NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PEACEMAKING

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in peacemaking in war-torn countries and evaluate the efficacy of these organizations. The study starts with an overview of NGOs, defining them, talking about their historic background and basic characteristics. Then various constructive roles that NGOs can play in conflict settings are discussed in detail. Many significant issues and problematic areas that NGOs face in the process of peacemaking in the post-Cold War era are also addressed in concluding the study.

Keywords: *Non-governmental Organizations, Peacemaking, Intra-National Conflicts, Conflict Resolution.*

Introduction

One of the few clear aspects of the post-Cold War era is the prevalence of intra-national conflicts, conflicts occurring within the borders of states. These are mostly ethnically-driven conflicts over self-determination, succession or political dominance. Until the end of the Cold War, the conventional wisdom in the world was that ethnicity and nationalism were outdated concepts and largely resolved problems. On both sides of the Cold War, the trend seemed to indicate that the world was moving toward internationalism rather than nationalism. As a result of the threat of nuclear warfare, great emphasis on democracy and human rights, economic interdependence, and gradual acceptance of universal ideologies, it became fashionable to speak of the demise of ethnic and nationalist movements.

Despite contrary expectations, a fresh cycle of ethnopolitical movements have re-emerged recently in Eastern Europe (including the Balkans), Central Asia, Africa, and many other parts of the world. While wars fought between two sovereign countries are increasingly the exception to the norm, intra-national conflicts account for over 90 percent of the major armed conflicts recorded in recent years worldwide.[1] This tendency appears to be holding.

However, the international community cannot be said to be well prepared to this trend. Major international organizations, including the United Nations (UN), were designed to cope with inter-state problems, historically the main source of threat to global peace and security. Besides, the fact that internal conflicts occur within the borders of states made major international actors reluctant to intervene, either for legal concerns or for concern to avoid probable loses.[2] Thus, unless they really escalate, the international community has preferred not to involve in intra-national conflicts.

Yet these conflicts somehow need to be resolved. In transforming hostile relationships and making peace in war-torn countries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are said to be particularly helpful in many ways. The purpose of this article is to explore, reveal, and discuss the contributions of NGOs to the process of peacemaking in conflict settings, evaluating the efficacy of these organizations as well. The study will start with an overview of NGOs, defining them, talking about their historic background and basic characteristics. Then various roles NGOs can play in conflict areas are discussed in detail. Many significant issues and problematic areas that NGOs face in the process of peacemaking are also addressed in concluding the study.

What are the NGOs Intervening in Conflict Settings: A Brief Overview

NGOs are privately organized and mostly privately financed agencies, formed to perform some philanthropic or other worthwhile task in response to a need that the organizers think is not adequately addressed by public, governmental, or UN efforts (Anderson, 1996, p. 344). In the cases in which NGOs are funded totally or partially by governments, the NGO maintains its non-

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[1] Source: http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0904550.html, 18.01.2008.

[2] For example, during Clinton administration, the US government issued PDD-25 (Presidential Decision Directive-25), limiting the conditions that the US can participate in UN peacekeeping operations. For details, see *The Clinton Administration's Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations*, Washington, DC, US Department of US Publication 10161, May 1994.

governmental status insofar as it excludes government representatives from membership in the organization.

Civic groups, labor unions, churches, private foundations, and millions of individuals have established NGOs that usually operate as tax free entities to support some group or some cause. Helmut Anheier *et al*, in the work *Global Civil Society*, place the number of internationally operating NGOs at 40,000 (Anheier *et al*, 2003). National numbers seem to be even higher. Russia has about 400,000 NGOs, while India is estimated to have between 1 and 2 million NGOs, to give a couple of examples.[3]

International NGOs have a history dating back to at least the mid-nineteenth century. They were important in the anti-slavery movement and the movement for women's suffrage (Davies, 2006). However, the phrase "non-governmental organization" only came into popular use with the establishment of the UN in 1945 with provisions in Article 71 of Chapter 10 of the UN Charter for a "consultative" role for organizations which are neither governments nor member states.[4] The definition of "international NGO" is first given in the resolution 288 of ECOSOC (The UN Economic and Social Council) on February 27, 1950. It is defined as "any international organization that is not founded by an international treaty". The vital role of NGOs and other "major groups" in sustainable development was recognized in Chapter 27 of Agenda 21, leading to intense arrangements for a consultative relationship between the UN and NGOs.[5]

As a rule, NGOs are not subjects of international law, as states are. One exception is the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has in some extent attributes of a subject of international law on some specific matters mainly related with the Geneva Convention. Yet many international NGOs have a consultative status with UN agencies relevant to their area of work. As an example, the Third World Network has a consultative status with UNCTAD (The UN Conference on Trade and Development) and ECOSOC. While in 1946, only 41 NGOs had consultative status with ECOSOC, by 2006 this number had risen to well over 3500.[6]

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[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-governmental_organization, 03.02.2008.
[4] http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/chapt10.htm, 05.02.2008.
[5] http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/res/1996/eres1996-31.htm, 06.02.2008.
[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-governmental_organization#_note-definiti, 06.02.2008.

Some NGOs may have annual budgets in the hundreds of millions or billions of dollars, while some others have a more modest budget. Funding budgets demands significant fundraising efforts on the part of most NGOs. Major sources of NGO funding include membership dues, the sale of goods and services, grants from international institutions or national governments, and private donations. Several EU-grants also provide funds accessible to NGOs.[7]

As for staffing, not all people working for NGOSs are volunteers. On the other hand, the reasons people volunteer are not necessarily purely altruistic, and can provide immediate benefits for themselves, as well as those they serve, including skills, experience, and contacts. There is some dispute as to whether expatriates should be sent to developing countries. Frequently, this type of personnel is employed to satisfy a donor who wants to see the supported project managed by someone from an industrialized country. However, the expertise these employees or volunteers may have can be counterbalanced by a number of factors: the cost of foreigners is typically higher, they have no grassroots connections in the country they are sent to, and local expertise is often undervalued.[8]

There are numerous classifications of NGOs. The typology the World Bank uses divides them into "operational" and "advocacy".[9] One frequently used categorization is the division into "relief-oriented" or "development-oriented" organizations. They can also be classified according to whether they stress service delivery or participation; or whether they are religious or secular; and whether they are more public or private-oriented.

Basic Roles of NGOs in Peacemaking in Conflict Settings

However they are classified, as a result of both their growing numbers and the variety of functions they fulfill, NGOs have become a vital component of the international response to humanitarian crises in cases of intra-national conflicts. Operational NGOs are even going beyond their traditional relief objectives of providing food, water, sanitation, and emergency health measures to serving as a substitute for local government, encouraging the growth of civil society, and

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[7] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-governmental_organization, 03.02.2008.
[8] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-governmental_organization#_note-definiti, 06.02.2008.
[9] http://docs.lib.duke.edu/igo/guides/ngo/define.htm, 08.02.2008.

utilizing third-party intervention and conflict resolution skills to bring antagonists together as part of a relief mission.

While they cannot be expected to solve all the problems associated with humanitarian interventions, NGOs can assume the following four types of roles in making and building peace in war-torn societies.
- The provision of humanitarian relief to people in emergencies.
- The rehabilitation functions, promoting political, economic, and social revitalization, in this regard.
- The preventive function through early warning.
- Conflict resolution activities.

The Provision of Humanitarian Relief

A great number of the NGOs operating in conflict settings today have had experience in war-related contexts. Many of them, such as the Red Cross, World Vision, CARE, OXFAM, Save the Children Fund, and Catholic Relief Services, to name only a few, were even formed during and immediately after wars. Therefore, NGOs usually define, and like defining, themselves as service agencies. Indeed, providing humanitarian aids to the needy is the first and most urgent thing to do for most NGOs operating in conflict settings. Lives have been saved through this way in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Haiti, Sudan, and many other conflict areas.

In fact, many recipients of NGO aid attest to the fact that the assistance kept their families alive under desperate circumstances, helped them escape from imprisonment or exile, provided the extra support needed for them to initiate a self-sustaining enterprise, or supported their pursuit of the values of intergroup harmony (Vedder, 2007). Foreign assistance provided through non-governmental channels has had a profound impact on the lives of many individuals, has helped spawn the creation of many NGOs in the recipient countries, and has prompted the articulation of operational principles adopted by most donor government and UN agencies. NGOs are valued for the humanitarian basis of their operations and for their ability to cross national boundaries with a message of interdependence and humanitarian concern wherever people are in need.

NGOs dedicated to humanitarian relief operations have attempted to maintain a policy of strict neutrality in situations of conflict, defining their role as providers of aid to those in need without regard to political, ethnic or religious

affiliation. However, some members of NGO community challenge the neutrality policy, pointing to circumstances in which relief organizations unintentionally aided individuals and groups perpetuating conflict. This typically happened in Rwanda, Somalia, Haiti, Liberia and indeed most war-torn countries receiving international aids through NGOs.

The potential misuse of resources is a problematic area for NGO interventions and in spite of having indigenous partners, NGOs are not in position to know exactly who the "right" side is in conflict settings. Yet they increasingly become aware of the necessity of being very careful in delivering aids and unwittingly not supporting war-prone groups.

The Rehabilitation Functions

Increasingly, NGOs that are primarily committed to providing emergency relief assistance in conflict settings are evolving to become development agencies as making peace in war-torn societies calls for more than provision of humanitarian aids (Alnoor, 2005).

Although intra-national wars occur in countries with varying physical and human resource endowments, cultures, and historical experiences, they, at the same time, produce significant similarities in the nature of civilian institutions and local economy.

It is typical that in countries emerging from an intra-national war, or still suffering it, the state tends to be the dominant actor in virtually all sectors. Yet in reality, the political institutions are weak and ill-suited to the needs of people. Efforts to strengthen and restructure the state apparatus so that governments can fulfill roles critical to social and economic well-being are severely hampered by the political environment, characterized by a vigorous competition for power. It is also distinguished by limited legitimacy of political leaders, extreme polarization, and a lack of consensus on the direction the country should follow. Civil-society institutions, which in democratic countries serve as one means of applying pressure to governments, are also usually poorly developed in war-torn societies. Those that exist are often inexperienced and highly politicized, seriously undermining their effectiveness (Yilmaz, 2007).

Prolonged civil strives have serious economic consequences too. At the macro level, economic and social infrastructures -such as the transport and

communication systems, health care, education, banking and financing- suffer extensive damage as a result of fighting or lack of maintenance. At the same time, the share of manufacturing, construction, transport, and commerce in gross domestic product drastically declines. In time, the country's economic capacity to re-generate substantial investments slowly diminishes.

At the micro level, lengthy conflicts create a variety of serious issues associated with human capital, land, and the environment. Human resource shortages are especially typical in war-torn countries as people with professional training -such as doctors, teachers, and government officials, in general,- are often targeted during civil wars. Additionally, educational opportunities decrease during wartime as schools are closed or students opt to participate in the conflict.

The overall social indicators in countries that have experienced prolonged civil wars are usually very poor prior to the armed conflict, and war related poverty causes even further decline. Hence, most post-conflict countries record abysmal rates of infant mortality, illiteracy, malnutrition, school enrolment, and so on.

Consequently, war-torn societies face large and complex set of issues that must be addressed rapidly. Resolving the myriad of institutional, economic, social, and political problems takes on a heightened urgency as many of these issues are related to the conflict itself. Failing to respond in a timely fashion may create the conditions for a return to organized violence.

Coping with such challenging tasks and building peace are not likely through the efforts of one actor only. Multi-level efforts must be put by several actors. In this respect, particularly important is to encourage the participation of NGOs. Especially in strengthening the institutional capacity, international resources can be channeled through NGOs. This is usually a better option comparing to channeling them through local governments, which, in this case, may result in the danger that assistance would be used to gain electoral advantage at the expense of the groups most affected by the civil war, fostering, thus, a political environment inimical to reconciliation. In addition, NGOs can collaborate with representatives of civil society and with private enterprise in strengthening institutional capacity. NGOs possess advantages to that end as they usually know the country in which they work quite well and often have indigenous partners. Strengthening civil society, in turn, can enhance opportunities for participation and foster political reconciliation in time.

In transition from civil war to peace, another priority is economic reconstruction. Although intra-national wars have many different causes, the economic dimension is still important, for a multi-ethnic state that is characterized by widespread poverty is a state where ethnic antagonisms are likely to go on. Economic well-being, on the other hand, may contribute to a sense of security and give different ethnic groups a stake in the system.

To heal economic deficits, NGOs can:
- Offer technical assistance to plan and implement reconstruction efforts.
- Rehabilitate the basic infrastructure, including health and education systems, water and sanitation systems, banking system, roads, bridges, and telecommunication facilities.
- Generate employment through micro enterprise assistance.

Of course, it is not possible to address all these issues simultaneously. Nevertheless, the peace building experiences in the post-Cold War era suggest that early action is especially needed to help rehabilitate the infrastructure that is crucial to economic revival (such as, major roads, marketplaces, power generation facilities, and so on), and stabilize both national currency and financial institutions (Jeong, 2005).

Also, a serious problem often confronting war-torn societies is that people's daily fear of being killed or wounded during the civil war is later replaced by a new fear of the thieves, gangs, and mafias that operate with relative impunity in the interim period. In some cases, these new criminals are demobilized combatants and officers of the conflict just stopped, still possessing their weapons but no new livelihood. To address this problem, post-conflict reconstruction needs to move quickly to establish courts, police forces need to be supported, and training and cleansing of the law enforcement system need to begin promptly following the conflict (Raush and Banar, 2006). To realize and implement these goals, NGOs can conduct a variety of programs, including -but not limited to- training, consultation, as well as observer and advisory missions.

Here are some success stories confirming the rehabilitation functions of NGOs:

Tajikistan

Tajikistan suffered a prolonged civil war in the early 1990s, right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As the civil war came to an end in the mid-1995, the international community provided assistance to help people rebuild their war-destroyed homes. These aids were channeled through many international NGOs operating in Tajikistan. This was a critical step towards restarting the shattered economy and preparing the way for reconciliation between the two groups that had fought.

East Timor

Many international NGOs were called in to East Timor in late 1999 to help the Timorese toward statehood in the wake of violence and devastation. Working with the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), NGOs managed to establish an effective administration, whereby it enabled refugees to return, helped to develop civil and social services, ensured humanitarian assistance, and supported capacity-building for self-governance. East Timor became an independent state (Timor-Leste) in 2002 and many NGOs are still present there to assist in building administrative structures and developing economic and social infrastructure.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Progress has been achieved in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well, suffering from a prolonged civil war. From a small humanitarian aid delivery mission in the late 1990s, NGO functions in this country evolved to become an assistance mission for resettling the groups most affected by the war, reactivating the smallholder agricultural sector, and offering technical assistance to plan and implement rehabilitation efforts. At present, a large portion of the country is at peace, and steps have been taken towards re-unification and further stability.

Liberia

NGOs in Liberia have also been very successful in assisting rehabilitating health and education services, water and sanitation system, roads, bridges, telecommunication facilities, and other elements of basic infrastructure, in general. As a result, the economic capacity and security situation improved in the

country, while inter-group tension and violence decreased. The ongoing presence of NGOs is currently facilitating the restoration of civil administration and governance.

The Preventive Function

Conflict prevention, as used here, refers to actions keeping disputes from becoming violent (violence avoidance) or limiting escalation of erupted violence (violence containment). NGOs are often well suited to play a role in early warning and preventive action, alerting the international community to potential breakdowns in a distressed country's governance or in relations among the country's major domestic groups. Since many NGOs have deep roots in local communities, their relief and development workers in the field have a unique vantage point to identify deteriorating conditions that might lead to organized violence.

In general, NGOs can, and should, use their early warning capabilities to advocate governmental policies aimed at stemming the outbreak of further violence during complex emergencies. The executive leadership of operational NGOs would serve as advocates to the UN and major powers of the international system, for their organizations could combine on-the-ground experience with difficult issues that give them a unique insight into the dimensions of complex emergencies. These insights can be crucial to policymakers in governments in international organizations. In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, Kosovo and many other violent intra-national conflicts, such an advocacy role for operational NGOs would have meant urging early UN, as well as possibly US, involvement and requesting that the military stay long enough to complete the job.

In some cases, violent intra-conflicts end with a peace agreement. Although a peace agreement engenders great expectations (it is often assumed that reaching an agreement will result in the successful resolution of all outstanding issues), in reality, an agreement is just an imperfect road map to the future. There are often unresolved issues at the time an agreement is reached. Besides, new problems can emerge, which must be accommodated within the framework of the agreement. In this regard, NGOs can function as a third-party during the implementation of the resolution process, monitoring basic human rights, helping the parties in revising the agreement, and helping them in pursuing a durable peace, in general.

Conflict Resolution Activities

Just as lengthy civil strives undermine institutional and economic capacity, they also severely weaken the social fabric of a country by destroying communities, engendering a culture of violence, creating a sense of mistrust that makes collaboration on long-term efforts difficult to achieve, and wreaking psychological traumas (Rodolfo, 1996). Thus, a lasting peace necessity a transformation of hostile relations between conflicting communities as well.

One way to ease relational problems and build trust between hostile parties would be "track-two diplomacy". Joseph V. Montville, one of the pioneers of this approach, defines track-two diplomacy as an unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations aiming to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict (Montville, 1990: 162). If they are well-organized and undertaken for a reasonably long time, people-to-people interactions, oftentimes working through problem-solving workshops, mediated or facilitated by psychologically-sensitive third-parties, may provide an opportunity for disputants to examine the root causes of their conflict and to identify obstacles to better relationships. What is more, by allowing face-to-face communication, they may help participants arrest dehumanization process, overcome psychological barriers, and focus on relation building (Davies and Kaufman, 2002; Yilmaz, 2005; Bavly, 2007).

In fact, many practical applications of track-two diplomacy confirm the utility of the approach. For example, Herbert Kelman, who conducted some problem-solving workshops between the Israelis and Palestinians, observed that the workshops allowed the participants to gain insights into the perspective of the other party, to create a new climate of trust, and to develop greater awareness of how the other party may have changed (Kelman, 1996: 515-517). Similarly, Edward. E. Azar, who also organized several workshop exercises around the Lebanese and Sri Lankan conflicts, claimed that the workshops allowed the parties to discover their common needs and values, to establish informal networks, and to widen their agendas towards a mutually acceptable solution (Azar, 1990). The utility of track-two diplomacy was also acknowledged by the Center for Multi-Track Diplomacy, a Washington D.C.-based NGO, in re-humanizing the relationships between the parties in conflict and in generating a wide range of alternatives for ultimate resolution (Diamond and McDonald, 1996; Mcdonald, 2002).

Track-two diplomacy is an area where NGOs would play a major role as third-parties. They would arrange and facilitate problem-solving workshops between adversary groups, working as intermediaries in the process as well. Although not necessary, third-party help is usually needed in organizing track-two diplomacy, since the parties in conflict cannot easily take unilateral actions due to the concern for appearing weak, as well as intense hostile feelings towards the other side.

The possibilities for easing antagonism between rival groups would also be enhanced when the groups are brought together to work toward some common ends by NGOs. The creation of supranational bodies that have the responsibility for fulfilling key economic and social needs would gradually bring about a transfer of loyalty from the narrow cultural group to the supranational bodies. Eventually, particularistic antagonisms would be dissolved as the participants become caught up in a web of mutual dependence.

NGOs can also play a significant role as intermediaries and mediators in conflict settings. The World Council of Churches played a crucial role in brokering the 1972 agreement which ended the first phase of Sudan's civil war. Former President Jimmy Carter, working from the Carter Center, was instrumental in bringing about a successful conclusion to the 1988-1989 negotiations that ended eight years of warfare in Nicaragua between the Miskito Indians and the Nicaraguan government. In the 1990s, International Alert, a London-based NGO, played a significant role in reducing tensions in a half-dozen ethnic conflicts in the global south.

Concluding Remarks

As the above discussions attest, NGOs have many significant roles to play in war-torn countries. As a result of their focus on the middle and grass-root levels of societies in crisis, NGOs are particularly effective at working with both a country's mid-level officials and the recipients of aid at the community level. Due to their familiarity with the country and its decision makers, NGO representatives have a keen understanding of the potential of the country in which they work, allowing them to help building and maintaining a sustainable infrastructure that has a better chance of ameliorating not just the manifestations but also the causes of conflict.

In the post-Cold War period, the task of NGOs intervening in conflict settings has become both more complex and more promising.

Intervention is made more complex in four basic ways. First, the international conventions that formerly governed the rules of war between nation states no longer apply. When wars are fought within countries, existing international law, as it primarily regulates inter-state relations, does not directly apply. Second, when groups within a nation fight over power and the national government is challenged as illegitimate, it is not clear where national sovereignty resides. The international community has no clear rules guiding its decision regarding intervention in such a situation. Third, when wars are driven by political opportunism, NGOs do not know with whom to align themselves. Who is right and who is wrong? How can an NGO decide it is justifiable to negotiate with a given regime and lend its aid to support it? Finally, with so many actors at different levels of the international system available to intervene in civil wars, the lack of coordination among them often limits the efficacy of NGOs, resulting in some degree of counter-productive responses and waste of resources.

Yet, at the same time, intra-national conflicts present new opportunities for NGO interventions. When there is no clear "right" side in a conflict and when the acts of all sides violate basic humanitarian principles, NGOs have an opportunity to reconsider their apolitical stance. They can unequivocally denounce conflict itself as the greatest wrong. An explicit moral message of NGOs against civil war may enable local people to articulate their own opposition. This possibility may particularly offer new opportunities for NGOs to ensure that their interventions have a positive impact on conflict. Some NGOs also initiate activities where people from opposing sides may collaborate directly on joint projects in which both have a stake. Some other NGOs are still exploring the ways in which information can enable people to resist becoming embroiled in battles that will only leave them worse off.

Overall, NGOs are free to act in ways which nation-states and other intermediaries are not. Because of their transnational identities, they are able to hold the world public interests above national interests in ways that neither the nation-states, nor even the UN itself can do. They operate with longer-term time horizons than nation states and have a better historical memory for issues. Many peacemaking activities that require time, effort, and patience can be best dealt with by NGOs. Besides, whereas nation-states and even most international organizations, as third-parties, are usually motivated by the desire for extending

influence, NGOs mostly operate independent of power politics; hence, they are likely to be trusted by the parties in conflict. In short, the work of NGOs forms a significant part of the entire repertoire of intervention strategies for dealing with intra-national conflicts in the post-Cold War era.

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