Conflict Resolution Handbook: Lessons and Recommendations

By Michael J. Jacobs
AFGHANISTAN PASTORAL ENGAGEMENT, ADAPTATION, AND CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT (PEACE) PROJECT

CONFLICT RESOLUTION HANDBOOK – LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Afghanistan PEACE project’s goal was to reduce the social and economic risks associated with extensive livestock production through better rangeland management information and peaceful resolution of land access issues. Established in 2006, the PEACE project concluded activities in 2012. The collaborating institutions were: University of California, Davis; Texas A&M University; Sanayee Development Organization; Mercy Corps; President’s Advisor on Tribal Affairs, Afghanistan; and the Independent General Directorate of Kuchi.

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Lessons and Recommendations

Introduction

The Pastoral Engagement, Capacity, and Enhancement Project (PEACE) was initiated in July 2006 in response to requests made by the Islamic Government of Afghanistan to address issues negatively affecting livestock production in the country. From 2006-2012, PEACE implemented multiple activities with the aim of reducing the social and economic risks associated with livestock production including: provision of timely information on emerging forage conditions; institutionalization of livestock market system; capacity building of pastoralist leaders and villagers to solve conflicts; and establishment of a conflict resolution process within various government institutions. This handbook will focus on the later two activities: capacity building of Kuchi pastoralist leaders and village leaders to solve conflicts, and the establishment of a conflict resolution process within the Independent General Directorate of Kuchi (IGDK). Partners in this effort included IGDK Provincial Directors, the IGDK Director, the IGDK Provincial Affairs Director, President Karzai’s Advisor on Tribal Affairs, and the Sanayee Development Organization.
Livestock in Afghanistan are raised intensively as well as extensively. Intensive production is carried out by settled farmers and generally involves a few sheep and goats and at times a cow, for personal use (e.g. milk, yogurt, meat and wool) and to generate cash from the sale of fattened live animals. Extensive production, on the other hand, currently involves transhumant pastoralists with herds generally numbering more than 100 head per family. Afghanistan’s transhumant pastoralists are referred to as Kuchi and those Kuchi still engaged in extensive production comprise approximately 5% of the country’s population.

Climate change is expected to transform Afghanistan’s temperate, semi-arid climate into an increasingly drier environment ill-suited for rain-fed agriculture schemes. Over 75% of the country’s land base is rangeland and the most productive use of these rangelands is, and will continue to be, seasonal grazing by livestock.

In Afghanistan, livestock are raised both by settled farmers (intensive production) and transhumant pastoralists (extensive production). Risk for pastoralists continues to rise as rangeland is plowed up for wheat, conflict restricts movement and land access for winter fodder is reduced.
The Kuchi’s herding strategy involves moving their animals from populated low elevation winter and spring rangeland areas, along the margins of the country, into the relatively unpopulated high elevation Hindu Kush Mountain rangeland areas for the summer and early fall. The Kuchi moving into the mountains each year come from every cardinal direction, depending on where they spend their winters and summers. With the advent of recent military conflicts (e.g. 1980’s), this strategy of seasonal movements has become increasingly fraught with risks related to insecurity and conflict, land access and land appropriations, access to water, and competition for winter fodder. The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), is the governing authority for Afghanistan’s rangelands. MAIL has little capacity, however, to limit or reduce these risks. The situation is further confounded by debate within the MAIL and the development sector as to whether or not the Kuchi should be settled.

The question of settlement is not surprising but when examined in full detail, it makes little sense in the current environmental and socio-economic climate. Afghanistan has a temperate semi-arid climate and an abundance of native vegetation, characterized as semi-arid steppe, resulting in classification of approximately 75% of the country’s land base as rangeland. Under the current as well as future climatic scenarios (the entire landscape is projected to become drier with climate change), the majority of Afghanistan’s rangeland areas are and will increasingly become even more unsuitable for rain-fed agriculture schemes. Of equal importance is the fact that the most productive use of the country’s rangelands is seasonal grazing by small ruminants. Furthermore, while only 5% of the population is currently engaged in extensive livestock production, a PEACE project survey of six major livestock markets indicated that 72% of small ruminants brought for sale originated from the Kuchi.
Afghanistan’s extensive livestock producers, the Kuchi. In other words, the livestock produced by the Kuchi not only represent the majority of the animals found in Afghanistan's livestock markets, they also represent a major economic contribution to the livestock market and value chains in Afghanistan, beginning with the producers and ending with the consumer. Additionally, if the Kuchis’ livelihood were to disappear, some of the most important industries which currently form the foundation of Afghanistan’s economy and are reliant on secondary animal products would be lost: wool, carpet and leather industries. Currently, products from these sectors account for more than 50% of Afghanistan’s GDP. Together, these data underscore the important role that the Kuchi play in food and economic security for Afghanistan, based on the type of transhumant livelihood they are leading now.

**IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM AND OBSTACLES TO RESOLVING CONFLICTS**

Field investigations, informal interviews and a risk assessment conducted by the PEACE Project led to a better understanding of the risks the Kuchi were facing while engaged in their livelihood:

- **Insecurity and conflict.** Thefts, abductions, attacks, insurgent activity, assessment of fees, and earlier than normal departures from grazing lands.

- **Land conversions/appropriations from cultivation, village expansion, (re)settlement programs (for IDPs and refugees), and greed on the part of commanders and warlords.** Assessment of fees, loss of critical grazing lands, competition with villagers for remaining grazing lands, confinement of herds on grazing lands insufficient in size, rangeland degradation where cultivation is being attempted in areas with unsuitable soils and rainfall conditions, and earlier than normal departures from grazing lands, the need to find alternative migration routes (prior to and during migration), and increased exposure to land mines.

- **Diminishing access to water.** Earlier than normal departures from grazing lands, the need to find alternative migration routes (prior to and during migration), and increased exposure to land mines.

- **Competition for winter fodder.** Loss of fodder resources, armed conflicts, and assessment of fees.
The direct consequence of these risks to the Kuchi included:

- Decline in animal health and productivity.
- Increased economic burden on the family in response to declining milk yields and fewer animals for sale.
- Decline in human health and nutrition.
- Increase in animal mortality.
- Decline in herd sizes.
- Loss of livelihood.
- Increase in number and types of conflicts among Kuchi, between Kuchi and villager groups, and between certain Kuchi and commanders.

Discussions with Kuchi Provincial Directors regarding obstacles to reducing these risks and resolving conflicts peacefully resulted in an understanding of three important factors: governance continued to be ineffective in Afghanistan, the Government had yet to establish a just judicial system, and trust was lacking among the various actors engaged in conflict.
A STRATEGY FOR RESOLVING CONFLICTS: 
WORKING WITH THE INDEPENDENT GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF KUCHI

Conflicts along migration routes needed to be resolved if Afghanistan's extensive producers were to continue to remain mobile while engaging in their livelihood. Investigations by the PEACE project, however, determined that there was very little capacity within the IGDK or its Provincial Directors to resolve any conflicts. This led to the development of a conflict resolution training program and a shura (e.g. meeting) facilitation program involving IGDK Provincial Directors.

The conflict resolution training program for Provincial Directors involved training in peace-building, negotiation, and conflict resolution techniques. PEACE partnered with the Sanayee Development Organization (SDO)\(^1\), a local non-profit organization established in 1990 and dedicated to providing training in conflict resolution techniques, as a means of delivering the required training. Through this collaboration, 31 Kuchi Provincial Directors (note: there is only one director per Province) received training sufficient to take on the responsibility of facilitating a resolution to certain conflicts.

Up until the time of the conflict resolution training program, Provincial Directors lacked a budget to hold meetings and it was determined that more conflicts might be resolved and more quickly, if Kuchi leaders from the province were enabled to attend regularly scheduled shuras. This led to funding of provincial shuras with the assistance of the IGDK. The details of these programs follow here.

\(^1\)Website: http://www.sanayee.org.af/english/
CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING
AND KUCHI SHURA FACILITATION PROGRAMS

In 2006, the IGDK was a newly formed institution with little capacity or capital to help the Kuchi. The IGDK had representation in 31 Provinces, and the directors of these provinces were responsible for holding regular shuras with their most powerful and respected leaders from the province. It is estimated that Afghanistan’s shuras are responsible for settling more than 80% of the country’s conflict-based problems. The traditional means of solving conflicts by shuras, however, involves stopping people from fighting rather than building peace between people and communities by finding a sustainable and just solution that everyone can agree on. With an understanding of the Afghanistan’s traditional problem-solving mechanism, it was determined that the best approach for the resolution of land access/use-related conflicts would be to train those Provincial Directors already engaged in solving conflicts and with interest in gaining new skills in the area of conflict resolution.

The training in conflict resolution was not an easy sell in the beginning. The IGDK Director at that time viewed commodities, such as tents and solar panels, as more important to the Kuchi than a capacity building program for conflict resolution. It took many meetings with the Director and his staff before he was eventually convinced of the benefits of a conflict resolution program, by the PEACE team and his staff. Following, ten IGDK Provincial Directors, selected by the IGDK Director, were invited to attend a week long conflict resolution training in which Mercy Corps conflict resolution training specialists were responsible for delivering this training.

The week-long training involved the presentation of an alternative approach to solving conflicts - using peace-building techniques in combination with some of their traditional means of conflict-solving. It was cumbersome, however, in that the trainers relied heavily on written materials and translations were required, from English to Dari and then to Pashto. The training was a success, however, and at its conclusion the participants expressed interest in participating in more skill-development workshops. Evaluations during the training also enabled PEACE to determine that their interest was genuine and that they had learned much from their experience. Following, subsequent trainings were scheduled for delivery to all 31 Provincial Directors. Additionally, PEACE engaged SDO to deliver the remaining trainings directly in Pashto and Dari and over time, was able to develop trainings in collaboration with SDO that specifically addressed the Kuchi’s needs and the PEACE project’s goals.
In total, 31 IGDK Provincial Directors received between three to seven trainings in conflict resolution and peace-building techniques over the course of this program. Skills and topics covered during the trainings included:

- Benefits of peace
- Social ethics
- Understanding different perspectives
- Communicating your interests
- Listening to others
- Analyzing a conflict
- Mediation skills (characteristics, steps)
- Negotiation skills (interests versus positions)

At the completion of each training session, the leaders were asked to go back to their provinces and try to use their new skills during their shuras to solve any issues they deemed of import. They were challenged in doing so due to a lack of funding for holding shuras. To facilitate their efforts, PEACE began a program of providing limited sponsorship of the leader’s monthly shuras in the form of reimbursement for transport and the cost of lunch. The aim of supporting the provincial shuras was two-fold. First, to provide a forum for each Provincial Director to increase dialogue between the Kuchi people and their representatives and second, to develop a mechanism by which conflict resolution could be achieved and rangeland management information could be disseminated.
As part of an agreement for supporting the shuras, Provincial Directors were required to submit a written report after each meeting to the IGDK Director and PEACE office with details about the issues and conflicts discussed and the means by which a conflict was resolved. Within a few months of receiving the director’s reports, it became obvious that some struggled to produce a report of any substance. Subsequently, the PEACE team provided trainings in organizational and report-writing techniques, in addition to developing a simple report format that they could follow. Directors who responded well to this initiative are now writing reports that are detailed in the nature of the conflicts they are dealing with and in the solutions that have proven useful. More importantly, the reports have proven useful to the IGDK Director in Kabul, as monthly information from the provinces has allowed the IGDK to systematically document the Kuchi’s problems at the provincial and national level and their efforts to resolve them. Support for the shuras also proved quite useful in that it has enabled Provincial Directors to demonstrate their skills in using peaceful negotiation as an alternative for solving conflicts. Several Provincial Directors have also reported that they have been able to prove to their constituents that their shura can help them and as a consequence, they were finding that their constituents were supportive of their leader’s attendance at the monthly shuras.

PEACE was specifically addressing the need for better peace and negotiation skills in the IGDK at the national and local level. Although conflicts between Kuchi and settled villages are very complex, this type of training changed the way the Kuchi now approach a land access conflict. PEACE also benefitted from this association. Increasing the capacity of the IGDK to collect information from their directors for the purpose of reporting to Afghanistan’s Parliament, was a significant factor in earning the trust of this institution. Increasing a Provincial Director’s ability to resolve conflicts within his means, while improving his standing and that of the shura members to their constituents, was an important factor in gaining the trust of the Kuchi at the local level. The benefits of this collaboration to PEACE were that it facilitated efforts to achieve the mandate of the project – improving livestock production.
In 2008, a second collaboration was created that included President Karzai’s Advisor on Tribal Affairs – Head of Peace Commission, His Excellency Wahidullah Sabawoon, the Sanayee Development Organization and the PEACE project. This collaboration involved a program designed to facilitate a resolution of conflicts between villagers and the Kuchi by providing training to leaders from both sectors. It began at the request by His Excellency Wahidullah Sabawoon when he learned of the success of the IGDK Provincial Directors in solving various conflicts. Specifically, he requested that the PEACE project attempt to provide similar trainings in an effort to resolve certain long-standing land disputes between the Kuchi and Hazara. An agreement was reached with His Excellency when he agreed to work with PEACE to expand the program to
include conflicts along specific Kuchi migration routes. This program was eventually assigned the name: Peace Ambassador Program.

Responsibilities of this collaboration included:

- His Excellency Wahidullah Sabawoon, Advisor on Tribal Affairs, Head of Peace Commission, identified high-priority conflicts and in collaboration with Provincial Governors and the IGDK, selected key leaders for training.
- SDO provided trainings and support during field efforts.
- PEACE provided the funding, organized the process, monitored and evaluated the training and field components, and analyzed the conflict data.

The program began with one region in central Afghanistan and eventually expanded to seven regions and four major Kuchi migration routes. At its peak, 75 Peace Ambassadors, from villages and Kuchi communities in the seven regions, were involved in resolving land access/use conflicts. Details of this program follow.

**PEACE AMBASSADOR PROGRAM**

The Peace Ambassador program, a name selected by His Excellency Wahidullah Sabawoon, was a 5-step program:

**Step 1:** Identification and selection of several hundred well-known community leaders demonstrating a strong commitment to building peace in their communities, from 18 different provinces, by Government partners. Following, the participants attended a short introductory training in peace building during which their skills and commitment were evaluated. Village and Kuchi leaders that performed the best during the initial training workshops were then chosen to move to the next level of training. The decision as to the best was a joint decision involving the PEACE project team, SDO trainers, a representative from the Peace Commission and the training participants.
Step 2: Once selected to continue, the participants/Peace Ambassadors (PA) were sent back to their provinces and assigned the task of facilitating the resolution of a conflict of importance. Sometimes this involved the PAs working independently; at other times it involved several working together, depending on the conflict they were addressing. In addition, PAs from different provinces were required to work together to address numerous conflicts specific to a migration route involving more than one province.

Step 3: Provision of additional training on a bi-monthly basis, to build upon the PAs capacity to resolve conflicts, mediate, and communicate peace building messages to communities. During this effort, the PAs were also given the opportunity to select particular training modules that they thought would be most useful for them. In this way, the program provided opportunities for both structured and unstructured trainings which served to give the Ambassadors some control over the learning process.

Step 4: During each follow-up training PAs were required to present their efforts to resolve conflicts to date to their workgroup and, to develop a work plan outlining the conflicts they would be attempting to resolve in the coming months. This effort provided a peer-learning opportunity for them in that their oral presentations always promoted comments and
discussions from the other PAs, suggestions on how specific conflicts might be solved more easily and insight into how someone from a different region solved a similar conflict.

**Step 5:** The Peace Ambassadors were evaluated every three months to determine if they were working effectively with their communities. Evaluations involved discussions with the communities the PAs had been working with. A team of evaluators made up of representatives from each of the partners conducted the evaluations and the team used an oral questionnaire when meeting with the community representatives. In the majority of the cases, the communities expressed an overwhelming satisfaction for the work of the PAs. This result is not surprising considering that only the brightest and most committed leaders were selected in the first place. In cases where the evaluators found problems with a PA’s work, the evaluation team would discuss whether or not the PA should be replaced and then submit their recommendation to the PEACE office. Ineffective PAs were not tolerated during the program and were replaced quickly. Several communities expressed appreciation for this replacement process.

Only the brightest and most committed leaders were selected as Peace Ambassadors. The President’s Advisor on Tribal Affairs, also known as the Peace Commission, played an active role in the selection and evaluation of the Peace Ambassadors. Communities have expressed an overwhelming satisfaction with the work of the Peace Ambassadors.
Since its inception in 2008, the Peace Ambassador Program has facilitated the resolution of 1531 land conflicts and 1276 social conflicts. For some leaders, particularly from rural communities there was some initial skepticism regarding the material being taught. Some were fearful that the material might contain messages that did not match their religious teachings because of the foreign donor involvement. Having Afghan government and non-government partners with appropriate sensitivities to these issues led to the end of these fears.

In 2012, the final year of the PEACE project, a program to train the next generation of leaders in conflict resolution and peace-building was implemented. Seventy-five young Kuchi were trained through the program.

**A STRATEGY FOR RESOLVING CONFLICTS: THE NEXT GENERATION OF PEACE-BUILDERS**

Following the success of the Provincial Director and Peace Ambassadors trainings, PEACE designed a program to train the next generation of leaders in conflict resolution and peace-building techniques. The training involved a one-month course with the following objectives:

- To provide future young Kuchi leaders with the opportunity to learn how to build peace in Afghanistan
- To use their newly acquired skills to teach other young Kuchi, thereby increasing the collective capacity of the Kuchi to peacefully resolve conflicts.
The content of the workshop was a good mix between theoretical lessons and practical exercises. Participants learned about types of conflict and violence, combating prejudice, effective means of resolving conflict, negotiation techniques, the value and purpose of mediation, and other conflict resolution-related topics. Additionally, throughout the month-long workshop they had the opportunity to engage in many role plays that illustrated these theoretical concepts, such as practicing to be mediators in common community and family conflicts.

Two days before the end of the workshop the participants also had the opportunity to visit a peace shura in Istalef, one of the local peace shuras sponsored by SDO. They witnessed the practical application of many of the concepts that they learned during the workshop. Based on conversations with the participants following this visit, they were impressed with the workings of the peace shura and in particular, they were impressed with extent of inter-ethnic cooperation involving Hazara, Tajik, and Pashtun members.

At the completion of the workshop, PEACE encouraged the workshop participants to explore possibilities of forming inter-ethnic shuras in their own communities, as well as shuras comprised of Kuchi members from several different provinces (e.g. Kunduz and Balkh). These inter-provincial Kuchi shuras would serve as a forum for the exchange of information between Kuchi from different provinces, along with creating joint negotiation teams to address those important issues that extend beyond political boundaries.

**IMPORTANCE OF Collaborations**

Through the IGDK Provincial Director and Peace Ambassador training programs, a significant number of important conflicts were resolved. Collaborations were crucial to the success of these efforts.

The collaboration with SDO was instrumental in that they were able to deliver trainings in the context and culture of the Afghan people. Additionally, they were skilled in delivering trainings to largely illiterate groups, in their own native language. SDO, as a local NGO, is also in the position of continuing their support in the years to come.

PEACE’s collaboration with His Excellency, Wahidullah Sabawoon, was instrumental in that he was able to provide village leaders for training, from high-priority conflict areas. His involvement was also central in that he was able to demonstrate his support for Afghanistan’s Governors, his
understanding of their challenges, and his commitment to work with them to resolve some of their more important issues. The result was a team of participants who felt empowered in solving some of their own problems.

The collaboration with the IGDK and their Provincial Directors was not only instrumental, it was central to the success of both peace-building programs. The commitment of the IGDK to providing respected and dedicated leaders resulted in a skilled and committed leadership at the provincial level; it resulted in community-building at the ground-level by providing concrete results of benefit to their constituents; it resulted in risk reduction/elimination by means of peace-building along critical migration routes; and it resulted in rebuilding trust and respect between communities once opposed to each other.

LESSONS LEARNED

There were several important lessons from this effort.

– It is critical to develop trust and demonstrate a commitment to the needs of Afghans
– Empowerment and skill-building were keys to the success of this effort – the participants were proud to be responsible for solving their own conflicts rather than having someone dictate the results for them.
– Coordination with Government and local NGO partners was essential – the government was able to identify the specific need and locate the appropriate participants; the local NGO made sure that the messages were culturally appropriate.
– Building peace takes time. More time spent facilitating these kinds of efforts will result in bigger gains and stronger local support.

Program success was improved because:

• Training was adaptive, incorporating the needs of illiterate participants
• Bimonthly presentations and skits enabled participants to learn from each other
• Mediators included respected leaders from both sides of the issue who were committed to a peaceful solution
• Communities were the ones who chose the conflicts they wanted solved
• Participants had a voice in finding and choosing the solution(s)
• Many of the agreements were registered with the District or Provincial Governor's Office
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Create and support a structure or a process and let the participants make it work. If you appear to be directing or dictating the effort you will not gain complete acceptance.

Work with people that the community already trusts. This should be obvious but is often not carefully achieved. A good evaluation process will assist in this determination.

Pick your partners wisely, particularly your government partners and require accountability. They can be the key to ensuring sustainability or steer you into a political dilemma.

It is extremely important to realize that development can result in conflicts. For example, drilling water wells to provide better access for Kuchi herders or villagers might seem like a good idea but if it is done without the participation of both user groups, it can result in decades of serious conflict.

Full understanding the drivers of a conflict is essential. The root cause may not always be apparent.

Remain neutral, provide equal access to the program and earn the trust of the people. Successful and meaningful development in any situation, in our experience, is based on trust between the community and those delivering the development effort. Civilian development workers that interact with the military in Afghanistan come under immediate suspicion by the communities they are working with. When communities observe NGO development workers communicating with the military they wonder if their personal information is being passed on to the military; they suspect that development workers could be agents or spies. If the community suspects that someone is not neutral, trust is never established or it can be quickly lost. Mixing military personnel with civilian development workers is a very dangerous strategy in Afghanistan. To ensure the safety of staff (both Afghan and foreign), implementing institutions (Government, INGO, NGO and contractors) must have the trust and buy-in of the community they are trying to help.

The PEACE Project has been proud to facilitate the efforts of the Afghans involved at all stages. PEACE is also proud to have facilitated a sustainable delivery system for peace. We are vegetation scientists and rangeland ecologists that understand the ecological implications of preventing the movement of livestock. We also understand that for our work to be useful for the management of natural resources we need to address the conflicts related to natural resource management because resolving them is what enables management.
From left to right; Catherine Schloeder, Ahmad Shah, Mansoor Durani, Michael Jacobs, Dawood Sherzad, Abdul Wali Hussainzai, Akbar Bayani, M. Kazem Sultani, Mohammad Jamal, and Babajan Amiri.
From left to right, Haroon Gulzar, Shams Ur Rahman, Hadia Banwal, Waris Mustamandi, Michael Jacobs, Zohal Maqsoodi, Mustafa Sultani, Dawood Sherzad, and Jalal Ghafoori.