

Background Note

National Consultation

On

Research and Teaching of Conflict Studies and Conflicts in Pakistan

October 28, 2014

Background Note

1. Introduction

Pakistan at the moment is faced with a number of political, ethnic, religious, sectarian and environmental conflicts etc. Multiple factors including, historical, social, ideological and political have contributed to the birth and intensification of these conflicts. There is a relative absence of informed and evidence based dialogue at the national scene that attempts to resolve these conflicts. We have come to a point where people of different ethnicities, sectarian orientation, and even provinces shy away from engaging with each other due to biases and fears. Communication mechanisms amongst different ethnic groups have broken down at the societal and national levels resulting in enhanced polarization. These conflicts are continuously on increase instead of abating for long. Most importantly, geo-strategic factors and recent developments in the region have exacerbated the situation. The response of Pakistani academia and opinion leaders for the peaceful and sustainable resolution of these conflicts falls short of required level of engagement.

Generally, academia and teachers of social sciences are considered opinion leaders and play an important role in generating an informed debate on the nature and ramifications of conflict and also contribute substantially towards peace and stabilization. In case of Pakistan academia appears lacking in effectively dealing with ever increasing conflicts in Pakistan. The way these conflicts are attended to in research and teaching in Pakistan points to a number of issues that call for immediate attention.

A quick review of reading lists of major social sciences departments like Sociology, Political Science, Mass Communication, Pakistan studies etc. highlights that Pakistan-specific evidence dealing with diverse conflicts, their nature, dynamics and resolution is largely missing. The geo-strategic conflicts are largely driving the research and teaching agenda at the cost of other factors that are equally important particularly from the standpoint of social, religious and ethnic conflicts. Absence of such evidence limits the possibilities of an informed debate on the topic. These issues are indicative of the fact that Pakistani universities have not been able to problematize the issues of peace, conflict and stabilization in the local context. It has also contributed to lack of Pakistan specific evidence, reducing the possibilities of an informed deliberation on understanding the local conflicts and ways to stabilization. Peace and conflict resolution are vital preconditions for sustainable economic growth, open society, democracy and development, therefore necessitating local knowledge production which is not only relevant in the local context but also benefits from comparative and international literature.

In this backdrop Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS) in collaboration with Open Society Institute (OSI) is working on conflicts, particularly local conflicts and conflict studies as an area of research and engagement with academia and policy community. The present engagement with the academic fraternity is aimed at promotion of peace and conflict scholarship with a specific emphasis on production of locally relevant knowledge base. The initiative is not solely focused on conflict studies, but aims to examine how conflicts are being treated and taught in other social sciences disciplines such as Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, Pakistan Studies, History, etc.

Under this initiative I-SAPS undertook a review of the teaching content and the knowledge being produced on local conflicts in the Peace and Conflict Studies and Social Science departments of select Pakistani Universities. The study aimed at understanding the existing academic discourse on peace and conflict studies and identifying the gaps. There are a number of significant findings of the study pertaining to the nature and content of the courses being taught and the nature and quality of the knowledge being produced at the universities on local conflicts in Pakistan. In order to share the findings, seek guidance and formulate future steps a national consultation is being organized. This is an effort to bring the academics of various social science disciplines together to deliberate upon various aspects, challenges and opportunities of academic importance in research and teaching of conflicts in Pakistan.

2. Aim and Objective:

The National Consultation aims to:

- Share the key findings of the study undertaken to review the state of research and teaching of conflict studies and local conflicts in Pakistan
- Identify existing gaps and challenges in the academic discourse on peace and conflict resolution.
- Provide a forum where the academics would be able to exchange ideas and suggest measures on improving the teaching of peace and conflict resolution in their respective universities.

3. Participants:

The participants will include senior academics, University teachers from different departments of social sciences of public and private sector universities and select representatives of civil society and media.