Peace-Planet Nexus: The Fifth Pillar of Sustainable Development

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Abstract

In 2000, in the Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations popularly known as the Brahimi Report, the watershed report for peacekeeping reform, underlined the need for immediate relief to establish sustainable peace. Later, in 2015, in Agenda 2030, the General Assembly conceptualised five essential pillars of sustainable peace - People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnerships, and Peace. While substantial progress has been made on four pillars, the pillar of the 'Planet' i.e. Climate, biodiversity, natural resources, etc. seems slightly disconnected. This article examines the importance of 'Planet' pillar in peacekeeping and how it can contribute to the overall peace process.

Introduction

On 25 September 2015, 193 member states of the UN and the Civil Society Actors unanimously adopted the General Assembly (GA) Resolution 70/1, commonly known as the 'Agenda 2030'.[1]The resolution identified five pillars of sustainability; People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnerships, and Peace. It was established that for any of these pillars to sustain, coherent development is

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required among all the other pillars. The Agenda 2030 also states,"We are determined to foster peaceful, just, and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development".[1]

While connections between four of the pillars are instituted successfully, the efforts to ascertain an interconnection between international peace & security and climate change don't seem to gain traction. Recently, during the 8926 meeting of the UN Security Council, Niger and Ireland proposed a draft resolution requesting the Secretary-General to integrate climate related security risks as a central component of the comprehensive conflict prevention strategies of the UN. The objective behind the same was to decrease the risk of conflict relapse due to climate change. However, these efforts failed after the draft resolution secured 12 votes in favour, 1 abstention from China, and 2 votes against from India and Russia.[2] This decision was irrespective of an open debate session during 8923rd meeting of the Security Council where nearly 60 speakers showed connections between climate vulnerable people and countries, and their susceptibility to terrorist recruitment and violence. Although The Simpsons might not have predicted this issue rolling into becoming a larger snowball, the spillover effects are of grave concern.

A Case in Action

One of the emerging climate change fuelled threats to peace and security is the Lake Chad conflict. Lake Chad is a large sink lake in Central Africa, which is bordered by Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. The basin of the lake is becoming one of the worst humanitarian disasters in history since World War-II. About 30 million people are dependent on the lake for their day-to-day activities and it is estimated that more than 17 million are affected by the crisis.[3,4] Some of the features of this crisis are widespread violence, forced displacement, and the consequences of environmental degradation and has pushed 7 million people into food insecurity and 800,000 children are believed to be suffering from acute malnutrition despite the fact that several international donors pledged US$ 672 million in 2018.[3,5,6] Meanwhile, attacks and suicide bombings by extremist group Boko Haram have made many people and farmers leave their homes and land involuntarily, further worsening the food insecurity and jeopardising livelihoods.[3]

The four countries that border Lake Chad share the common political dynamics of military rule, influence of oil exploration in policies, and relegation at national level. In past five decades, the lake has shrunk by over 90 per cent, while the population has increased at a rapid pace.[3] The combined effects of climate change and the ongoing conflict have greatly undermined the resilience of the communities, including the ability of the people to adapt to and mitigate the threats projected by climate change, or even secure their livelihoods. Apart from the armed conflicts by extremist groups, the dwindling resources also have the potency to fuel inter-group and intra-group conflicts, reducing their resiliency further. The increased vulnerability of these communities to social and economic risks, and uncertain livelihoods, makes them more likely to be recruited by non-state armed opposition groups. These trends further hinder any efforts or future interventions by the international community or the UN to address armed conflicts, climate change, or unsustainable peace. And, this is just one of the climate change related security threats, with many more in the Sahel, West Africa, and the Horn of Africa.

Spillover to Subsequent Arenas

As conflicts push Earth beyond its' capacity to regenerate resources and ecological services, some Global North countries will speed up looking towards the outer space. Though the current international legal regimes and mechanisms are, somewhat, maintaining peace in the space presently, their fragility and loopholes will be exposed soon after the first country is successful in extracting resources from space. As with energy and resource exploration, similarly will come militarisation of space. Simultaneously, some relatively less rich nations will try to infiltrate weaker countries, and this is already happening. Germany and several other European countries are already expanding their gas drive in Africa post the Russia-Ukraine War.[7] And, while these states are funding their own requirements by taking resources from African nations, they're not ready to fund the 'basic' domestic needs of the very same countries they're extracting this gas from, because these states say that they don't want to support fossil fuel industry outside their country as they're busy promoting it within their country. The result, millions of women die in Africa alone due to indoor air pollution, and things like 'clean cooking' remain on the agenda list forever, but not an achieved goal.[8, 9]

While the richest nations are making efforts to dominate the outer space, and the relatively lesser monied nations increase their activity in Global South countries, the developing and underdeveloped states will become more vulnerable to unrest and conflicts.During the Asia-Africa Ministerial Level Dialogue at the Sustainable Energy for All Forum 2022 in Rwanda, African leaders said, "For transitioning to sustainable energy, we need to transition to energy first". The further discussions at the conference clearly showed that they're losing their faith and trust in the international community, and are fed up of the long list of unfulfilled promises made to them. Energy is one of the prerequisites without which people can't progress and nations can't develop.

Armed conflicts have been disrupting lives of people since decades, while climate change has started to endanger communities, both economically and socially. The stunted development of many Global South countries further limit economic and social development, which weakens institutions and makes communities lesser resilient to climate change and falling in the grip of armed conflicts. Western nations extracting resources from these countries, while ignoring their domestic needs and development, adds up to the whole problem. In past few years, loss and damage due to climate change related disasters, such as super cyclones during the Covid-19 pandemic, have caused damage equivalent to as much as a whopping 50 per cent of some of the affected country's GDP, dismantling and paralysing government and institutions, and forcing people to flee to other countries, often developed, as refugees.[10] We've already witnessed the problem of overburdening of civic amenities due to refugee migration, which eventually resulted in 1971 Indo-Pak Bangladesh Liberation War. And, as many Global North countries have ratified the Geneva Conventions, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and some other conventions, they're bound to provide refuge to these people. In countries with low population, such as European countries, huge inflow of refugees can cause huge demographic changes and overstrain the already shrinking resources, especially after the Russia-Ukraine War. At the end, a loop is formed where each problem exacerbates another problem, and so on,while interconnections between issues, such as climate and conflict, are denied and findings and strategies

like Disarming, Demobilising, Reintegrating and the Brahimi Report are reduced to just atext sounding like Beethoven's Seventh Melody.

Systems Thinking and Strategic Intervention

With thorough strategic planning and systems thinking, several entry points, leverage points, and drivers can be identified within a loop, and can act as a force multiplier in efforts to curb the crisis. Some of them can be:

- **Youth.** With strength of about 2 billion, young people around the world account for a major chunk of population, especially in conflict affected and war-torn countries. Sensitising them in a correct manner and harnessing their energies in efforts to make peace can have an exponential effect. The UN Security Council Resolution(SCR) 2250 was the first major document which recognised the role of youth in international peace and security.[11] Some of the most remarkable inventions, such as a device which harnesses the power of moving pedestrians, and vehicles, and converts it into electricity was invented by Jeremiah Thoronka, a youth who was brought up by a single mother in a slum during the Sierra Leone civil war. As a child, he witnessed his village falling in wrath of darkness as soon as the sun went below the horizon. He also saw children facing difficulties in continuing education and developing respiratory diseases because of smoke from firewood, while the forests dwindled which intensified the frequency and impact of climate and natural disasters. Today, Jeremiah's devices are providing free and clean electricity to 150 households with 1,500 people, and 15 schools with more than 9,000 students.[12] Similarly, there are many more such bright young minds at places they're least expected to be, and doing wonders with scarce resources. Leveraging them can have a great impact on their communities, making them more resilient to relapsing into conflict and climate change induced risks.

- **Women.** Women are disproportionately affected by wars and conflicts. During times of unrest, men of the family are recruited by militias and armed groups, often leaving behind many single women headed households. Additionally, atrocities against women are often used by warring parties

as projection of power, and they're subjected to Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV).[13] Therefore, women should be seen as a critical actor at all the peace negotiations and discussion tables. This will increase the efficiency of mechanisms and make sure that needs of all conflict affected people are taken into account, while helping better understanding the underlying conditions which resulted in the conflict. Moreover, women in military, police, or civilian roles in a peacekeeping mission have a high chance of being seen as a role model by women of the host country, encouraging them to recognise their rights and pursue non-traditional careers. Also, women peacekeepers can better interact with women and children in conflict affected communities, especially in orthodox settings where women of a household are barred from interacting with men. Research after adoption of SCR 1325 (Women, Peace, and Security Agenda), during operations in Liberia, Timor-Leste, Kosovo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), etc, concluded that women peacekeepers don't face the same cultural restrictions as male peacekeepers.

The 'Female Engagement Teams' also succeeded in their operations in Afghanistan.[14] At the community level, women are trying to bring a change to improvise their neighborhoods. One of them is Sister Alphonsine Ciza, a nun in DRC,who convinced her superiors to support her in pursuing mechanical engineering, and later raised US$ 297,000 over the years. She used this money to build a hydropower plant in her town, which provides clean energy to a convent, a church, two schools, and a clinic for free. She also empowered other members from her community, who now assist her in running the plant.[15] 2014 was a historic year for SCR 1325 when Major General Kristin Lund of Norwegian Armed Forces was appointed as the first female Force Commander of a UN Peacekeeping Mission.[14] However, there's still a long way to integrate women as drivers of change and entry and leverage points in peacekeeping missions. The gap in data and analysis related to participation of women in national security institutions, social norms and stereotypes flaming gender inequality within the security sector, and lack of understanding of UN policy on gender

equality in peacekeeping, and SCR 1325, among member states remain some of the biggest hurdles.

● **Active Interventions.** Some months ago, entire Twitter witnessed the heated discussion between the Executive-Director of World Food Programme (WFP), David Beasley, and Business Magnate Elon Musk, where the former asked Elon to donate US$ 6 billion to WFP. The plan tweeted by WFP showed that the money will be used to feed 42 million people for 365 days.[16] Though it might sound an excellent strategy to some people, it would not solve global hunger, but only avert it by a year. In order to make communities self-sustaining and empower them to reduce their tendency to fall into conflicts, the focus of interventions has to shift from passive to active. Entrepreneurship can be one of the avenues for integrating people and providing income and employment to people with limited access to the labour markets. One of the examples can be Uzuri, a brainchild of two Rwandan college students, which has till date provided employment to over a thousand people, most of which are women in villages. At first, people are given training for different operations and then they're employed by the organisation. Uzuri produces footwear and accessories, majority of which is made of waste collected from landfills, and aims to promote Africa as 'House of Sustainable Fashion of the Globe'.[17] Such low-cost and high social-environmental impact entrepreneurship ventures can do a great job in providing people with employment, while enhancing their skills and promoting indigenous culture and art around the world, which will further strengthen their soft power.

● **Community Engagement.** While making decisions which determine the fate of people of a community, it is essential to make its members a part of the entire process, and let them have their say. All the concerned stakeholders of a conflict, especially residents of the communities which experience the unrest, should be included in the negotiations in form of Track-II or Track 1.5 dialogues. This will ensure just and ethical representation, of those who're affected the most by empowering their voices. It will also felicitate trust building and make it easier to implement the plans.

- **Strong Institutions**. Institutions are one of the most critical leverage points in any society. They create and uphold rights, govern resources, manage conflicts, grow businesses, and provide services. Transparent, inclusive, and strong institutes are a necessity for peace in societies, and representation and inclusion of all people. Strengthening institutions would require establishment of a proper feedback mechanism, backed by targets and indicators, formulation of programmes and policies to achieve them, instruments to deal with risks and uncertainties, and systems for monitoring and evaluation. It would also require involving citizens, wherever possible, as it will increase transparency and ensure more issues faced by a wider section of society reach the policy formulation table. Simultaneously, policy coherence can be enhanced across the system, both vertically and horizontally.

- **Religion.** It is a fact that majority of global population identifies themselves with a religion. Hence,faith and traditions can be a powerful entry point in situations threatening peace and security. Religious leaders,who're respected and followed by their communities, can play the role of mediator within the community, as they have respect from all the parties. One such example can be of Imam Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye, whose mediation between their communities in Kaduna state (Nigeria) resulted in successful development and implementation of local peace process.[18] Religious teachers also play a major role in molding the perspectives of a society. Teachers in Uzbekistan and Indonesia have already endorsed religious peacebuilding training. They have integrated a traditional peacekeeping text with a religious lens relevant to their particular cultural context. Religious actors also played a major role during tensions in Bosnia-Herzegovina.They used powerful and evocative ideas and included them in inter-religious settings. They also used existing religious institutions to support efforts for peacebuilding, and worked together with non-religious peacebuilding practitioners,and transformed the conflict landscape in a way that would've not been possible without mobilising the religious dimension. Post war, these religious leaders kept working for human rights in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Some of their efforts include bringing previously excluded women, youth, and minorities into peace process,

rebuilding inter-ethnic trust, and protecting and managing cultural heritage sites which were at the center of the conflict.[19] The potential of religious engagement in peacebuilding can be understood by analysing the impact of pre-existent social roles on religious actor's capacity for peacebuilding, and how an opportunity is created by conflict for them to assume new roles, building upon the roles they already had.

● **Comprehensive Policymaking.** A two front adaptation-mitigation approach is in need, while long term solutions are in discussions to mitigate the issues related to international peace and security. Immediate actions are required to stop the suffering and damage taking place currently. This can be achieved by using a combination of both soft and hard power authorising use of force only as a last resort to control the situation. The first step towards mitigation can be setting a floor for discussions and negotiations, where both elected representatives and extremist groups should think of a long term solution against short sustained quick fixes which only last till the completion of their electoral cycles.

Conclusion

Sustainable development is like a Rubik's cube which can only be solved by focusing on all sides (in this case, the 5 Pillars) together but solving the sides one by one. The untapped potential of various non-conventional actors, and entry and leverage points, should be realised and harnessed in order to make peacekeeping operations truly multidimensional. Supporting special groups, such as youth and women, through active interventions can have several economic, social, and environmental benefits, breaking the loop between uncertain livelihoods, conflict, and climate change and making communities resilient while reducing their tendency to lapse into conflict. This will also help in engaging communities and strengthening of institutions. Meanwhile, religious actors could be involved in the peace process whenever viable and applicable. Therefore, all these critical components and actors should be strategically incorporated in the current peacekeeping mechanisms to ensure a sustainable and long lasting peace which facilitates the process of making communities resilient and the planet healthier.

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