

Higher education in Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan after 9/11: Problems and prospects

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Abstract: The troubled state of affairs in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan portends serious repercussions and grave consequences, destined to affect education particularly higher education in the entire tribal belt. Ironically, no extensive study has been conducted, to investigate those dimensions of FATA higher education which have been adversely affected in the aftermath of 9/11. This exploratory study examines those areas which have been badly affected as a result of current turmoil. In fact, the higher education in FATA has its own peculiar dynamics. Inherently, the entire tribal region has very few well-maintained and properly equipped colleges. Lack of adequate educational facilities, multiplied poor security environment has aggravated the entire situation. Law and order situation in the region has undermined the already dilapidated monitoring mechanism of education department. This state of affairs provides breeding ground for extremist propensities and radical tendencies. In reality, very little attention has been devoted to reform the education system in tribal areas. The whole set up needs to be rehabilitated by taking recourse due to the proactive role of international community. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy makers besides offering new avenues for further research.

Key words: FATA; 9/11; higher education; tribal areas; Taliban

1. Introduction

Decades of infighting and rivalry have left FATA battered and impoverished. The entire tribal region has been facing major problems of turmoil, social unrest and insecurity. The hard hit area is the education sector, predominantly higher education. Higher education means all courses, institutions and teaching staff involved in imparting knowledge above the intermediate level. To begin with, the education facilities provided by the state government are miserably inadequate and poorly maintained so as to cater to the needs of the students in the area. The dismal state of female education, deficiency of local teaching staff, teachers' absenteeism and endemic corruption are the major factors adversely affecting education in tribal areas. To be brief, the education system of FATA is in tatters. The set up delineates a dismal picture of mismanagement and bad governance (Government of NWFP—GoNWFP, 2008).

Since, September 11, 2001, often referred as 9/11, the day when two American commercial planes crashed into the buildings of the World Trade Center, the dynamics of the entire region have changed radically. The United States retaliated by declaring war on terrorism and launched an invasion of Afghanistan to depose the Taliban (the Islamic religious students who ruled most of the Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001), who were regarded to be

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harboring the alleged al-Qaeda terrorists. These events proved to be harbinger of serious ramifications for the tribal areas. Education in general and higher education in particular remained seriously affected from the crises unfolded in the aftermath of these untoward incidents which plagued the entire region.

In fact, very little research has been conducted in FATA, predominantly, in the field of higher education for palpable reasons of insecurity. Similarly, the problems engendered in the aftermath of 9/11 have not been thoroughly investigated. The study aims at unearthing those dimensions of the higher education which are critically affected as a result of the said crises. An effort has been made to uncover the compelling reasons for the poor state of affairs, concerning higher education in the volatile region of FATA. The endeavor is to find out what the government is doing in tandem with local and international community alleviates the sufferings of the students hailing from the tribal area.

2. Literature review

2.1 FATA at a glance

FATA is in the spotlight, these days, for all noxious reasons. Once known for its exemplary effective dispute resolution mechanism, i.e., the Jirga system, the entire region, nowadays portrays a wayward image of widespread lawlessness, prevalent instability and lasting hopelessness. Officially documented as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) is by and large a mountainous region boarding Afghanistan all along 450 kilometers stretched Durand line on the west, NWFP in the northeast, Balochistan in the south and Punjab in the southeast.

Home to majority of Pakhtun population, the area covering FATA consists of seven “agencies” (i.e., Bajaur, Khyber, Kurram, Mohmand, North Waziristan, Orakzai and South Waziristan with six relatively small pockets) called Frontier Regions (FRs) (i.e., Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohat, Lakki Marwat, Peshawar and Tank). Over the years, FATA is generally regarded as one of the most widely neglected, poorly developed and extensively mismanaged area of the country (GoNWFP, 2008).

2.2 Recent political history of FATA

In the chronicles of history, FATA acted as a buffer zone for many years. During the course of the “Great Game” of 19th century, the area remained a bulwark against the expansionist designs of communist Russia. To protect Indian riches, it became indispensable for the colonial masters of India to ensure a convincing sway over the entire region. Colonial rulers have had serious problems in maneuvering an effective control over the area. Ultimately, they had recourse to their agents backed by some of the local tribes (GoNWFP, 2008).

Guided by their ambitions to subdue the region, and prolong their stay on the Indian scene, the British in 1901 introduced a series of laws regarded in the history books as the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR). These regulations, based on the idea of collective territorial responsibility, have the provision of Jirga (council of elders) for dispute resolution, worked effectively since then (Hussain, 2008).

As the history says, people of the tribal areas have always been free to govern their internal affairs. The colonial masters had the wisdom not to touch upon that, hence, allowing the tribes to live according to their tribal codes, customs and traditions. In return, and for some additional bounty various tribes cooperated with the colonial rulers (Abbas, 2006). However, this makeshift arrangement was found extremely defective. Notwithstanding, their all out efforts and share hard work the colonial administration could not manage to keep the Tribals subdued for long. Ultimately, they called it a day in 1947. Soon after independence, the various tribes in the region entered into an agreement of allegiance with the newly established state of Pakistan, which granted

the tribal areas a special administrative status (GoNWFP, 2006).

2.3 Significance of the area

The tribal areas have enjoyed immense geo-political importance and great strategic significance throughout its long chequered history. Today, the region is once again in the limelight, for being the front line region in the war against terror. As said earlier during the course of the last century, the area seized overwhelming strategic leeway, serving as a buffer region between the British India and communist Russia. More than a hundred years later, the region has been thrust onto the world political stage once again for the reasons of global security (GoNWFP, 2008).

When only the world's superpower is convinced that the next big attack against it would come from a particular area, one has to worry a lot about the consequences. By labeling FATA as a place of immense concern in terms of serious threat to its security, Washington has been sending a loud and clear message that anything concerning FATA is of paramount importance to US (Yusufzai, 2008).

According to Markey (2008), today, "Few places on earth are as important to US national security as the tribal belt along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan". It is rightly said that the northwest frontiers of Pakistan have seen perhaps more invasions in the course of history than any other region in Asia. FATA has been all the time in the forefront of all such adventures (Hussain, 2008).

2.4 Political and administrative structure

The peculiar system of administration introduced by the British, dated back, is still effective in tribal areas under which FATA functions as a semi-autonomous zone. It is represented in the National Assembly and the Senate, however, which remains under the direct executive authority of the President. Governor of the NWFP administers in his capacity as an agent to the President of Pakistan (Khan, 2004).

Political agent is the administrative head for each tribal agency, assisted by a number of assistant political agents, Tehsildars (administrative head of a Tehsil) and Naib Tehsildars (deputy Tehsildar), as well as members from various local police (Khassadars) and security forces (levies, scouts). The Malik (chief) serves as an intermediary between his tribe and the political administration, while the tribal Jirga (council of elders) enjoys widespread legitimacy as a traditional mechanism for conflict resolution and maintenance of law and order situation (GoNWFP, 2008).

2.5 Social and economic life

FATA is one of the most underdeveloped regions of Pakistan. Its people are poorly educated, inadequately skilled and mostly deprived of basic amenities such as health care and sanitation. A great deal of population resides in rural areas which are divided along the lines of traditional affiliation and tribal loyalties. Although a strong tradition of hospitality exists, however, relations between the tribes are not always cordial and hostilities used to erupt sporadically. Inter-tribe clashes, excessive crimes and extremist propensity affect the quality of life of ordinary people (GoNWFP, 2008).

The patriarchal fabric of society and chronic illiteracy has left women seriously disadvantaged. Women are the most part restricted to household chores, and are excluded from decision-making role on any front. Their access to education and health care is limited by any means. In the conservative tribal society, there is a strong resistance to change. The economy is largely based on agriculture coupled with the paltry use of natural resources. Skeletal infrastructure has been instrumental in constraining access to health care and education.

Poverty has, to a greater extent, made the population vulnerable to extremist tendencies. According to the study of Asian Development Bank (Hamid, 2008), 60 percent of the people in Bajaur, Mohmand and Khyber live

below the poverty line. In the absence of quality education and means to earn decent living, the lure of illicit activities such as smuggling (consumer goods, weapons) and drug trafficking is as difficult to resist as the call of extremist elements.

Table 1 Selected development indicators of Pakistan, NWFP and FATA

Indicator	Pakistan	NWFP	FATA
Literacy ratio (both sexes, %)	43.92	35.41	17.42
Male literacy ratio (%)	54.81	51.39	29.51
Female literacy ratio (%)	32.02	18.82	3.00
Population per doctor	1,226	4,916	7,670
Population per bed in health institutions	1,341	1,594	2,179
Roads (per sq km)	0.26	0.13	0.17

Sources: GoNWFP (2006); GoP (2001).

Other development indicators paint equally depressing picture, exhibited at Table 1. Only 56 percent of the population enjoys the access to drinking water and electricity supplies covering about 62 percent of households in FATA. In the absence of a comprehensive roads network, access to a wide range of services and facilities such as health care and education is restricted since schools and hospitals were rarely built in remote areas (GoNWFP, 2005; GoP, 2001).

2.6 Demographic profile of FATA

According to the 1998 census, the population of FATA is 3.18 million. The population density stands at 117 persons per square kilometer, with wide variations among individual agencies and FRs. The population profile and literacy figures of FATA are given at Table 2.

Table 2 Population profile of FATA

Name of agency/FR	Area Sq. Km	Population in thousands	Literacy ratio (%)		
			Male	Female	Both sexes
All FATA	27,220	3,138	29.51	3	17.42
Bajaur	1,290	597	22.32	3.38	13.41
Mohmand	2,296	332	19.11	1.92	11.325
Khyber	2,576	534	39.96	2.55	22.96
FR Peshawar	261	54	52.76	5.26	29.31
FR Kohat	446	91	50.79	10.12	31.615
Orakzai	1,538	224	19.65	1.28	10.63
Kurram	3,380	442	33.34	4.46	19.78
FR Bannu	877	20	17.25	0.64	9.71
FR Lakki	132	7	9.73	1.54	5.74
N.W.A	4,707	358	26.77	1.47	15.88
S.W.A	6,620	414	32.52	2.57	19.84
FR Tank	3,229	27	17.93	1.43	10.56
FR D.I.Khan	2,008	39	23.57	7.95	6.47

Source: Census Report of FATA (1998).

FATA remained seriously deprived vis-à-vis higher education. As the data shows, only a small chunk of the

over-all population, barely (17 percent) is literate. The female literacy rate is dismally low as 3 percent. The over-all facilities of higher education in FATA are very thin. There are 33 colleges in the entire FATA out of which 22 are for boys, whereas 11 are for girls (GoNWFP, 2005).

Apart from this, there are three colleges for Bachelors in Education (B.Ed.) program in FATA, only one of these, located in Khyber Agency, is for women. The shortage of qualified teachers restricts expansion of B.Ed. programs and makes it particularly difficult to increase the number of female teachers (Directorate of Education FATA, 2006).

2.7 Inherent problems of higher education in FATA

The reasons for poor higher education in FATA are numerous. The buildings of the educational institutions are being frequently used for other than education purposes, including running own enterprises. Curits (2007) has similar observations: “one of the major problems with Pakistan’s public education sector has been—the phenomenon of ‘ghost schools’, i.e., teachers not showing up to teach classes but only to collect their pay checks”. Thus, scores of teachers do not turn up to perform duty.

Poverty dearly affects girls’ education. Poor families afford to send their male off springs for higher education and let alone female for which also have to go to other areas/cities. This phenomenon creates a vicious circle in which few young women promote to pursue higher education, leaving FATA with insufficient numbers of women to enter into the work force (GoNWFP, 2008; Shami, et al., 2005).

Beside, the perceived low economic impact of education, improperly located schools and lack of community involvement are a few of the inherent problems of FATA education. Among girls, enrolment is affected by the shortage of girls’ schools and female teachers multiplied by social factors such as early marriages, cultural taboos and tribal enmities (GoNWFP, 2008).

2.8 FATA education in the after math of 9/11

Since September 11, the entire FATA is locked in a painful paradox. According to Khan (2008), the volatile situation in the region has adversely affected the education sector, consequently, jeopardizing the future of thousands of students. Education especially of girls is under serious threat in the troubled zone of FATA, as schools and colleges are being bombed and set ablaze on a regular basis. Scores of incidents for torching of female educational institutions were reported recently from different parts of the area. As a natural consequence, the attendance has dropped in both schools and colleges across the tribal belt.

Colleges in almost all parts of FATA invariably came under attack as this vicious trend is not confined only to Darra Adamkhel, Bannu and Swat, but also exists in Bajaur, Khyber, Mohmand and Kurram agencies, as well as Buner, Dir Upper and Dir Lower. The government is helpless to restore peace in the region and ensure a congenial environment, in which the girls could go to colleges without any fear or threat (Khan, 2008).

3. Methodology

Since the incidence of 9/11 has vastly affected the entire tribal region, it was realized that the aftereffects experienced by the area in the field of higher education should be methodically investigated. Qualitative research method has been adopted for systematic search of new dimensions of the subject area and to gain an in-depth understanding of the ground realities therein. In the light of a detailed literature review, the authors collected the data via group discussion, telephonic as well as face-to-face unstructured interviews. Interviews were conducted with the people who remained associated with higher education in FATA for the last 7-8 years, and they would

have considerable understanding of the events taking place around consequent to 9/11.

Five officials of the directorate of FATA education and 10 principals of the government colleges in FATA, five male and five female were chosen for the purpose. Apart from this, group discussion was conducted with 100 students from FATA. Data was collected during the months of October, November and December, 2008. Only those colleges were selected, which were found accessible under the prevailing circumstances across the tribal belt. In the light of the literature review, group discussion, telephonic interviews and unstructured face-to-face interviews and data were analyzed.

4. Findings

To conduct a study in FATA has never been a plain sailing. In the existing situation, it has become even more problematic. To travel in FATA is tantamount to asking for trouble. Even the residents of the area, find it hard, these days, to move freely in the area. Keeping these things in mind, the authors made an effort to investigate the extent of damage done to FATA higher education in the aftermath of 9/11. It was discovered that in the first instance, no one is willing to share information. Those who assisted the authors in the process of collecting data were having serious concerns regarding the authors' personal security while travelling in the tribal areas for the said purpose.

The findings of the study have been organized in two broad sections. Firstly, the problem areas in FATA higher education in the aftermath of 9/11 have been identified. Then the future prospects of higher education in the tribal area are examined and discussed. It was found that the FATA faced some inherent problems in the field of higher education. Lack of awareness on the part of local community, lack of strategic planning on part of the government and apathy on part of the international community are some of the challenges encountered by FATA education. The events unfolded as the upshot of 9/11 multiplied the agonies of the students of FATA. The local elders, government agencies and international community play a major role in ensuring peace and stability in the region. However, the same positive role has not been played by any quarter. It was found that the prospects of investing in education have always been overwhelmingly rewarding, provided that the international community undertake the same in FATA.

4.1 Which are the hard hit areas in higher education in FATA in the aftermath of 9/11?

The data revealed that the worst is the female higher education and the pressing problem is insecurity. Almost all the respondents agreed on the same point but they identified more or less different reasons for the poor state of affairs of higher education. For example, a principal of a postgraduate college reckoned that there is not even a single aspect of daily life in FATA, which has not been affected as a result of the recent unrest. However, the hard hit is the education sector, particularly female education.

According to Kakar (2008), a Jirga of local Taliban and tribal elders of Orkazi agency has banned female education in the area. A student informed that the students of the colleges in North and South Waziristan, Kurram and the troubled Bajaur agencies have either stopped going to colleges altogether for security reasons or reduced their study hours substantially due to recent social unrest in the area. According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) annual report (2007), girl students and female teachers of the areas are being harassed to observe purdah. The ensuing bomb scares and blasts at girls' educational institutes badly affected the attendance and enrolment of girls in the educational institutes.

During the visiting of the areas, it was observed that the buildings of government colleges are being occupied

by the security personal, to base their camps. Government Degree College Dara Adem Khail located about 30 kilometers from Peshawar, right on the road that leads south from Peshawar to Kohat, presents a look more of an army barrack. The authors did not notice even a single student in the surrounding of the college during his frequent visits to the area. A passerby could observe that from some distance security personnel with artillery were positioned on the rooftop of the college.

Government Degree College for boys Miranshah has been badly affected as a result of military operation started by the armed forces in the area. The college has been occupied by the personal of Frontier Constabulary and remained closed for several months. Major parts of the building were hit by missiles and mortar guns and it was not suitable for education purposes anymore. Similarly, classes of about 200 students of the Girls' Degree College Miranshah have been affected for the last one and a half years as the army Jawans and personnel of Frontier Constabulary are housed in the college building. The trend is prevailing in all other troubled agencies. According to Asian Human Rights Commission report (2008):

Of a total of 580 public sector educational institutions in the South Waziristan, 350 schools have been closed because the buildings of these facilities have been so badly damaged due to the ongoing conflict. The building of the Government Degree College Laddah was bombed which damaged the infrastructure, while equipment and furniture from many schools have been stolen. The damaged building of the college is now under the use of the security forces.

In the aftermath of the recent spate of infighting, no one is willing to perform duty in FATA. One principal of Government Degree College told that the non-local staff both teaching and supporting, stopped coming to the area for fear of being caught as government spies. It was also observed that the most derelict area in the government developmental schemes is the continuous monitoring and evaluation system.

It was revealed by an official of the FATA Education Directorate that the monitoring efforts of the government received serious set-back when two officials of the FATA Education Directorate were kidnapped back some time in the tribal areas. They are yet to be recovered after the lapse of some one and a half years. Such untoward incidents have completely paralyzed the entire monitoring machinery of the government education department in the tribal areas.

4.2 What are the main reasons for these happenings?

With Pakistan becoming the frontline state in the war of resistance against the Soviet forces, the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan virtually ceased to exist. The tribal belt, virtually, landed on warpath. During this period, the local law enforcing agencies started losing grip of the situation. With the emergence of new actors on the scene, the writ of the government in the area became less effective.

Insurgency broke out in South Waziristan in 2002. Non-local populace was largely to be blamed for the situation. Talibanised elements were mainly responsible for spreading turbulence into other parts of FATA. There was sabotage of government installations and buildings, particularly schools and colleges (Hamid, 2008). The data revealed that one of the root causes of extremist tendencies is the sense of despair among the people of FATA, arising from rampant poverty and lack of education and employment opportunities. The rising militancy, as noted by Kakar (2008), played havoc to the academic life in the educational institutes.

According to professor Khadim Hussain referred in Kakar (2008), the militants want to realize three objectives by destroying buildings of educational institutions. Firstly, they want to paralyze the education system in order to level grounds for recruiting future fighters. Secondly, by doing this, these elements want to challenge writ of the state. And last, by means of such sabotage, they will create terror in the vicinity. In addition, the

militants destroy school buildings on the plea that the security forces use these buildings to house their personnel.

The results of the ADB survey (Hamid, 2008) indicates that the people in tribal areas consider illiteracy as the foremost, amongst the root causes of religious extremism in Pakistan followed by the Afghan conflict, poverty, bad governance and unemployment. A principal of Government Degree College observed that the hopelessness, desperation and resignation arising from poverty and deprivation make the youth prone to become victims of militants who use them as future recruits.

The rise of religious extremism in South Asia has to do primarily with factors such as the absence of democratic and accountable governments in many of the Islamic countries as well as the failure of governments in some Islamic countries to address problems arising from rapid social, demographic and economic transformation during the last few decades (Barsalou, 2002).

According to Curits (2007), lack of adequate education opportunities in FATA has contributed to the development of extremist tendencies that have ultimately fuelled terrorism and sectarian tension. According to Orkzai (2008), Taliban have distributed pamphlets in the mosques telling that the attacks on the buildings of educational institutes are undertaken to tackle with the alleged profanity and vulgarity in the area.

4.3 What the local community is doing to address these issues?

The local community has a larger than life role in creating congenial environment for education in FATA. However, a principal of a Government Degree College observed that the community has realized neither the significance of education nor its critically important role in this connection. Community participation has always been low. They do not show any concern with the affairs of educational institutes. For the first reason, they are not even aware of the significance of these institutions. Secondly, they are not mindful of their own responsibilities.

While an official of the FATA Education Directorate revealed that, the local community is helpless to do anything. There are far big actors on the scene and in such a situation the efforts of local community to restore peace do not produce the slightest of impact. The local administration, having nominal control over the tribal population, rendered totally ineffective under the impact of the ongoing war in Afghanistan.

A student of the area told that the elders of the community are not inclined towards female education for the reason found in their traditions. Those who want to educate in offspring, move to the settled areas. In essence, after the occurrence of 9/11 and subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by allied forces, new powerhouses emerged on the FATA scene, which led to the diminishing role of the Jirga in conflict resolution in the area. This trend, ultimately, calls for a greater role of the federal government in restoration of peace in the region.

An education officer of the FATA Education Directorate, views that the local community is susceptible to do anything in the current turmoil. According to Orkzai (2008), the pamphlets distributed by Taliban threatened all government official, local leaders, Mailks and influential of dire consequences who resisted destruction of school buildings.

4.4 What the government is doing to improve the situation?

The data disclosed that the access to many parts of FATA is constrained. In the restive parts, even the government officials cannot move freely without a security escort. They encounter serious difficulties in the provision of basic services and monitoring and evaluation. Security is a major source of concern for those who consider taking up employment in the tribal areas.

An official of the FATA Education Directorate told, "Over the years the successive governments had shown little interest in the affairs of FATA. The tribal areas have been always sidelined for developmental schemes". The pre-civilization legal code has certainly helped radical elements to spread their tentacles across the length and

breadth of FATA (Hussain, 2008).

The government has started various schemes for promotion of education in the area. Various scholarship schemes have been launched. Seats for the students of FATA have been reserved in the universities and professional colleges. And in fact free education schemes for the FATA students have been introduced. However, the government earned a bad name when in the absence of any strategic thinking, for it resorted to the use of military force in retaliation of the recent developments. All the interviewees agreed on one point that such actions of government are destined for failure in the absence of any effective Jirga systems and leading role of the tribal elders in the region. These developments, ultimately call for a greater role of the international community to restore peace and stability in the entire region.

4.5 What the international community is doing about it?

The findings of the 9/11 Commission Report (2004) impressed upon the importance of educational opportunity in South Asia for uprooting terrorist ideology, and increased congressional oversight of US aid programs to Pakistan led to the increased spending in education. US assistance to Pakistan for literacy has more doubled during the last two or three years. Through a program started in 2003, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is constructing and furnishing 65 primary, middle and high schools in five agencies of the FATA.

International donor agencies have started pouring huge amount of funding in FATA education sector. It is for the first time in the history of Pakistan that international donor agencies and world major economic powers, mainly US and Japan have committed plentiful of spending, particularly, in the FATA education sector (Amir, 2004). The US and Japanese governments are partnering on the project, to construct an additional 65 schools in the tribal areas. USAID's education program in Pakistan provides training, technical assistance and infrastructure for government officials, citizens and the private sector to deliver high-quality education (Curits, 2007).

Apart from this, other international agencies such as ADB, UNICEF, UNESCO, GTZ and World Bank have initiated multimillion dollars projects to strengthen education sector in FATA and to raise literacy rate in the area. However, all these projects have negligible provision for higher education. This is probably due to the reason that the donors will focus more on primary education (GoNWFP, 2008). However, the officials of the FATA Education Directorate seem to be not convinced. "International community is rendering only lip services. Its contribution is just a peanut in the face of colossal damage done to the entire fabric of tribal society on account of the recent spade of violence", an education officer added.

The donor agencies should encourage Islamabad to implement systemic reform of public sector education in order to make a significant impact on education outcomes, such as increased literacy, enrolment rates and decreased dropout rates. The US should begin to program more funds for specific higher education and development projects rather than continue to provide the bulk of the economic assistance in the form of a direct cash transfer to the Islamabad (Curits, 2007).

4.6 How can these problems be resolved?

These critical problems can be resolved in a much more ingenious manner. Policy in this direction, as in any other field, must be guided by sound research. It is considered worthwhile for the government to focus on chalking out strategic plans and keeping in consideration the existing threats and future opportunities, and objectively examining the root cause of the menace. The essential threat of insecurity must be addressed by dialogue and negotiation.

There is a dire need for adopting a holistic approach to introduce reforms and initiate the process of

development in all parts of FATA. Education, security and infrastructure development should be the priorities. The construction of a “Grand Trunk Road” linked all tribal regions with one another. And last but not the least, all agencies should be integrated in the main stream with NWFP. Similarly, the regular laws of the land should be extended to the entire FATA. The first step in this connection could be the constitution of an elected council for FATA on the analogy of the Legislative Council for the Northern Areas of Pakistan. The FATA Legislative Council could eventually be transformed into a provincial assembly, once the time is ripe to reconstitute FATA into a separate province of Pakistan (Hamid, 2008).

Apart from this, the community participation is necessary for smooth functioning of educational institutions. Education system in FATA needs to be streamlined and the bottlenecks need to be thoroughly examined, to evolve a strategy for raising educational standards. FATA education is a strategic matter that requires a focused approach. The government should take result-oriented measures to achieve these ends within a stipulated timeframe.

4.7 What are the prospects of higher education in FATA?

FATA is backward as compared to the rest of the country, predominantly in high education. According to another official of the FATA Education Directorate, the government has been taking concrete steps to improve the situation; however, the road to success has always been bumpy. There are few special opportunities for the unprivileged FATA students for higher studies such as Ph.D. and Post-Doctorate. In addition, the quota reserved for FATA students in the educational institutions in the country is not adequate. The students of FATA deserve special consideration in all scholarship schemes for higher studies abroad.

The donor agencies should encourage Islamabad to implement systemic reform of public sector education, to make significant impact on education outcomes, such as increased literacy, enrolment rates and decreased dropout rates. The US should begin to program more funds for specific higher education and related development projects rather than continue to provide the bulk of economic assistance in the form of a direct cash transfer to Pakistan. Fostering development and reform of the public education system will not only contribute to economic prosperity and social tolerance but will also help improve the image of the country (Curits, 2007).

In the trouble-hit areas, radical activities are still underway. There is no ray of light at the end of tunnel. To hope against the hope, peace will return, one day to the war ravaged FATA. However, committed efforts by the government and international community would be required for restoration of tranquility and creating a serene environment for the FATA students, to attend their schools and colleges without any fear or panic.

5. Conclusion

Higher education in FATA has its own inherent predicaments. 9/11 has further aggravated the situation. The worst effected is the female education. Under the prevailing circumstances, local community is susceptible to make any substantial contribution for restoration of peace and tranquility and for smooth functioning of educational institutions. The peace initiatives of the government have not produced the desired results as the situation on the ground is still murky. The international community should come forward and play its long-due role in the restitution of harmony and stability in the area so that the people can resume their journey on the road towards education and enlightenment.

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(Edited by Nicole and Lily)