Query: Please provide an overview of selected community peacebuilding initiatives in South Asia and their outcomes (with particular focus on Pakistan).

Enquirer: DFID Pakistan

1. Overview

Community peacebuilding initiatives have been developed in several conflict-affected countries. In fragile and (post)conflict-affected settings, community-led processes to peacebuilding can complement state structures and institutions that are often weak in capacity or political will. In South Asia, some interesting examples of community peacebuilding initiatives were found:

- **Pakistan**
  1. Just Peace International’s work on community peacebuilding, including a project funded by The Asia Foundation on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in Peshawar and Abbottabad;
  2. The Asia Foundation’s community policing project in Balochistan; and
  3. PAIMAN’s ‘Let’s Live in Peace’ initiative with women and youth peace groups in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and a few conflict prone districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

- **Afghanistan**
  1. Female participation in community mediation, as part of USAID’s Provincial Strategic Roads programme in Ghanzi Province; and
  2. United States Institute of Peace (USIP) funded studies and pilot programmes, including:
     a. working with community-based structures for traditional dispute resolution in four provinces across Afghanistan (in Nangarhar, Khost, Paktia and Herat); and
     b. the interactions and linkages between the formal and informal justice institutions in two districts of Afghanistan (in Jalalabad and Paktia).

- **Sri Lanka**
Community Peace Councils, funded by World Bank Post-Conflict Funds (PCF), which aim to promote dialogue and end violence by promoting village economic self-sufficiency and democratic self-governance.

- **Nepal**
  The Asia Foundation’s mediation programme, which has trained over 4,000 mediators and has over 14,000 registered cases.

### Outcomes

An Oxfam report (2008) on Community Peacebuilding in Afghanistan emphasises that peacebuilding initiatives that build the capacity of communities, especially jirgas and shuras, can have a range of **“positive, often interconnected outcomes”**, for example:

- 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.

Most community peacebuilding initiatives in South Asia are relatively new. As such, evaluation reports have generally concluded that the timeframe of the project and/or evaluation is too short to observe significant long-term outcomes yet.

Nonetheless, the following outcomes can be identified from the literature consulted in this query:

### Support and acceptance of community initiatives by the police and courts, including increased referral of cases for mediation:

In Pakistan, an evaluation of an alternative dispute resolution initiative in Peshawar and Abbottabad found that police officials were referring most cases to the Muslahathi committee, with courts also referring several cases for resolution. The cases handled by the committee are becoming more serious, with petty nature cases being replaced by land issues and even murder. In Afghanistan, the Liaison Office (2009) found that cooperation between key actors from both formal and informal justice institutions in two research sites had positive outcomes, such as reducing the burden on an overstretched state justice system and strengthening the implementing power of jirga-decisions.

### Buy-in from other government agencies:

In Nepal, for example, there are signs that the Asia Foundation’s community mediation programme is becoming increasingly accepted, not just by the police and courts, but by social workers who regularly refer local disputes to the mediation office. Local government authorities have also put aside funds in their development budgets to support mediation.

### Influencing social attitudes and behaviour:

In Nepal, an evaluation of Search for Common Ground (SFCG)’s programme that aimed to increase youth involvement in peacebuilding and community decision-making found a change in young people’s attitudes and behaviour since

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1 Please note that this query has been unable to find many evaluation reports of community peacebuilding initiatives in South Asia. The evidence presented here includes information from implementing agencies’ websites or in some cases refers to ‘expected’ outcomes.

2 Jirgas and shuras are informal local mechanisms for resolving disputes. Shuras are a Dari word referring to permanent and quasi-permanent local councils. Jirgas are a Pashto term, typically used to describe a gathering of people. It can also mean consultations, or a tribal assembly of elders which takes decisions by consensus, particularly among the Pashtun people, but also in other ethnic groups near them; they are most common in Afghanistan and among the Pashtuns in Pakistan near its border with Afghanistan.

3 Muslahathi committees are local level institutions comprised of elected local representatives responsible for dispute resolution and conflict mitigation.
the baseline survey. Young people also felt more confident, able to communicate with adults in the community and to get involved in peacebuilding activities, conflict resolution, social services, and civic education.

**Changing perceptions of the role of women in society:** One of the outcomes of the community mediation program in Nepal, for example, is helping to “recast women, who sometimes have a limited role in public life, into trusted leaders”. Similarly, a USAID-funded road programme in Ghazni Province in Afghanistan found that women were the ‘surprise peacemakers’, with 660 women playing an important role in arbitrating family and community conflicts, including long-standing conflicts over pathway access. Despite initial doubts, women’s involvement in the programme was changing people’s attitudes: “They saw women as having the skill and power to solve social problems” (USAID, 2010).

**Extension and expansion of the project:** Most initiatives are small and limited in geographical scope. One positive outcome is the expansion of the project. The Asia Foundation, for example, has received funding from the Australian Embassy to extend a successful alternative dispute resolution project in Peshawar and Abbottabad to five other districts in Pakistan.

**Requests from other organisations for capacity building:** As a result of increased visibility, other organisations (including CSOs, NGOs, and international stakeholders) have asked implementing agencies to train them in community building and mediation techniques. For example, as a result of the positive publicity in Just Peace International’s (JPI) work on alternative dispute resolution, UNICEF contacted JPI about the possibility of applying conflict transformation methods as part of a youth and justice project.

Examples of lessons learned or challenges to the effectiveness of community peacebuilding initiatives can also be found in the literature identified in this query. Several studies note the difficulties of reaching poor and socially excluded groups. For example, the United States Institute of Peace advises that the international community in Afghanistan should not assume that traditional bodies “fairly represent their respective communities” and recommends conducting more research on local dynamics before starting projects. The need for a genuine bottom-up, participatory approach to community peacebuilding also comes through as a message from the research, with warnings about decreased effectiveness when traditional bodies are created or promoted too heavily by the international community or national government actors, as has been the case in some of the initiatives in Afghanistan.

### 2. Pakistan


This final report details Just Peace International’s role in assisting, advocating and empowering local communities, organisations, government and civil society in Peshawar and Abboobad to work towards justice and peace through conflict transformation methods (funded by The Asia Foundation).

Two case studies are given of success stories and the following examples of project impact are provided:

- Establishment of Muslahathi committee office in the police station, where community elders can perform their duties on a daily basis
- Referral of most cases by police officials to the Muslahathi committee, with several cases being referred by the courts for resolution in Abbotabad
Non-political committee, with little involvement by police apart from referral and help in record keeping

- Behaviour changes in police and community elders, as a result of training
- Cases handled by the committee becoming more serious, with petty nature cases being replaced by land issues and even murder
- Extension of the project by The Asia Foundation to 5 other districts, due to the success of the project, which will be funded by the Australian Embassy.


This progress report covers Just Peace International (JPI)'s work on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in Peshawar and Abbottabad in early 2009. Examples of activities include:

- A short audio play on restorative justice, broadcast on Radio Pakistan;
- Informal resolution of petty cases at the mediation centre in Peshawar;
- Publication of an English version of a book on restorative justice.

The report also provides data on resolution of petty issues at the level of police stations in the project area. It also describes some of the (unexpected) outcomes of the project:

- **Increased visibility and interest in restorative justice by other organisations, the print and electronic media.** For example, UNICEF contacted JPI to help it develop structures for diversion of juveniles from the formal criminal justice system in two Districts, Mardan and Peshawar, by applying conflict transformation methods of family jirga conferencing.

- **Increased demand for capacity building in restorative justice across Pakistan.** For example, JPI have trained staff from the FATA Rural Development Project (FRDP) - a joint venture of federal government and Asian Development Bank for the socio-economic development of the deprived communities of FATA. Twenty-five staff members including line department's personnel from FATA secretariat and 125 community activists from FATA were trained through 6 trainings in the reporting period.

CPDI, 2010, ‘Executive Summary’, End of Project Evaluation: Community Policing Project (Balochistan) The Asia Foundation (TAF), Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI), Islamabad

This executive summary comes from an evaluation report of a community policing project, designed and implemented by The Asia Foundation with support from the British High Commission (BHC). The project was implemented in five target districts in Balochistan through NGOs and the evaluation used a mix of focus group discussions, key informant interviews, quantitative surveys and desk review.

Although the end of project evaluation observed that all of the agreed project outputs were achieved, it was considered too soon to “arrive at conclusive judgment on success or otherwise of the project” (p.4), for example to analyse impacts relating to behaviour/attitudinal change. The evaluation observed that the context of Balochistan is a challenging one with a ‘nexus of factors’ (from budget allocations, initial tension between stakeholders, to ‘ill devised and inadequate development policy focus) continuing to constrain governance and law and order maintenance.

Gohar, A., ‘Who Learns from Whom? Pukhtoon Traditions in Modern Perspective’

This book explores Pukhtoon life and traditions, including community peacebuilding, and examines how these practices can be used by implementing agencies and local communities. It looks at the three important institutions of Pukhtoon communal life: jumat
Pages 29-38 focus on the jirga and its role of peacemaking, peacebuilding and peacekeeping.

The author notes that jirgas play an active role in three types of peacebuilding:

- **Political peacebuilding** - building a legal infrastructure that can address the political needs and manage the boundaries of a peace system. Some examples are negotiation, technical working groups, and fact-finding missions.

- **Structural peacebuilding** - creating a “structure-system” of behaviour, institutions and actions that support the implementation of a peace culture, for example, disarming warring factions, repatriating refugees, monitoring elections, and cooperative projects of economic and social development.

- **Social peacebuilding** – building relationships and the social fabric of communal and inter-communal life, for example dialogue processes, community building activities and training.

The book examines how the Jirga system relates to the modern system of alternative dispute resolution (ADR), for example in terms of mediation-arbitration, community-based, preventative measures, volunteerism, spirituality, access to justice and involvement of the parties in further dispute resolution. It also identifies some of the more ‘traditional’ (‘anti-social aspects) of Jirga, such as the limited role of women, punishment, forced implementation, arbitration and verbal decision-making.


This book explores why Jirga is important to Pukhtoons, what the tasks and responsibilities are, and the reasons for success or failure of Jirgas. It is based on over 200 interviews and focus groups in the tribal and settled areas of NWFP and Balochistan in Pakistan, and parts of Afghanistan. The authors concentrate on the role of Jirgas in community peacebuilding and explore the future prospects for Jirga, in particular the possibilities of using Jirga in the local government system in Pakistan and the institutionalisation of Jirga at the national level in Afghanistan. The book also looks at how the development sector can partner with tribal and rural Jirga.


This interview with Ali Gobar from Just Peace International describes the organisation’s work on peacebuilding and conflict transformation in Pakistan. The interview covers issues such as honour killing; women peacemakers; and the connection between Islam and peace or peacemaking. Fairmichael and Gobar also discuss JPI’s work on alternative dispute resolution and their plans for a mediation centre and a storytelling project on good practices of youth.

This article on PAIMAN’s peacebuilding projects in Pakistan is an interview with the founder and executive director of PAIMAN Alumni Trust, Mossarat Qadeem. It looks at PAIMAN’s ‘Let’s Live in Peace’ initiative with women and youth peace groups in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and a few conflict prone districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly known as the North West Frontier Province). PAIMAN has reached out to 65,000 people in these areas through these peace groups and built the groups’ capacities in conflict transformation, peacebuilding and leadership.

In the interview, Mossarat Qadeem is asked about the outcome of the initiative. She answers, “Its impact is amazing. Initially when we started it we didn’t know what would be the outcome or impact. But when we started the processes PAIMAN’s Peace Practitioners took sessions with an extraordinary zeal and showed tremendous courage. In the process of sensitizing of the community, radical youth and mothers were identified and they got sensitized to an extent that they want their sons to be de-radicalized and these mothers are now part of our peace movement. Again it is a very sensitive issue and we are trying to handle it with great caution”.

3. Afghanistan


This short Peace Brief by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) examines traditional justice mechanisms, including tribal councils and village and religious leaders, in Afghanistan. The authors argue that working with community-based structures is the most effective way of making “significant, visible, short-term (12-18 months) gains” in resolving disputes between individuals and among communities.

Based on pilot programmes that USIP has run with Afghan partners in four provinces across Afghanistan (in Nangarhar, Khost, Paktia and Herat), the authors provide a checklist of recommendations to ensure that ongoing conflicts and disputes in insurgent-affected areas of Afghanistan can be resolved peacefully. Examples of good practice include:

- Identify local trusted actors and encourage relationship-building
- Secure government buy-in to traditional justice programs—while also allowing communities to decide who sits on shuras or jirgas and how decisions will be reached (i.e., a bottomup approach with government endorsement, if not involvement).
- Encourage respectful, regular dialogue on justice needs between state and traditional actors
- Create regular mechanisms that build links between the state and traditional systems (e.g., formal recording and storage process for traditional justice decisions, registering decisions with the state, the designation of a respected individual as a liaison between the state and community shuras, etc.).
- Recognize that district and provincial governors have historically played and continue to play an important role in resolving disputes.
• Understand that individuals should never be forced to participate in traditional dispute resolution against their will.

The paper also provides some suggestions for approaches to avoid, for example:

• Do not pour money into traditional justice (e.g., don’t build shura “courthouses,” don’t pay shura salaries); the system generally works well without much money in it.
• Do not assume you’ll know the right people to engage
• Do not think what works in one district will necessarily work in the next.
• Do not be seen as biased in favour of one group, tribe, etc. over another. Again, understanding local power dynamics and demographics is key.
• Do not think that traditional justice bodies just need to “learn the law” to change how they resolve disputes. Their approaches are cultural more than legal, and must adapt over time.
• Do not assume that all disputes are ripe for traditional justice resolution. Some, like serious crimes and crimes against members of other communities, are better resolved in courts.
• Do not create programs where expatriate advisers are the primary focal point in the communities. Afghans must lead the work and must not be seen as simply acting on behalf of foreign donors or militaries.


This USIP PeaceBrief concentrates on shuras and other traditional bodies in Afghanistan and their potential to strengthen local governance. The authors argue that the strategy of supporting community decision-making has led to a proliferation of community councils (‘shura-creation and promotion), which has generally undermined local governance in the short-term.

The authors argue that traditional dispute mechanisms are most effective when they are formed by local residents and reflect community interests, but that sponsorship by different actors within the Afghan government and the international community can decrease their legitimacy and effectiveness. The paper warns that the international community should not assume that traditional bodies “fairly represent their respective communities” and should conduct more research on local dynamics, what types of bodies already exist, which bodies are representative and therefore legitimate within the community. In the long-term, the authors argue that local governance should be based on legitimate representative political bodies, selected through elections.


This Oxfam International research report emphasises the need for community peacebuilding in Afghanistan: “For the vast majority of Afghans, disputes have local causes, and people turn to local institutions and individuals to resolve them” (p.5). It emphasises that participatory, bottom-up approaches (particularly building the capacity of communities especially jirgas and shuras) to resolving disputes peacefully can have a range of “positive, often interconnected outcomes”, for example:
increased resolution of disputes;
lower levels of violence, including domestic violence;
greater community cohesion;
stonger resilience to external threats or events;
the expansion of development activity; and
the successful reintegration of returnees.

The report argues for greater donor support for NGOs engaged in peacebuilding and the development of a national strategy for community peacebuilding. Several elements of the national strategy are suggested:

- phased capacity-building, which is participatory, inclusive and flexible;
- teaching peacebuilding in schools
- awareness-raising activities
- mainstreaming peacebuilding into relevant sectors of government
- mechanisms to monitor the consistency of shuras’ decisions with the Afghan constitution and human rights;
- clarifying links between peacebuilding work and state institutions, in particular the relationship between informal justice and the courts.

Challenges to community and national peacebuilding are also discussed, for example the difficulty of measuring the impact of peacebuilding. Balancing the need for government involvement but not ownership is another challenge, as is “ensuring the full and meaningful participation of women; dealing with potential spoilers; managing with a lack of human resources; and introducing sufficient flexibility” (p.5).


This success story of female participation in community peacebuilding comes from Ghanzi Province in Afghanistan. As part of a grants programme within USAID’s Provincial Strategic Roads program, 660 women played an important role in arbitrating family and community conflicts. The article describes how Nafisa, the head of the Tabarghanak Female Peace Shura, brokered peace deals such as pathway access between local neighbours: “Prior to Nafisa’s peaceful mediation, the conflict was so tense, that for years, the wives and children of these neighboring families were not allowed to speak to one another.”

Gobar, A. ‘The Tribal Security System (Arbakai) in Southeast Afghanistan & Shalgoon, Swarlastha, Tribal Areas of Pakistan’

This paper discusses forms of community policing, known as Arbakai, in Southeast Afghanistan and tribal areas of Pakistan. Based on focus groups discussions, interviews and the author’s experience of working with the Arbakai from 2001-6, the paper examines how the state security sector can engage with community policing. It looks at how the Arbakai institution works, how it differs from militias and the possibilities for expanding the system to other regions of Afghanistan.
This USIP-funded study by The Liaison Office (TLO) examines the interactions and linkages between the formal and informal justice institutions in two districts in the majority Pashtun East and Southeast of Afghanistan, one urban (a nahia of Jalalabad) and one rural (Ahmad Aba in Paktia). Cooperation between key actors from both systems in the research sites has positive outcomes, such as reducing the burden on an overstretched state justice system and strengthening the implementing power of jirga-decisions.

The linkages are not always positive, however. The study argues that the extent to which informal justice actors are connected informally to state agencies in general has the effect of reducing the built-in accountability mechanisms of customary justice mechanisms. In particular, accountability can be threatened when shuras, from which mediators for jirgas are frequently drawn, also serve to distribute government and aid resources.


This paper explores gender and community peacebuilding issues emerging from a UN-sponsored pilot refugee reintegration initiative, known as Coexistence Afghanistan. The project aimed to promote peaceful reintegration of people returning home by:

1. Promoting inter-communal interaction, trust-building, and cooperation,
2. Facilitating rehabilitation and equal access to shared resources, through small-scale income-generation activities that members from the various conflicting groups would jointly design and carry out.

The report examines challenges to women’s participation in community peacebuilding programmes and makes some suggestions for transforming attitudes about male and female involvement in community peacebuilding in Afghanistan. For example, increase education for empowerment; involve men in awareness campaigns (especially political and religious leaders); develop economic self-sufficiency; and create stronger gender-aware structures and cultures within peacebuilding and development organisations.

4. Sri Lanka


This World Bank progress summarises the status of the State and Peace-Building Fund (SPF), Low Income Countries under Stress (LICUS) Trust Fund and Post-Conflict Fund (PCF). Of particular interest to this query is page 8, which highlights the impact of PCF funding in Sri Lanka with the Community Peace Councils, which aim to promote dialogue and end violence by promoting village economic self-sufficiency and democratic self-governance.
The Community Peace Councils project is managed by the Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka and has 18 Community Peace Councils in 7 districts and 7 Peace Resource Centers at the district level. They have produced Community Peace Strategic Action Plans that have helped identify and prioritize the needs of the different communities. The progress report notes that “community gathering programmes involving a total of 1,750 communities have provided participants with a forum for discussing the conflict situation in the country and necessary peace-building activities. Three peace mediations were carried out at the district level, and five more are planned for 2010. Empowerment of communities, complemented by conflict prevention at the community level has made the project a cornerstone of democratic self-governance in Sri Lanka.” (p.8)

5. Nepal

http://asiafoundation.org/country/overview/nepal

The Asia Foundation’s work on conflict resolution and their mediation program in Nepal is summarised on the country webpage. Since 2004, the mediation program has trained over 4,000 mediators. It covers 118 towns in 14 districts and 118 towns and has over 14,000 registered cases, of which the Asia Foundation notes that 85 percent were resolved with an “exceptionally high rate of satisfaction”.

There are signs that the programme is becoming increasingly accepted, for example social workers, police, and the legal court systems refer local disputes to the mediation office. Local government authorities have also put aside funds in their development budgets to support mediation. The website notes that one of the outcomes of the community mediation program in Nepal is helping to “recast women, who sometimes have a limited role in public life, into trusted leaders”.

SFCG, 2008, Key Findings from 2008 External Evaluation, Youth in Peacebuilding and Community Decision Making, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) Nepal

This report highlights the key findings from Search for Common Ground (SFCG)’s work in Nepal since 2006, with support from the European Commission, UNICEF, the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the World Bank. Using media and community-based activities, SFCG aims to increase people’s participation in the peacebuilding process, with a particular focus on youth. Key outcomes emerging from their two-year programmatic of their youth in peacebuilding and community decision-making project activities include:

- **Change in young people’s attitudes and behaviour** since the baseline survey. The SFCG project, especially the radio drama program - Nayaa Bato Nayaa Paailaa - has had a positive impact in building awareness, fostering positive attitudes and motivating youth towards participating in peacebuilding.
- **Increase in confidence** - Young people feel more confident and able to communicate with adults in the community, especially in rural areas
- **Increase in youth involvement** in peacebuilding activities, conflict resolution, social service, social change, social harmony, and civic education.
6. Additional information

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Websites visited

About Helpdesk research reports: Helpdesk reports are based on 2 days of desk-based research. They are designed to provide a brief overview of the key issues; and a summary of some of the best literature available. Experts are contacted during the course of the research, and those able to provide input within the short time-frame are acknowledged.

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