]

This section highlights key sources of disputes at a local level, the underlying causes of insecurity, and the impact on individuals and communities. It is based on Oxfam's many years of programme experience in Afghanistan, pre-existing research and analysis, dozens of interviews with peacebuilding practitioners, and a survey conducted by Oxfam for the purposes of this report. Box 1 gives details of the methodology used to carry out the survey. It should be noted that the survey is not the only basis of this report, but was conducted in order to verify the findings of broader research and inferences drawn from the field experience of Oxfam and other NGOs.

Box 1: Oxfam Security Survey methodology

Afghan nationals interviewed 500 Afghans in mid 2007 in six provinces in different parts of the country, with varying security conditions: Herat, Nangahar, Balk, Gazni, Daikundi, and Kandahar.[9] The UN categorisation of access risk for these provinces, which reflects general levels of security, is as follows: Kandahar: extreme risk; Gazni and Nangahar: areas ranging from medium to extreme risk; Daikundi: largely low risk but for two southern, extreme-risk districts; Herat and Badakhshan: low risk, with limited areas of medium risk; and Balk: low risk.[10] Regrettably, security concerns and administrative problems limited the number of interviews which could be undertaken in Daikundi and Kandahar.[11]

A multi-stage random sampling procedure was used to select participants, who reflect a cross-section of the Afghan population in terms of age, sex, ethnicity, and occupation. Reflecting national demographics, roughly two-thirds of respondents lived in rural areas. Sampling points within villages or urban areas were also selected at random. Each respondent was asked about major causes of disputes, greatest security threats, and principal dispute resolution mechanisms. Respondents could identify multiple causes, threats, and dispute resolution mechanisms, in response to each question, which were then recorded and are reflected in the figures below. The survey findings were supplemented by ten focus-group discussions, with participants selected at random; two such discussions were conducted with men and women, and two with women only. There were also over 40 in-depth interviews with randomly selected interviewees.

The research findings reflected the enormous variability of circumstances and conditions in different regions and localities of Afghanistan. Regrettably, there is no space in this report to examine local and regional variations, and the research does not fully reflect circumstances in extreme risk areas (primarily the south); the analysis should be read with these caveats in mind.

Causes of disputes

Legacy of conflict

Decades of conflict in Afghanistan have led to an environment which is physically, socially, economically, and politically insecure. As Citha Maass summarises, 'manifold divisions of previous victimization, mixed experiences, post-war frustrated expectations and discrimination have created fragmented perceptions of the war, its causes, repercussions, suffering and political responsibilities. It reveals how deeply Afghan society is still split even if the survivors currently avoid addressing the dividing lines'.[12]
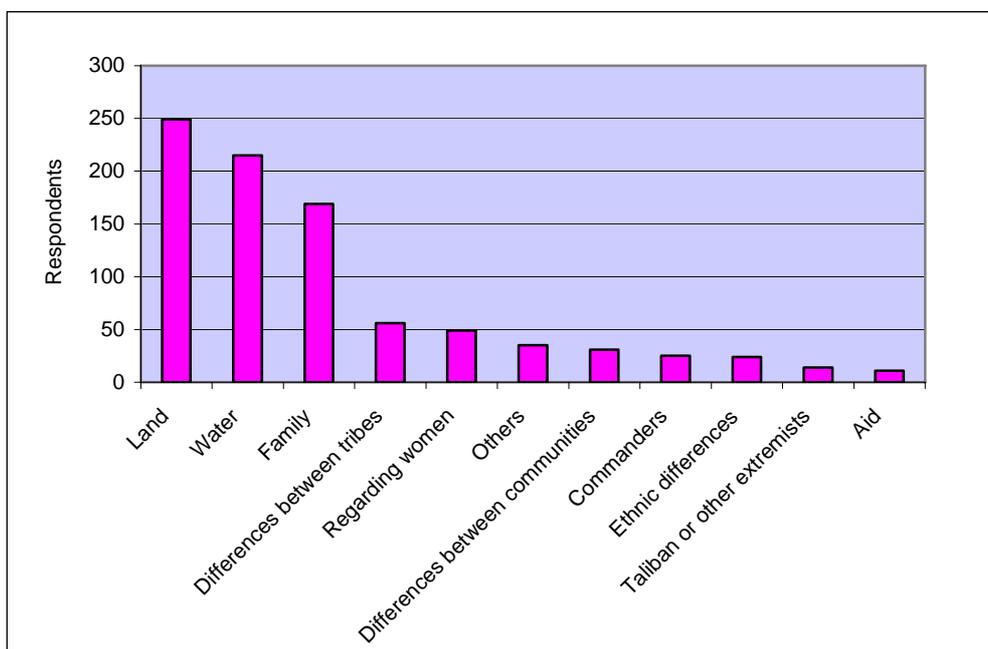
War has fractured and strained the social fabric of the country. A whole generation has grown up amid pervasive tension and insecurity, and all dimensions of violence, whether physical, psychological, structural, or cultural, are evident in Afghan society. At the same time, conflict has caused widespread poverty, having devastated the rural economy on which the majority of Afghans depend, and crippled local government infrastructure for the delivery of essential services.

Poverty and unemployment

It is clear from the Oxfam survey results, focus-group discussions, and in-depth interviews, that poverty and unemployment are the biggest factors in causing local insecurity. Unemployment in Afghanistan is extremely high, at 40–60 per cent, and in some places higher. Given that those who are unemployed receive no social benefits, and many have large families to support, its impact is severe and can drive people to desperate measures. As one young man from Herat put it, 'I have five family members who depend on me. I can only find work two days a week if I am lucky. I can't find money for bread to give my family; twice I decided to commit suicide'. An elder of the same district explained, 'when people have no means of surviving they commit robbery'. Other focus groups expressed similar views, often linking unemployment to criminality, disputes, and violence, particularly over resources. As one man from Behsoud district of Jalalabad said, 'most of the conflicts in our area are on water and land and this is among people who are jobless'. Oxfam's programme experience in southern Afghanistan also suggests that difficult social and economic circumstances can be a significant factor in the decision of ordinary Afghans to grow poppy or join anti-government groups.

Figure 1: Oxfam Security Survey: major causes of disputes[13]

The graph shows, for each issue, how many respondents believed that it was a major cause of disputes in their community.

Land and water

In the Oxfam survey (Figure 1), half of respondents said that land was a major cause of disputes, and this is corroborated by other surveys. A major survey in 2006 by the Independent Afghan Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) found that close to half of all local 'problems' related to

property.[14] Likewise, according to an Asia Foundation survey, a majority of local disputes relate to land or property.[15] This is due to a range of factors: multiple systems of land ownership, incoherent attempts at land reform, the seizure of private and public land by successive power-holders, the destruction of legal records, population expansion, forced migrations, and waves of displacement and returnees. The situation has been exacerbated by the impact of war and drought in causing a steady contraction in the supply of cultivable land, sometimes by as much as 80–90 per cent for a given district.

The Oxfam survey indicates that water is the second biggest cause of disputes. This is due to water's importance both domestically and agriculturally, and the disruption of established patterns of supply and demand caused by conflict. The situation has been exacerbated by poor water management, insufficient irrigation, and environmental degradation.

Frequent natural disasters compound existing hardship. As a result of the 2006 drought, for example, some two and half million people faced chronic food shortages. Currently, a similar number of Afghans face high-risk food insecurity. The capacity of the government and communities to minimise the impact of disasters, and to ensure swift and effective responses, remains inchoate and variable.

Family disagreements

Another major source of conflict, as demonstrated in the Oxfam survey, is disagreements within or between families. Such disputes can easily spread to tribes or communities, and in a significant number of cases relate to women, marriage, or sexual relations.[16] Violence can result from the transgression of traditional conjugal norms, such as the provision of dowries, arranged marriage, the custom of a family providing a girl for marriage as compensation for a crime (*baad*), or to resolve a dispute (*badal*), or the practice whereby a widow is expected to marry her deceased husband's brother. Domestic violence against women or severely discriminatory treatment is also often a cause and consequence of family, tribal, or community disputes.

Tribal and ethnic disputes

Afghanistan's people are a patchwork of different ethnicities and in some areas these differences hinder social cohesion. For example, Oxfam researchers in the Ghourian district of Herat reported that 'the biggest reason for conflict is land disputes, which mainly happen between Pashtuns and Tajiks'. Despite a strong sense of national identity, ethnic and tribal affiliations have long been of significance. Inequalities and rivalries between ethnicities existed prior to the Saur Revolution of 1978, but were intensified by conflict as tensions increased and commanders sought to exploit differences for their own ends.

Displacement

Waves of displacement, both internally and beyond, have placed additional pressure on communities that have been forced to accommodate large numbers of newcomers or returnees. Disputes arise when returnees seek to reclaim their land or other property, and social and cultural difficulties can be caused by the fact that many returnees acquire different attitudes or mindsets as a result of their experiences overseas. Some four million Afghans have returned to Afghanistan since 2002, and communities could be placed under more pressure given statements by officials in Pakistan that Afghan refugees, who number some two million in that country, should return in the near future.[17]

The opium trade

The production and trafficking of opium, and the responses to this, can also be highly destabilising for Afghan communities. In particular, aggressive eradication timetables or the provision of development assistance which is conditional on counter-narcotics progress can result in a breakdown in relations between key local actors. The impact is particularly severe where there is a failure to provide genuine alternatives, especially in licit agriculture. Heavy-handed interventions

risk causing hardship and resentment among the ordinary people, and strengthening the hands of local warlords: thus forcing poor people to suffer while powerful traffickers are unaffected.

Aid

Broadly speaking, foreign aid has ameliorated the material impact of conflict, but in some cases it has also undermined community stability. During the 1980s, aid was used by both Soviet occupiers and *mujahadeen* for political purposes, and was at times deliberately used to divide communities. Where aid has been delivered without care or proper consideration of local circumstances it has consolidated existing power imbalances, favoured one community or part of a community over another, been used to extract bribes, or been diverted for criminal or subversive purposes.[18] Some aid programmes, even those of established agencies, are still perceived to be exploited by local power-holders for their own benefit.[19]

Local government capacity

The lack of effective institutions of local government and accepted processes for the management of civil affairs is inherently destabilising; and this is compounded by the fact that Afghan civil society is not yet well established. This, and the lack of both physical and human resources, has rendered local government open to exploitation. Thus, the abuse of power at a local level, for personal, criminal, or other illicit purposes, has also been the cause of local disputes.

Impact of disputes

Oxfam research suggests that while a majority of local-level disputes are resolved peacefully, a significant minority of cases result in violence. In a major study, the UN describes how land disputes 'lead regularly to violence between communities'.[20] Likewise, the ICG concluded that 'local disputes frequently flare into violence and lead to wider problems'.[21]

While the strength and importance of family and tribal affiliations in Afghanistan can be a source of stability, they can also lead to the rapid escalation of disputes. A dispute between two individuals can ultimately lead to conflict between families, extended families, communities, or even tribes.

Violence is perpetrated against both men *and* women; women suffer especially as a result of disputes within families. As the UN concludes, 'millions of Afghan women and girls continue to face systematic discrimination and violence, either in their homes or in their communities'.[22]

Although local disputes attract little attention compared with the resurgent Taliban, they generate fear and uncertainty, and produce an 'environment of insecurity which destroys all quality of life for ordinary civilians'.[23] They also prevent or deter families and communities engaging in joint initiatives, or providing mutual support – so often necessary in impoverished rural areas.

Divided communities are also vulnerable to exploitation or domination by power-holders such as warlords, criminal groups, or the Taliban, in order to strengthen their positions and undermine the government.[24] For example, in 2006 the Taliban took hold of Gezab district in Daikundi. As the UN observes: 'Pashtun tribalism has taken a considerable toll on the overall stability of the district. The rivalry between the Malozai and Nikozai tribes has been used to great advantage by the Taliban. Both tribes wish to exert their control over the district and the Taliban have managed to exacerbate their divisions to further their own agenda'.[25] In Helmand, also in 2006, the Taliban exploited protracted disputes and rivalries between the Alzai, Itzhakzais, and Alikozai tribes in order to help re-establish Taliban authority in the province.[26]

Threats

While this section has focused on the causes and consequences of disputes, real and perceived *threats* also impact on local security. Although threats do not appear to cause disputes at local level, they contribute to an environment of tension and insecurity in which it is difficult to promote
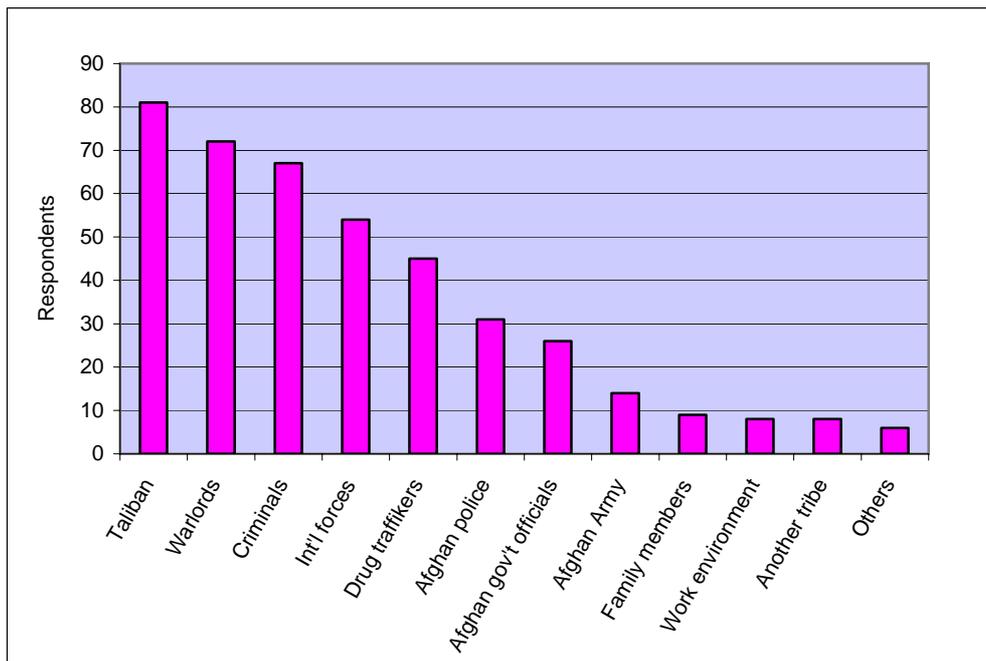
peace, resolve disputes, or strengthen social cohesion. The intention here is not to address this issue in any depth, but to highlight key points.

The Oxfam survey and discussion groups reveal that while the majority of Afghans feel relatively safe in their families and communities, they face a range of threats to their well-being. As indicated in Figure 2 below, the Taliban are not, as is sometimes portrayed, the sole or even predominant threat to Afghans. Rather, the picture is more complex: warlords, criminals, international forces, drug traffickers, and the police all present varying degrees of threat, which are of different types and are variously configured in different localities. Indeed, it appears that in some areas 'the Taliban' itself is more of a network of militant, anti-government groups than a coherent group. As one observer has put it, 'the war in Afghanistan is not against a monolithic Taliban movement. In much of the country it is entwined with older struggles rooted in tribalism.'[27]

This study does not seek to examine how communities are impacted by and respond to major security threats; nor does it examine the relationship between threats and disputes, both of which merit further research. However, this research does at least indicate that in many areas there is no single major threat or cause of conflict, and that to be effective, measures to address these threats must be relevant to local circumstances.

Figure 2: Oxfam Security Survey: greatest threats to security[28]

The graph shows, for each issue, how many respondents believed this issue constituted a major threat to their security.
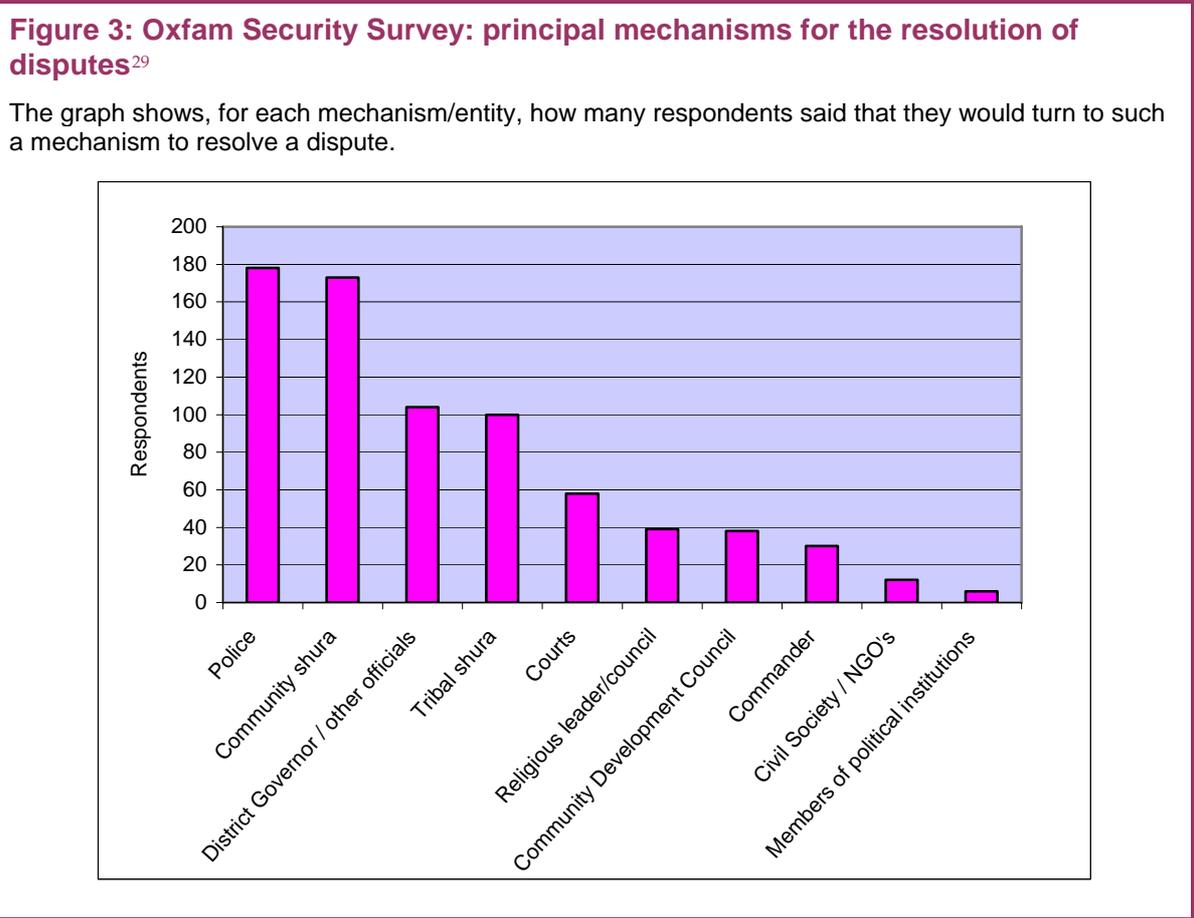
Existing mechanisms for dispute resolution and conflict management

Having identified that many of the causes of insecurity originate and escalate from a community level, the question, then, is how do communities address and resolve these tensions or disputes?

Formal mechanisms

In terms of formal state institutions, the Oxfam survey (Figure 3) shows that police are often consulted to help resolve conflicts. This is particularly true in urban areas, where there is a much larger police presence. The involvement of police appears to reflect the fact that disputes either involve violence or have the potential to turn violent. Focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews also reveal that people tend to approach the police either for the short-term physical control and management of a dispute or when alternative means of resolving the dispute have failed. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether there is sufficient awareness among policy makers of the extent to which local police have a dispute-resolution role and are trained accordingly.

Figure 3: Oxfam Security Survey: principal mechanisms for the resolution of disputes[29]

The graph shows, for each mechanism/entity, how many respondents said that they would turn to such a mechanism to resolve a dispute.

Local government institutions suffer from a lack of capacity, and in some cases legitimacy, to be in a position to resolve disputes authoritatively. However, the survey indicates that where district governors have popular respect, they are often called upon for this purpose.

Certain community disputes are not suitable for judicial resolution, but even where national courts *are* appropriate, they are not frequently used. Courts have limited national presence and most

Afghans tend to regard them as slow, expensive, and in some cases corrupt. Many judges are insufficiently qualified or informed to administer local justice – a recent report suggests that only about half of judges hold degrees in law or *sharia*, and over a third have not completed their training. [30] There is also a backlog of up to 6,000 cases awaiting adjudication.[31] For these reasons, as the Oxfam survey shows, the courts tend to be a last resort for the resolution of serious or long-running disputes.

Informal mechanisms

Any individual decision as to whether to use formal or informal mechanisms of dispute resolution undoubtedly depends on a wide range of factors, which differ from one community to another, as well as the nature of the dispute. For example, for serious crimes such as murder, it is apparent that formal state courts are preferred.[32]

However, the Oxfam survey indicates that overall the single most popular mechanism for the resolution of disputes is community or tribal councils of elders (usually known as *jirgas* or *shuras*). These councils of elders (which, in this report, shall be referred to collectively as *shuras*) have a variable and *ad hoc* membership, comprising elders and others with relative wealth, influence, or power in the locality, such as mullahs. They rarely include women, youth, or the poorest members of the community. They have a degree of legitimacy and institutional constancy but fail to be properly representative or inclusive, and members generally have little or no training in dispute resolution or conflict management. They tend to apply customary laws, such as *pushtanwali*, or *sharia* law.

Comparatively, *shuras* are perceived as being more effective than formal state mechanisms: in the Asia Foundation 2007 survey, over 75 per cent of respondents agreed that *shuras* were fair and trusted, followed local norms and values, and were effective at delivering justice; whereas just 57–58 per cent believed the same of state courts.[33] In the AIHCR survey, 58 per cent of people said that state institutions had failed to help them resolve problems, whereas just 13 per cent said that *shuras* had failed to help them.[34] Indeed, the Afghan government has recognised the positive elements of traditional institutions in its 'Justice for All' strategy of 2005.[35]

Consistent with these findings, research commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) suggests that when *shuras* address disputes, the most common outcomes are peace between the disputants and compensation for the victim,[36]

However, *shuras* lack agreed processes, systems, or rules, and usually adopt an authoritarian approach. Thus, although *shuras* are the preferred method of dispute resolution, they sometimes act in a way that either fails to resolve disputes fairly, or neglects their underlying causes, which could lay the seeds for future disputes or violence. *Shuras* are almost solely *reactive* rather than *proactive*; and in some cases their composition alone can aggravate socio-cultural tensions. It is also of grave concern that in a significant proportion of disputes addressed by *shuras* the outcome is *baad*.[37]

Modern *shura* structures, such as elected Community Development Councils (CDCs) under the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), of which there are some 16,000 nationwide, are more representative but can at the same time be hampered by a lack of local legitimacy, and tend to be associated with government. Although a recent bylaw gives CDCs a role in consensual dispute resolution, they are task-orientated and have been used predominantly for the channelling of aid rather than as mechanisms for peacebuilding. This perhaps explains why only a small proportion of respondents in the Oxfam survey said that they would turn to CDCs for the resolution of disputes.

Local mechanisms

In the Oxfam survey, roughly equal numbers of respondents said they would use formal and informal mechanisms of dispute resolution. However, when first preferences are taken into account, it is clear that a majority of respondents in the Oxfam survey would turn first to *shuras* and

elders before using formal mechanisms. For example, a resident of Angeel district of Herat province told us: 'We have a local *shura* where people are trying to solve their problems and sometimes it is *arbabs* (landlords), or the elders, or the head of the *shura,* who solves the problem, but if not then they will go to the police'. In a different part of the same district, we were told: 'If there is a problem or conflict, first people try to solve their problems through the *shura*, and then go to the district governor, because we trust the *shura* to solve our problems with justice'.

Oxfam's research confirms that preferred mechanisms of dispute resolution are almost always *local*, involving community institutions, such as *shuras*, and to a lesser degree, local police or officials, such as the district governor.

These findings are confirmed by the AIHRC survey which found that 55 per cent of people used traditional or informal mechanisms to resolve problems, and 38 per cent used formal state mechanisms of the court, government, or police.[38] The Asia Foundation survey from 2006 indicated a strong overall bias in favour of informal mechanisms of dispute resolution, finding that 70 per cent of people would approach local community or tribal elders or the *shura*. [39] However, the Asia Foundation's 2007 survey differs from that of 2006, and is broadly similar to the findings of the Oxfam survey.[40]

Despite the centrality of local institutions and individuals in resolving community disputes, few resources have been devoted by the international community or Afghan government to building community capacities for doing this in a way which is fair, effective, and sustainable. Historically, the role of NGOs 'has been primarily to mitigate some of the hardships caused by the conflict, rather than address underlying causes or support social capital'.[41] Donors have also tended to support projects which yield rapid and visible results, rather than give support to longer-term processes whose benefits are less tangible.

Local peacebuilding work is currently being undertaken by a small number of national and international organisations in Afghanistan, with very positive impact in terms of the resolution and prevention of conflict, as will be examined later in this report. Some larger NGOs have also incorporated peacebuilding into their broader development work; for instance, as part of the NSP. But localised peacebuilding is not a component of the Interim Afghan National Development Strategy. What is currently being done is fragmented both geographically and structurally, and benefits only a tiny fraction of the Afghan population. Moreover, the overwhelming focus of donors remains on material and physical support, with visible results, rather than the promotion of social or institutional capacity-building at a local level.[42]

Peacebuilding

What is peacebuilding?

As recently recognised by the United Nations High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, peace and security cannot be considered in isolation from development and human rights. Thus, to some extent all of the political, state-building, reconstruction, and development work in Afghanistan can be considered as peacebuilding work. Activities that more directly seek to promote peace have been defined from a theoretical perspective as either political, structural, or social.

Political peacebuilding is concerned with high-level political or diplomatic arrangements, usually to bring conflict to an end or to prevent an impending conflict. Structural peacebuilding focuses on creating structures, institutions, and systems that support a peace culture, and often involves promotion of more equitable and participatory systems of governance. Social peacebuilding seeks to influence attitudes, behaviours, and values by creating a social infrastructure or fabric which promotes peace. In practice, however, different forms of peacebuilding are often connected and overlapping in form and effect, and all seek to strengthen the prospects for peace, and decrease the likelihood of violence.

Community peacebuilding

Community peacebuilding is predominantly both social and structural. It is a participatory, bottom-up approach, founded on the premise that people are the best resources for building and sustaining peace. It posits that the promotion of peace must be undertaken not only at the highest levels but also at a local level, with families, tribes, and communities, where disputes can escalate to violent conflict.

Community peacebuilding aims to develop trust, safety, and social cohesion within and between communities; to strengthen social and cultural capacities to resolve disputes and conflict; and to promote inter-ethnic and inter-group interaction and dialogue. It aims to *prevent* conflict and achieve conditions which reduce community vulnerabilities to violence from internal or external causes; and ultimately, it seeks to influence attitudes and behaviours through promoting values of peace and tolerance.

The means of achieving this is through strengthening the capacity of community institutions, especially *shuras*, to resolve disputes through mediation, negotiation, and conflict resolution; supporting civil-society involvement in peace and development; and promoting peace education. Community peacebuilding promotes restorative justice, in that it seeks to provide restitution to victims and to restore relationships between offenders and victims.

Peacebuilding is not about imposing solutions, or preconceived ideas or processes. It involves self-analysis and helps support communities to develop their own means of strengthening social cohesion and of building capacities to reach solutions that are peaceful and just. It aims to encourage gradual and progressive change in traditional community institutions, for them to become fairer, more representative, and more constructive.

Community peacebuilding promotes inclusive partnerships between people, institutions, and civil society. It is not a fixed or defined activity, but is an ongoing social process that adapts to local circumstances and seeks to incorporate peacebuilding values, skills, and techniques into all aspects of governance and development work.

Community peacebuilding in practice

Impact

What impact does community peacebuilding have?

Community peacebuilding has been carried out with much success by local and international organisations in a range of conflict and post-conflict countries, such as Cambodia, Viet Nam, and Nepal. Oxfam has been implementing peacebuilding and conflict-management programmes since the early 1990s in northern Kenya, where disputes often arise over scarce resources. The programme works with communities, partners, officials, and peace and development committees in 14 districts and focuses on enhancing and improving traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms. It also supports initiatives of the National Steering Committee on national policy, advocacy, and co-ordination of peacebuilding, and a peace and development network (PeaceNet).

As a result of this programme in northern Kenya there has been a marked reduction in conflict, and more peaceful coexistence among pastoralists. The capacity of local and national partners, communities, government officials, and NGOs to work on conflict prevention and peacebuilding has been enhanced, and their co-ordination improved. More effective, local approaches to address the root causes of conflict have been recognised and supported by the government and the National Steering Committee. The programme helped to sustain many years of peace in northern Kenya before the recent upheaval which followed the disputed election, and reports from Oxfam field staff in Kenya suggest that the work may be helping to contain the current violence.

The government has incorporated peacebuilding and conflict-management mechanisms into training curricula for administrative and security personnel. Additionally, harmonised guidelines have been developed for the operation of district peace structures, and best practices disseminated through PeaceNet. Oxfam is implementing similar projects, with pastoralist education as an entry point, in East Africa (Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Sudan), West Africa (Mali and Niger), and South America.

A number of highly effective community peacebuilding programmes have been undertaken by various organisations in Afghanistan, as described later in this section. The impact of this work depends on where and how the programmes are designed and implemented, the local context, and many other factors; however, some key outcomes, which are often interconnected, are highlighted below.

Increased resolution of disputes

The most direct impact of peacebuilding work is an increase in the number of disputes which are resolved. For example, the Afghan peacebuilding organisation, CPAU, has successfully helped to resolve a range of disputes between families, community factions, and commanders. In particular, CPAU has been able to facilitate the resolution of marriage disputes, long-running tribal feuds, and competing claims for land and water resources. Similarly, Oxfam staff in two districts in north-east Badakhshan have observed significantly higher levels of dispute resolution, after less than two years of peace work. In Kharistan, Badgis province, the head of the peace *shura* echoed many others spoken to in the course of this research, observing that by first analysing disputes and using a mediation approach, they had been able to resolve protracted disputes.[43]

Lower levels of violence

Peacebuilding has led to a marked reduction in the incidence of violence, which is partly due to the increased resolution of disputes. One Afghan NGO, SDO, has helped to resolve an impressive number of violent disputes, including a conflict of 25 years in Farah province between two neighbours and their factions which had caused the deaths of eight people. In Baghdis two groups had been skirmishing since the 1990s, killing 30 people. SDO brought the two groups together for

the first time and conducted peace work with them, after which they said that if they had been given this support in the beginning the killings could have been avoided.[44] An independent evaluation of SDO's peacebuilding work in western Afghanistan concluded that 'inspirational achievements have been made within a very short time period, with concrete outcomes and impact'.[45] The evaluators observed that 'once initial suspicions are overcome, the new peace *shuras* have quickly set up structures, systems and peace-building mechanisms, [and] are successfully implementing their own violent conflict resolution and prevention strategies'.[46]

Lower levels of domestic violence

There is strong evidence that peacebuilding programmes have led to improved attitudes towards women and lower levels of domestic violence. One SDO peace *shura* in Badghis, for instance, ended a long tradition of forced marriages in the community; another determined that beating of wives and children was no longer allowed.[47] Given the extent to which such practices are entrenched in parts of Afghanistan, these achievements are nothing short of extraordinary. CPAU, also, has found that its programmes have brought about a reduction in domestic violence; in particular, the resolution of a small number of individual cases was found to have a positive knock-on effect on the wider community.

Lower levels of violence amongst children

Peace education has helped to bring about more peaceful relations between children and adolescents. SDO, for example, has developed a peace-education curriculum for grades one to 12, covering primary, secondary, and high schools, and ensures a peace education component runs through its development activities. Peace education now forms part of the official national education curriculum.

Improved social relations

Peacebuilding programmes in Afghanistan have helped to strengthen community cohesion, and relations within and between communities. While they can rarely expunge grievances accumulated over years or decades, they have helped to improve understanding between different ethnic groups, especially in areas where one group is in a minority, which has reduced tensions and allowed for more positive interaction. For example, in Gazni province exposure visits by *shura* members to different ethnic communities, lasting several days, have helped to strengthen relations between Hazara and Pashtun people.

Stronger resilience to external threats or events

Peacebuilding has enabled communities to resist or minimise militant interference. For example, peace *shuras* established by CPAU in a district of Wardak province helped communities to present a unified front to militants and thus for several months prevented them from dominating the area. Regrettably, this could not be sustained as the militants had taken control of neighbouring areas; but it is indicative of what the impact of more widespread peacebuilding could have been, especially if undertaken in conjunction with other measures such as strengthening and improving local policing and governance.

Peacebuilding has also helped communities to respond peacefully to external events which might otherwise have triggered violence. For example, CPAU *shuras* played an important role in ensuring a peaceful response to the publication of the Danish cartoons of the prophet in February 2006.

Expansion of development activity

The resolution of major disputes can help to establish an environment in which development can take place. In a district of Wardak province, CPAU's work helped to facilitate an end to a long-standing feud between rival commanders which had prevented the delivery of any international assistance to the area for several years. In another case, prior to national elections, peace *shuras* in Badakhshan province facilitated the provision of civic education to areas which had previously resisted such work.

Successful reintegration of returnees

Peacebuilding has helped to facilitate the reintegration of returnees. For example, in a number of locations the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) provides assistance to refugees and displaced people for the resolution of disputes. SDO, supported by The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has implemented a 'coexistence initiative' which provides a range of assistance to returnees in two districts of Kabul.

Mitigation of oppression

Peacebuilding has enhanced community capacities to mitigate the impact of oppression. For example, in Jaghori district in Hazarajat, strong and inclusive community institutions, with shared values and considered strategies for preserving the peace, had considerable success in mitigating the impact of Taliban occupation, protecting women, retaining basic education for girls, and preserving community cohesion.[48]

Local peacebuilding in Afghanistan

The following section outlines some of the actors currently engaged in local peacebuilding in Afghanistan.[49] This outline is not definitive, and there are other NGOs that undertake such work, in some cases as part of their role as facilitating partners under the NSP.

Co-operation for Peace and Unity (CPAU)

CPAU is one of the leading community peacebuilding organisations in Afghanistan.[50] It engages primarily in capacity-building of existing or newly established community institutions to resolve conflict and promote peace. Its practical approach to peacebuilding prioritises long-term solutions and sustained efforts for developing and strengthening local mechanisms for dealing with violence. The organisation believes that this requires a participatory approach to enable community members to understand the root causes of their problems and to help them find effective solutions. It has 76 peacebuilding staff, of whom just six are based in the main office in Kabul, and its total budget for peacebuilding activities in 2008 is $800,000.

CPAU's approach comprises the following key activities. 'Counterparts' for peace are identified – for example youth groups, *shuras,* CDCs, schools, provincial councils – and partnerships are developed. CPAU staff then undertake capacity-building programmes which focus on participatory learning through community workshops, and they give support for the development and implementation of peace plans. They provide ongoing coaching, together with on-site teaching. Inter-ethnic 'exchange and exposure' visits are arranged, and efforts are devoted to strengthening the involvement of civil society. Its capacity-building activities cover essential concepts and analysis of peace and development; skills, such as communication, negotiation, mediation; and strategies, such as conflict management.

Sanayee Development Organization (SDO)

SDO has a similar approach to CPAU and has undertaken highly successful work through the establishment of 88 peace *shuras* in eight districts of four provinces of Afghanistan. It focuses on the capacity-building of community institutions to resolve conflict and promote peace. SDO staff implement peacebuilding workshops; produce a monthly peace journal; and promote peace education. SDO has 15 peacebuilding staff and its budget for peacebuilding activities in 2007 was $340,000.

According to the evaluators, 'this is a creative and innovative initiative at the forefront of enabling and supporting what is truly wanted by Afghan partners and communities […] it is clear that this is an area that people see as absolutely crucial to their needs. […] People voiced that they do not want emergency or physical inputs but preferred this type of support which empowers their own means of development'.[51]

Oxfam–Afghanaid

In conjunction with Afghanaid, Oxfam has undertaken a major programme of community peacebuilding in Badakhshan province. It provided six rounds of peacebuilding training for programme staff and community leaders. This led to the establishment of conflict-resolution committees which work closely with community institutions on peace and conflict management. Since its recent inception, the programme has already reached more than 40 target groups, some 3,000 people directly, and over 17,000 indirectly. As a result, communities are now better equipped to deal with disputes, manage conflicts, and initiate their own peace and development programmes. A new round of training for staff working on the NSP is being undertaken by Oxfam, based on the Oxfam–Afghanaid 'Working Manual for Peace-building and Conflict Management'.

Tribal Liaison Office (TLO)

The TLO was established in 2003 and works on tribal issues in Logar, Kabul, Kandahar, Helmand, and Uruzgan. Its mission is to engage with tribal institutions, supporting them better to serve their communities, and facilitate the formal integration of communities and their traditional structures within Afghanistan's governance framework.[52] It also works to promote better dialogue and co-operation between tribes and with the government; build the capacity of *shuras* to improve peace and security; facilitate reconstruction and development; and improve understanding about tribal structures and decision-making.

Afghan Women's Skills Development Center (AWSDC)

This centre was established by women in 1999 to reduce the suffering of women and children through the promotion of peace and by spreading awareness of human rights. With the support of Trocaire, and in collaboration with CPAU and SDO, the centre has implemented programmes to establish and support six peace committees, with one central women's *shura*, in two districts of Parwan province. The programmes focus on promoting the economic independence of women as a means of escaping violence.

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

As mentioned above, the UNHCR coexistence initiative consists of participatory projects, implemented by SDO, to assist refugees and internally displaced people to integrate into communities.[53] The projects also seek to strengthen community institutions, promote group ownership of projects, and work with local government and other actors. They involve monitoring, capacity-building, training, peace education, protection alliance/networks, direct intervention, mediation, and advocacy. In each case the work is preceded by extensive conflict analysis and participatory needs assessments.

Norwegian Refugee Council, German Development Service (DED), UNICEF, and UN Habitat

As indicated above, NRC has established eight information and legal aid centres. These centres provide assistance and support to refugees and internally displaced people with civil disputes which can arise when they return. They also engage in enhancing the capacities of communities to resolve such disputes. Mobile legal teams provide support in other provinces.

The German government's civil peace service programme offers support to media and NGOs working on peace education and conflict resolution. Separately, UNICEF has been working with the Ministry of Education to establish a Centre for Peace Education, and has given assistance on peacebuilding elements of the curriculum. UN Habitat also incorporates peacebuilding into its family and community rehabilitation programmes.

Afghan Civil Society Forum (ACSF)

ACSF arose out of the first Afghan Civil Society Forum in Germany in late 2001. It is a partner-based organisation committed to encouraging the active participation of civil society through

targeted civic education, advocacy, reconciliation, peace, and capacity-building programmes. In 2006 it implemented capacity-building programmes in peacebuilding for 14 Afghan partner organisations which operate in 14 different provinces, including in Helmand, Nimroz, and Paktia. In 2007 these organisations then conducted peacebuilding workshops in two districts of each of the provinces in which they work.

Afghan Civil Society Organizations Network for Peace (ACSONP)

ACSONP was established in January 2005, with the primary purpose of improving co-ordination among Afghan organisations working in the field of peacebuilding, and organising national events to promote a culture of peace.

Its current members are:

Afghan Civil Society Forum (ACSF)
Afghan Peace and Democracy Act (APDA)
Afghan Women's Skills Development Center (AWSDC)
Afghan Youth Foundation for Unity (AYFUn)
Cooperation Center for Afghanistan (CCA)
Education Training Center for Poor Women and Girls of Afghanistan (ECW)
Mediothek Afghanistan
Sanayee Development Organization (SDO)
Training Human Rights Association (THRA)

On 20 June 2006, ACSONP initiated the first Afghan Peace Day in more than 30 provinces of Afghanistan, which constituted Afghanistan's biggest single peace campaign organised by civil society. ACSONP also organised International Peace Day events on 21 September 2007, which took place in all Afghan provinces with the exception of Zabul, and which received widespread media coverage.

Towards a national strategy

It is evident that community peacebuilding in Afghanistan is highly effective in promoting peace, stability, and an environment which fosters development. However, only a tiny proportion of Afghanistan's population, perhaps less than one per cent, benefit from local-level peace work, which has been undertaken on an *ad hoc,* fragmentary, and un-co-ordinated basis. Collaboration between NGOs engaged in peacebuilding has proved elusive, perhaps due to lack of time and resources, and competition over limited donor funding for peacebuilding projects.

It is essential for donors to provide greater support for peacebuilding programmes so that they reach and benefit more Afghan communities. This requires building the capacities and expanding the operations of peacebuilding organisations and the peacebuilding units of broader organisations. As an immediate first step, donors should commission assessments of the current capacities of these organisations and the scope for expanding their work.

It is also essential for NGOs and other civil-society actors engaged in peacebuilding to lead the development and implementation of a national strategy for community peacebuilding.

As discussed earlier in this report, the causes of disputes and of violence, and their interrelationships, undoubtedly vary between regions and communities. Effective peacebuilding must be adapted to local circumstances and be led by local people. A national strategy would not conflict with this: it would allow for flexibility at provincial level, and would not affect project adaptability at community level. Moreover, the strategy would be at macro level and is essential to ensure the systematic expansion of peacebuilding activities; share best practices, institute monitoring, and ensure high standards; spread awareness; mainstream peacebuilding into government institutions; and enhance co-ordination between all relevant actors.

The first stage in developing a national strategy could be a national conference on community peacebuilding, attended by experts and NGO practitioners from Afghanistan and overseas, as well as government officials, parliamentarians, UN representatives, and others. It would aim to establish a broad framework for a national strategy, and a steering group, preferably with representation from the government, civil society, academia, and religious organisations, which would oversee the development and implementation of the strategy.

If such a strategy is not included in the Afghan National Development Strategy, due to be finalised early this year, it could at least be endorsed by the Afghan government and national assembly.

The national conference could be followed by a series of parallel provincial conferences, to elaborate how the strategy would be adapted to provincial conditions and to establish a parallel series of provincial-level steering groups. These conferences would ensure the national strategy incorporates appropriate provincial variations.

Consideration should be given to strengthening and expanding the existing Afghan peacebuilding network of NGOs and civil society, which could play an important role in driving the process forward. With sufficient support there may even be the potential for the network to develop into a peace movement. Ideas for this could perhaps be drawn from the Oxfam South Asia 'We Can' campaign in terms of the mobilisation of large-scale public support.

Potential components of a national strategy are outlined below, and would include: phased capacity-building, education, awareness raising, mainstreaming, reporting, research, information collation, monitoring, and co-ordination with state institutions.

Phased capacity-building

One of the first tasks of a national steering group would be to agree a comprehensive training manual, which could draw heavily on existing materials. The steering group would arrange for peacebuilding experts and organisations to institute the training of capacity builders, who would

operate at district level. These individuals would, sequentially, train other capacity builders and the programme could be expanded to an increasing number of districts over a given timeframe.

For example, it might be possible, optimistically, for the programme to be introduced nationwide over a five-year period. As there are approximately 400 districts in Afghanistan, the programme could be initiated in 60 districts in the first year, and 70, 80, 90, and 100 new districts in each of the following years. (Clearly, it would not be possible to introduce the programme into those areas of the south and south-east where there is intensive fighting.) Given that there are 34 provinces, each with a varying number of districts, this translates to an achievable provincial target for the programme to be introduced into one to three new districts annually.

In each new district, the first step would be an analysis of security conditions to establish key priorities and opportunities for peacebuilding work, variably known as a conflict map, audit, or baseline survey. Initially, the programme would be introduced in a limited number of areas of a district, to be consolidated, and expanded into further areas over time.

Key targets for capacity-building would be:

- community institutions (peace *shuras* for large villages or clusters of villages, or CDCs; district *shuras* and provincial councils);
- civil society (community organisations, youth and women's groups, religious leaders; including local and national networks, with support from international networks);
- key individuals, community leaders, and mullahs;
- local government officials at district and provincial level, especially district governors;
- the Afghan national police, especially at district level.

Some organisations such as SDO and Oxfam have included peacebuilding training for CDCs. There may be a case for ensuring the formal inclusion of peacebuilding training for all such Councils, within the framework of the NSP.[54] The key objective would be to build the capacities of existing institutions, so that they could take on the additional role of a 'peace *shura*' or 'peace and development committee'.

The process could be replicated so that peace councils are established at the level of clusters of communities and districts, in order to address disputes between tribes and communities. The Afghan constitution envisages the election of district councils, and it may be that these institutions could take on a peacebuilding role.

A participatory, inclusive, and flexible approach

The approach would be to build long-term peacebuilding and conflict-management capacities through participatory training, workshops on key issues, exposure visits to existing programmes, and ongoing coaching, combined with monitoring and evaluation. Minimal resources would be required to support small projects or peace-related events or activities. The programmes would be responsive rather than prescriptive, incorporating the flexibility to adapt according to local conditions. Rather than imposing values or preconceived processes, they would encourage self-analysis and would focus on building human capital.

The programmes should be as inclusive as possible, particularly in respect of women. This may pose challenges in some areas of Afghanistan, particularly in the south, and a strategy for securing female participation and capacity-building could be developed. Where female participation in the *shura* is blocked, dedicated women's peace groups could be established (as undertaken by the Afghan Women's Skills Development Center), and dialogues initiated with locally influential figures. In light of past experience, careful consideration must be given to ensuring that such groups have a central role in community peace and development, with strong links to male-dominated institutions.

Gender training could be incorporated into peacebuilding programmes to increase future prospects for female involvement. At the same time, peacebuilding training could also be provided to women through other channels, and could form part of existing media, vocational, literacy, and teacher training.[55] Strategies could perhaps draw on the experience and factors for success of women's peace groups in other states, such as in Uganda or Sudan.

At the same time, efforts must also be made to incorporate local religious leaders, who often have considerable influence and authority, as well as young people, who comprise the vast majority of the Afghan population.

Education

A number of organisations have already produced peace-education courses for children; CPAU and SDO, in particular, have developed a full curriculum for grades one to 12. This has been tested in schools in Pakistan and is currently being taught as supplementary material in around 100 education centres in Kabul and Ghazni provinces, alongside the national curriculum.

The development agency GTZ has also recently facilitated the inclusion of peacebuilding into the national curriculum. Measures should be taken to monitor and evaluate how successful this is in practice. A working group comprising national and international experts on peacebuilding, together with educationalists, could seek to ensure that peacebuilding is being taught effectively, and that it is fully incorporated into teacher training.

Awareness-raising: general and specific

Awareness campaigns, involving publications, events, and other initiatives, could be organised to target the public, government officials, and elected representatives at national and provincial level. These campaigns could emphasise the value of peacebuilding and encourage inclusive participation.

Separately, part of the strategy could consider ways of ensuring awareness within communities of peacebuilding activities, as well as their purpose and outcomes.[56]

Mainstreaming

Projects would be developed to mainstream peacebuilding into other relevant sectors of government, particularly those connected to governance; and into national priority programmes, such as the NSP. For every project and for each relevant government department, there should be focal points, at national, provincial, and district levels, with clear responsibilities to promote peacebuilding.

Reporting, research, information collation, and monitoring

A new body could be established (or perhaps it could be part of the AIHRC) with responsibility for monitoring the outcomes of *shuras*, to ensure that they are consistent with the Afghan constitution and with international human-rights laws. There should be comprehensive monitoring of *baad* and other practices which discriminate against women, to ensure that measures are taken by the government to address such abuses.

A separate body could be established, perhaps linked to an academic institute such as Kabul University and a think-tank like the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, to collate information on community peacebuilding activities, monitor progress, evaluate success, and promote best practice. Preferably it would have a small secretariat in each province which would work closely with the provincial steering group. Links could be established between this body and international academies/think-tanks specialising in peacebuilding.

Co-ordination with state institutions

Legislation or official guidelines should address the role of informal justice. A recent UNDP paper concluded that informal mechanisms of dispute resolution 'may be crucial' in post-conflict countries; and that 'informal systems are usually the primary means of resolving disputes in many countries, as such their effectiveness determines whether they can be resolved in a peaceful way or whether they will descend into violence'. It argues that engaging with informal justice mechanisms is essential for enhancing access to justice for poor and disadvantaged people, as part of a broader, holistic justice strategy which covers both formal and informal sectors.[57]

More specifically, UNDP has recently argued for a hybrid model of justice in Afghanistan, whereby institutional links are established between the formal and informal mechanisms of justice; and for state regulation of the latter.[58] This could bring clarity to current arrangements, which are diverse and un-co-ordinated, and could help avoid abuses such as *baad*, which occur under the informal system. As the Afghan government stated in January 2008, 'Afghanistan's *jirga* and *shura* systems can contribute, with assistance and oversight from the formal system, to resolve disputes fairly, efficiently and according to constitutional principles.'[59]

More broadly, legislation or guidelines could set out the relations between *shuras* and state institutions, and would stipulate when and how issues should be referred to local government, political entities, or the courts. Given the lack of public and official awareness of the roles and responsibilities of sub-national state institutions, it might be useful for these measures to be included in the awareness-raising strategy referred to above. They may need to incorporate a degree of flexibility for variations in local and provincial approaches.

Donor and Afghan government commitments

The strategy should set out the commitments that are required from donors and the Afghan government for its successful implementation. Donors should be prepared to make long-term financial commitments to support the expansion of peacebuilding activities and the other elements of a national strategy; for example, expert technical assistance in capacity-building or the establishment of a body for research and monitoring. The Afghan government, especially relevant ministries, should be willing to endorse the strategy and give it the support it needs.

Challenges

There is no doubt that there would be considerable, but not insurmountable, challenges in developing a national strategy and achieving its implementation. These are set out below.

Intangible results

It is difficult to measure or demonstrate the results of community peacebuilding, given that the focus is on building social and not material capital, and it is impossible to measure the disputes or conflicts which are prevented. This could impact on funding: donors would not have concrete results to present to domestic populations. However, over time, greater security and lower levels of violence should be achieved, and research on past levels of insecurity would allow comparative analysis. Donors could also be made aware of the success of peacebuilding in other developing countries.

Government involvement

In order to ensure the participation of the broadest possible spectrum of individuals in peacebuilding, it is important for it not to be associated with military forces. Thus it could not be undertaken by, or associated with, provincial reconstruction teams. Given negative perceptions of the government in some parts of Afghanistan, especially the south, it would be preferable for the strategy to have wide ownership, rather than being simply considered a *government* programme. Existing community peacebuilding in Afghanistan has been undertaken by a range of actors in conjunction with civil society and local officials. There is no reason why a national strategy couldn't replicate this approach.

Gender

As highlighted above, there may be considerable challenges in incorporating women into peacebuilding programmes and ensuring that peacebuilding includes work to prevent domestic violence. This is not only due to male dominance in Afghan community institutions and in society as a whole, but also the fact that the programme envisages building the capacities of existing community institutions, rather than attempting to establish another layer of institutions.

However, current NGO programmes have managed successfully to promote the involvement of women in peacebuilding, and best practices could be replicated. The evidence that peacebuilding programmes result in improved attitudes towards women, fewer abuses against women, and reduced domestic violence, suggests that when such programmes are combined with other means, such as gender training for existing *shuras* and alternative approaches, the opportunities for female involvement in peacebuilding will expand, as the programmes develop.

Any monitoring mechanism established as part of the national strategy should have as one of its primary responsibilities the duty to monitor the inclusion of women in peacebuilding programmes. In particular, it should identify where women continue to be excluded from peacebuilding, and make recommendations as to remedial action, such as the establishment of women's *shuras*, as well as promote and spread awareness of best practices.

Spoilers

It is possible that influential individuals, such as warlords, commanders, or politicians could perceive peacebuilding as a threat to their positions, and try to impede or influence the work. However, existing programmes have been able to overcome this problem by using various strategies, such as including these individuals in the programme, and there are cases where

warlords have been transformed and taken an active role in peacebuilding. It is also unlikely that the proposed work would be perceived as a major threat, given that the programme would operate primarily at community level.

Diversity

Afghanistan's geographical diversity and the wide range of types of dispute means that the most effective type of peacebuilding will vary according to local circumstances. Although a national strategy would require a unified framework, there is no reason why it shouldn't incorporate flexibility and accommodate local variations. This may even help to facilitate the identification of best practices.

Due to local circumstances, culture, or security conditions there may be variable commitment between districts or provinces to the implementation of the programme. If a proper monitoring and evaluation mechanism is established, this should be able to identify those areas where there are gaps or weaknesses in implementation; it could then propose appropriate remedial steps to the provincial or national steering group.

Lack of implementing partners and human resources

There is a lack of competent implementing partners with experience of peacebuilding and a general lack of qualified and reliable human resources. However, CPAU, SDO, and a number of other organisations have a high level of institutional experience and knowledge of peacebuilding which could be drawn on in order to implement the strategy. Experts from other countries, some of whom have already worked in Afghanistan, could also make a significant contribution.

Security, coverage, and effectiveness

High levels of insecurity will inevitably limit the extent to which the programme can be implemented in south and south-east Afghanistan. However, current peacebuilding programmes are being implemented in insecure areas, which suggests that this could be accomplished on an incremental basis through established techniques such as using local partner organisations, engaging with community and tribal leaders, and demonstrating the value of peacebuilding by implementing the programme in areas adjacent to insecure areas.

Aside from highly insecure areas, in the initial phases of the roll-out of the programme, significant disputes will undoubtedly occur in areas not covered by the programme. However, local steering groups could take steps to identify and prioritise areas where serious disputes have arisen.

Even where peacebuilding is taking place, certain disputes may also prove too difficult for local mechanisms to resolve. But community peacebuilding is not intended to be a panacea: it cannot be expected to resolve all disputes, and nor should it be regarded as a substitute for appropriate judicial, governmental, or political activities.

Weather and access

Afghan physical limitations would apply: access to remote areas would absorb time and resources; weather conditions would prevent work in rural areas during winter. These constraints apply to the majority of Afghan development programmes, whether local or national, but sufficient donor funding could help ameliorate their impact, such as for reliable transportation to remote areas.

Conclusion

There is an urgent need for a recognition that existing measures to promote peace in Afghanistan are not succeeding. This is not only due to the revival of the Taliban. It is also explained by the fact that little has been done to try to ensure that families, communities, and tribes – the fundamental units of Afghan society – get on better with each other.

As Oxfam research shows, for the vast majority of Afghans, problems have local causes, and people turn to local institutions and individuals to resolve them. Yet little work has been done with local institutions and other actors, especially with *shuras*, to enhance their capabilities to promote peace. Peace work at community level strengthens community cohesion, reduces violence, and enhances resistance to militants.

A range of steps are required in order to achieve a lasting national peace in Afghanistan, not least concerted measures to promote better governance, rural development, and the professionalisation of police and security forces. Local peacebuilding is an essential and complementary component of this strategy.

As the ICG has argued recently, the international community should be 'focussing on community outreach to ease local conflicts and fault lines.'[60] Donors should substantially increase their support for NGOs engaged in peacebuilding, and a national strategy for community peacebuilding should be developed, which is phased, flexible, and led by civil society. The Afghan government should provide its full support and co-operation; donors should ensure long-term funding for its implementation. It is five years too late: with increasing levels of insecurity there is no time to lose.

Appendix: Oxfam Security Survey

Table 1: Major causes of insecurity

	Land	Water	Family disputes	Regarding women	Ethnic differences	Differences between communities	Differences between tribes	Commanders	Aid	Taliban or other extremists	Others
Herat	42	27	26	10	9	9	27	6	2	4	12
Nangahar	39	33	28	9	3	3	0	2	4	1	15
Balk	39	42	53	9	2	3	10	2	0	0	2
Gazni	65	59	43	16	6	0	5	7	5	9	2
Daikundi	52	49	12	0	2	7	8	4	0	0	4
Kandahar	14	7	8	5	2	9	7	4	0	0	0
	251	**217**	**170**	**49**	**24**	**31**	**57**	**25**	**11**	**14**	**35**

Table 2: Greatest threats to security

	Taliban	Int: forces	Afghan army	Afghan police	Afghan govt officials	Warlords	Criminal	Drug traffickers	Family members	In working environment	Another tribe	Others
Herat	13	14	7	7	5	12	24	17	3	2	4	3
Nangahar	7	10	0	5	2	6	12	2	1	1	0	0
Balk	11	10	1	4	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0
Gazni	27	6	2	6	11	28	22	22	1	2	1	2
Daikundi	11	0	0	0	2	9	4	3	3	1	3	1
Kandahar	12	14	4	9	6	16	4	1	0	1	0	0
	81	**54**	**14**	**31**	**26**	**72**	**67**	**45**	**9**	**8**	**8**	**6**

Table 3: Principal mechanisms for the resolution of disputes

	Community shura	CDC	Tribal shura	Religious leader/council	Courts	Police	Member of political institutions	Civil society, NGOs	Commanders	District officials
Herat	0	3	5	4	17	22	0	3	8	39
Nangahar	51	4	7	4	3	61	0	0	16	8
Balk	54	3	17	3	1	30	0	0	3	8
Gazni	49	4	42	11	22	57	2	9	1	49
Daikundi	14	25	24	7	10	7	1	0	2	0
Kandahar	5	0	6	10	6	1	3	0	0	0
	173	**39**	**101**	**39**	**59**	**178**	**6**	**12**	**30**	**104**

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Notes

[1] Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board Bi-Annual Report (2006) 'Implementation of the Afghanistan Compact', para 25.

[2] J. Goodhand and and D. Hulme (1999), p 17.

[3] International Crisis Group (2003).

[4] Overseas Development Institute, Humanitarian Policy Group (2003).

[5] See Oxfam International (2008), which outlines Oxfam's recommendations for policy change in a range of areas.

[6] D. Rohde (2007) 'Afghan police are set back as Taliban adapt', *New York Times*, 26 August.

[7] The Asia Foundation (2007), p 27. (This survey involved interviews with 2,263 people from all 34 provinces.)

[8] *Ibid.*, p 28.

[9] Two hundred and seventy-four men and 226 women were interviewed; 242 respondents lived in rural areas, 163 in urban or semi-urban areas; the average age was 36; and just over half of the respondents worked, for whom the average monthly wage was 1050 Afghanis ($21).

[10] United Nations (2007) 'Programme Accessibility Map'. These maps are produced regularly by the UN and set out levels of access to different areas of the country. They are based on an assessment of risk from a broad range of factors, such as political stability, volatility of criminal and illegally armed groups, and insurgent and security forces activity.

[11] Fifty-two and 20 surveys were conducted in Daikundi and Kandahar respectively.

[12] C. Maass (2006), p 25.

[13] Exact figures can be found in the Appendix.

[14] Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (2006), p 16. The survey was conducted with over 8,000 people in 29 provinces.

[15] The Asia Foundation (2007) p 72; The Asia Foundation (2006), p 58. (The 2006 survey involved interviews with 6,226 respondents from 32 provinces.)

[16] The reasons for this are complex, but one important factor is that in Afghan society women have traditionally been regarded as the repository of family honour.

[17] UNHCR (2007) 'Afghanistan At A Glance', Geneva: UNHCR.

[18] See J. Goodhand (2000) and A. Suhrke *et al.* (2003).

[19] M. Suleman and D. Copnall (2006), p 25.

[20] UNDP (2007), p 8.

[21] International Crisis Group *op.cit.*

[22] UNDP *op.cit.*, p 58.

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[26] *The Economist* (2008) 'Afghanistan's Tribal Complexity – In The Dark', 31 January.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Exact figures can be found in the Appendix.

[29] Exact figures can be found in the Appendix.

[30] UNDP *op.cit.*, p 8.

[31] *Ibid.*, p 8.

[32] *Ibid.*, p 74.

[33] The Asia Foundation (2007), p 66.

[34] Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, *op.cit.*, p 17. Similarly, in The Asia Foundation survey, 40 per cent of people said that formal courts were not administering justice well (p 60).

[35] Government of Afghanistan (2005) 'Justice for All: A comprehensive needs analysis: challenges and the way forward for the justice sector in Afghanistan', p 14.

[36] UNDP *op.cit.*, pp 93–4. A UNDP-commissioned survey suggests that 80 per cent of cases handled by *shuras* always or sometimes result in peace, and 50 per cent in compensation for the victim.

[37] *Ibid.*, p 93. According to the survey, up to 30 per cent of disputes handled by *shuras* always or sometimes result in *baad*.

[38] Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, *op.cit.*, pp 16–17.

[39] The Asia Foundation (2006), p 59.

[40] The Asia Foundation (2007), p 71.

[41] J. Goodhand, *op.cit.*, pp 9–10.

[42] C. Maass, *op.cit.*, p 26.

[43] M. Suleman and D. Copnall, *op.cit.*, p 8.

[44] M. Suleman and D. Copnall, *op.cit.*, p 11.

[45] M. Suleman and D. Copnall, *op.cit.*, p 2.

[46] *Ibid.*, p 2.

[47] *Ibid.*, p 27 and p 43.

[48] M. Suleman and S. Williams (2003).

[49] *Ibid.*, pp 5–35.

[50] Co-operation for Peace and Unity (2004); (2006); (2005).

[51] *Ibid.*, p 3 and p 6.

[52] Tribal Liaison Office (2006).

[53] UNHCR (2004).

[54] This proposition may depend on developments which could serve to clarify the legal status, role, and responsibilities of the CDCs.

[55] M. Suleman and D. Copnall, *op.cit.*, p 2 and p 6.

[56] M. Suleman and S. Williams, *op.cit.*

[57] E. Wojkowska (2006), pp 5–6.

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[60] International Crisis Group (2008).

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