New winners and losers in North Waziristan: Understanding tensions between top-down projects and local knowledge in the post-conflict setting (2015–2019)

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Abstract: There is a growing academic literature on the role of cultural sensitivity in post-conflict peace-building. However, the role of local knowledge in a post-conflict reconstruction setting is rarely discussed explicitly. Attempting to fill the gap, this research paper aims at understanding why local knowledge is imperative to achieve just and equitable post-conflict reconstruction policies and practices. Using qualitative field data, the paper is based on the experiences and lessons learned from the post-conflict reconstruction efforts (2015–2019) in the tribal district of North Waziristan (NW), Pakistan. The paper finds out that while establishing human security as a benchmark, top-down reconstruction policies and projects ignore local knowledge and, in fact, exacerbate pre-existing fragilities by creating new winners and losers. The refashioning of the social order, along with notions of justice and equity, in the post-conflict setting results in local disputes among families and tribes. The paper argues that cultural-sensitive reconstruction planning is even more pertinent and pragmatic in “close-knit community” settings, where people remain dependent on continuous social and economic relationships with each other.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This research paper evaluates critically the role of local knowledge in terms of its efficacy, equity, and broader implications in post-conflict reconstruction interventions. The paper argues that in order to achieve positive outcomes in terms of stability and human security, development approaches need to move beyond the technocratic notions of “expert knows best” or “best practices” in the direction of more inclusive policies and practices that take into consideration and adopt local cultures and knowledge into post-conflict reconstruction agendas. A cultural-sensitive reconstruction planning is even more pertinent and pragmatic in “close-knit community” settings, where people remain dependent on continuous social and economic relationships with each other. By challenging and critiquing top-down technocratic approaches this study sets out to consolidate a mode of analysis, policy design and practicing interventions that could be replicated and adapted in other conflict and post-conflict settings.
Rather, a less sensitive approach to cultural factors most often fosters discord, thereby reinforcing tensions and power inequalities.

Subjects: International Relations; Development Studies; Development Policy

Keywords: Post-conflict reconstruction; local knowledge; top-down projects; human security; community development

1. Introduction

The relationship between local knowledge and community development is a critical element in the study and practice of post-conflict reconstruction and yet, interveners often ignore these connections in their design, planning and practice (S.-A. Wilson, 2015; World Bank, 1998). Most often interventions are undertaken following a top-down, technocratic planning that does not acknowledge adequately the importance and potential of local knowledge (Chambers, 1997; Escobar, 1995; Mansuri & Rao, 2012; Sillitoe, 1998; S.-A. Wilson, 2015). Policies and practices planned through a “top-down approach”, with little regard to local wisdom, jeopardize community development and most often contribute to fuel division and even violence—particularly in environments already affected by conflict (Anderson, 1999; Uvin, 1998). The shortcomings of top-down approaches have urged scholars and policymakers to rethink the importance of bottom-up approaches that take into consideration the full array of traditional knowledge systems in their strategies for effective and equitable community development (Brennan, 2005; S.-A. Wilson, 2015). Hence, various international development organizations have highlighted the need to replace top-down approaches, focusing instead on the comprehensive use of local knowledge in their planning and practices (United Nations, 2009; World Bank, 1998).

Local knowledge in development contexts refers to and takes into consideration the full array of local customs and norms, as well traditional forms of governance mechanisms and local structures that resonate more with local needs, meanings, practices, and ways of life (Brennan, 2005; Sillitoe, 2006; S.-A. Wilson, 2015). Often explicitly related to “participatory approaches”, local knowledge points at culturally-appropriated policies and practices which empower the local community through promoting a collaborative atmosphere and enhancing the legitimacy and efficacy of interventions, thereby consolidating human security and sustainable development (Brennan, 2005; Chambers, 1994; Friedmann, 1992). At the same time, local knowledge acts as an “information base” that advances awareness of how societies function at the grassroots level and increase the likelihood that vulnerable groups are neither excluded nor harmed by social and technological change or external interventions (Mansuri & Rao, 2004; Sillitoe, 2006; Ward, 2020).

Using qualitative data collected in the field between 2017—2019, this research paper evaluates critically the role of local knowledge in terms of its efficacy, equity, and broader implications in post-conflict reconstruction interventions. In fact, we still know relatively little about the role and impact of culturally sensitive reconstruction processes in post-conflict settings, which constitutes both a gap in the literature and a challenge for the fieldwork researchers. Taking the tribal district of North Waziristan (NW) in Pakistan, as a case study, this research paper presents empirical evidence and seeks to understand—(i) the extent to which post-conflict interventions that are not sensitive to cultural knowledge alter the pre-conflict social structure by creating new “winners and losers”; and (ii) the extent to which the new social order has contributed to fuel local disputes which in turn seriously affect post-conflict reconstruction practices and processes. This research paper is based on the study of experiences and lessons learned from the Government of Pakistan’s (GoP) efforts to revitalize economic activities through the reconstruction of demolished bazaars in the tribal district of NW. During the recent military operation “Zarb-e-Azb” (2014), the main bazaars of “Mir Ali” and “Miran Shah” were destroyed as “collateral damage”. The destruction of bazaars put a heavy burden on the economy and livelihoods of local communities. In response to massive destruction, the GoP initiated the reconstruction of the destroyed bazaars to revive market activities and promote human security in the post-conflict setting.
In the context of this research paper, we adopt “local knowledge” as the framework of local customs and traditions, including informal institutions, that the people of NW have developed over a long period of time based on local practices and interactions in order to produce governance and distribute public goods. Local knowledge in NW is a structuring factor for understanding social order in the longue durée and is maintained via informal institutions and traditional mechanisms to which the local people are bound by a network of primordial obligations. Presenting empirical evidence from recent conflict and post-conflict in NW, this research study sets out to contribute to the renewed debate and scholarly literature on how and why local knowledge must have a central place in post-conflict reconstruction policies and practices. This research paper also aims at bringing new insights into how and in which ways both anthropology and ethnography (from traditional types to collaborative and auto-ethnography) should be more engaged in articulating local knowledge to the promotion of post-conflict human security and development practices. Moreover, within the same debate, this paper also contributes to the existing literature on how culturally less sensitive development aid may destabilize communities and exacerbate violence in critically fragile conditions. Finally, this study also reviews the paradoxical outcomes of top-down bureaucratic reconstruction policies in order to draw policy implications for GoP and aid donors.

The paper begins by underlining the theoretical framework, followed by the context and the methodology of the study. Section three discusses the main findings and is further divided into three sub-sections. First, we discuss several general problems that emerged due to culturally insensitive post-conflict reconstruction policies, including the creation of new winners and losers and the complexities of land-related procedures. The second sub-section serves as a background for how these problems were addressed previously in comparison to current procedures in the post-conflict setting. The third sub-section addresses the problem of how the reconfiguration of societal power dynamics has promoted new polarizations and human insecurities, which in turn have affected the overall reconstruction efforts in NW.

2. Understanding “local knowledge” in the context of community development: a theoretical framework

By the end of the 20th century, the emerging interest in the use of local knowledge within development studies reflects a paradigm shift from the top-down modernist approach to a more localized form of development (Barakat & Zyck, 2009; Boonzaaijer & Apusigah, 2008). The question over epistemic authority was then raised: what knowledge is to be held as authoritative in the development of local communities? Several writers have come to question top-down approaches as a technocratic (G. Wilson, 2006), Northern meta-narrative that erases local stories and claims to be the best, most effective, or even the only, solution to development problems (Chambers, 1994; Ellen, 2002; Escobar, 1995). On the contrary, the understanding of local knowledge ingrained in particular ways of life, value-systems, beliefs and informal institutions has become essential for development (Chambers, 1994; S.-A. Wilson, 2015). Local knowledge is the heritage of everyday life, based on collective experience, often tested over centuries and adapted to local conditions (Sillitoe, 2006; Warren et al., 1995).

Social constructivists present “knowledge” as a human product that is socially and culturally situated (Kothari, 2001; Kukla, 2000) and is passed down from “generation to generation, in many societies by word of mouth” (Warren, 1991, p. 1). Constructivists focus on the consideration of norms, values and culture, stressing in particular (i) the role played by “collectively held or intersubjective ideas and understandings on social life”; (ii) the “intersubjective” beliefs as shared collective understanding; and (iii) that these beliefs construct the actors’ identities and interests” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). Constructivism elucidates knowledge as a broader (inter)subjectivist postulation that sees knowledge as produced in the interaction among communities and structuring social order and local governance over a long period of time (longue durée). Local knowledge embodies the collective consciousness of local communities, thereby enriching the understanding of development needs and opportunities within a given context, and promoting culturally suitable transformational interventions in line with human security. Ellen (2002, p. 239) argues that local
knowledge in the development context is a system of belief that is held more or less collectively by a population and informs the interpretation of things.

Eventually, the consideration of local knowledge in community development has achieved an increasing acknowledgment as a best-fit model to support bottom-up approaches to development in remote and traditional communities (Kihl, 2015; S.-A. Wilson, 2015). Various international organizations and development experts have been focusing, for development planning, on the need to adopt policies that prioritize local knowledge that local peoples intrinsically own and have developed for generations (World Bank, 1998). The World Bank report (Mansuri & Rao, 2012) stresses bottom-up approaches to formulate effective development strategies by drawing upon traditional knowledge systems. Increasingly, the “indigenization of development” as the precursor of “empowerment” has made inroads as an alternative approach into discussions on development (Chambers, 1994). In many cases, the failure of development projects has been linked to the ignorance of planners rather than the ignorance of local communities (Boonzaaijer & Apusigah, 2008, p. 13; Warren, 1991). Escobar (1995, p. 98) argues that the “remaking of development must start by examining local constructions, to the extent that they are the life and history of the people, that is, the conditions for and of change”. Sillitoe (2006, p. 6) argues that local knowledge enriches the “understanding of development opportunities within a cultural context, promoting culturally appropriate interventions relevant to people’s needs”. Within remote indigenous communities, “local culture provides a sense of identity and is central to the identification of plans of action to improve well-being” (Brennan, 2005, p. 1).

Therefore, Haraway (1988) uses the concept of “situated knowledge” as useful and effective as a way to take into consideration alternative ways of thinking and doing in a specific “time” and “context”. She argues that local communities can better comprehend the situation of the surrounding environment by engaging in relevant forms of participation and cooperation. The relief and reconstruction expert Fred Cuny, killed in Chechnya in 1995, called for a new way of working in fragile contexts. He asserted that the local population could better comprehend their situation and response mechanisms through local resources and local technical capacities (Cuny, 1994). While illustrating their experiences, Leino and Peltomaa (2012) argue that situated knowledge not only gains support but also underpins “legitimacy” in a particular activity among local communities. Parallel to this, the “indigenous development” framework aims at revitalizing, enhancing, and complementing in-situ development based on local knowledge and cultural practices (Boonzaaijer & Apusigah, 2008; Hoppers, 2002). It takes local cultures as a critical starting point and posits those cultures as a central framework for community development (Boonzaaijer & Apusigah, 2008, p. 9). Such an endeavor intends to develop a cooperative atmosphere between outsiders and the local community that promotes the identification of jointly perceived challenges and negotiated actions (Sillitoe, 2006).

More recently, in tribal societies, the proposition that “informal traditional institutions matter” for peace and development has received immense attention (Bräucher, 2015). Tribalism involves the possession of strong cultural values, beliefs and attitudes that guide people’s lives within a community and connect them subjectively through intense feelings of common identity. Glatzer (2002) argues that tribal groups or communities are bound by a network of primordial obligations on the solid basis of well-structured genealogical ties. Members of a community feel a sense of belonging and share a kinship with each other as well as recognition, harmony, and cohesiveness within this organizational unity (Trencher, 2019). Each tribe across the globe share common cultural values, social structure and informal institutions which play a vital role in promoting peace and social order within communities. Therefore, informal institutions are rooted in local cultural knowledge, aiming at establishing stability, resolving conflicts, reducing tension, and rebuilding social relationships (Shakirullah et al., 2019). Top-down transformational projects underestimate broadly the “local coping mechanisms” or disrupt its ability to function properly by undermining its credibility within the community (Barakat & Milton, 2020). Empirical research has produced deep knowledge about, for instance, the institution of “Bashingantahe” in Burundi
(De Juan, 2017), the traditional tribal governance in Yemen (Al-Dawsari, 2012) and the Jirga system in rural Afghanistan, all cases of institutions that have performed multi-dimensional roles such as brokering ceasefires, conflict resolution and facilitated humanitarian and reconstruction interventions at the local level.

Research has also shown the significance of local knowledge in reconstruction interventions due to the effective identification of vulnerable groups within conflict-affected communities. In post-Sadam Iraq, the reconstruction shortcomings contain many examples of contextually ill-suited projects bracketing out local wisdom that result from externally driven interventions (Barakat & Milton, 2020). The study of Shah and Shahbaz (2015) presents empirical evidence of how post-conflict relief and rehabilitation efforts through top-down approaches in conflict-affected areas of Swat, Pakistan, did not completely align with local realities, culture, and traditions, and failed to achieve a positive outcome. In rural Kenya, for example, the construction of water wells closer to remote villages, designed to avoid women having to travel long distances for water, had the unexpected outcome of increasing family and inter-village conflicts (Marthaler & Gabriel, 2013).

On the other hand, top-down approaches take local knowledge as inherently primitive because traditional, and inferior or even a token of backwardness (Briggs, 2005; Sengupta, 2015). Most state-led interventions render traditional local knowledge as inferior and often ignore the desire of traditional communities to incorporate their cultural and traditional values in development practices. In contrast, they regard scientific knowledge as uniform and superior, universal, testable, and verifiable (Kuhn, 2012). However, issues related to ingrained power relations and lack of homogeneity are usually identified as main obstacles to the incorporation of local knowledge into development practices (Antweiler, 1998; Hobart, 1993). Agrawal argues that local knowledge is culturally embedded and therefore, “acutely political” (Agrawal, 1995). Local elites who hold power superpose themselves to the voices of the community and try to impose their knowledge and views on others (Sengupta, 2015; Sillitoe, 1998). Power relations and social hierarchies are deeply entrenched at the local level and contribute to the crystallization of iniquities (Mohan & Stokke, 2000, p. 253). Therefore, state-led top-down transformational interventions become effective in early recovery phases because they are easier to devise as a uniform policy based on a centralized command. This explains part of the paradoxical account of top-down development projects.

3. Doing research: the field and the method

3.1. The field

Data for this research study was collected in the NW district of Pakistan between 2017 and 2019. NW is located on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and is surrounded by the South Waziristan district to the South, Afghanistan to the West, the Bannu district to the East and the Kurram district to the North. The total area of NW is 4707 Sq.km and the approximate population is 543,254 (according to the 2017 census of Pakistan). NW consists of three sub-divisions and ten tehsils. The Miran shah sub-division is composed of Miran shah, Ghulam Khan, Datta Khel and Shewal tehsils. The Razmak sub-division comprises Razmak, Garyum and Dosali tehsils. The Mir Ali sub-division comprises Mir Ali, Spinwam, and Shewa tehsils. The Tochi River flowing through the district has formed the Tochi Pass, through which armies, people and cultures have moved in and out of this region. The Dawar land lies across the Tochi River which is most fertile and cultivable. Wheat is the major Rabi (winter) crop, occupying almost 90 percent of cultivated land. Maize, rice and fruit are the main Kharif (summer) crops, and vegetables are grown in villages across the River Tochi. Due to lack of other opportunities, local people rely on livestock and small businesses in Mir Ali and Miran Shah bazaars to earn their livelihoods and feed their families.

In NW, tribalism is a key to understand the local system of governance, as well as the socio-cultural order structuring the life of local communities. Dominated by the Wazir and Dawar tribes, the fabric of society is based on the kinship system, which provides the strongest social bonds to sustain social
order and to regulate socio-economic life (Dawar, 2020b). Glatzer argues that kinship is based on the “genealogical concept of social structure inherited from common ancestor further divided into tribes and sub-tribes, clans and sub-clans down to the local lineages and families” (Glatzer, 2002, p. 3). The local population of NW shares a common socio-cultural identity based on Pashtunwali (Dawar, 2020b), which is an informal unwritten law that guides the cultural practices formed by primary rules strictly followed by the Pashtun tribal groups (Ahmad, 1980). Pashtunwali comprises local customs, tradition, heritage, customary law, and usages making all social relations a compact system. Pashtunwali is “so essential to the identity of the Pashtun that there is no distinction between practicing Pashtunwali and being a Pashtun” (Kakar, 2007, p. 2). A person violating any of these values would lose his or her social status and the blessing of collective support and protection of the community.

3.2. The method

Fieldwork for this research study was conducted in two villages of the Mir Ali tehsil. This tehsil was selected for the study because it was severely hit by the conflict so that its main economic hub was razed to the ground during the military operation conducted by the GoP. During the military operation in 2014, the entire population was internally displaced. During the post-conflict situation, the GoP has been involved in reconstruction activities such as roads, hospitals, schools and the rebuilding of the demolished bazaar in Mir Ali. NW is a close-knit community where people of different tehsils remain dependent on contiguous social and economic relationships. People remain aware and involved in each other’s problems and hardships. Therefore, by selecting this tehsil the study also covers the socio-economic, cultural and tribal fabric of the whole NW.

Methodologically speaking then, data collection in conflict zones presents numerous challenges as far as empirical research is concerned, but it also provides unique insights and first-hand data to understand the dynamics of human communities (Mazurana et al., 2013). In our case, an ethnographic approach supported by the intermittent interview method, and based on the principle of mutual confidentiality, sustained the fieldwork for this study (Dawar, 2020a). A locally contextual methodology was adopted to interview both local and key respondents. The situated methodology approach has already been used with good results by other studies meant to analyze and interpret knowledge in a specific context as an empirical and observable phenomenon (Gherardi, 2008; Kovats-Bernat, 2002; Sluka, 1995).

A total of 46 in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted for this research study. Local respondents were interviewed through convenient sampling whereas key respondents were interviewed using purposive sampling. Convenient sampling was adopted for two reasons. First, this research seeks a generalization of the local community perspective on the post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Therefore, the opinion and lived experience of the local people irrespective of their tribe and sub-tribe or clan remained critical to assess the complex process of constructing social reality in that context. Second, due to the volatile security situation in NW, convenient sampling imposed itself as an answer to overcome the limits and challenges posed by a far from ideal research situation. Convenient sampling facilitated access to a considerable number of local respondents despite numerous security challenges (Dawar, 2020a). The purposive sampling helped to identify information-relevant respondents in line with the most effective use of limited resources at hand. The respondents were selected based on their relevant expertise and experiences to the area of research or because of their privileged witnessing of events. Relevance was assessed in terms of the respondents’ comprehensive knowledge about the conflict and the post-conflict reconstruction efforts in NW. Along with IDIs, the research also involved a total of 42 informal discussions (IDs) in shops, Mosques, and Hujras (communal guesthouses), as well as other public places within the local communities (Table 1).

Moreover, some ethnographic research was conducted that went further into the local mindsets than the formal interviews over those 14 months (2017–2019). It provided a deeper insight into
the lived experiences and practices of local people and the complex ways they (re)produce but also refashion social order. Ethnographic research is based on prolonged contact with people in their particular settings which involves the researcher’s observations, interviews, analysis of documents but also broader interactions and even collaboration with local people in their daily routines (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007, p. 3). The familiarity with local culture and language played a significant role in participating in community Jirgas and sitting with elders in Hujras (communal guesthouse). Participation in community Jirgas provided an opportunity to understand the hurdles and issues that emerged due to post-conflict reconstruction policies and practices. Sitting in Hujras with the elders was especially useful for remarking the perspectives of local communities on the post-conflict refashioning of social order and the emerging disputes and power shifts.

This qualitative research methodology is supported by interpretive epistemology and constructivist ontology. Constructivism asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continuously constructed by social actors. Therefore, social reality must be analyzed in terms of the intersubjective experiences of social actors stemming from their interaction within a group (Bryman, 2008). Interpretive epistemology uncovers the multiplicity of participants’ views and empowers researchers to delve into the understanding and contextualization of particular and situated knowledge constructs (Grix, 2002; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015). Interpretive epistemology proceeds pragmatically, i.e., using both inductive and deductive methodologies. Conclusions and findings are presented after qualitative (but also quantitative) data is subjected to a complex process of reflexive and interpretative analysis. Induction is mainly linked to empirical observation but deduction plays a major role early in the research process as an exploratory starting point for research.

In the context of this study, constructivism operates as a powerful critique and challenge to positivist ways of approaching the security-development nexus, community participation, and legitimacy. Drawing on Gordon G. Wilson (2006, p. 506) “the constructivist critique operates at all levels, from ideology and theory to the practice of development interventions”, thereby working as a sharp epistemic tool in the understanding of how social groups construct reality through discourse. However, the challenge remains for constructivist approaches to develop both

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**Table 1. Shows the local and key respondents interviewed for this research study**

| Classification                                                                 | Total Respondents |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Local respondents (In-depth interviews)                                       | TR = 36 (Male)    |
| Key respondents (In-depth interviews)                                         | TR = 10 (Male)    |
| Key respondents                                                               |                   |
| Influential elders (Maliks)                                                   | TR = 10           |
| Government and army officials                                                 | TR = 2            |
| Patwaris (Land record keepers)                                                | TR = 2            |
| Academic scholar                                                              | TR = 1            |
| NGOs officials                                                                 | TR = 2            |
| Local Respondents                                                             |                   |
| Village A                                                                     |                   |
| (1) Business-class (shopkeepers, restaurant owners)                          | TR = 7 (7 M)      |
| (2) Working-class (farmers, daily-wage workers)                              | TR = 7 (7 M)      |
| (3) Landlords (Market owners, Agricultural Landowners)                        | TR = 4 (4 M)      |
| Village B                                                                     |                   |
| (1) Business-class (shopkeepers, restaurant owners)                          | TR = 5 (5 M)      |
| (2) Working-class (farmers, daily-wage workers)                              | TR = 8 (8 M)      |
| (3) Landlords (Market owners, Agricultural Landowners)                        | TR = 5 (5 M)      |
theoretical/reflexive and empirical tools capable of producing more situated accounts of how intersubjective systems of concepts, rules and beliefs are (re)produced within particular social groups, especially beyond Western-centric models of instrumental rationality (Röling, 1996). Likewise, it is fundamental for constructivists to develop a more sensitive and empirical approach to how security and development practices are deeply enmeshed in power relations (Kothari, 2001), and become affected by power shifts like those occurring during and in the aftermath of violent conflicts. This research study sets out to address both challenges.

4. Findings and discussion: new winners and losers

Development has become a very contentious concept and practice lately, not least because of the problematic relationship it entails with security and human rights, both individual and collective, and is facing a serious challenge from local, situated approaches. According to Escobar (1995, p. 98), the “remaking of development must start by examining local constructions, to the extent that they are the life and history of the people, that is, the conditions for and of change”. In the last few decades, NW has remained the focus of a lively debate in international politics. The bombing of Afghanistan by the US-led alliance pushed militants into NW through a porous border. With the immediate response of the GoP through the deploying of troops, the region become a site of intense conflict between Pakistan’s security forces and those militants (Dawar, 2020b). Since 2003, the GoP has conducted several small and large scale operations in NW which caused serious social, economic and psychological problems to the local people. It was not until 2014 when the GoP finally decided to launch a military operation against militants (Zarb-e-Azb). Most of the population (of approximately one million) was internally displaced during the military operation (UNOCHA, 2014) which, along with the subsequent population displacement, resulted in a strong impact on macro and micro economies of households, including the loss of employment and market failure. For instance, the main bazaars of Mir Ali and Miran Shah were destroyed as a result of collateral damages during the military operation. In January 2015, the GoP declared the area clear of militants and initiated the rehabilitation and reconstruction in order to bring human security and stability to the region.

Responding to the post-operation vulnerable situation in NW, and with the help of the international community, the GoP has developed a comprehensive plan: the FATA Sustainable Return and Rehabilitation Strategy (FSRRS) (FATA Secretariat, 2015). The efforts were aimed at promoting human security by empowering local communities through capacity-building support that was tailored to meet the communities’ priorities and aspirations in terms of development (Dawar & Ferreira, 2021). Under the slogan “build back better and smarter”, the GoP became involved in the reconstruction of markets, roads, schools, hospitals, sports facilities, and the creation and maintenance of orphanages. The role of the military has been prominent all along, and 400 projects have been carried out by armed forces in NW (Dawar & Ferreira, 2021; Spychoła-Kij, 2020). The interventions were designed to fill the gap in support for private businesses, livelihood promotion through infrastructure development, construction of new bazaars and overall employment creation. In other words, all the interventions were designed conceptually to revitalize livelihoods and social life in the tribal areas through equal participation in the development schemes and projects of reconstruction of markets, roads and villages.

Although the GoP has achieved visible success in the material reconstruction of infrastructures (schools, hospitals, roads and sports facilities), the reconstruction of new bazaars was much more problematic because it generated a number of property controversies among landowners and shopkeepers across NW. The fact that reconstruction interventions ignored local perceptions is evident from the fact that the government predominantly focused on top-down bureaucratic interventions and avoided the complexities of local perspectives and priorities (Dawar & Ferreira, 2021). Therefore, local respondents remarked that the bazaars and roads were constructed or repaired even before the return of the displaced local communities, and it is commonly believed that by being top-down in approach, these interventions produced new kinds of long term inequalities and injustices. Reconstruction interventions have disrupted the pre-conflict social structure by
creating new winners and losers in the post-conflict setting. Confictual policies and schemes through top-down model of interventions without paying due attention to local knowledge deter the natural development of the affected community in its way to self-actualization (Ep & Sebastian, 2016) and exacerbate the vulnerability by widening socio-economic inequalities (Bender, 2011). Therefore, excluding local communities from conflict assessment and implementing development interventions by ignoring the local socio-cultural dynamics usually fails to achieve positive outcomes both in development and peacebuilding (Schirch, 2013).

4.1. The disruption of the traditional land distribution mechanism and bazaars
In spite of the success in the reconstruction of material infrastructure, the GoP failed to take into account local knowledge in its post-conflict reconstruction policies and practices for NW, meaning it did not give enough recognition to the importance of situated forms of dealing with challenges, based on the everyday collective experience, and tested over centuries of local interactions and material conditions (Sililoe, 2006; Warren et al., 1995). For instance, in NW, land and land management and control historically belong to the people, owned by individuals, clans and communities which regulate its distribution according to their customary practices locally known as Nikkat. Nikkat is derived from the word Nikka which means grandfather or ancestor. It is the non-negotiable law of tribal division that provides a traditional basis for the division of resources, profits and sharing of loss, which is worked out with exact mathematical precision within the families and among the tribes (Ahmed, 1991; Beattie, 2011; Caroe, 1958). The ancestral land is divided equally among legal heirs. However, women do not get their share of inheritance according to Pashtunwali.

Respondents explained that the GoP introduced new rules for the reconstruction of destroyed bazaars in NW. For instance, and under the new rules, in the Mir Ali bazaar locals were obliged to reconstruct their destroyed markets at their expense, with a distance of 30 feet from each side of the road. The widening of the road inside the bazaar has caused two issues. First, it confiscated the private property of the local community without compensation. The local community was asked to approve the proposed reconstruction design of their markets to make sure that the owners complied with the newly approved rules by the GoP. A local “Patwari” (land record-holder) illustrated that under the new policies, hundreds of families lost their small patches of land comprising single or two shops lying on the front road. And second, the widening of the road disturbed the traditional land distribution mechanism among brothers and families. One of the local landowners elaborated on this:

After returning, we noticed that the road inside Mir Ali bazaar had been expanded by making encroachment upon private property. The authorities failed to understand that the bazaar was not the property of a single person. The expansion of the road disturbed the customary land distribution resulting in conflicts between families and even among brothers. (ID1, 25 January 2019)

A local influential elder, who is actively engaged in mediating these disputes, explained that, as a consequence of the new reconstruction policies, victims who held an essential position previously in the bazaar lost valuable property. With the loss of front road shops, new beneficiaries (winners) occupied central positions on the front of the new road, which eventually reconfigured the economic power dynamics and social relations upon which local social status depends. In NW, the value of a commercial entity is gauged over its proximity from the main road. Consequently, the majority of the victims demand the redistribution of their ancestral land. However, the potential beneficiaries actively resist the redistribution of land. They support the GoP new policies and practices of reconstruction. The interviewed elder was afraid that the redistribution of land would further exacerbate preexisting fragilities. During an interview, one of the beneficiaries categorically denied the redistribution of land and argued:
We agreed on the losses and benefits of distribution for decades, and second, the victims need to claim compensation from the government rather demanding redistribution of the land. (IDI, 22 November 2017)

Local respondents further explain that another common type of dispute that emerged in the post-conflict period is between people having Qabza (occupation) and those possessing legal documents. A local Malik explained that in the Pashtun tribal tradition, Qabza for around 20–30 years signifies the ownership of land. Unruh (2003) has rightly stated that traditional land distribution mechanisms are always negatively affected by armed conflict and prolong displacement which can be a reason for potential renewed confrontation. As a consequence of the destruction and prolonged displacement during the military operation in NW, the decades old disputes over markets and agricultural lands re-emerged among families and tribes. A local Patwari explained that as a settlement it happened in several cases that the disputed property was re-divided between both parties. However, he further explained that hundreds of cases are still under consideration in the local magistrate office. As a consequence of giving up the Qabza and re-dividing the land, despair and resentment were generated which, in other words, locked conflicting parties up in permanent confrontation.

The destruction of bazaars and subsequent reconstruction obliterated the traditional demarcated boundaries in that setting. Mir Ali and Miran Shah markets were destroyed and leveled to the ground during military-operation. There is disagreement on where the property of one individual ends and another begins, especially where physical markers have been either altered or destroyed. Local respondents illustrated that the history of land ownership and management practices in NW is poorly documented. Land issues are regulated through customary evidence, which connects them to history, physical signs of occupation being among the most common evidence for ownership. Due to the non-availability of proper documentation, the elimination of traditional boundary lines has produced local disputes among families. Therefore, and along with Ellen (2002, p. 239), it is critical to underline here that local knowledge embodies the collective identity and consciousness of local communities, which serves as the repository of the collective memory and understanding of justice, security and development needs. Local “coping mechanisms” such as these provide a sense of identity and direction that “are central to the identification of plans of action to improve well-being” (Brennan, 2005, p. 1).

Kihl (2015) argues that community development practitioners need to understand the importance of local traditional mechanism and the existing social bonding capital as very strong community assets for the success of development interventions. As a blatant example of ignoring local “coping mechanisms”, in Miran Shah the newly reconstructed markets were built according to modern design which does not take into consideration the traditional demarcation lines among the thousands of owners. The GoP considered the land as a single-owned property, although the previous bazaar was owned by hundreds of families starting from two or three shops up to multiple markets. In newly constructed markets, owners can hardly mark the boundaries of their property. Moreover, local respondents explained that hundreds of families lost their market places either for parking lots or lavatory areas. One of the victims of new reconstruction strategies remarked:

I have lost everything to the parking lot of the market. Why should my lot be the parking area of another person? (ID, 12 October 2018)

Furthermore, the destruction of bazaars and subsequent reconstruction practices also destroyed the traditional water channels in bazaars that were used in the past for the drainage system. Due to the elimination of boundary markers, most of those water channels have been either confiscated by adjacent owners or destroyed during the military operation. The elimination of traditional water channels not only disturbed the drainage system of the bazaars; it also disrupted the water flow to the agricultural land near the bazaars. These water channels were developed during the colonial period and were administered through local customary rights known as Izzat. Under Izzat,
a person has the legal right to use water channels either for drainage or watering their fields. Local respondents explained that the disruption of traditional water channels results in local disputes among the market owners themselves and with agricultural landowners.

Similarly, the top-down policies and practices of reconstruction ignored the tribal dynamics in NW, also resulted in the creation of new winners and losers, detrimental to collective security. For example, during the military operation, thousands of shops and plazas were destroyed in the main traditional bazaar, locally known as Mir Ali bazaar. In the post-conflict interventions, the authorities constructed new commercial zone of 120 shops in different geographical location, while ignoring the reconstruction of the old bazaar. The owners of the destroyed bazaar were neither compensated nor helped in the reconstruction of the markets (DAWN, 2016). Local respondents explained that the construction of a new commercial zone is a positive step for economic development, but the favor of one village to the detriment of another results in local tensions and power imbalances among the local communities (see section 4.3).

During an interview with a GoP official, evidence was provided that the authorities had planned to develop small pockets of markets in different geographical locations for two reasons: first, to facilitate the local community access to nearby markets and, second, to manage more easily the security of bazaars. An army official explained that those congested shops and buildings were used by terrorists as a sanctuary to store lethal weapons for terrorist activities inside Pakistan and move them across the border into Afghanistan. In contrast to the old congested bazaars, the newly constructed markets are spacious and contain all the modern facilities required for urban centers. Moreover, government officials see the construction of new economic zones as a source of competition for the economic development of the region. However, the local elders claim that in view of their central and strategic location, reconstruction and development of the main Mir Ali and Miran Shah Bazaars as business hubs were the prerequisites for the success of the newly constructed small markets and overall business development. They argued that these ill-planned and random interventions further spoiled the chances of revival of well-functioning markets and sustainable business activities in the area. Furthermore, due to the non-availability of wholesale dealers and suppliers, the small markets are flooded with substandard stocks of items of basic needs and daily use including foods, flour, milk, ghee, and medicines.

This study underlines sharp differences in perceptions regarding the GoP post-conflict intervention. The winners of the process appreciated governmental practices both in terms of the widening of the road as well as the relocation of bazaars. A beneficiary of new reconstruction practices in Mir Ali Bazaar argued:

The government has taken extraordinary measures for the reconstruction of Waziristan. We need to look forward and support the new social change as well as government efforts in rebuilding Waziristan in the post-conflict period. (IDI, 22 November 2017)

However, most of the losers of the process expressed disappointment, discontent and even deep despair over the GoP reconstruction plans and policies. The confiscation of private property without consent and compensation created more grievances on top of existing ones. Such grievances range from simple disappointment or distrust towards the state and its ability to handle land issues justly and fairly, to the perception of the state as an interested party in the disputes among families and tribes. Jones (2014) argues that culturally insensitive reconstruction efforts increase fragility through supporting tensions and power imbalances among local communities. Losers categorically objected and rejected the GoP plans for reconstructing NW. A local who lost several shops in Mir Ali bazaar outlined that:

It is not a reconstruction, but a de-construction of our social harmony and coherence. Instead of settling existing land disputes among families and tribes, the Government is creating new ones. This will generate hatred and rift among families and tribes. (IDI, 12 February 2019)
4.2. The distortion of the traditional conflict resolution mechanism

Societies in human history have developed different mechanisms for conflict resolution, specific to their cultural contexts. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are viewed as essential in dealing with local disputes, mainly because of issues of legitimacy, restorative justice and its consensus-based character (De Juan, 2017). Informal mechanisms frequently dispense both parties with the responsibility to compensate for the wrong done and restore communal harmony, rather than assigning a winner and a loser to the process (Coburn & Dempsey, 2010). In the Pashtun tribal areas, the Jirga is a proto-legal system that settles disputes relating to a property, blood feuds and money among families, individuals, and tribes, as well as intra-tribe issues (Dawar, 2015). The Jirga exercises both an executive and judicial role in settling disputes and dispensing with quick decisions, based on traditional informal law and institutionalized rituals with impartiality. The appeal of the traditional Pashtun Jirgas is that the council of elders not only ensures quick disposal of minor and major disputes, but acceptance and compliance of its decisions are binding on all the concerned parties in letter and spirit.

The Jirga provides a safety net to the weaker tiers of the tribal society. Before taking a decision, it conducts proper investigations, affording reasonable opportunity to all the parties of producing evidence, witnesses in support of their claims, as well as cross-examination of witnesses during the proceedings. The Jirga gives opponent parties the opportunity of personal hearings and spares no effort to reconcile opponents (Coburn & Dempsey, 2010). The decision of the Jirga is binding on all parties. Non-compliance or any violation of the final decision entails heavy fines, social boycott, expulsion from the tribe and forcible implementation of decisions. According to Bangash (2004), the party which offends the Jirga by non-acceptance of its decisions is publicly declared as a violator of the code of Pashtunwali. Bringing back the notion of situated knowledge to this discussion, it is important to underscore, with Leino and Peltonmaa (2012), that local “coping mechanisms” like these not only gain support to a particular set of practices among local communities, but they also underpin legitimacy and are critical to the consolidation of collective identity and purpose.

In recent years, this tribal social structure has been weakened, deteriorated and undergone significant changes (Dawar, 2019; Shakirullah et al., 2019). The elders were either killed by the militants or by drones. Militants targeted the traditional governance mechanism in the tribal areas. They disrupted, or rather destroyed, this century-old traditional pillar of Pashtunwali, which in the past played an important role in conflict resolution and maintaining peace and stability (Shakirullah et al., 2019). Militants understood that dismantling the centuries-old conflict resolution mechanism would strengthen their power in the region and so thousands of local elders across the tribal areas were killed. Thus the tribal governance structure has become virtually deprived of its leadership.

In 2018, the GoP decided to amend the asexual status of tribal areas by implementing an Interim System of Administration of Justice and repealed the Frontier Crime Regulation of 1901. Under the new administrative framework, the local Assistant Commissioner is vested with the power to act as District Magistrate. This institution channels the land-related cases or other disputes to the Council of Elders to find facts and report back within 15 days. After holding a necessary inquiry and hearing the parties, the Council of Elders submits its findings to the District Magistrate. This new hybrid system of justice governance in place nowadays in the tribal areas neither retains the previous structure of the Jirga nor fully implements the Pakistani judicial system. Under the new administrative rules, the designated council of elders eroded the old structure of the Jirga system. Local respondents explained that, in the Jirga system, all parties had the right to nominate elders according to their own choice. However, under the new system, members of the council are nominated by the District Magistrate. Under the new justice system, the state favors claimants in possession of some form of legal documentation. In many ways, this lack of clarity regarding proper documentation and land ownership laid the foundation for several of the land-related conflicts discussed above.
This is one more contributing factor to the general complaint about land-related corruption. Respondents told many stories about corruption in the process of settlement of land-related disputes at the Magistrate office. This generally includes misuse and abuse of authority in the form of bribery, tempering, favoritism and nepotism. Respondents explained that influential persons and elites use their social connections and commanding positions in order to take advantage of the new system and win their cases. Allegations of corruption remain to be investigated and ascertained, but the grievances of local communities are gaining strength from the fact that ordinary people suffer under the present judicial system with non-prescribed procedures and nontransparent proceedings. They complain that grievances presented by the poor go untended while the powerful get relief with impunity. During an interview with a GoP official, these allegations of corruption in dealing with land-related issues emerging in the post-conflict setting were denied. He explained that claimants who possessed legal documents hold leverage in dealing with land-related disputes. Many respondents mentioned the fear of reprisal if they raise their voice against corruption in dealing with land-related issues. They were afraid that they might lose their cases or get them further delayed.

4.3. Post-conflict reconstruction, local (in)securities and power reconfigurations

Development aid can facilitate socio-economic development, provided it takes on an “endogenous turn” or framework aiming at revitalizing, enhancing and complementing in-situ development based on local knowledge and cultural practices (Boonzaaijer & Apusigah, 2008; Hoppers, 2002). Yet, it can also inadvertently contribute to divisions, or fuel violence within traditional societies (Uvin, 1998). Writing as early as the 1960s, Mancur Olson pointed out that disproportionate development might produce instability and conflict rather than stability, partly because the new development order can destabilize the existing socio-economic order by creating new “winners and losers” (Olson, 1963, p. 538). Favoring one group to the detriment or exclusion of another has been a major source of societal cleavages (Anderson, 1999; Stewart, 2009). Exploring the case of the Rwandan genocide of 1994, Uvin (1998) argues that development agencies were mainly responsible for exacerbating structural violence through the unequal distribution of resources between Tutsi and Hutu groups. Stewart (2009) argues that the uneven distribution of reconstruction resources, and thereby its benefits among affected people, can increase the inequalities. As underlined by (Sillitoe, 2006), new development orders must be based on a close cooperation between outsiders and local communities that promotes the identification of jointly perceived challenges and negotiated actions.

Hilhorst (2007, p. 10) argues that reconstruction aid without understanding local realities can “strongly affect local power relations and (re)ordering processes in the locale of implementation”. Most often outsiders see traditional societies as homogeneous without understanding differences among and within communities. For example, while framing the problem against the Taliban in Afghanistan, the international community overlooked the power dynamics among tribes gravitating around land rivalries and disputes (Hilhorst, 2007). Ultimately, the lack of understanding of local knowledge in post-conflict rebuilding efforts reinforces hidden imbalances and unjust power relations which recurrently lead to violence (Jones, 2014). In this case study, the creation of new winners and losers has triggered power contestation at the local level. The GoP policies and practices have taken the Pashtun tribal society as homogenous, thereby weakening traditional knowledge systems that prevailed within local communities. Power struggles—tribes against tribes, villages against villages, families against families, and brothers against brothers—characterizes the post-conflict tribal system in NW. Competing groups seek to defend their preferences, interests and identities, adapting to the governmental model of reconstruction through lobbying activities. Therefore, the new system of power contestation has led local customs, issues and politics to a deteriorating state of tribal affairs fraught with conspiracies, rivalries, grabbing and enmity.

In Pashtun tribal areas, the power struggle among families is a common norm of Pashtunwali. The rivalries are common among cousins famously known as Tarboorwali (competition among cousins). Rivalries about status are defining elements of the relationship among cousins, and
competition develops for material and social resources (Caroe, 1958; Dawar, 2020b). The Pashtuns in tribal areas are fiercely independent and do not accept leadership. Rivalries among the families and tribes dominate internal politics, but in case of external aggression, they stand united in support of their tribes, sub-tribes and relatives. An elderly respondent explored the idea according to which Pashtuns are always in competition with cousins but do not let them down in front of others even if they are staunch opponents.

The particularity of the post-conflict setting is that local families and villages started competing among themselves for access to more limited assets and even survival. Respondents explained that due to scarce resources, both commercial and agricultural land held a very high material and symbolic value. According to the land use data from 2007–2008, only about four percent of the total geographic area in NW is arable, while 96 percent of the land consists of rugged mountainous terrain. In the few fertile valleys, the households are engaged in primary level subsistence farming and livestock rearing. Those unable to earn a living at home migrate to other parts of the country or travel abroad in search of work. The region retains the unenviable title of being Pakistan’s most highly food-deficit administrative unit (Shahbaz et al., 2012). Consequently, due to the scarcity of livelihood resources, bazaars and the commercial activities related to them are the main means of subsistence in NW. Respondents explained that bazaars are not only a source of income generation and business activities but also a symbol of identity, power and social status. The emergence of local disputes over land exacerbated societal cleavages which result in the breakdown of social structures and networks of relationships at the base of stability and solidarity. Without social harmony, mechanisms for reinforcing collective actions are weakened, and societies become fragmented, which often leads to violent conflicts (Colletta & Cullen, 2000). Local respondents referred to NW’s post-conflict society in terms of a “zone of social capital deficiency” (Goodhand et al., 2000). In Douglas’s terms, the post-conflict reconstruction in NW has eroded “the community accumulated store of trust and traditional readiness to collaborate” (Douglas, 2004, p. 89). Social bonds within the community are the foundation of community security and peaceful co-existence within communities (UNDP, 2009). Development practitioners commonly believe that strong and inclusive social relations, operationalized as social cohesion within communities, contribute to a variety of positive development outcomes (World Bank, 2005).

During the fieldwork, it was observed that some of the disputes turning violent and ultimately resulted in a contraction of social bonds and reciprocity. More recently, several violent incidents have been reported by online media and local newspapers (DAWN, 2020; Shakirullah, 2020). Paradoxically, reconstruction efforts aimed at promoting stability and human security in the post-conflict period became the reason for local disputes. Andersen (1999) and Uvin (1998) have rightly stated that development aid does not always bring positive change but sometimes fosters discord, reinforcing tensions and power inequalities inside and among conflict-affected communities. Consequently, renewed power contestation has derailed the initiatives aimed at consolidating stability and human security in the region. While expressing his apprehension, one of the local key respondents observed:

I see a civil war at micro-level among the families and at macro-level among the villages and tribes. (IDI, 7 December 2018)

All in all, Cernea (1985) argues that the incorporation of local culture, values and knowledge enhances the capacity, design and implementation of rural development projects. Projects based on local knowledge help “avoid expensive mistakes by preventing development initiatives that start from false premises through failing to show respect for local views” (Sillitoe, 2006, p. 6). By incorporating local knowledge a positive impact will be gained, not only by getting community buy-in, but also by increasing the efficacy of projects as community members commit and take responsibility and ownership for the outcomes (S.-A. Wilson, 2015). In NW, top-down post-conflict interventions that were not sensitive enough to local knowledge affected negatively the government-led reconstruction efforts, to the point that local communities actively resisted the plan to reconstruct the Mir Ali bazaar. Lederach (1995) argues that bracketing out local culture and
community perspectives is, therefore, fundamentally ineffective and potentially insidious. The GoP’s proposed design for the demolished bazaar suggested playgrounds and parking lots, which was not acceptable to the landowners. During a Jirga meeting, concerns regarding the plan for the new Mir Ali bazaar were voiced very actively. Owners were apprehensive that the plan would trigger more rivalries among families. The project was designed without proper consultation and feasibility, so it was rejected and actively resisted by the local community and remained as an unexecuted project. Consultative development efforts empower local communities to infuse development projects with their identity, values and knowledge (S.-A. Wilson, 2015). During an interview, the president of the Local Owners Association stressed that:

We held several Jirgas with the official authorities but in vain. Finally, the government gave us two options: either accept their project or reconstruct the demolished bazaar on our own and with our own money. Therefore, we were compelled to choose the second option, and the government cleverly absolved itself from the liability and responsibility of the reconstruction of the Mir Ali bazaar, which was ruthlessly destroyed during the military operation, Zarb-e-Azb. (IDI, 28 December 2018)

Similarly, in the case of the Miran Shah bazaar, the GoP intended to expand the market facilities from 1100 up to 4000 shops, but the local community strongly resisted the expansion due to fears of further disputes. Consequently, the scarcity of market places deprived thousands of families of a viable livelihood. Moreover, they have not been provided with any help for the rebuilding of their shops and markets, as was promised by the GoP when displaced people returned.

Top-down interventions often increase the mistrust of local communities vis-à-vis central governments due to the extensive practice of authority (Höglund & Orjuela, 2011). The monopoly of knowledge claimed by experts and technocrats, while ignoring local cultures and knowledge, proves to be a strong constraint to development efforts and its efficacy (Brennan, 2005; S.-A. Wilson, 2015). In NW, post-conflict reconstruction efforts have not only ignored local knowledge but also challenged it by promoting several mega projects in the region. For example, the GoP announced in 2015 it would set up an industrial zone in NW (The Nation, 2017). The land measuring up to 500 Kanal, and acquired for the industrial facility, has since been declared as disputed by local tribesmen. The local community accused the local administration of ignoring the traditional legal rights of the adjacent villages in acquiring land for the industrial facility. Consequently, and without taking into consideration traditional land ownership mechanisms, the project remains disputed and pending in papers.

Similarly, TOCHI, an association constituted of well-educated youth and reputable officers, set up a mega education project with the name of “Education City” and acquired land measuring up to 1008 Kanal, free of cost, located at Pir Kali, Tappi, on the Bannu-Miran Shah road. TOCHI worked on the feasibility of the project and presented it to the Commander 11 Corps, Peshawar, and the Chief Minister, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in September-October 2019. Due to the lack of educational infrastructures, there has emerged an urgent need for collaboration between the GoP and local communities for the promotion of this public good. In the post-conflict setting, TOCHI has played a very positive and supportive role by assisting the GoP in its reconstruction efforts. Due to its feasibility and urgent need, the Education City project was agreed to and processed for allocation of funds by the provincial government. However, this much-needed project could not materialize due to emerging local rivalries and disputes.

5. Conclusion
The complexity of the socio-cultural and economic setting in post-conflict NW has challenged the GoP to take into account multiple factors such as local knowledge, legally valid rights, traditional rivalries and existing as well as emerging disputes in its reconstruction interventions. As we have tried to attest, the answer has been paradoxical. This study finds out that, in spite of success in the rehabilitation of material infrastructure, the GoP ignored the local culture and knowledge while designing and
implementing the overall post-conflict reconstruction project for NW. Dominated by a top-down state security agenda and a technocratic approach to development, in which the war against militants was the priority, the reconstruction of bazaars and commercial facilities served the goal of promoting surveillance and easier control of the territory. Consequently, and in contradiction to the human security agenda formally adhered to, a top-down approach has promoted new human insecurities and major fault-lines in questions of stability, equity and justice that are the source of new grievances for local communities, and which further the state-society distrust in the post-conflict period.

The study illustrates that the unfair distribution of resources among local communities and families through top-down mechanisms has triggered internal strife and new factions were formed such that the pre-conflict social structure was altered and new winners and losers were created in the post-conflict context. The new social order has triggered power contestation at the local level. Local tribes and families seek to defend their preferences, interests and identities while adapting to the top-down model of reconstruction through lobbying activities. This study remarks that the reconstruction strategies underestimated the traditional land distribution mechanism which plays critical role in conflict resolution and peace, and sustains social order in the tribal society. Culturally insensitive or technocratic reconstruction efforts increase fragility through feeding tensions and power imbalances among local communities. On the contrary, locally situated knowledge enriches the understanding of development needs and opportunities within a given context, promoting culturally suitable interventions that are relevant to people’s needs.

The paper concludes that in order to achieve positive outcomes in terms of stability and human security, development approaches need to move beyond the technocratic notions of “expert knows best” or “best practices” in the direction of more inclusive policies and practices that take into consideration and adopt local cultures and knowledge into post-conflict reconstruction agendas. In a traditional close-knit community such as NW, culturally sensitive policies develop sentiments of solidarity among local communities for a common cause that results in a more coherent and sustainable development. A change that comes from within communities themselves, showing confidence in and applying local knowledge and responsiveness, among other values, leads to repair and restorative justice in communal relationships, as well as integral and balanced change. By developing empirical tools that give priority to the voices and perspectives of people affected by daily insecurities and vulnerabilities, this study aims at a minimum level of generalization, both in theoretical and policy terms. By challenging and critiquing top-down technocratic approaches, this study sets out to consolidate a mode of analysis, policy design and practicing interventions that could be replicated and adapted in other conflict and post-conflict settings.

All in all, this study does not advocate a romanticization of traditional culture, politics and governance. What it does try is to highlight the critical gaps in technocratic development approaches and practices. Therefore, it is fundamental for the researcher to observe, register and go deep into the vernacular practices, institutions and power dynamics in local communities’ everyday life, as well as into the meanings constructed and reconstructed within those communities while adapting to the changing conditions of modern life. This approach is crucial in order to bridge the gaps detected in the top-down, technocratic approaches. In line with this, it is our view that the adoption of anthropologically sensitive development projects by development stakeholders is critical to increasing the social relevance and efficacy, as well as to develop a trustful relationship between communities and governmental bodies conducive to an equitable, just and sustainable social change. It must be kept in mind that more ethnographically sensitive studies can play a central role in achieving the kind of contextual knowledge that matters for positive security and change. Understanding local socio-cultural and power dynamics can only play a critical and positive role within strategies aimed at consolidating long-term stability and development in areas emerging from violent conflict.
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