

Building peace in communities in Afghanistan

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM ANALYSIS:

Communities in rural Afghanistan follow a traditional pattern of conflict prevention and transformation through community and peace councils known as Jirgas or Shuras. Conflicts are normally referred to the peace councils by one of the parties whereupon the council gather, mainly on Fridays after noon prayers and then discuss the conflict. If the conflict has a dimension that requires religious input then religious scholars' opinions are sought.



Photo: Norwegian Church Aid, Afghanistan

While these councils are committed, well known and respected by the constituencies, their members face challenges such as low level of education, influence by powerful elites and tribe elders and lack of women participation. As a result, conflicts are often "solved" by arbitration and thus suppressed, not actually being resolved through addressing the root causes.

From experience these "low level" conflicts - family conflicts dealing with relationships but also conflicts over resources and inheritance rights and legal conflicts- often spill into political conflicts and turn violent, and can be exploited by political interests.

NCA's strategy has been to build on local traditions and to establish peace councils in communities where no institution existed, and strengthen the capacities of already established institutions such as the Community Development Councils (CDCs). An important component of the peacebuilding programme was the inclusion of women in CDCs and peace councils and facilitate coordination between the community and district levels CDCs and peace councils. NCA has also brought together a group of influential religious leaders with an extensive reach both down into communities and up into key policy making bodies.

RESULTS:

Since 2013, 666 members of CDCs, traditional and religious leaders and other community groups from 77 communities in Daikundi, Faryab and Uruzgan have significantly increased their knowledge on peace building, human rights, women rights, inheritance rights, gender and conflict transformation after participating in capacity developing activities organised by NCA and its local partners. For example, in Dehrawood district of Uruzgan province the level of knowledge of participants in the above mentioned topics had increased from 15% to 74%. Community members appreciated the value of the capacity development initiatives, as evidenced by the overall participants' satisfaction rate with the trainings (76%).



34% of the totally trained people were elected by the CDCs and organized in 21 District Level Peace Councils (DLPCs). The DLPCs are providing support to community institutions like the CDCs and Shuras in dealing with conflicts which are beyond their capacity. The DLPCs not only intervened in conflicts that are related to domestic violence, inheritance and family disputes, but also in higher level community conflicts. In 2014, a total of 120 conflicts on land, inheritance, water distribution, family conflicts and violence were resolved by the trained CDCs and DLPCs in Daikundi, Faryab and Uruzgan.



Photo: Norwegian Church Aid, Afghanistan

50 religious leaders –including 10 women– have since 2013 had the opportunity to explore contentious issues of faith, identity and peace in a different, safe and inclusive context, inside and outside Afghanistan. As a result of the project the participants also gained a better understanding of the key issues related to peace building and knowledge of experiences from within the group as well as from external religious scholars and leaders which could inform their own peace building activities. An external evaluation concluded that the effects of the project on participants ranged from informative (new information) to transformative (new ways of thinking, working and relating). One of the major successes of the project was the increased awareness of women’s roles in peacebuilding where limited awareness existed previously. The participants all developed and implemented action plans for addressing conflicts in their respective communities and provinces.

LESSONS LEARNED:

A solid understanding of local conflict dynamics and synergies with provincial and national levels is key to design and implement peacebuilding interventions in a conflict-sensitive way. Creating arenas for interaction contributes to attitudinal change within and between groups: with the right understanding and grounded work, initial resistance can be overcome and positive change achieved. This applies to inclusion of women but also of other ethnic and religious groups.

PROGRAMME SCOPE

These NCA peacebuilding interventions have been financially supported by Norad (“Building Resilience Communities for Development and Peace”, 2013–2015) and the British Embassy in Kabul (“Mobilising Religious Actors for Peace”, 2013 – 2014), amounting approx. NOK 15 mill.

PARTNERS:

Afghan Development Association (ADA), Afghan Women Skills Development Centre (AWSDC), Cooperation Center for Afghanistan (CCA), and Sanayee Development Organization (SDO).

SOURCES: NCA and partners’ monitoring reports and reflective sessions; 2014, Mark Rogers and Frozan Mashal, Mobilising Religious Actors for Peace. End of the project formative evaluation; 2012, Glencree, Evaluation of the Right to Peace and Security Afghanistan.



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