

Strengthening Peace Process through Track III Approaches in Nepal

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In Nepal's history, the conflict that lasted for a decade between 1996 and 2006 proved most disastrous to the nation. Even after several years of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Treaty in 2006, the nation is yet to return to normalcy.

There has been no substantial achievement in the peace process except that the Maoist ex-combatants have vacated the cantonments and that they have taken either voluntary retirement or are integrated into the Nepalese army. Such thorny issues as the re-structuring of the state and rehabilitating conflict affected people have not been resolved. Equally worrisome is the fact that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (CED) are not yet functional. Therefore, the fear of another conflict still looms large in Nepal.

During the post-conflict period, there was a great expectation from the Track I national level government actors that they would play effective role in bringing peace to logical conclusion by making constitution within two years after the election of first Constituent Assembly. But even after its repeated extension for four long years and a hooping amount of money spent on various activities, the constitution was not delivered to the nation.

Subsequently, the election of the Second Constituent Assembly was conducted in November 2013 and the political leaders in the government vowed to bring the new constitution by 22nd January, 2015. But to the great dismay of the Nepalese people the thorny issues in the constitution are yet to be settled. More than that what is also disturbing is the fact that the major political parties in the government, including the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) are in a mood to go through the voting process and not through consensus to get the constitution passed by the Constituent Assembly. As the ruling parties command over two-third majority in the Constituent Assembly, it could

easily do so. But such a step could prove disastrous as the political parties in opposition, including the UCPN (Maoist) and the Madheshi parties would not have alternative left but to resume fresh conflict.

In the post-conflict period, the Track I actors were expected to exhibit enormous courage in the larger interest of the nation to resolve such thorny issues in constitution making process as state restructuring under federal structure. But nothing tangible happened towards this end. They indulged more in power-sharing game rather than addressing contentious issues through consensus.

The Track II civil society actors could have played supplementary role in moderating the behavior of decision-makers in the government. Also, peace process could have reached logical conclusion if the civil society were given due space to deliver. But there was a lack of initiative in that direction and most of the peace agreements signed between the government and the stakeholders during the post-conflict period largely remained implemented.

In such a situation, Track III actors might prove more useful as that there is a greater scope for involving grassroots level people in the peace process. Their role in peace mechanism is well acknowledged for their engagement in countless mediation and reconciliation measures through the Local Peace Committees, NGOs, alternative dispute resolution system, community mediation, traditional means of public action, business initiatives, all-party committees and formal process of court system. With this context, the recent effort made by the Centre for Economic and Technical Studies (CETS) and Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (FES), Germany to organize a national seminar on "Strengthening Peace Process through Track III Approaches in Nepal" on December 14 and 15, 2014 in Lalitpur obviously appears to be a welcome step. The seminar had participants from diverse groups of society, including the academicians, political activists, journalists, indigenous group people, Dalits and women from Madhesh and different other parts of Nepal.

An attempt was made in the two-day seminar to generate valuable ideas for the restoration of long-term peace and stability in the society through the discussion on issues related to national business initiative, grassroots actors, different dimensions of justice system, community mediation and alternative dispute resolution mechanism. Such ideas could also prove useful to the government's initiative to achieving sustainable peace and bringing economic prosperity in the country.

One of the outcomes of the seminar was the strong thrust given to the growth of spiritual dimension of peace in the society. It was felt that peace outside cannot be maintained in the absence of peace within. A few important practical measures were also discussed for the revival of inner peace, which was most appealing.

Most importantly, a co-relation was established between peace and business activities. Permanent peace is not possible in the absence of sound business environment in the same way as business cannot thrive when there is no peace. As per the principle of corporate social responsibility, the business groups have a tendency to take into account interests of customers, employees, shareholders and communities.

It is encouraging that even in Nepal a modest beginning has been made by the private business groups to empower people by launching various activities in education, health and other sectors. There has been a surge in business activities in the post-conflict period mainly on account of growth in FDI, tourism and entrepreneurship. A sense of human security, freedom to change and freedom from fear is gradually evolving in the society, which could go a long way in ensuring long-term peace and development in Nepal.

Finally, it appears that peace is not possible without the involvement of Track III actors. As peace is realistic, tangible peace would be established only in an environment in which people get justice and business activities are revived. It is the need of the hour to strengthen the existing legal systems in the country. Informal justice system and also alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that could help support court reforms, improve access to justice, and reduce the cost of dispute settlement be promoted. The community leaders should be trained, civil society engagement be increased and the level of community tension be reduced. All such activities falling under the purview of Track III approaches might prove helpful to the government, political parties, civil society, foreign agencies and above all the people to restore long-term peace and stability in the country.

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