Peace & development

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| UNDP`S latest quarterly research publication Development Advocate Pakistan underscores that `peace is a key component for achieving sustainable development. A peaceful society provides a healthy socioeconomic environment for businesses and people to flourish, leading to sustainable development. However, if development is [only] concentrated in certain areas amongst a few people, it ... creates resentments leading to conflicts thereby disrupting peace.... Peace and development, thus, share a mutually reinforcing relationship; while peace is a prerequisite for sustainable development ..inclusivity of development is essential [to maintain peace].Pakistan is trying to strike a balance between this peace and development nexus to progress towards inclusive sustainable development. Despite immense potential for growth, Balochistan and former Fata in particular are unfortunate cases of stunted development-partly owing to non-inclusive development and partly to lack of peace in the region. For instance, the percentage of people living in poverty in Balochistan has reduced from 83.4 per cent in 2004-05 to 71.2pc in 2014-15. In contrast, comparatively peaceful provinces with fewer people living in poverty than in Balochistan have experienced a much higher rate of reduction in poverty.Several other factors also play a crucial role in the peace and development nexus, such as a well-functioning government, political stability, equitable distribution of resources, good governance, well-functioning business environment, good diplomatic relations with neighbours, low levels of corruption, high levels of human capital, protection of fundamental rights of all, and easy access and flow of information.For countries like Pakistan with areas affected by insecurity, along with all other factors, development interventions can serve as a crucial catalyst in the peace-conflict dynamics of these areas. However, if not prepared or planned well, these interventions can do more harm than good. Thus, a thorough peace and conflict impact assessment should be conducted before the design phase of the development intervention. This is to ensure that the projects designed, especially in conflicts and post-conflict areas, not only consider the development objective and how to achieve it, but have also carefully considered the conflict situation to determine how the projects can reduce conflict through economic, social and environmental protection.Additionally, development interventions can also directly contribute towards restoring peace through conflict resolution and management by providing neutral spaces for interaction, positive communication outlets and mechanisms for cooperation. In short, byproviding non-violent means to work together and address contentious issues, they can demonstrate alternatives to conflict.However, which strategy should come first is debatable and varies in different situations. For instance, the question of whether the state or development partners need to focus on restoring peace through equitable development projects or whether peace must first be restored in the region before any developmental work is implemented is context specific.The example of other countries must also be looked at to understand how both dynamics need to be taken forward simultaneously.Countries such as New Zealand and Iceland have always taken pride in having a peaceful society and maintaining high levels of human development. Sri Lanka managed to maintain high standards of human development despite suffering from decades of conflict, therefore implying that peace cannot necessarily be taken as a precondition to development.Pakistan has demonstrated considerablecommitment to achieving its Sustainable Development Goals.The SDGs have a holistic approach that can serve as a catalyst to positively impact the peace-development nexus by addressing poverty, inequity, education, hunger, discrim-ination, poor governance, etc in an interconnected manner. However, a considerable and lasting change will take a far greater effort.In Pakistan`s case, along with other targeted development interventions, its youth can play a critical role in maintaining and boosting peace and development in the country. The National Human Development Report 2017 also informs us of an existing demographic advantage ie, the majority of the population is young. If they are provided with quality education, gainful employment and meaningful engagement opportunities, Pakistan`s youth can serve as positive agents of change.Along with the state and development partners, grass-roots organisations, civil society and local authorities are also essential for ensuring a bottom-up approach in order to achieve a peace and development balance. A holistic and inclusive approach which features all stakeholders, and which is thoroughly based on evidence-based research and ground realities, is required to achieve this balance.m The writer is resident representative, UNDP Pakistan.  |