

Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
Case Study Series

LEGACIES OF CONFLICT
Healing Complexes and Moving
Forwards in Ghazni Province

EDITED



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About the Author

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About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research institute based in Kabul. AREU's mission is to inform and influence policy and practice through conducting high-quality, policy-relevant research and actively disseminating the results, and to promote a culture of research and learning. To achieve its mission AREU engages with policymakers, civil society, researchers and students to promote their use of AREU's research and its library, to strengthen their research capacity, and to create opportunities for analysis, reflection and debate.

AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organisations. AREU currently receives core funds from the governments of Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. Specific projects in 2011 have been funded by the European Commission (EC), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and UN Women.

7. Conclusion

This is the third and final case study written in a series exploring the legacies of conflict in different parts of Afghanistan. The conflicts have affected and are continuing to affect different parts of the country in a variety of ways and each community and the individuals within it have their own stories and experiences to tell. These varied histories result in a wide variety of perceptions and opinions about how to deal with the past and the overall research has demonstrated that there is no one way to deal with either the legacies of wartime violations or those held responsible for them. Different opinions of how to achieve justice in the aftermath of conflict were collected from the different groups participating in each research community. Since the project deals with perceptions and opinions, it has produced fluctuating data rather than fixed information, in many cases reflecting the thinking of respondents as they grapple with the challenges they face.

While the challenges of analysing and drawing reliable conclusions from this type of data have been discussed throughout this paper, it is possible at this stage to reflect on the original research questions and identify some key lessons.

Experience of conflict

- How an individual experienced each conflict was largely determined by where they were living at a specific period in time. While the rural community in Qarabagh District appeared to have experienced the conflict as a community and consequently had more unified perceptions, respondents in the research site in Ghazni City had much more varied stories, having lived elsewhere at various points during the conflicts.
- Both communities had somewhat different experiences of the conflict, largely as a result of their geographical locations and levels of support for the Taliban. The urban site perceived that it faced the most suffering under the Taliban and also during the communist regime. The rural site felt it had experienced huge violations under the communists, but identified the Taliban era as a period of relative calm. The rural site faced far greater direct violence in the current conflict and generally the urban area felt a level of security had been restored, though both areas widely rejected the government as legitimate in their province.
- Respondents in each community, aside from women in Ghazni City, generally identified foreign powers as ultimately responsible for triggering and prolonging the conflicts and for their accompanying violations—whether committed directly by them or by Afghan forces. However, different groups of Afghan leaders were identified as playing a role and as responsible for their wartime suffering, identifying ordinary people as victims. The level of blame attributed to the different groups was largely dependent on where people had lived during the conflicts, with ethnicity and sex found to have a small influence.
- During every conflict, competition for power was perceived to play a key role in triggering and prolonging the violence, while people's illiteracy and personal loyalty was perceived to have been manipulated and abused.

Dealing with the legacies of conflict

- The impact of the past conflicts was felt to have an ongoing impact on people's emotional, and in some cases, physical "well-being." The experience of ongoing conflict perhaps exacerbated these tensions, particularly among women in Ghazni

City, but conversely meant that in the rural community people were less concerned with addressing past issues and more concentrated on the current fears they faced.

- Processes aimed at addressing people's ongoing suffering received varying degrees of support. Truth-seeking was widely supported by both communities, but people expressed more concerns associated with recording processes, especially concerning the security implications of attempting this in the current environment. Moreover, truth-seeking and documentation were intrinsically linked with criminal proceedings, particularly by men, rather than being perceived as sufficient justice in themselves.
- Memorialisation efforts were widely supported and some, mostly younger, respondents emphasised that these should serve historical and information-building goals.
- Financial and material compensation for physical wartime damage was the most popular approach in both communities. Reparations were, however, perceived in practical terms and did not appear to hold much healing potential if implemented without accompanying punitive measures. Reparations were only perceived as sufficient for economic and material loss, not for the loss of a loved one.
- The government was perceived as primarily responsible for implementing these processes. Government action in any one of these areas was seen as key to creating government legitimacy. For many, specific government policies were less important than a general acknowledgement of victims' suffering.
- The international development community was also perceived as possessing a key role, particularly by men in Ghazni City.
- The overall failures of the government and international community to address victims' concerns to date and their preoccupation in fighting an insurgency meant there was very little genuine expectation that any of these processes would be implemented in the current environment.

Dealing with the perpetrators of war crimes

- The demand for the punishment of perpetrators of crimes was supported by the vast majority in both communities and forgiveness was overwhelmingly rejected.
- Criminal justice processes implemented by the state were strongly supported by all interviewees. Criminal justice was seen to be in accordance with Islam, play a role in healing processes, fulfill desires for formal documentation and vital for developing respect for the rule of law, security and government legitimacy.
- While forgiveness was rejected, the urban community was most likely to say they could forget past crimes, including a majority of male respondents, because they recognised expectations of achieving criminal justice were unrealistic and possibly had dangerous implications for security. The rural community largely remained consistent in demanding retributive measures.
- The government was seen as primarily responsible for administering retributive justice, in some cases with international support. International jurisdiction gained most support from people in both communities attending FGDs, largely because of the research methods employed.
- Considerable objection to international involvement was registered in the rural site and was a divisive topic among many men in the urban community, largely due to the demand that criminal trials be enacted according to Islamic law and Muslims be

punished by Muslims. The failure of the international community to act to date also played a role.

- The role of apologies and the repentance of perpetrators in people's ability to forgive played a small role, largely in the urban site and among younger respondents in the rural area. However, many of these people still insisted that apologies be accompanied by punishment and that confessions and demonstrations of repentance should occur in court.

Achieving reconciliation and peace

- Achieving security in Afghanistan was the key concern of all respondents and all policies were measured against their ability to contribute to this goal.
- Peace was perceived to entail more than security and was strongly linked with justice, development and government legitimacy. In the rural community, peace was also largely perceived as entailing the establishment of a true Islamic government.
- While residents of both communities were prone to downplaying any tensions within the community or externally with other ethnic groups, obvious problems stemming from wartime experiences still existed.
- There was widespread support for the need to build unity and understanding between different groups. Consequently, there was a demand that messages of peace and lessons of the negative impact of war be propagated through education, cultural awareness initiatives, the media and, particularly, community elders and mullahs.
- Since leaders were perceived as primarily responsible for driving the conflict, peace was perceived generally as resting on their ability to cooperate and build trust. Reconciliation from the top down was perceived as essential to creating peace in Afghanistan.
- The government was primarily responsible for leading peace processes, but there was a strong emphasis on employing integrative mechanisms such as *jirgas*, which were seen to represent all Afghans' interests.
- The presence of the international community was perceived by many as presenting an obstacle to peace by contributing to the environment of insecurity and fuelling the insurgency, prompting calls for their departure.
- The Taliban were perceived as presenting the most serious obstacle to peace, and the vast majority of respondents accepted the need for negotiations. However, there was clear disagreement between the two research sites over what this would entail. While the rural site largely favoured a Taliban government, this was overwhelmingly rejected by the urban community, some of whom argued that the Taliban still needed to demonstrate repentance and even face punishment before reconciliation could occur.
- Perceived collusion between the government or the international community—particularly the United States—and the Taliban weakened expectations that peace would be reached in the immediate future.
- Ultimately, the prospects for peace in Afghanistan looked bleak to both communities.