

The Role of Local Supporters in Promoting Social Cohesion in District Orakzai: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Background and Study Aim: After the surge of terrorism, the study area has suffered many socio-economic problems such as insecurity, unemployment, illiteracy, and local disputes. The traditional social organizations such as the *Jirga* system and other civil society organs, which were meant to bring peace and solidarity in the region is disturbed. The area is witnessing disputes such as property-related, sectarianism, mineral distribution, and bordering land, causing serious physical and infrastructural damage. This article aims to explore the role of local supporters in promoting social cohesion in District Orakzai Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Methodology: A qualitative study was used to investigate the role of local supporters in promoting social cohesion in District Orakzai. A purposive sampling method was applied to select participants for this study by using open-ended interviews. The primary data was analyzed by thematic analysis technique.

Findings: The study explored that the major local supporters in the study region are *Jirga* council, *Mashran/Elders*, *Ulema-E-Kiram* (Clerics), and Sportsmen play a pivotal role in promoting social cohesion.

Conclusion: Holistically, the study reveals that these elements collectively strengthen social cohesion by bridging social division, promoting mutual respect, and providing platforms for conflict resolution. Thus, effective engagement and collaboration among these stakeholders are the hidden roots of social cohesion, peacebuilding, and development in the region.

Keywords: Social Cohesion; Local Agents, Qualitative Study, Orakzai Agency.

Introduction

Social cohesion implies the degree of integration and solidarity among various units of a society. It is characterized by two major elements of society such as the sense of belongingness of a group and the inter-relationships among its members (Manca, 2014). Delhey et al. (2018) revealed that social cohesion is the degree of cooperation and attachment based on the totality of the individual and group.

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Thus, it is a social process that intends to enhance plurality among individuals by lowering disparity and socioeconomic gaps and breakages in society. It connects people by increasing mutual respect, social justice, and individual freedom by lowering the hostilities among various stakeholders of a society (Manca, 2014). Among all other elements, mutual trust among individuals and their institutions is also an important factor of a cohesive society (Chan and Chan, 2006). The main aim of social cohesion is to ensure the progress of all members of a society by eradicating exclusion and marginalization to boost a sense of belongingness, and trust building and provide the opportunity for upward mobility to all stakeholders (Manca, 2014; Chan and Chan, 2006).

The recent literature that the region of former FATA has been suffering from various social problems such as terrorism, illiteracy, inter and intra-tribal feuds, poor infrastructure, drug availability, and unemployment. Keeping in view, this paper is designed to explore those elements (individual and group/s) that can contribute to a cohesive society.

Literature Review

Social cohesion has drawn considerable attention from both the academic and political arena (Jenson 1998, 2010; Beauvais and Jenson, 2002; Chan et al., 2006; Hulse and Stone, 2007). Social cohesion is often regarded as both a desirable and a declining attribute of a social entity (i.e. groups, communities, or societies) as reported by (the Council of Europe, 2005; Jenson, 1998; Schmeets and te Riele, 2014). According to Green and Janmaat (2011) and Green et al. (2009), cohesive societies have strong social orders that are bound together through cultural norms and values and by admiration of the role of the individuals in their community, hence, their position is accepted by the society. There is no clear difference between individuals and society based on race, language, caste, and traditions. All individuals are considered as important and equal having the least conflicts.

The concept of social cohesiveness has its origins in a lengthy history of theoretical discussions concerning what social order in a society is and why it may endure through periods of social upheaval (Green and Janmaat, 2011; Green et al., 2009). Hence social cohesion among groups increases or decreases with the changes in society i.e. social, cultural, educational, and economic.

Social change events that appeared to deteriorate the social fabric, recognized authorities, and social order were frequently the sources of both early and contemporary discourses on social cohesion. The major among these included industrial development, a rise of capitalism, or globalization as reported by (Green and Janmaat 2011; Green et al. 2009; Jenson, 1998)

Social cohesion and order arose certainly from the natural coordination of individual concerns which included the interchange of goods and collaboration which ultimately benefited every segment of the society. Social cohesion is considered an involuntary by-product of individual actions (Green and Janmaat 2011; Green et al. 2009; Jenson 1998). French sociologists and political philosophers, with their key exponents such as Emile Durkheim (1893), also presented the idea that society is a unified system with mutual values and principles that stress unity and solidarity among individuals and groups. It is also found that social cohesion is not a by-product of individual behavior rather it is grounded in solidarity, collective faithfulness, cooperation, and mutual respect (Chiesi 2004; Council of Europe 2005; Green and Janmaat 2011; Green et al. 2009; Jenson, 1998).

Durkheim (1893) differentiated solidarity that is grounded on common and collective standards, beliefs, mores, and livelihood styles he called it mechanical solidarity. He said that there is more mechanical solidarity in traditional societies than in modern) and the form of solidarity that developed in the progression of industrialization and division of labor, which is grounded on shared needs among individuals owing to their characters in a society known as organic solidarity.

Likewise, another sociologist namely Ferdinand Tonnies (1887) critically viewed modernization and individualization and expressed the distinction by using two different terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. According to him, the *Gemeinschaft* is a set of individuals who express more social

solidarity, and their actions are collective to serve their community, whereas *Gesellschaft* is a group of individuals who live together within the geographical unit but are not completely socially connected having more isolation and idealization. Thus, such groups are less socially cohesive having the least collective interests and cooperation.

The sociologists of the Twentieth century also examined social integration and solidarity. They believe that social cohesion exists when individuals and groups with different identities based on lifestyle, values, norms, values, and socio-economic resources have uniform access to all spheres of societal amenities and live together without hostility (Gough and Olofsson, 1999). Considerable attention was given to Lockwood (1999) with his division between social integration (associations amongst individuals or groups) and system integration (associations between functional fragments of a community). It is also found that social cohesion (strength of systems) and civic integration (institutional direction of society) and is grounded in collective values and other resemblances as revealed by (Berman and Phillips, 2004; Giardiello, 2014).

A recent model was explored by the Canadian Policy Research Networks (Jenson, 1998) by proposing five elements of social cohesion:

- i. Belongingness/isolation included collective values and shared identities in the social unit.
- ii. Economic inclusion/exclusion, opportunities for business, trade, and employment for everyone in the labor market.
- iii. Participation and immersion of individual members in civic affairs.
- iv. Acknowledgement versus denial of diversity and pluralism.
- v. The extent of legitimacy of societal organs.

Bernard (1999) further extended Jenson's idea by categorizing her dimensions rendering to three specific spheres such as sociocultural, political, and economic. Chan et al. (2006) identified two major elements of social cohesion, these may be subjective such as attitude, trust, and identification, and objective such as partaking rates, misconduct, etc. Bernard (1999) and Chan et al.'s (2006) contexts suggested four key extents of social cohesion: legitimacy against illegitimacy (i.e., established trust), acceptance versus rejection (i.e. harmony, and apprehension for the mutual benefits), political involvement, and socio-cultural partaking (Dickes and Valentova, 2012).

Research Question

What are the Local agents (individuals and groups) of Social Cohesion in Orakzai Agency?

Objective of the Study

To explore the Local agents (individuals and groups) of Social Cohesion in Orakzai Agency.

Methodology

A qualitative research method was used to conduct this research study. A qualitative method is more suitable in case the objectives are exploratory as suggested by Cresswell (2014). The Participants include *Jirga* members, *Maliks*, members of the Dispute Resolution Council (DRC), and residents of District Orakzai. The data was collected through the purposive sample technique as per the analogy given by (Charmaz, 2010). Open-ended face-to-face interviews were conducted by using a voice recorder and writing notes, where applicable during the collection of primary data. Furthermore, the in-depth interview guide was also used to know the participants' opinions in qualitative research design for the in-depth interview guide has used for the accumulation of information from the participants as recommended by (Miller, 2014). The primary was further analyzed through the thematic analysis technique as per the method given by Braun and Clark (1996).

Discussion

The outcomes of this study provided qualitative insight exploration of the role of the factors contributing to social cohesion and integration in the Orakzai District. The role of local agents in social cohesion and preventing inter-communal violence has also been emphasized. Many elements within a society by engaging its members, can promote social cohesion and inclusion the major among these identified through the current study are given as follow.

Imam e Masjid/Clerics

The role of *Imam e Masjid* is of prime importance in the tribal region. He can create an environment of tranquility and eradicate animosity among individuals or groups. This entails fostering a sense of harmony, understanding, and cooperation, while actively working towards resolving conflicts and promoting reconciliation.

A participant Ajab Khan identified that.

“I believe that Imam E Masjid plays an important role in bridging the gap among individuals and groups by addressing the root causes of enmity and engaging in dialogue, it becomes possible to establish lasting peace and cultivate a culture of mutual respect and empathy. This requires a collective effort from all parties involved, as well as a commitment to open-mindedness, forgiveness, and the pursuit of common goals. Through these endeavors, the aim is to transform hostility into harmony, paving the way for a more peaceful and inclusive society”.

Another participant Noor Khan expressed that.

“I found that a large group of people gather during prayers and listen to and obey the words of religious clerics, hence they must deliver those sermons which teach peace and solidarity on the occasions such as Jumma Prayers/Friday prayer, Eid Prayers or any other occasion. Thus, can promote social cohesion in the region”.

The above findings illustrate the extensive role of religious clerics of all sects in addressing a wide range of issues, including both individual and communal matters especially tribal and sectarian matters. It also highlights their capability not only to resolve disputes but also to tackle broader community challenges. Thus, they can mediate complex issues, navigate cultural sensitivities, and reach inclusive solutions that benefit the entire community.

The Council of Jirga

The study findings reveal the diverse range of issues that a *Jirga* can address effectively within communities. An unbiased and effective *Jirga* can engage groups in advocacy, mediation, and community mobilization, civil society organizations contribute to improving infrastructure, resolving disputes, and enhancing the overall quality of life for community members. This proactive approach underscores its ability to address both immediate and long-term issues through collaborative efforts and advocacy, thereby fostering sustainable development and social cohesion within communities.

A participant Ishfaq identified that.

“Jirga is an important element of our society. It has played a crucial role in resolving various challenges, including issues related to electricity supply, water access, land disputes, pathway conflicts, and road construction concerns”.

A participant namely Sadeeq stated that,

“There are a lot of things that solve civil societies. The members of civil society do their best for building integration and cohesion, some of them are linked with government and some are doing services in private as well”.

A participant Amjad responded that

“You know, Jirga as an organization plays a significant role in resolving various issues and promoting unity within communities. Members of a Jirga dedicate themselves to fostering integration and social cohesion through their efforts to resolve conflicts. Jirga in some cases also collaborates closely with government agencies, while others operate independently to provide essential services and address community needs effectively”.

The above findings clarify that *Jirga* plays a crucial role in resolving conflicts that arise between individuals and groups within a community or society. It serves as a mediator or facilitator, helping to negotiate and find solutions that satisfy all parties involved. It aims to promote dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation, aiming to prevent escalation of disputes and promote harmony. It also fosters communication and cooperation to maintain social order and cohesion, thereby enhancing the overall stability and well-being of the community.

Mashran (Elders)

The study findings suggest that elders (i.e. *Mashran*) of the study area have the traditional authority to control the society. Their words are of prime importance in all matters of the community. They are the controllers of *Hujra* and the family system, all youngsters are bound to respect them and obey their words. Besides, they are the primary agents of socialization and imparting culture and tradition to the next generation. Thus, their role in promoting social cohesion and integration is of prime importance.

A participant Majeed Khan expressed that.

“We cannot ignore the role of our Mashran because people often prefer seeking assistance from them over approaching formal courts or seeking help from any other source. This preference reflects a trust in them and their ability to understand local dynamics, address issues effectively, and provide timely and accessible solutions”.

Another Participant Asghar Khan identified that.

“I would say that Jirga as an organization is perceived as more responsive to community needs, fostering a sense of trust and cooperation among residents. Their role is significant in addressing diverse local issues and promoting community-based solutions that resonate with the preferences and values of the people they serve”.

A participant Wajid Khan responded that.

“I believe that Elders are the leaders of any groups in Tribal areas, they also play an important role in gathering and motivating youth towards different social activities. They may include peace and social cohesion as a part of their discussions/debates in Hujra or any other gatherings. They facilitate dialogue, promote understanding, and help reach mutually acceptable solutions, thereby reducing tensions by working and cooperating with other organizations such as Jirga and Government”.

The above findings reveal the scope of the role of elders in the study area and their effective address within a community or society. It suggests that civil society organizations play a crucial role in resolving serious matters such as murder cases, conflicts, disputes, issues related to land ownership, personal life challenges, and gender-related issues affecting women. Moreover, it is also explored that *Jirga* is engaged in social activities such as advocacy, mediation, and community mobilization to promote justice, reconciliation, and social harmony. By addressing these diverse issues, civil society contributes to strengthening community cohesion, supporting individual rights, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Local Sportsmen

Sportsmen and organizers of sports activists are the ambassadors of an area. They can play an active role in peace rather than a conflict game. They promote friendliness and brotherhood through sports. Moreover, organizing events such as cultural, educational, and sports festivals also brings diverse community members together.

A participant Junid identified that.

“I appreciate those who organize different sports events in our area. In these events, people from different villages come together both as players and as spectators. They enjoy the sports festivals, and a sense of solidarity can be observed during these events by appreciating the players and meeting each other during the match”.

Another Participant Obaid Khan responded that.

“The effectiveness of sports and sportsmen in promoting integration and solidarity cannot be ignored. They foster a sense of unity and solidarity among community members, encouraging them to resolve conflicts peacefully and maintain harmonious relationships. Sports are also important in mutual understanding, respect for differences, and collaborative efforts in addressing interpersonal challenges within Muslim communities”.

Another Participant Sajad Khan opined that.

“Sportsmen and organizers of sports festivals support tolerance, acceptance, understanding, mutual respect and conformity with rules. Those societies where there are sports activities have fewer conflicts due to a high degree of self-confidence and mutual interaction among individuals. These also provide feelings of ownership and belongingness which is a good way of resolving conflicts through non-violent means”.

A participant Raziq also responded that.

“I believe that sports and other physical activities enhance social skills and inculcate tolerance, mutual respect, unbiasedness and enhancing ideas about conflict resolution. Such activities should be encouraged by the government and provide enough funds to these”.

The above findings disclose that sports bring communities together on a single platform. By doing so, it leads to fostering peace, social cohesion, integration, and overall well-being within society. Engaging diverse community members in sports competitions enhances solidarity and mutual support among individuals. It decreases the tension and promotes understanding, thus, contributing to peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion

The research study explored the role of various agents such as clerics, the *Jirga* members, community elders, and sportsmen in promoting social cohesion in the Orakzai Agency, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Based on qualitative interpretation the study explored some concluding remarks while keeping in view the yardsticks of social cohesion and solidarity. The study found that clerics, the *Jirga* members, community elders, and sportsmen have a significant role in promoting social cohesion and mediating conflicts, fostering healthy dialogue, and organizing sport as a recreational institution while ensuring healthy and overall well-being. The lesson of reconciliation during various *Khutba* (sermon), and guiding behavior of the upcoming generation is fruitful. Holistically, the study reveals that these elements collectively strengthen social cohesion by bridging social division, promoting mutual respect, and providing platforms for conflict resolution. Thus, effective engagement and collaboration among these stakeholders are the hidden roots of social cohesion, peacebuilding, and development in the region.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest.

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