

A move towards democratization

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are comprised of fragmented villages and valleys alongside the rugged terrain of Pak-Afghan border. The complex tribal setting and predominant socio-religious mix of FATA sometimes creates hurdles in socio-economic development of society. Stagnancy in socio-economic domain is a result of inherited internal conflicts plagued by social, political and religious divide and centuries old history for being the host land of conflicts between and among the internal and external actors.

For sure, the Government of Pakistan was not the architect of these complexities, but it is solely responsible for exacerbating them over past 63 years. Since its independence in 1947, it has repeatedly failed to introduce a viable political reforms agenda in FATA. The interplay of regional geo-political factors aside; had the state exhibited will to start political reforms process almost over six decades ago, the state of affairs of FATA would have been entirely different today. In 1996, through a presidential ordinance, the electoral process was initiated in FATA. Unfortunately, it did not take roots in the society of FATA. Women who form over 50% of the population in FATA are still deprived of their right to vote, whereas their access to schools and health facilities was banned in 2003.

All externalities aside; unless the voices are not raised from within, the change will not take place. In 2009, SPO led by its principles of participation and equity, made its first intervention on political sensitization in Khyber Agency in FATA. In order to help raise voices from within, SPO constituted a human rights cluster of 15 CBOs. The political sensitization and knowledge and skill transfer related processes of CBOs paid the dividends, for it gave them capacities to pursue a reforms agenda. To begin with, they organized themselves under a civil society network called “Khyber Peace & Development Network (KPDN)”. KPDN’s role, since the start of its struggle for horizontal and vertical mobility on the political paradigm of FATA, has been remarkable. KPDN’s frontline activism for reforms in FCR, awareness on women, children and human rights and lobbying for community-led development, has attracted a larger local audience so far. KPDN spearheaded local populations’ collective voices calling the FCR a ‘black law’, and organized consultations, dialogues, seminars, and signature, print and electronic media campaigns.

KPDN organized a multi-stakeholder dialogue on core issues of conservatism and under-development in the Khyber Agency. The local academia, journalists, political and religious leaders, medical doctors, teachers, representatives of unions, students and the traders held dialogues with each other, exchanged views, shared and highlighted issues of common concern and agreed to make such dialogues a permanent feature in the future. The participants of the dialogue named their forum “**the tribal think tank**”. To start with, a seven members’ ad-hoc committee was constituted which will be replaced by an elected steering committee in near future.

The objectives of the tribal think tank were unanimously agreed by all the participants. These are as under:

- Eradication of FCR
- Inclusion of FATA in Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa province
- Enforcement of the 1973's constitution in FATA

Moving one more step ahead, the tribal think tank joined hands with the other seven agencies of FATA and 6 Frontier Regions FR to launch a collective political campaign from the platform of '**FATA democratic movement**'. The thrust of this political movement will be on the following objectives:

- FATA agencies should be merged with the Khyber Pakhtonkhwa Province
- Natural gas should be supplied to the Khyber agency
- Drone attacks on innocent people of the tribal areas should be stopped

The FATA Democratic movement is at the initial stages of its formation. It is yet to start its activities on the ground. There are big challenges lying ahead of it. It anticipates resistance as well as internal and external threats in the course of its rights-based political campaign in the future. The tribal think tank realizes that its journey on the political landscape of FATA entails challenges, resistance and opposition. Therefore, it resolves to remain steady and consistent in its approach in the future.