



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report evaluates the micro-impact of cross-Line of Control confidence-building measures, particularly trade and travel, between the Indian and Pakistani sides of Kashmir since 2005. Commissioned by the United States Institute of Peace, it is based on a survey, focus group discussions, and interviews with local traders, academics, and civil society members on both sides.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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*Pawan Bali and Shaheen Akhtar*

## Kashmir Line of Control and Grassroots Peacebuilding

### Summary

- India and Pakistan have been in conflict over Kashmir since 1947. In April 2005, a cross-Line of Control (LoC) bus service was launched between the Indian and Pakistani sides of Kashmir, followed by cross-LoC trade in 2008.
- A plurality of respondents on both sides felt that people-to-people contact and grassroots interactions have had some impact on the overall conflict; others regarded them as only symbolic.
- Most respondents believed that the impact of grassroots involvement is limited to a small group of divided families and traders, and that the processes have failed to expand, become institutionalized, or involve stakeholders.
- From 2008 to 2016, goods worth \$754 million have been exchanged through cross-LoC barter trade, and the bus service has recorded nearly twenty-eight thousand visits.
- Cross-LoC interactions have led to a limited perception shift as well as nominal and nascent social linkages. The economic impact is limited to a small constituency and has failed to filter through into the larger society.
- Most respondents said that grassroots efforts cannot affect policies and that the process remains government driven. In Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, respondents were more hopeful. In Pakistan-administered Kashmir, an overwhelming majority felt that civil society was weak.
- Some of the weaknesses in grassroots peacebuilding, in the context of cross-LoC collaborations, were described as limited expansion, stringent checks, low or no impact on Kashmir's political situation, and lack of stakeholders.
- Challenges include a tendency to overemphasize top-down approaches, strained India-Pakistan ties, lack of capacity of existing grassroots bodies, and poor linkages between grassroots and state structures in peacebuilding.

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## Introduction

India and Pakistan have been enmeshed in a territorial conflict over the Kashmir region since 1947, the year both nations were carved out of British India. They have fought two related wars, first in 1947 and again in 1965, and engaged in an escalated armed conflict in 1999. The Line of Control (LoC)—a de facto border between the Indian- and Pakistani-Administered Kashmir—has been the locus of repeated artillery exchange and friction between both sides despite a ceasefire agreed to in 2003. Both nations have oscillated between dialogues and deadlocks, failing to break the impasse.

In 1997, the two countries began a composite dialogue process aimed at building bilateral relations. Both sides identified a cluster of eight issues, including the Kashmir dispute, peace and security, economic and commercial cooperation, and promotion of friendly exchanges.<sup>1</sup> In 2005, the composite dialogue and Track II (middle leadership) exchanges led to the start of the first cross-LoC bus service, Karvan-e-Aman (Caravan of Peace)—a historic initiative to launch formal people-to-people contacts between Indian- and Pakistani-administered Kashmir. Subsequently, in 2008, cross-LoC trade was initiated. Cross-LoC travel and trade restored Track III (grassroots) people-to-people contacts that had been cut in 1947 and provided the local population an opportunity to revive traditional, economic, and sociocultural ties.

Based on extensive fieldwork, this report assesses the impact, relevance, and effectiveness of Track III peacebuilding and interactions across the LoC over the past decade-plus. It evaluates the psycho-social, economic, political, and security impact of cross-LoC confidence-building measures (CBMs), especially travel and trade, and their relevance and effectiveness in the context of grassroots peacebuilding in Kashmir. It argues for the need to expand grassroots linkages and localized cross-LoC collaborations to create stronger constituencies of peace. It builds a case that the localized cross-border interests and civil society coordination will sensitize the governments and decision-making bodies to make informed decisions and eventually create an environment conducive to a political solution to the Kashmir conflict. The report also looks into the limitations and scope of grassroots and civil society in affecting systemic and political processes, and develops recommendations for future grassroots peacebuilding in the region.

A purposive sample survey of three hundred respondents was conducted on both Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (IAJK) and Pakistani-administered Kashmir (PAK).<sup>2</sup> An equal number of respondents—traders and travelers randomly chosen based on their being involved with cross-LoC interactions and processes—were selected from each side in each subgrouping: 150 traders, one hundred cross-LoC bus travelers, and fifty members of civil society. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were also held, separately despite minor overlap—with members of the media, civil society, and local stakeholders. The survey reflects the opinions only of those who have been associated with grassroots interactions and CBMs; it is not representative of the general population.<sup>3</sup> Analysis also incorporated a close review of journal articles, newspaper reports, social media forums, and cross-LoC trade and travel data.

In PAK, the survey was conducted from July to September of 2016. Four focus group discussions with local stakeholders took place from August to October at Muzaffarabad, Rawalakot, Kotli, and Islamabad. Participants included civil society members such as journalists, lawyers, doctors, traders, local government officials, political workers, teachers, and selected students. From July to October, semi-structured interviews were conducted with political leaders, local government officials, media, and academia from different parts of PAK to find out the efficacy of Track III peacebuilding in the context of Kashmir.

In IAJK, the survey was conducted between April and October of 2016. It was briefly stalled between July and August in response to unrest in Kashmir Valley.<sup>4</sup> Focus group discussions were also held across the state at Kashmir University, Jammu University, Chakkan-Da-Bagh trade center in Poonch, and Salamabad Trade Center in Kashmir Valley. Personal semi-structured interviews were conducted with peacebuilders, heads of peacebuilding organizations, journalists, nongovernmental organization heads, lawyers, academics, and prominent members of civil society.

## Dialogue in Kashmir

The history of the dialogue process in Kashmir is dominated by Track I (top leadership): UN mediation, the Bhutto-Swaran Singh talks (1962–63), the Soviet-mediated Tashkent Agreement (1966), the Simla Accord (1972), the Lahore Declaration (1999), and the Agra summit of 2001. Beginning in the 1990s, Kashmir figured in most of the Track II dialogues on India-Pakistan relations, the most significant of which were the India-Pakistan Neemrana Initiative (1991), the Pakistan-India People’s Forum for Peace & Democracy (1994), and the Kashmir Study Group (1996). Kashmir-specific Track II meetings were more frequent after the Composite Dialogue of 2004. A November 2004 Pugwash event, held in Kathmandu with the tacit support of both governments, brought together prominent politicians, intellectuals, and civil society activists from both sides of the LoC and resolved “to integrate the Kashmiri leadership and society in a framework of semi-official dialogue.”<sup>5</sup>

Relatedly, the Balusa Group, Ottawa dialogue, and Chaophraya dialogue each tried to involve academics and high-level retired military and government officials to discuss a variety of issues, including terrorism, extremists, Kashmir, trade, economic cooperation, nuclear stability, and water disputes. The New Delhi-based Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation has engaged in intra-Kashmir dialogue at both regional and cross-LoC levels, organizing seventeen cross-LoC conferences between 2005 and 2015. Since 2008, London-based Conciliation Resources has supported cross-LoC dialogues and collaborative projects between diverse groups including youth, women, the media, traders, and academicians. Currently, more than twelve highly institutionalized Track II groups are in place, as are more than twenty people-to-people exchange programs between the two countries, supported by both external and internal funding.<sup>6</sup>

## Grassroots Peacebuilding

Cross-LoC travel since 2005 and trade from 2008 onward have paved the way for grassroots peacebuilding and greater people-to-people contact between India and Pakistan. The contact has given locals an opportunity to interact and engage with each other for the first time since Partition, leading to reducing distrust, changing perceptions, and forming collaborations. The change, however, is a small step, and is limited to a small proportion of the population on both sides, mainly divided families and a few traders. These measures have also failed to expand and have not been institutionalized.

In the last ten years, the bus service, which started running fortnightly and was made weekly in 2011, has recorded more than 27,907 visits, 8,379 from the IAJK and more than 19,528 from the PAK side. This number is miniscule in the context of the entire state population, which is 12.5 million in IAJK per the 2011 census and an estimated 4.4 million in PAK.<sup>7</sup> The bus service is underused, limited to divided local families, and the process of obtaining permits to travel remains tedious. Each travel application goes through twenty-one offices,

twelve Indian and nine Pakistani, before it is cleared. Three times as many applications have been filed as people have traveled.<sup>8</sup>

Cross-LoC trade through the Uri-Muzaffarabad and the Poonch-Rawalakot crossings was the second CBM initiated—on October 21, 2008—and became another LoC point of contact. It is a zero tariff trade conducted four days a week and based on a barter system, specifically, an equal exchange of goods that involves no monetization. Goods must be exchanged within three months to balance the value. Both Indian and Pakistani governments have agreed on a list of twenty-one allowable items, of which only five or six are actively traded.<sup>9</sup> No organized grievance redressal mechanism is in place. Despite these constraints, trade has grown since it started and carries high symbolic and emotive value. From fiscal year 2008–09 to fiscal year 2015–16, the total volume of the trade has been approximately \$754 million.<sup>10</sup> Overall exports from IAJK were more than \$397 million, and from PAK \$357 million—only a small percentage of the annual bilateral trade between India and Pakistan, which was recorded at \$2.61 billion in 2015–16.<sup>11</sup>

Most respondents on both sides (56 percent) felt that the grassroots peacebuilding and people-to-people contact has had some impact on the overall Kashmir conflict, however small or limited.

On the IAJK side, more than 61 percent cited some change; 39 percent saw the process as symbolic (see table 1). The impacts of people-to-people contacts were described as building bridges, initiating communication, and restoring linkages within the small scope of people involved. The respondents who did not see any change regarded the grassroots involvement as a “show off to the international community” and that neither India nor Pakistan was “serious enough to empower people.” They also felt that the process had not involved real stakeholders or reached a stage at which it had the potential to make a change.

Responding to an open-ended question about the strengths of the process, 47 percent of IAJK respondents said that it had restored trade and social linkages, and 33 percent regarded trust building between the civilian population and breaking of stereotypes as a major contribution. A few (5 percent) saw the processes as contributing to improved Indian-Pakistan ties. Other micro impacts included “making state governments more relevant” and “helping build synergies of peace” (see table 2).

On the PAK side, 52 percent of the respondents thought that cross-LoC interactions had brought some positive changes—“people have better information about each other” and “there is a relative peace on the LoC”—which contributed to an environment of trust. The other 48 percent saw no real change because “trade or softening of LoC [was] symbolic” and “[did] not change the character of the political conflict” (see table 1).

In describing the strengths of the process, 64 percent from PAK believed that it had reconnected them with their relatives, and 30 percent said that it had in some way contributed to trust building and better understanding each other’s perspectives. Only 3.3 percent said that it had in some way helped in improving India-Pakistan relations (see table 2).

**Table 1. People-to-People Contact and Change in the Kashmir Conflict**

	IAJK	PAK	Total
Yes	60.6	52	56
No	39.4	48	44

Note: All figures in percentages.

**Table 2. Strengths of Cross-LoC Interactions and Grassroots Processes**

	IAJK	PAK	Total
Restoring socioeconomic linkages	46.7	64	56
Changing perceptions and trust building	32.7	30	31
Improved India-Pakistan relations	4.6	3.3	4
Other	16	2.7	9

Note: All figures in percentages.

## Psychological Shift

Opening the travel and trade routes between IAJK and PAK brought down the “iron curtain” that had existed since the borders were drawn in 1947. The Partition and subsequent India-Pakistan war of 1965 left the people in the region with divisions and a deep sense of mutual distrust. The lack of information exchange and interaction had created stereotypes and respectively poor images of the other side, leading to trust gaps. The bus service and the trade, however, restored the linkages so abruptly cut off. Interaction, which had been limited to Track I and Track II actors, was extended to the grassroots. Dissemination of ideas and forging of social links set small changes into motion.

According to Susobhho Bharve, director of the Center for Dialogue and Reconciliation in New Delhi, “the process...healed the wounds of the 1947 and 1965 war and was a psychological uplift because people never believed that [it] would happen.” Political analyst and Kashmir University professor Gul Wani said that it had contributed to a perception management that “India and Pakistan can come down from certain hawkishness to rationality.”

In the overall survey, more than 43 percent of all respondents said that grassroots efforts had led to a perception shift. Another 33 percent saw no impact. More than 24 percent said that the shift was limited and miniscule.

On the IAJK side, 57 percent agreed that perceptions have shifted, 35 percent thought the process ineffective in that regard, and 8 percent considered the shift limited (see table 3). Some Hindu and Sikh respondents from Jammu and the border district of Poonch believed that interactions with Muslims from the Pakistani side had helped break stereotypes on both sides and that sharing information had contributed to “nullifying propaganda.” A civil society member in Poonch, IAJK, explained: “Now we know that not all people on the Pakistani side support terrorism and they also know, that Muslims on the Indian side can offer prayers freely. These are examples of stereotypes that had reinforced due to lack of information and interaction.” Some respondents admitted to a “change in the opinion of the other,” a “breakdown of existing perceptions,” “trust building,” “no longer feeling revengeful about the Partition and wars,” and being aware of “more infrastructural development” on the Indian side. One respondent, Subash Tandon, the first Hindu to travel on the cross-LoC bus, described the change in perception as a “complete turnover” that led to forming friendships of a lifetime. A cross-LoC trader in Uri, Salamabad, described it as becoming “aware that infrastructural development on the Indian side was more than the Pakistani side of Kashmir.”

Those who did not agree to a perception shift attributed it to the “absence of real change in perceptions,” “existing distrust due to continuity in violence,” and “lack of continuity and penetration of the process.”

On the PAK side, 29.3 percent of respondents said that grassroots interactions between travelers, traders, media, and civil society from both sides of Kashmir generated a positive perceptual shift (see table 3). This was attributed primarily to the availability of more

information about the other side through meetings of relatives, traders’ linkages, and information sharing by the media. Support for peace and ceasefire on the LoC has increased. A working photojournalist from Neelum Valley said, “Previously people wanted firing on the enemy side, now they know each other better and feel that the loss would be borne by the common civilian.” A trader from Poonch said, “Now we know that someone known to us could get killed on the other side.” Contacts between traders and journalists across the LoC led to increased information sharing and a decline in distorted information, especially during the periods of tension on the LoC. Interactions helped in changing stereotypes. A female civil society activist from Rawalakot explained: “I met my relatives and made new friends. I always thought that due to conflict, girls on the other side could not go to school, but I came to know that my cousins on the other side are well educated.”

About 30 percent of the respondents, however, saw no change; such interactions were cosmetic, they said, and would not alter their perspective on the Kashmir conflict (see table 3). More than 40 percent said that the shift was limited but saw their interactions with relatives, who they met after a long gap, as a source of “great satisfaction.” Respondents also expressed a strong desire for peace and dialogue but felt that ongoing conflict between the two countries limited the impact of interactions and peacebuilding.

**Table 3. Cross-LoC Interaction and Perception Shift**

	IAJK	PAK	Total
Yes	57.3	29.3	43.3
No	35.3	30	32.7
Limited	7.4	40.7	24

Note: All figures in percentages.

## Social Change

Grassroots interaction across the LoC, despite being more than a decade old, is still in its nascent stage. Has this limited interaction percolated down to the formation of social bonds, relations, and institutions? A plurality of the respondents on both sides felt that social change is still far from reality; a minority said that the process is bringing in a change within the society, especially in the areas close to the LoC.

On the IAJK side, 50 percent believed that no social change had taken place and 17 percent believed that it was limited (see table 4). These respondents felt that the “larger societal participation” was missing and that the “common man has been ignored,” which was why the effects at the societal level were minimal or nonexistent. The other reasons were described as lack of a procedure for greater social interaction, limited time for interaction or travel, lack of cultural exchange, limited to divided families, security restrictions, and lack of trust between both sides.

At the same time, 33 percent of the IAJK respondents said that social change was taking place in the form of societal linkages, bonds, social media exchanges, cross-LoC groups, and cross-LoC marriages. Some of the examples of existing social media collaborations included a Facebook group—H.E.A.R.T of J&K—that aims to “share, promote, and preserve common cultural heritage of both sides” and the Salamabad Cross-LoC Traders’ Group. Social interactions have expanded over the years, some respondents describing them as “virtual social bonds.”

Imitiaz Ahmed, a forty-year-old trader at Salamabad Trade Center, summed up the micro-change: “Basic political issues remain the same, but now we are sitting here with a Pakistani driver, drinking tea. That is a change.”

Cross-LoC interactions have initiated social bonds and a few cross-LoC marriages. In September 2016, Srinagar-based policeman Owais married Muzaffarabad-based Faiza, a match facilitated by cross-LoC travel.<sup>12</sup>

Involving youth in the process, especially trade, is another example of social shift. A 2012 survey by Conciliation Resources reported the majority of traders in IAJK to be younger than forty years old.<sup>13</sup> A few traders between twenty-five and thirty-one described the process as “an opportunity to engage the youth in an industry-less and land locked region.” Trade has engaged a small number of former militants who have now laid down arms and are earning a living through the cross-LoC trade.<sup>14</sup> A few respondents in Jammu said that the predominant social change was that the cross-LoC interactions had to some extent shifted the central focus from the Kashmir Valley to the border districts and Jammu region, which included a substantial number of divided families. The process had given a space to the border residents to be stakeholders in the entire Kashmir conflict.

**Table 4. Cross-LoC Interaction and Social Change**

	IAJK	PAK	Total
Yes	33.3	20	26.7
No	50	39.3	44.7
Limited	16.7	40.7	28.7

Note: All figures in percentages.

On the PAK side, only 20 percent of the respondents subscribed to the view that cross-LoC interactions had revived social bonds and cultural linkages; more than 39 percent disagreed and nearly 41 percent felt that the change had been limited. Those who replied positively referred to the revival of cultural connectivity between two parts of Kashmir. Many pointed out that people who traveled across were able to see the culture and old traditions on the other side and could share their experiences. The cross-LoC trade has developed cross-community linkages, like the traders in Poonch, who are mainly Sikhs and Hindus, constantly interacting with their counterparts in Rawalakot, who are Muslims. The traders from both sides and the Kashmir Lawyers’ Forum have formed WhatsApp groups and stay connected even during periods of high tension on the LoC.

In areas like the Neelum Valley, which were hit by cross-LoC shelling, respondents also reported that with the ceasefire and CBMs their local social and cultural activities had revived. They could freely move around, visit relatives, participate in weddings and funerals, and even send their children to school. This was not possible before the ceasefire, when both sides exchanged constant fire and shelling.

Respondents who saw no social change attributed it to the “inability of such limited interactions to bring about a societal change.” For them, the people-to-people contacts were restricted to divided families and faced a number of procedural barriers. Distrust was high and the frequency of these visits and exchanges too low. Because of this, any broader social change in outlook was not realistic at the time.

## Economic Impact

As noted earlier, cross-LoC trade was the second CBM—initiated on October 21, 2008. It was touted as the “mother of all CBMs” and accompanied by references to changing “the line of control to the line of commerce.”<sup>15</sup> But in the eight years after that, the economic impact was limited to a “few traders” and a small “constituency of people associated with trade.” The absence of a substantial impact is attributed to the “collective failure at both central and regional levels to make these CBMs a priority.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite a lack of push behind expanding trade, the trade continues and is high on symbolic and emotive value. In terms of numbers, from 2008 to 2016, the total trade between both sides was approximately \$754 million.

More than 1,215 cross-LoC traders from both sides of the line are registered: 585 from PAK (296 from Chakothi and 289 from Tatrinite), and 630 from IAJK (327 from Uri and 303 from Chakkan Da Bagh).<sup>17</sup> The number of active traders, however, is much lower. In 2015 and 2016, active traders made up only 18 percent of the total registered cross-LoC traders.<sup>18</sup>

The trade is also economically engaging laborers, associated beneficiaries such as truckers, agents, taxi drivers, shopkeepers, rental property owners, and hoteliers. On the PAK side, about five thousand people are associated with trade-related activities.<sup>19</sup> On the IAJK side, spillover economic activity supports five hundred more than that.<sup>20</sup>

In the overall survey, a plurality of 48 percent believed that the economic impact of the cross-LoC initiatives had been “a big boon for a select few” but had failed to seep through to the rest of society. Although 26 percent agreed that the economic impact had been substantial, another 26 percent said that no economic change had taken place (see table 5).

In IAJK, 32 percent agreed that an economic change was taking place, 31 percent disagreed, and 37 percent considered it limited to only a “few traders who can be counted on [one’s] finger tips.”

**Table 5. Cross-LoC Interaction and Economic Change**

	IAJK	PAK	Total
Yes	32.6	19.3	26
No	30.7	20.7	25.6
Limited	36.7	60.0	48.4

Note: All figures in percentages.

Only 19 percent of PAK respondents thought that the trade had brought in substantial economic change; 20 percent said that it had no economic impact. More than 60 percent considered the change limited, saying that the benefits were only for those directly engaged with cross-LoC trade or associated with allied services, such as loaders, local transporters, truck drivers, or producers. Some respondents underscored change that, for example, enabled traders “to build their own houses,” “afford a better living for their families,” and “[be] financially empowered.” Khurshid Ahmad Mir, a cross-LoC trader and president of the Intra-Kashmir Trade Union Muzaffarabad, said that more than half of the LoC traders now own their homes.

The traders, however, said economic impact was hindered by the lack of a banking system, minimal trader-to-trader contact, poor communication linkages, absence of full-scale scanners, limited tradable items, lack of a local dry port, and no access to market. They also complained that traders from Lahore, Faisalabad, Amritsar, and Delhi had hijacked this trade,



that mainstream traders from India and Pakistan were using local traders as proxies to channel their goods through this route and exploit the zero duty benefit.

## Political Impact

The grassroots sector on both sides of the Kashmir LoC is largely unorganized politically and has failed to tap its full potential. The only organized joint platform is the Joint Chambers of Commerce and Industry, which was initially formed in 2008 and reorganized in November 2011. It comprises more than ten business entities, including the heads of four chambers and federations of industries from both sides of the LoC, and has been recognized by the governments, indicating its acceptability at the policy level. Grassroots traders are in the process of forming a cross-LoC joint federation, increasing their ability to affect policy and political changes.

Cross-LoC interaction remains government driven. More than 54 percent of respondents overall thought that grassroots efforts had been unable to sway policy or politics; 46 percent believed that civil society had effected small changes and had the potential for further impact if organized properly.

In IAJK, a majority of the respondents (54 percent) believed that the grassroots could bring in policy and political changes if they were organized and strengthened; 46 percent did not. One micro-level policy change was the influence of a traders' lobby to increase the number of trading days from two to four, and the number of trucks from twenty to forty. The lobby also pressured the government to exempt the trade from value added tax.<sup>21</sup> In 2011, a three-month strike by the traders against the value added tax prompted the state governor to pass an amendment to the Sales Tax Act, which officially recognized the cross-LoC trade as being "across Line of Actual Control," thus exempting it from value added tax.<sup>22</sup> The traders' protests also forced the Indian home ministry to lift the ban on trading bananas in 2014.<sup>23</sup>

Civil society stakes have also prompted political parties such as the local unit of the Bhartiya Janta Party and separatist leaders to extend their support to cross-LoC collaborations. Kashmiri separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani, who heads the hard-line faction of the All Party Hurriyat Conference, had initially opposed the cross-LoC bus service and later toned down the opposition to say that the cross-LoC interactions should be substantive, not symbolic.<sup>24</sup> The local wing of the right-leaning Bhartiya Janta Party, which formed the coalition government with the People's Democratic Party in March 2015, has also supported these collaborations. The People's Democratic Party-Bhartiya Janta Party coalition had listed "enhancing people-to-people contact on both sides of the LoC, encouraging civil society exchanges, taking travel, commerce, trade, and business across the LoC to the next level" as a part of its coalition agenda.<sup>25</sup> In 2016, the coalition government approved the use of banking facilities for cross-LoC trade and authorized the Department of Industries and Commerce to work out modalities for establishing banking facilities.<sup>26</sup>

On the PAK side, more than 62 percent believed that grassroots could not directly affect policies. The general feeling was that governments were strong and people too weak to make an impact at the political level and that neither government had enough political will to support grassroots efforts. PAK civil society is considerably weaker than IAJK's and not well organized. More than 38 percent of the respondents felt that grassroots had the potential and that sustained efforts by the people could have an indirect impact at the policy level. More specifically, respondents believed that increased cross-LoC interactions could help in reducing hostility, building spaces for dialogue, and expanding acceptability of increased grassroots interactions, which could in turn lead to political changes.

## Military-Security Impact

In 2003, India and Pakistan announced a mutual ceasefire along the LoC that has proved fragile and is frequently violated. A majority (55 percent) of respondents thought that grassroots interactions and CBMs had contributed positively to sustaining the ceasefire; 45 percent considered the impact nominal.

Responses were significantly different on either side of the LoC. IAJK respondents were less positive, 77 percent saying that “military actions are delinked from grassroots.” Only 23 percent thought that civil society could have some impact on militaries and contribute to maintaining the ceasefire. Respondents who saw no impact said that “grassroots could not dare to challenge militaries,” that “military action should be delinked from civil society,” and that armies were “sacred” and “could not be touched.” Respondents who supported the role of civil society in maintaining the ceasefire said that the “border residents have close ties with local commanders,” which is significant to maintaining peace. They also said that “regular trade was increasing positive military interactions on both sides.” Civil society has had some impact on sustaining the ceasefire in issuing joint petitions urging both New Delhi and Islamabad to maintain it.<sup>27</sup>

“Local traders are affected by shelling and border firing and they do have ties with local army commanders to influence them,” remarked Dipankar Sengupta, head of the economics department at Jammu University and a cross-LoC trade analyst. Given greater involvement of the locals and traders on the LoC, he said, armies were being careful about collateral damage.

On the PAK side, an overwhelming majority—87 percent—said that grassroots interactions and ensuing cross-LoC linkages had positively contributed to peace and normalcy on the LoC. A journalist from Kundal Shahi, in Neelum Valley, remarked that despite the lack of any “major policy shift in strategies. . . resistance from people from either side has influenced governments to maintain peace.” In 2013 and 2016, Neelum Valley locals protested the escalation of tension along the LoC and the two governments listened. Escalation was avoided.

In August 2013, a group of women from Neelum Valley led a rally from Athmuqam, the district headquarters in the Neelum Valley, urging the militaries to maintain the peace. The local military commander assured the demonstrators that he would convey their concerns and demands to the authorities.<sup>28</sup> In 2011, after three Pakistani soldiers were killed in Indian shelling, Neelum Valley residents rallied in Athmuqam on Eid-ul-Fitr, calling on Islamabad and New Delhi to exercise restraint and maintain the truce.<sup>29</sup> More than 13 percent of respondents, however, said that grassroots and CBMs efforts were not enough to sustain the ceasefire or affect military action, and that “other than the crossing points, shelling and firing continue along the LoC.”

## Assessment

In the last ten years, grassroots interactions and cross-LoC CBMs have failed to expand beyond the initial stage. Except for a limited trade lobby, grassroots efforts have not been organized to effect substantial changes. Despite a lack of push, however, cross-LoC interactions have survived a fractious India-Pak relationship, rising border tensions, and frequent ceasefire violations. Initiatives have survived the political and the diplomatic standoff between India and Pakistan since the Mumbai attacks of 2008, the more recent Pathankot airbase attack in January 2016, and the attack on army headquarters in Uri in September 2016. India responded to the Uri attack with surgical strikes and boycotted the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation meeting in Islamabad, but cross-LoC initiatives were not suspended. A day after the attack, the cross-LoC bus between Uri and Muzaffarabad ran

on schedule and was the only civilian vehicle to pass through the town where the attack had taken place.<sup>30</sup>

Earlier in the year, cross-LoC bus passengers from PAK publicly condemned the attack on the Indian air base in Pathankot and urged both countries to fight collectively against terrorism and maintain peace.<sup>31</sup> Such are the small but significant indicators that the processes have the potential to make a space for peacebuilding and generate opinion on the ground to initiate dialogue.

Even though the processes have been sustained, a plurality of the respondents on both sides believed that the grassroots and cross-LoC interactions were vulnerable to “local politics and national events.”

In IAJK, 57 percent said that the process was vulnerable, and 43 percent said that it had survived “vulnerabilities of military, diplomatic and local standoffs.” Respondents who regarded the process as highly tenuous said that grassroots efforts depended on central governments, which could easily stall or allow these steps to gain momentum. Other vulnerabilities were identified as local events and unrest in Kashmir, security risks, and lack of proper procedures and infrastructure.

In PAK, an overwhelming majority of respondents (96 percent) felt that this process was highly fragile and that its existence and sustenance depended on the goodwill of the two governments. The perception was strong that it could abruptly come to an end or be jointly suspended. Uncertainty was high. Farzana Yaqoob, former minister for Social Welfare and Women’s Development in PAK, remarked in an interview that “the process is vulnerable because the parties have a major trust deficit that needs to be addressed.” Because neither government has made any efforts to institutionalize the ceasefire, CBMs, or grassroots peacebuilding, respondents were skeptical about the future. They observed that “peacebuilding efforts are highly vulnerable to shelling and cross-LoC firing,” and that the CBMs continued to be weak. About 4 percent said that the process was not vulnerable. For instance, Mirza Ashfaq Ahmad, a trader from Madar, observed that “After a very long time, Kashmiris have crossed the *khooni lakir* (a line drawn in blood) and the processes should not be limited.”

As to relevance, despite skepticism, an overall 63 percent of respondents were hopeful that grassroots processes could foster greater psycho-socioeconomic change, affect policies, and be relevant to the Kashmir conflict, if channelized and organized. Only 37 percent of respondents did not see much value in grassroots efforts.

In IAJK, 67 percent regarded the processes as relevant and attributed it to their ability to “mobilize ideas,” “ensure willingness of civil society to engage,” “build a synergy of peace,” and “provide alternatives to peace institutions, where governments have failed to do so.” The 33 percent who described Track III peacebuilding as irrelevant said it was so for its inability to “expand beyond the divided families and a few traders” and “penetrate the core and involve stakeholders.”

On the PAK side, 59 percent thought that grassroots peacebuilding was relevant and had the potential to bring about greater psychosocial and economic change; 41 percent felt that it had brought no change over the previous ten years. Those who regarded it as relevant said that there was “no military solution to the conflict,” and that the process was “essential for peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute” and was “giving people a chance to be a part of peacebuilding.” A cross-LoC trader in Poonch remarked that “conventional rhetoric has yielded nothing except destruction, so the grassroots process should be given a chance and reviewed biannually.” Manzoor Gilani, a former chief justice of PAK High Court and a member of a divided family, believed that people “can build channels of interactions by community participation, exchanging of goods and expertise.”

Those who were skeptical about the relevance of the grassroots process for peacebuilding felt that it was not sustainable, that “governments are not serious about giving it ownership,” and that “tension in India-Pakistan relations is keeping it weak.”

In an open-ended question on the weaknesses of the process, 38 percent of all respondents said that the lack of infrastructure and the process being limited “to a few members of divided families and traders” were the main drawbacks. Some 28 percent believed that stringent security checks and clearance procedures were hindering the process; 19 percent thought the lack of stakeholders’ involvement was the main weakness. About 12 percent felt that grassroots interactions had little or no impact on the overall conflict. Other weaknesses reducing its relevance and impact were identified as “irregularity,” “distrust,” and “lack of serious government initiatives.”

## Conclusion

Grassroots actors on both sides have taken small steps toward peace, but significant challenges remain in translating this into a deeper Kashmiri peacebuilding process. Tension on the LoC and in India-Pakistan relations directly affects cross-LoC CBMs, and attacks such as those in Mumbai, Pathankot, and Uri and ceasefire violations along the LoC dampen prospects for collaborative civic engagement.

Top-down approaches have been overemphasized and too little attention has been paid to either repairing community relationships or initiating an inclusive dialogue process. Grassroots stakeholders remain marginalized in the engagement process and cannot articulate their voice or connect vertically to state structures. Government attitudes are discouraging and favor controlled interactions across the LoC. Cross-LoC travel and trade continues to be restricted and intra-Kashmir dialogue is patchy.

To enable civil society to make contributions that have an impact, both governments need to improve infrastructure, reduce security restrictions, increase cross-LoC interactions, and recognize the relevance of local actors. The grassroots also need training and support to recognize their potential and organize themselves into agents of change. The support can be facilitated by external actors and should be continuous and consistent. The idea, explained Siddiq Wahid, a historian and political commentator from IAJK, to “work from the ground, by the ground, and for the ground, while convincing the top that the ground cannot harm it” has considerable potential and needs to be organized.

## Recommendations

A future framework would include six elements: training, review, social connectivity, economic linkages, political collaboration, and military security.

### *Training Emerging Grassroots Leaders*

The grassroots leaders need to be trained and sensitized to their role in peacebuilding and decision making. At present, actors recognize their potential but feel, a government school principal explained in an interview, as if they are “not prepared to play a useful role in conflict resolution.” Their training can be facilitated by external actors, peacebuilding experts, and nongovernmental organizations. Training in problem-solving mediation, community decision making, reducing prejudice, negotiation, and peacebuilding can make them more sensitized and prepared to further influence Track II and Track I actors. Emerging leaders, independent thinkers from the grassroots, and those who can have a ripple effect should be recognized and supported to become agents of change and peace.

## ***Reviewing Grassroots Engagements Regularly***

Both governments and Track II actors need to develop a mechanism to regularly engage with the grassroots and review their suggestions and feedback. Engagement with the grassroots will ensure an exchange of ideas between the tracks, help governments and upper-level tiers make informed decisions, and support local ownership of processes. Regular reviews will also help remove obstructions and smoothen processes of civic society engagements across the LoC.

## ***Expanding Social Connectivity***

Analysis of the survey reveals that psycho-social connectivity, which is critical to changing perception and building trust across the LoC, continues to be weak because interaction opportunities are limited. These can be expanded in several ways.

More than 56 percent of all respondents suggested that the way forward to strengthening grassroots peacebuilding is to expand cross-LoC civic engagements. Collaborative groups of media, teachers, lawyers, women, and local leaders should be established. So far, only cross-LoC traders' groups exist. It is encouraging that in the August 2015 interaction of cross-LoC journalists, it was decided to set up a mechanism for sharing content, both news and views, that would help in breaking various myths and distortions associated with their respective regions.<sup>32</sup> Such joint groups can issue statements, work collaboratively, and engage at the Track II level.

Civic engagement should be widened by promoting exchanges of students and academics, reserved seats for students across the LoC, and joint thesis evaluations. Virtual lectures (via Skype or other systems) and online dialogue between students could be held to promote understanding. Joint training courses in peacebuilding and negotiation should be introduced for the students to build constituencies of peace and future civic actors and influencers.

Exchanges of cultural troupes, folk and theater artists, poets and dramatists could be encouraged across the LoC to disseminate cultural information and encourage affinity. Collaborative productions in drama, literature, and films as well as joint messages of peace through other artistic mediums should be encouraged. Cultural groups from both sides should be regularly allowed to perform at venues and events across the LoC.

Both sides of the LoC are home to significant tourist destinations. On the IAJK side, the Kashmir Valley is first, but the Ladakh region is also a hub and Jammu offers considerable historical and border tourism. The region is home to numerous shrines—including Hazrat Bal (Srinagar), Charar-e-Sharief (Budgam), and Shardha Sharief (Rajouri) on the IAJK side and several Sikh Gurdwaras, Hindu temples and a number of Muslim shrines on the PAK side. These sites would not only attract tourists but also promote interfaith harmony. For cross-LoC tourists, the idea of homestays should be encouraged, which could not only cater to the lack of infrastructure in border areas but also promote cultural and social bonds.

Civic engagement could also be widened by holding sports events at schools, colleges, and universities as well as at the district and regional level. Events such as the cricket premium league or soccer tournaments could be held annually across the LoC to strengthen sporting ties as well as interactions generally.

Social media connections and interactions should be encouraged given that they can help build trust and shed stereotypes. Some Facebook pages are already in place and WhatsApp groups are being used for information sharing. These need to be further encouraged and promoted to build conversations of peace and collaboration.

Another potential avenue would be to institute collaborative mechanisms for disaster management, water, and environmental security. The mountainous regions on both sides

of Kashmir are extremely vulnerable to flash flooding, landslides, and earthquakes. Ecologists and civil society actors from both sides could develop a platform to work together in mapping deforestation and its impact on the Indus watershed in the Upper Indus Basin and coordinate strategies for sustainable conservation, protection, and development of forests in the region. First response teams on both sides could be formed, trained, and allowed to work across the LoC in times of disaster. Collaborations among academicians in this sector could be encouraged to conduct joint research and mapping and to share data on hydrological, meteorological, and seismological activities.

### ***Reinvigorating Economic-Social Linkages***

To change the mindsets and bridge the trust gap, expanding travel and trade across the LoC is essential. This would entail improving travel modalities, expediting travel permits, not limiting the process to divided families, and opening more routes. Respondents also suggested the use of state identity documents (referred to as the State Subject) as a travel document or a biometric card rather than the tedious permit system. The two governments should also further consider opening more traditional routes, including Kargil-Skardu, Jammu-Sialkot, Turtuk-Khapulu, Chhamb-Jorian to Mirpur, Gurez-Astoor-Gilgit, Titwal-Chilhana, Jhangar (Nowshera)–Mirpur and Kotli.

Cross-LoC trade, which has the potential to develop a stronger trade community and peace constituency in both parts of Kashmir, needs improved infrastructure such as banking and communication facilities, full-scale scanners, warehouses, meeting halls, and access to market on both sides. Registered and active traders should be issued short-term trade permits to visit trade facilitation centers on both sides. At present, only truck drivers are issued such permits. The list of items to be traded should be expanded beyond twenty-one and each item listed with the Harmonised System of Coding to remove discrepancies. Cross-LoC trade, referred to as “the blind trade” because IAJK and PAK traders have no direct line of communication between them, needs a dispute resolution mechanism and after-sales servicing. It should also involve local manufacturers, local trade fairs and markets near the LoC, and federations of local traders on both sides.

### ***Building Political Linkages and Collaborative Mechanisms***

In the past decade of cross-LoC interaction, exchanges between grassroots community leaders, local politicians, and assembly members on either side of divided Kashmir have not been emphasized. An inclusive political dialogue is missing. Most respondents considered a political solution to the Kashmir conflict essential and thought that civil society did not have ownership of the dialogue initiated. An inclusive intra-Kashmir dialogue involving local political leaders, parliamentarians, and grassroots leaders would provide ownership to the process.

Grassroots peacebuilding would be strengthened if local political units on both sides were effectively engaged. On the IAJK side, the local *panchayats* are the smallest unit of elected representatives at the village level and elected *sarpanches* and *panches* number more than thirty thousand. In PAK, the lowest administrative-political unit are the local bodies, which had been dormant since 1996. In 2017, local bodies will be revived in the process of the elections. The local administrative and political units on both sides should be strengthened, encouraged to collaborate and nurture dialogue, and be delegated more powers to deal with everyday cross-LoC issues.

## ***Strengthening Military and Security Impact***

Consolidation of the ceasefire on the LoC is central to expanding and sustaining grassroots interactions across the LoC. Trade and travel were by-products of the 2003 ceasefire and are affected by escalation of tension on the LoC, whether directly or indirectly. A limited number of military and political CBMs—such as dedicated hotlines between director generals of military operations and sector commanders, monthly flag meetings between formation commanders, and a 1991 agreement on airspace violations—are in place to defuse tensions. But the LoC continues to be heavily militarized and tense. Many respondents suggested that militaries on both sides should facilitate cross-LoC interactions and consolidate the ceasefire. Other suggestions included increasing the frequency of meetings at the local commanders' level, relocation of heavy artillery to at least thirty kilometers from the LoC, the ability to call a meeting with the other side within twenty-four hours, delegation of responsibility to brigade commander level, demining areas along the LoC, and expanding the no man's land area, which may act as a Zero Point LoC Market regulated by designated authorities on both sides.

Civil society interactions could be enhanced by organizing grassroots and civil society into peace committees to interact regularly with local commanders to better emphasize the need to maintain peace, exchange civilians who cross the LoC unintentionally, and help defuse tensions.

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Grassroots peacebuilding in Kashmir remains an emerging concept struggling amid a traditional top-down approach. Even though cross-LoC CBMs have provided a window of opportunity to grassroots to engage and interact, the overall impact has been limited and has failed to expand. Those associated with the processes, however, believe that perceptions have shifted, that social linkages have been formed on a micro level, and that a limited population is drawing larger economic benefits. The impact of grassroots peacebuilding at political and military levels remains limited, but the processes have the potential to sensitize and influence political and military decision makers. Although grassroots peacebuilding remains vulnerable and fragile, the strength lies in its ability to sustain itself even during times of rising tensions. It is a small space for civil society, but can be widened and strengthened. This gives hope for a future framework in which grassroots peacebuilders can be trained, strengthened, and organized to become an important voice in the overall conflict scenario.

## **Notes**

1. Sajad Padder, "The Composite Dialogue Between India and Pakistan: Structure, Process and Agency," *Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics* 65, February (2012).
2. For this report, the term Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir (IAJK) and Pakistan-administered Kashmir (PAK) refer to the parts of former princely state region of Jammu and Kashmir administered by India and by Pakistan respectively. IAJK includes the Kashmir Valley, Jammu, and Ladakh; PAK includes Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.
3. The survey was not conducted in the regions of Ladakh (in IAJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (in PAK) because they have not been actively involved in cross-LoC CBMs.
4. The Kashmir Valley erupted into protests after the death of a young militant Burhan Wani in July 2016. Curfew was imposed for more than fifty-two days.
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8. Shaheen Akhtar and Zaffar Choudhary, "Institutionalizing Confidence Building Measures on Kashmir" (London/Kashmir: Conciliation Resources / Kashmir Initiative Group, December 2013).
9. Afaq Hussain and Riya Sinha, "Trading Confidence: A Compelling Case of Cross Line of Control Trade" (London/New Delhi: Conciliation Resources: BRIEF, November 2016).
10. The figure of \$754 million was calculated by converting the total volume of trade in Indian currency through March 2016, at an average exchange rate of 65 Indian rupees to the US dollar.
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