

Armed Group Rivalry and Its Implications for Post-Accord Peacebuilding and Inclusive Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study examines the intricate relationship between armed group rivalry, post-agreement peacebuilding, and inclusive development in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Using a qualitative research methodology, the study collects data through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to investigate the key variables driving armed group rivalry and its consequences for regional peacebuilding and development initiatives. The findings suggest that historical grievances, ethnic divisions, struggle for resources, and political influence are the driving forces for armed group conflict in the CHT. The study also finds the enormous influence of armed group rivalry on the implementation of the 1997 CHT Accord, ongoing peacebuilding efforts, and the region's inclusive growth. The analysis underlines the necessity for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to peacebuilding that addresses the core causes of armed group rivalry, engages all relevant stakeholders, and encourages the full implementation of the 1997 CHT Accord. The study contributes to a greater understanding of the complex interplay between armed group rivalry, peacebuilding, and development in conflict-affected regions by offering policy recommendations to support lasting peace and inclusive development in the CHT.

Keywords: Armed group rivalry, Post-accord peacebuilding, Inclusive development, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Conflict resolution, Socioeconomic inequalities and Regional cooperation

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Introduction:

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh have been a location of significant conflict and tension, marked by ethnic disputes, land rights issues, and the presence of numerous armed groups (Mohsin, 2003). Since the signing of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord between the Government of Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), a prominent indigenous political group, numerous efforts have been made to foster peace and development in the region (Roy, 2010). Nevertheless, despite these efforts, the situation continues to be precarious, with persistent armed group rivalry undermining the peacebuilding process and impeding inclusive development (Van Schendel, 2009).

This article examines the intricate relationship between armed group rivalry, post-agreement peacebuilding, and inclusive development in the CHT. Using a conceptual framework that encapsulates the important characteristics and interactions between these variables, the study employs a qualitative research methodology. The framework is informed by the expanding literature on peacebuilding and development, which emphasizes the need to comprehend the complexities of conflict dynamics in order to promote sustainable peace and development (Lederach, 1997; Paris, 2004).

The article begins with a contextual overview of the CHT, drawing on historical accounts and studies that have documented the region's ethnic composition, the emergence of armed groups, and the peace accords that have attempted to address the situation (Mohsin, 2003; Roy, 2010; Van Schendel, 2009). The article subsequently explores into the dynamics of armed group conflict, examining elements such as ideological differences, competition for resources and territorial control, and the influence of foreign actors (Kaufman, 2001; Pugh, Cooper & Goodhand, 2004).

The article then examines the influence of armed group rivalry on post-agreement peacebuilding initiatives and inclusive development in the CHT. It evaluates the extent to which armed group rivalry has undermined peacebuilding efforts, including Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR) programs, reconciliation processes, and power-sharing arrangements, using the insights of scholars such as Lederach (1997) and Paris (2004). In addition, it examines how this competition has impeded inclusive development by diverting resources, impeding development projects, and bolstering social divisions (Collier, 2007; Stewart, 2008).

The article concludes by assessing the feedback loop between peacebuilding and inclusive development, highlighting the potential for inclusive development to foster sustainable peace and create an environment conducive to development efforts (Collier, Hoefler, and Soderblom, 2008; Kaldor, 2012). The article concludes by offering policy recommendations for addressing the challenges posed by armed group rivalry and promoting

both peacebuilding and inclusive development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

Literature Review:

This review of the literature examines at major themes and conclusions from existing research on armed group rivalry, post-agreement peacebuilding, and inclusive development. The goal is to put the current study within a broader academic context and highlight topics that need future inquiry in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

Armed Group Rivalry

Researchers have long sought to comprehend the dynamics of armed group rivalry and the elements that contribute to intergroup competition and violence (Cunningham, 2006; Kalyvas, 2006; Kaufman, 2001). Armed organizations frequently form as a result of ideological disagreements, struggle for resources and territory, or grievances against the state (Cunningham, 2011). The role of ethnic differences and historical grudges in fostering armed group rivalry has been underlined in the context of the CHT (Mohsin, 2003; Van Schendel, 2009).

Another key subject in the literature is the involvement of external players in establishing armed group rivalry. External support has been found in studies to strengthen armed groups, extend hostilities, and change the balance of power among competing factions (Salehyan, 2010; Thomas, 2014). The extent to which external actors have influenced armed group dynamics in the CHT, on the other hand, remains an unexplored subject.

Post-Accord Peacebuilding

Post-agreement peacebuilding research has found a number of elements that can influence the success or failure of peace initiatives. The architecture of peace treaties, the presence of third-party peacekeepers, and the willingness of conflict parties to collaborate and follow agreed-upon measures are all important variables (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006; Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003; Walter, 2002).

In the case of the CHT, the 1997 Peace Agreement has been extensively scrutinized. While some experts appreciated the agreement for resolving significant complaints and setting a foundation for peace (Roy, 2010), others criticized it for flaws such as the exclusion of certain armed groups and the poor implementation of key clauses (Mohsin, 2003; Van Schendel, 2009). These constraints have generated concerns about the peace process's long-term viability and the possibility of renewed conflict.

Inclusive Development

Inclusive development is gaining popularity as a vital component of post-conflict recovery and long-term peace (Collier, 2007; Stewart, 2008). The notion highlights the importance of addressing socioeconomic disparities and ensuring that underprivileged populations benefit from development efforts (Galtung, 2004; Sen, 1999).

The impact of governance, access to public services, and social cohesion in supporting equitable development outcomes has been studied in research on inclusive development in post-conflict situations (Cramer, 2008; Kabeer, 2010; stby, 2008). Yet, there is a scarcity of research on inclusive development in the CHT, with few studies analyzing the effectiveness of development policies and programs in addressing the region's specific difficulties.

While existing literature gives useful insights into the dynamics of armed group rivalry, post-accord peacebuilding, and inclusive development, more specific study on the interplay of these variables in the context of the CHT is needed. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the implications of armed group rivalry for peacebuilding and inclusive development in the region, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities for promoting sustainable peace and development in the CHT.

Methodology:

In this research, a qualitative approach was used to study the complex relationship between armed group rivalry, post-agreement peacebuilding, and inclusive development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Qualitative research methods are well-suited for exploring the diverse dynamics of conflict and peace processes because they enable an in-depth analysis of underlying processes, contextual factors, and multiple perspectives (Flick, 2018; Yin, 2017).

The study collected core data through a combination of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a limited group of key informants, such as representatives from armed groups, government officials, peacebuilding practitioners, and development experts. These interviews provided insights into the dynamics of armed group rivalry and its impact on peacebuilding and inclusive development efforts, as well as potential solutions to these challenges (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Furthermore, focus group discussions were conducted with members of local communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, including both indigenous and non-indigenous individuals. These discussions aimed to gather multiple viewpoints on the effects of armed group rivalry on regional peacebuilding and inclusive development (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

Table 1: Focus Group Discussions Overview

Focus Group ID	Location	Number of Participants	Participant Composition (Ethnic Group)	Main Topics Discussed
FG1	Rangamati	12	Chakma (6), Marma (4), Tripura (2)	Peace Accord, land disputes
FG2	Khagrachhari	10	Bengali (4), Chakma (4), Marma (2)	Resource allocation, security
FG3	Bandarban	08	Tripura (4), Bengali (2), Chakma (2)	Political influence, education

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the context and various initiatives in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, relevant papers such as peace treaties, development plans, and policy reports were reviewed. The study utilized content analysis methodologies, which involved systematic categorization and interpretation of textual data. Thematic analysis, a commonly used method for identifying, interpreting, and reporting patterns in qualitative data, was performed to analyze the collected data. The study adhered to well-known ethical guidelines for social research, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and prioritizing participant welfare (British Sociological Association, 2017).

Findings and Analysis:

This study revealed many major results relating to armed group rivalry, post-accord peacebuilding, and inclusive development in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) based on qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. These findings are classified into three major themes, which are described more below.

Dynamics of Armed Group Rivalry in the CHT

The analysis revealed that armed group rivalry in the CHT is driven by a combination of historical grievances, ethnic divisions, and competition for resources and political influence (Mohsin, 2003; Van Schendel, 2009). Interviews with representatives of armed groups indicated that unresolved issues related to land rights, political autonomy, and cultural preservation have contributed to ongoing tensions among different factions. Focus group discussions with local communities further highlighted the role of external actors in shaping armed group dynamics, with some participants suggesting that support from neighboring countries or diaspora communities has fueled the rivalry (Salehyan, 2010; Thomas, 2014).

Table 2: Key Factors Driving Armed Group Rivalry

Factor	Description	Frequency (out of 30 interviews)
Historical grievances	Grievances rooted in past injustices and perceived marginalization	27
Ethnic divisions	Tensions arising from differences in culture, language, and identity	25
Competition for resources	Disputes over land, natural resources, and development opportunities	22
Political influence	Struggles for power and control over local governance	19

Implications for Post-Accord Peacebuilding

The research demonstrates that rivalry between armed groups has had a significant impact on the implementation of the 1997 Peace Accord and ongoing peacebuilding efforts in the CHT. According to government officials and peacebuilding experts, the absence of certain armed groups from the negotiation process has undermined the validity of the pact and exacerbated tensions. (Mohsin, 2003; Roy, 2010). Incomplete execution of significant initiatives, including as land reforms and the withdrawal of military forces, has also contributed to a sense of mistrust among local residents, hindering efforts to foster social cohesion and reconciliation. (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003; Walter, 2002).

Table 3: Implications of Armed Group Rivalry on Post-Accord Peacebuilding and Inclusive Development

Implication	Description	Frequency (out of 30 interviews)
Hindered implementation of Peace Accord	Delays and difficulties in implementing key provisions of the 1997 Peace Accord	28
Reduced trust and social cohesion	Erosion of trust and social cohesion among different ethnic communities and stakeholders	24
Limited access to resources	Unequal distribution of resources and development opportunities, particularly for marginalized groups	20
Increased security concerns	Persistent insecurity, which undermines peacebuilding and development initiatives	18

Impact on Inclusive Development

The study found that armed group rivalry in the CHT has hindered the region's inclusive development, as focus group discussions with local residents suggested that ongoing tensions have worsened socioeconomic inequalities (Stewart, 2008; Østby, 2008). Interviews with development experts also revealed that insecurity resulting from armed group rivalry has impeded the effectiveness of development programs and the provision of essential services like healthcare and education (Collier, 2007; Kabeeer, 2010).

Several NGOs and international organizations are currently engaged in peacebuilding and development initiatives in the CHT, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB), CARE Bangladesh, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and the European Union. The CHTDB is a government agency that executes various development programs to increase connectivity, such as infrastructure development. CARE Bangladesh is an international humanitarian organization that has launched several economic development programs, including livelihood programs, training and capacity building, and microfinance services. The UNDP, World Bank, and European Union have also developed a range of projects in the region aimed at reducing violence, enhancing trust and collaboration, and strengthening local governance through initiatives like community-based programs, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution.

Table 4: Peacebuilding and Development Initiatives in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

Serial	Implementing Organization	Location	Initiative Type	Target Group	Duration (Months)	Key Outcomes/Impact (Hypothetical)
1	BRAC NGO	Rangamati	Education	Chakma, Marma	24	Improved literacy rates, skills development
2	Care Bangladesh	Khagrachhari	Healthcare	Bengali, Tripura	12	Increased access to healthcare, reduced infant mortality
3	Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB)	Bandarban	Infrastructure	All ethnic groups	36	Enhanced connectivity, economic opportunities
4	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Rangamati	Conflict Resolution	Armed group members	18	Reduced violence, increased trust and cooperation

This study highlights the intricate connection between armed group rivalry, post-agreement peacebuilding, and inclusive development in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tract. The findings underline the necessity for an all-encompassing approach to tackling the root causes of armed group rivalry and the attendant obstacles to peacebuilding and development. This analysis contributes to a deeper knowledge of the issues at hand by providing insights into the viewpoints of important players and local populations. It can also inform the formulation of more effective policy solutions.

Discussion:

The intricate dynamics of armed group rivalry in the CHT region of Bangladesh have substantial implications for post-agreement peacebuilding and inclusive development. While the 1997 CHT Peace Accord intended to address the core causes of conflict between indigenous communities and the Bangladeshi government, it was not entirely effective in bringing an end to tensions in the region. (Mohsin, 2003). This article has examined the causes of the continuous rivalry between armed groups, as well as the influence these rivalries have on peacebuilding and development initiatives in the region.

First, the inadequate implementation of the CHT Peace Accord of 1997 has been a major contributor to the ongoing conflict between armed factions. (Roy, 2010). The pact provided for power-sharing, demilitarization, and the development of the CHT, but several essential clauses have not yet been implemented. (Chowdhury, 2015). This has resulted in residual mistrust between indigenous communities and the government, as well as among indigenous groups. (Adnan, 2004). Consequently, armed groups continue to operate in the region, continuing the cycle of bloodshed and undermining the peace effort. (Khan, 2011).

Second, the conflict for control over resources and political authority in the CHT has increased armed group rivalry and exacerbated the difficulties peacebuilding initiatives face. (Rashid, 2007). Land disputes, especially those involving illegal land grabbing and forced migration, are a major source of tension between armed groups and have contributed to intermittent bloodshed in the region. (Sarker & Rabbani, 2014). These conflicts impair the region's prospects for long-term reconciliation and sustainable development. (Gain, 2017).

In order to address the core causes of violence and promote lasting peace in the CHT region, inclusive development is vital. Ensuring that development efforts reflect the unique requirements of indigenous

communities and incorporating these groups in the conception and implementation of development programs can help establish a sense of trust and ownership over the development process. (Biswas & Choudhury, 2019). However, the ongoing rivalry between armed groups and the accompanying instability make it challenging for development organizations and government agencies to engage in inclusive development activities in the region. (Islam, 2015).

To overcome these obstacles, it is essential that all parties address the core causes of the conflict, such as the historical marginalization and persecution of indigenous peoples, and ensure the full implementation of the CHT Peace Accord of 1997 (Barakat, 2019). International actors, such as the United Nations and donor nations, can play a crucial role in supporting peacebuilding and inclusive development initiatives in the CHT region by providing technical assistance, financial resources, and diplomatic support to ensure the successful implementation of the peace accord. (Hossain & Chowdhury, 2020).

The continuation of rivalry between armed groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has substantial implications for post-agreement peacebuilding and inclusive development. Efforts to build sustained peace and prosperity in the region are hampered by the continued conflict and fight for resources and political power. To address these difficulties needs comprehensive efforts from all stakeholders, including the full implementation of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord, the promotion of equitable development, and the backing of international actors in order to ensure the region's long-term peace and prosperity. The implications of the findings for policy and practice, and outline potential avenues for future research are discussed below:

Policy Implications

Our findings suggest that a comprehensive approach to addressing the underlying drivers of armed group rivalry is crucial for promoting sustainable peace and development in the CHT. This entails addressing historical grievances and unresolved issues related to land rights, political autonomy, and cultural preservation, as highlighted by Mohsin (2003) and Van Schendel (2009). It also involves engaging with all relevant stakeholders, including armed groups that were excluded from the negotiation process, to ensure the legitimacy and inclusiveness of peacebuilding efforts (Roy, 2010; Walter, 2002). Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of implementing key provisions of the 1997 Peace Accord, such as land reforms and the withdrawal of military forces, to build trust among local communities and foster social cohesion (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003). In addition, the findings point to the need for targeted interventions to address socioeconomic inequalities and improve access to resources and development opportunities for marginalized groups (Stewart, 2008; Østby, 2008).

Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between armed group rivalry, post-accord peacebuilding, and inclusive development in the CHT, there are several areas that warrant further investigation. For example, future research could explore the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as civil society organizations and international actors, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

Additionally, comparative analyses of other post-conflict contexts could help to identify common patterns and lessons learned, informing the development of more effective peacebuilding and development strategies (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006; Kalyvas, 2006). Longitudinal studies could also be useful in tracking the evolution of armed group dynamics and their implications for peacebuilding and development over time.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings and analyses of this study, the recommendations that follow are made to address the challenges provided by armed group rivalry to post-accord peacebuilding and inclusive development in CHT:

Comprehensive and inclusive peacebuilding approach: Policymakers, practitioners of peacebuilding, and international actors should collaborate to produce a comprehensive and inclusive strategy for peacebuilding in the CHT. This strategy must address the underlying causes of armed group rivalry, such as historical grievances, ethnic differences, and struggle for resources and political influence. To ensure the legitimacy and inclusiveness of peacebuilding efforts, it is essential to involve all key individuals, especially marginalized armed groups.

Implementation of the 1997 Peace Accord: Implementing the fundamental terms of the 1997 Peace Accord in a complete and efficient manner is crucial for fostering trust and social cohesion among local communities. In accordance with the stipulations of the pact, authorities should prioritize land reforms, the withdrawal of armed forces, and the transfer of political power to local organizations.

Targeted interventions to address socioeconomic inequalities: To promote inclusive development, focused measures must address socioeconomic inequities and improve excluded groups' access to resources and development prospects. This involves expenditures in education, healthcare, and infrastructure, in addition to support for income-generating activities and skill-building initiatives.

Strengthen regional cooperation and engage diaspora communities: Given the significance of external actors in shaping the dynamics of armed groups in the CHT, authorities should seek to increase regional cooperation to address transnational concerns such as arms trafficking and support for armed groups. Engaging with expatriate

communities can also lessen the negative effects of armed group rivalry on peacebuilding and development by facilitating conversation and establishing a shared knowledge of the CHT's challenges and prospects.

Monitoring and evaluation of peacebuilding and development efforts: To ensure the effectiveness of peacebuilding and development initiatives in the CHT, both government agencies and independent NGOs should perform continual monitoring and assessment. This will aid in the identification of potential obstacles and challenges, as well as guide the development of strategies and interventions to better address the needs and priorities of local communities.

Promote research and knowledge-sharing: The intricate interplay between armed group rivalry, post-agreement peacebuilding, and inclusive development in the CHT and other conflict-affected regions requires further research. Policymakers, scholars, and practitioners should collaborate to exchange knowledge, experiences, and lessons gained, thereby contributing to the creation of more effective solutions to overcome the obstacles armed group rivalry poses to peacebuilding and development.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the intricate relationship between armed group rivalry, post-agreement peacebuilding, and inclusive development in CHT. Through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, the study has highlighted fundamental variables fueling armed group rivalry and its consequences for regional peacebuilding and development initiatives.

The findings underline the necessity for a comprehensive and inclusive peacebuilding strategy that addresses the root causes of armed group rivalry and ensures the participation of all relevant stakeholders. To develop trust and social cohesion among local communities, thorough implementation of the 1997 Peace Accord and targeted initiatives to reduce socioeconomic disparities are essential. In addition, regional cooperation and involvement with expatriate groups are crucial for minimizing the detrimental effects of armed group rivalry on peacebuilding and development initiatives.

This study provides policymakers, peacebuilding practitioners, and international actors working to promote sustainable peace and inclusive development in the CHT and other conflict-affected regions with actionable recommendations. This study contributes to the development of more effective strategies to address the challenges posed by armed group rivalry to post-agreement peacebuilding and inclusive development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and beyond by fostering a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between armed group rivalry, peacebuilding, and development.

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