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Beyond Blueprints Civil Society and Peacebuilding*

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Beyond Blueprints: Civil Society and Peacebuilding

Summary

Civil society plays an important role in encouraging the cessation of armed conflict, and constitutes a vital force in post-conflict recovery. The role played by civil society in war and post-war contexts is increasingly acknowledged internationally, and has triggered a wide debate as to whether or not, and how, external actors can strengthen civil society as part of a broader peacebuilding strategy. Civil society has the potential to promote reconciliation, serve as a corrective to political and military elites, as well as enhance local ownership and foster democracy. Civil society actors may constrain the use of violence by conflicting parties, as happened in Angola in 1998, when the mobilization of the church and networks of traditional local leaders (*sobas*) – backed up by international donors and church networks – pressured the government. In peace negotiations, civil society may also play a central role, as in the Guatemalan peace talks in 1994, when a broad alliance of civil society organizations played a major role by contributing position papers on all key issues in advance of meetings between the two factions. In post-conflict recovery, civil society actors have considerable potential. A main element in Afghanistan's post-9/11 agenda, for example, is to provide cash grants to traditional village councils (*shuras*), while insisting - contrary to tradition – that *shura* members are elected by secret ballot.

War may have a severe impact on civil society. Civil society itself is transformed as a result of resisting the pressures of war. The state, which defines much of the framework civil society functions within, may fully or partly break down, while at the same time becoming more authoritarian. In many cases, the market is transformed into a predominantly illegal economy, to which civil society inadvertently adapts. War divides people along ethnic, religious or regional lines, and erodes the social ties that bridge various groups. Oftentimes, encompassing forms of association are replaced by local and family-based networks that may be essential in securing survival during war-time, but which may have less potential for enhancing peace.

Norway's policy emphasizes the need to support civil society in peacebuilding as well as in long-term development. This position is outlined in Norway's new strategic framework for peacebuilding, and in the 2004 White Paper on development. The policy emphasizes balancing support to states with support to civil society, contributing to competence and capacity building in civil society, and facilitation of the "watchdog" role of civil society. The proactive stance taken by Norway in relation to civil society places it at the forefront of international trends in peacebuilding. Through linking its strong peacebuilding engagement with its historic emphasis on civil society, Norway assumes an international responsibility for future policy in this area. Supporting the role of civil society in peacebuilding is an inherently complex task. Working with civil society, however, forms an integral part of any considered peacebuilding strategy, and constructive engagement on this front can both strengthen individual peace processes, and advance international knowledge on peacebuilding more generally.

Lessons Learned

Solid analysis is the linchpin for successful engagement with civil society. Analysis includes an identification of various types of civil society, the broader institutional framework, as well as an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of various entities. Analyses must be rooted in a firm understanding of civil society's role in peacebuilding, while being sensitive to context.

- *Different Forms.* The composition of civil society - in terms of its component entities and its functions - varies greatly between different contexts and situations.
- *Transformed by War.* War always transforms civil society, often weakening its potential for bridging various societal groups, and restraining its opportunities to interact constructively with the state and market actors.
- *Exists Everywhere.* There are elements of civil society in any setting. Even an apparently weak civil society may contain considerable potential under the right circumstances.
- *"Uncivil Roles".* Civil society always has the potential to take on "uncivil roles," particularly in conflict situations. Accommodating civil society actors with an "uncivil" record may prove particularly important in the long-term.
- *Continuous Monitoring.* Ongoing monitoring of civil society is an integral part of analysis, particularly in conflict and post-conflict situations, where changes appear rapidly, requiring frequent adjustment to support measures.

Support to civil society organizations and groups is an important part of any peacebuilding strategy. Strategies for civil society support need to be sensitive to the risk that external support may weaken the local legitimacy and effectiveness of civil society entities, as the latter adapts to the requirements of external actors. While external support to civil society may be essential, it is also important that support is measured and appropriate, both in terms of its form and scope.

- *More than a Channel for Assistance.* Civil society plays a key role in influencing state action and political processes, in serving as a corrective and complement to market economies, and should therefore not first and foremost be seen as a channel for emergency and development assistance.
- *Means of Support.* External agencies have a variety of instruments available to support civil society, including financial support, capacity-building, protection from hostile actors in the environment, and linkages to international actors. The challenge is finding the right balance.
- *Focus on Institutional Environment.* External actors can play a major role in working to improve the institutional framework for civil society, including laws and regulations; administrative structures; as well as political modalities.
- *Ensure Independence.* There is a need to encourage multiple sources of support, including international and domestic, and to avoid excessive external support in order to prevent fostering dependence.
- *Long-term Perspective.* Support to civil society requires a long-term perspective, particularly when civil society is weak or dormant, as is often the case in conflict and post-conflict situations. Support to civil society in times of crisis may be instrumental for building the capacity to respond when opportunities arise in the future. Strengthening civil society, when successful, will not only enhance peacebuilding, but will also build essential resources for long-term development.

Beyond Blueprints: Civil Society and Peacebuilding

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Introduction

How can civil society contribute to conflict resolution and post-war reconciliation? How can international agencies and actors work to strengthen civil society both during, and in the aftermath of armed conflict? What are the potential pitfalls associated with engaging civil society in conflict-ridden and post-conflict societies? Over the past decade, the role of civic actors in forging peace agreements, contributing to reconciliation initiatives, and promoting democratic transitions have highlighted the need for an understanding of the role civil society can play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The recent conflicts in the Balkans, the African continent, as well as elsewhere in the world, have demonstrated the vitality of civil society in underpinning the cessation of armed conflict, contributing to sustainable peacebuilding, and its capacity to spur the onset of democracy. In the wake of General Secretary Boutros-Ghali's definition of peacebuilding in 1992, discussions of civil society have become central among policy makers seeking ways to mitigate the effects of armed conflict, and the need for new ways to position civil society within broader policy discussions of peacebuilding. In this paper, we take a critical look at the role of civil society in peacebuilding, and suggest ways in which policy makers can design initiatives that incorporate civil society actors in conflict and post conflict situations.

Understanding the role of an autonomous civil society is particularly important in the context of conflict-ridden or post-conflict societies. The multiple centers of thought and legitimacy inherent to civil society can be a driving force in promoting a pluralistic society, with power distributed widely, rather than concentrated in the hands of a select few – a cornerstone of democracy. The degree to which citizens can be drawn into participation in civic groups, associations, and organizations can help to further educate individuals for democracy. The type of social organization and integration civil society presupposes can serve as the foundation for building trust and greater social cohesion. In situations where the state's capacity has been undermined by conflict, civil society organizations can become providers of vital goods and services. To the extent that civil society associations can transcend religious, regional, and ethnic cleavages, they provide a potential avenue for interest articulation at the grassroots level, while creating the possibility for conflict resolution between former adversaries (Bahmueller 1999).

In the midst of this renewed interest in civil society, there is a great deal of debate as to what civil society actually is, and, not least of all, how civil society can be effectively integrated into peacebuilding initiatives. Given that this is a wide-ranging and multi-faceted discussion, it is unrealistic to do justice to its various nuances within the scope of this paper; rather, the analysis here seeks to highlight central issues regarding civil society and how they relate to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In so doing, the objective is to gain a basic understanding of the dynamic between civil society and peacebuilding, provide fresh insight into strengthening the role of civil society in conflict-ridden areas, and offer some practical guidelines for designing strategies to support civil society in peacebuilding initiatives. Because international agencies and donors have become crucial in conflict resolution and reconciliation, much

of the discussion in the following is devoted to examining civil society from the perspective of external parties.

Norway's Position on Support to Civil Society in Peacebuilding: Key Elements

Definitions of civil society are broad, including both formal and informal structures, as well as organizations. Important peacebuilding actors include human rights groups, peace associations, women's networks, academia, independent media, and at times, religious groups and business associations.

The main roles for civil society are to promote reconciliation and non-violent conflict management in all domains and at all levels. More specifically, roles may include the provision of services, functioning as watchdog or "agents of change" in relation to authorities, promoting reconciliation and bridge-building, and empowering weak or marginalized groups.

Analytic capacity is essential for external actors in order to identify constructive forces in civil society. This is particularly important during conflict, where conflicting interests and weak democratic structures entails considerable risks.

The Norwegian position is outlined in multiple policy documents and statements, including:

- 'Felles kamp mot fattigdom: en helhetlig utviklingspolitikk' (Joint Campaign Against Poverty: A Comprehensive Development Policy), White Paper no. 35 (2003-2004), 30 April 2004'
- 'Utviklingspolitikkenes bidrag til fredsbygging: Strategisk rammeverk for Norges rolle' (The Contribution of Development Policy to Peacebuilding: Strategic Framework for Norway's Role), Draft, 27 July 2004

The role of external actors is particularly important given that, where the international community has sought to strengthen civil society, the results have frequently been far from satisfactory (Ottaway 2001). Propelled by the so-called "good governance" agenda that has held sway over the past decade, the international community has increasingly channeled resources through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Such a strategy, however, has raised a number of debates regarding the efficacy of relying predominantly on external organizations. For example, NGOs created with the help of donor funding have been criticized for being poorly rooted in their own societies, formed with the sole intention of tapping into funding from donors; these NGOs often have a political agenda, and are not necessarily well-versed in the intricacies of local contexts and realities. The analysis in the following suggests that strengthening civil society entails a multi-pronged approach: this includes an understanding of specific contexts, and support to both actors and the institutional framework in which civil society is embedded. Such an approach can help provide the foundation for assessments of how to best direct resources, approach conflict resolution, and serve as a basis for designing sustainable peacebuilding initiatives.

What is Civil Society?

Social scientists and policy makers alike have often struggled with grasping the essence of civil society. Part of the problem stems from the fuzzy nature of civil society itself: its boundaries are inherently vague and imprecise, and identifying its features, role, and significant actors is subject to contestation. Furthermore, the concept of civil society has been applied inconsistently within research, policy formulation, and political discourse; hence, discussions regarding civil society often wind up as debates over arriving at a clear definition as to what civil society is, and what it is not. Developing consensus on a singular conceptualization of civil society, however, is perhaps somewhat unrealistic even under the best of circumstances. The complexity of the social infrastructures, networks, and relationships that characterize civil society vary greatly from context to context, thereby necessitating a broad definition. In this regard, civil society is not necessarily a sharp analytic tool, but is rather a "sensitizing" term that can help shed light on actors and processes. Civil society can be seen as a concept that can help make

sense of political and social realities, and as a means of inspiring action on the ground (Lewis 2002: 570). Employed as a sensitizing concept – as it will be throughout this paper – it can help guide thinking on civil society, and constitute part of the broader tool kit available to those looking to gain an understanding of the role civil society can play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

At the most basic level, civil society can be conceived as the sphere of voluntary and civic groups that occupy the space between the state and the market (Carothers 1999:19). Broadly stated, civil society is comprised of organizations, associations and voluntary groups, as well as networks of varying sizes, densities, and levels of interconnectedness. Common examples include social, religious, cultural, welfare, professional and trade organizations, women’s groups and NGOs. The self-organization of society is thought to function as a check on the power of the institutions of the state and the encroachment of the market – playing a type of “watchdog” role – while serving as the locus for promoting democratic change. More recently, international organizations and informal advocacy networks have assumed a more vital role in peacebuilding. As the numerous conflicts the African continent has endured are testimony to, conflict is contagious. Conflicts that transcend national boundaries demand solutions that are difficult to accomplish purely at the national level. Promoting an active civil society has been posited as a way of engaging grassroots elements of civil society, facilitating peacebuilding, development, and democratization from the bottom-up, thus providing local groups with a sense of empowerment and ownership (Harvey 1998).

From a neo-liberalistic standpoint, a well-functioning civil society can complement the role of the state and market in enacting reforms. This has, in particular, been the contention of the good governance agenda, which suggests that a partnership between the state, market, and civil society can help promote development and democracy. In this view, the role of the state is reduced, and the provision of goods and services is partially assumed by flexible combinations of governmental, non-governmental, and private institutional actors. It should nevertheless be noted that it is somewhat difficult to uphold a strong distinction between civil society on the one hand, and the state and the market on the other. Civil society, state institutions, and the market may be more closely enmeshed, particularly in the developing world, making it difficult to simply think of civil society in terms of a sphere apart from these. Civil society actors, for example, may assume political roles by entering into a working partnership with state authorities; the state can intentionally co-opt civil society actors with the intent of pacifying them; or, by including them in the policy making arena as a way of legitimizing the state. Civil society also overlaps with the market, such as when groups and associations receive donations from the private sector, or engage in competition with other economic actors for resources and prestige. In reality, then, civil society must be viewed in relation to both the state and the market, with the understanding that these constitute inter-related spheres with civil society.

What is Peacebuilding?

Peacebuilding refers to the range of activities and measures designed to mitigate the effects of war, and prevent its future recurrence. First introduced by then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992, peacebuilding refers to efforts aimed to cease violence, monitor compliance with agreements, and lay the foundation for a conflict-free future. With the recognition that most peace agreements fail within the first five years, the UN Security Council adjusted this definition to include activities aimed at conflict prevention in 2001. Thus understood, peacebuilding takes a wide perspective, looking to

achieve political solutions in order to defuse violent conflict, and, importantly, prevent its reemergence. Peacebuilding looks to address issues related to security, provide the foundation for socio-economic development, and establish the political framework needed to ensure long-term peace (Smith 2004). Of these, the political framework may ultimately be the most crucial since the issues that need to be confronted in order to sustain peacebuilding are, at their core, political; peacebuilding is a process that at some level, alters the power relations between conflicting parties, and can restrict their potential for influence in the future. Issues such as confidence building, conflict resolution, and reconciliation are fundamentally political, and need to be addressed as such (Harpviken & Skåra 2003).

In general, peacebuilding can be approached from two basic perspectives. On the one hand, peacebuilding can be addressed in relation to the tools and capacities at the disposal of agencies; on the other hand, peacebuilding can be viewed in terms of the particular conflict in question, its nature, intensity, and duration. In the former, peacebuilding measures are designed according to the capacities available to agencies; in the latter, peacebuilding initiatives are developed in concordance with needs as dictated by the characteristics of the conflict in question (Cousens 2001:5). While either approach has its strengths and weaknesses, the options open to policy makers often becomes a matter of pragmatism, resulting in a combination of both approaches. Nevertheless, it is the “bottom-up” approach that may hold most promise and yield the most significant results since it allows for an emphasis on the root causes of the particular conflict. By placing a premium on diagnosing the problem before offering a solution, the bottom-up approach suggests a more nuanced assessment of what a particular society needs. For example, in Cambodia, the UN sought to facilitate democratic elections by applying a bottom-up approach through support to Cambodia’s emerging civil society, effectively redressing long-standing causes of conflict within Cambodian society (Cousens 2001:9).

Peacebuilding and Civil Society

Understanding the role civil society can play in peacebuilding becomes inherently more complex when attempting to assess the relative strengths or weaknesses of a society, particularly at the local level. Part of the challenge in such instances is that countries are frequently ambiguous as to their location on an active conflict/post-conflict continuum. For instance, the end to hostilities has been officially declared in Afghanistan, but there are nevertheless episodes of active conflict. Similarly, civil society is neither inherently “strong” or “weak,” but will fall somewhere in between, often being strong in some respects, while weak in others. For instance, a country may contain an active and vital NGO sector, while traditional structures have been broken down as the result of the displacement of citizens; conflict may lead to a fallback on primary groupings within society, with kinship, tribal, religious, and traditional structures serving as coping mechanisms, but with a prevailing lack of trust towards government officials. In other words, the relationship between civil society and peacebuilding is complex, and working with civil society groups in peacetime is quite different than during or following armed conflict.

In conflict, civil society is simultaneously torn apart while constituting a source of social support. At the most fundamental level, war undermines civil society. It displaces people, and divides up communities; looting and theft depletes communities of vital resources; and, the basic dehumanizing nature of war weakens the basic fabric that binds society together. At the same time, civil society functions as a source of support by those affected by conflict. Traditional structures become more important as people

seek refuge in the familiar when facing upheaval and suffering; village, family, ethnic, and religious solidarities are reinforced; and, there is a development of a parallel subsistence economy or a black market. Importantly, although civil society is broken down by war, it is nevertheless resilient, and new and traditional structures will emerge during times of conflict (Harvey 1998:206-207).

Conflict disrupts the relationship between civil society, the state, and the market. During conflict, the state may assume a more authoritarian stance and place restrictions on civil society, thereby reducing the room to maneuver for civil society groups. A paradox of civil society is that, while civil society is thought to act as a check on the powers of the state, it is the state that sets the parameters for civil society. One way in which the state can define the boundaries for civil society is through changes to the institutional framework, such as by curtailing the legal rights of citizens and their right to organize. In so doing, the state can avert criticism and hinder the watchdog function of civil society. For instance, restrictions to the right to organize or free political expression can serve to weaken civil society, particularly during conflict. However, the encroachment of the state does not necessarily mean that there is not an active civil society; as the revolutionary movements in Latin American countries bear witness to, totalitarian regimes often sow the seeds for change as civil society organizes against its oppressive policies. The relationship between civil society and the market will also be altered as the result of armed conflict. Economies of societies in the midst of war may increasingly become oriented towards providing goods and services directly and indirectly related to the conflict. This may either assume a legal nature, or it may be part of a “gray” sector, or even the illegal black market. NGOs, for example, may be drawn into becoming providers of intelligence, used as vehicles for the trafficking of drugs, or laundering money. In many cases, there will develop an economic sector that operates parallel to the legal financial market (Strand *et al* 2003).

Understandings of civil society at times originate from the optimistic position that civil society is an inherently positive or noble force in peacebuilding. As the discussion here has sought to make clear, civil society can constitute a catalyst for peacebuilding and reconciliation. However, that civil society becomes perverted through engagement in the conflict or involvement in criminal activity itself challenges the conventional wisdom that civil society is generally a positive force. Notions of civil society thus need to be tempered by the reality that they contain the potential for so-called “spoilers.” Within any country segments of civil society will assume “uncivil” roles and seek to advance their own interests first and foremost (Maley & Saikal 2002), particularly in conflict situations where there is both greater need and opportunity. This may include former warlords or so-called “strong men” who see civil society primarily as a means to further cement their hold on power, instances where civil society actors become drawn into advocacy for one or more part in the conflict, operate as promoters of ethnic or religious interests, or function at the behest of clientelist networks with a vested interest in the conflict. Nevertheless, even civil society groups that may have assumed an uncivil role during the conflict may prove invaluable in the post-conflict reconciliation process. It is thus important to bear in mind that roles may change from conflict to post-conflict. For instance, the church in Rwanda can be said to have played an uncivil role during the atrocities, but its inclusion in the subsequent peacebuilding process was nevertheless essential. In short, well-meaning policy that does not incorporate an understanding of the roles civil society can play runs the risk of strengthening its uncivil rather than civil components (Maley & Saikal 2002).

If discussions of peacebuilding can be couched in terms of top-down and bottom-up approaches, one of the central challenges confronting policy makers is how

to effectively utilize both approaches. That is, peacebuilding has mostly concerned itself with the implementation of national level agreements, or interventions by international agencies, while less attention has been paid to how local civil society can contribute (Prendergast & Plumb 2002). In the wake of Boutros-Ghali's concept of peacebuilding in 1992, for instance, focus was placed on the capacities of donors and international actors in addressing an ambitiously broad – albeit undifferentiated – set of needs. This included disarming warring parties, weapons destruction, election monitoring, repatriating refugees, along with far less tangible objectives such as advancing human rights, strengthening government institutions, and promoting political participation. Problematically, however, this also led to a disjointed approach to peacebuilding, with little attention to the actual needs of societies, or to how each component fit into the overall effort; nor was there much in the way of sustainable initiatives (Cousens 2001).

In contrast, the bottom-up approach takes as its starting point the needs of those impacted by conflict, and looks to redress the root causes of war in each context. In the bottom-up approach, the emphasis is clearly on a more prominent role for local civil society. While bottom-up approaches are not without their problems – and it is important to underscore that they should by no means be accepted uncritically – they do address several concerns within peace building. By diagnosing the problem before offering a solution, bottom-up approaches provide greater insight into the specific needs of a society, without the presumption that all conflict-affected countries will benefit equally from a standard repertoire of practices. Furthermore, bottom-up approaches pay greater attention to the crucial dimensions of peace and security at the local level (Cousens 2001). The majority of wars over the past decades have been civil wars. Reconciliation and peacebuilding must thus also involve local groups and provide these with a sense of ownership. Solutions that involve only military leaders or state officials will likely be fragile, while a sense of local ownership in peacebuilding can influence reluctant military leaders to contribute in constructive manner. In the end, designing effective peacebuilding strategies should entail a pragmatic evaluation of the specific context and its needs, combined with a realistic assessment of the resources and competence available to outside parties. In the following sections, we describe the interrelationship between civil society and conflict along two basic dimensions: where a country finds itself on a conflict/post conflict continuum, and according to the relative strength or weakness of its civil society.

1. Conflict – strong civil society. In situations characterized by active conflict, the response of the international community has generally been to prioritize initiatives designed to save lives and avert a humanitarian crisis. In emergency situations, building sustainable peace and addressing the root causes of conflict often become secondary objectives. For communities exposed to conflicts, coping mechanisms become stretched. Nevertheless, the resilience of community leaders, activists, and women can come to expression in unexpected ways. As traditional livelihoods become impossible to sustain in the face of conflict, self-help based on community solidarity can reveal itself as a vital resource. Prior to the arrival of emergency relief, war-affected communities will often improvise means of survival, including trade of goods with opposing ethnic and interest groups. Effectively, when humanitarian agencies arrive in an active conflict situation, there is already a local self-help network in place that has begun the process of adapting to the upheavals and realities of armed conflict. In such situations, the challenge for external agencies is to determine to what extent it is possible or even desirable to build on these largely informal networks (Quinn 2002).

Civil Society and State Building in Palestine

Palestinian NGOs and civic organizations are active within virtually all areas of society, including education, health, the media, culture, labor, human and women's rights. In comparison to neighboring countries, Palestinian civil society is markedly stronger. Egypt, for instance, which has a population 20 times larger than that of Palestine, has only a fraction of the number of operational NGOs (Hassan-Gordon 2002). In the absence of a viable state, Palestinian civil society has taken on tasks that, in other situations, would fall under the responsibility of the state. Palestinian civil society not only encompasses civic groups and organizations, but in effect, all political society based around Palestinian NGOs. Organized around contested issues such as agriculture, health, labor, and education, these NGOs constitute a nationalistic counterforce against occupational forces. Although there is dissent, Palestinian civil society has largely championed the two-state solution, entailing advocacy, dialogue with international partners and Israeli counterparts, and dissemination of information (Hadi 2003). The promise of Palestinian civil society in the conflict resolution process, however, has been greatly compromised by widespread corruption and abuse of power by the Palestinian Authority and NGOs. The Palestinian Authority has been involved in extortion, attacks on property and personal freedoms (Moaipek 2004). Prior to the Oslo accords, the PLO established a number of Higher Councils with responsibility for various public services. These Higher Councils assumed control over contacts with the international community, including financial transactions. The result of this arrangement was the diversion of funds away from Palestinian NGOs and instead to the PNA's ministries, resulting in the collapse of many NGO-run services (Usher 1995). A further dilemma has been that some NGOs have been established as a way of tapping into donor funds, rather than as a response to the real needs of Palestinian society.

Mixed Experiences with Civil Society in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka appears to have a strong civil society that includes NGOs, research institutions and the media – all recognizable elements from a Western perspective. Yet, the effectiveness of civil society in promoting peace has been constrained by a number of factors. Most importantly, the institutional conditions for civil society are very different in the areas controlled by the government, and those controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE). In LTTE areas, there is strict political control of all civil society activity, and existing organizations are tightly linked to the LTTE; in government areas meanwhile, the room to maneuver is considerably greater. There is, however, a virtual absence of civil society associations that bridges representatives of the Tamil and Sinhalese populations. One factor in the breakdown of the peace initiative of President Kumaratunga in the mid-1990s was that civil society organizations in government-controlled areas had associated themselves closely with the President, to the extent that once she was elected in 1994, their independence was compromised (Whall 2000). In recent years, a group of NGOs and research institutes have worked to foster popular support for the peace process, and sought to play a more formalized role in the negotiations. Weakened by differences among various organizations, and struggling to identify credible counterparts in the LTTE areas, civil society in Sri Lanka has played only a marginal role in promoting the peace process, and is not well equipped to meet the challenges that will follow a possible peace agreement.

A number of considerations need to be taken into account when determining the participation of civil society groups in peacebuilding (Quinn 2002:3). First and foremost, it is vital to understand:

1. The political economy of war and its interface with development;
2. The impact of conflict on how social relationships have been transformed;
3. How and whether or not participatory processes can exacerbate the conflict;
4. Levels of trust, distrust, and expectations.

The last three points above are particularly crucial, and deserve some elaboration. Within in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, an oft-stated objective is the need to secure local engagement and ownership. Yet, as the *Joint Utstien Study of Peacebuilding* has pointed out, questions regarding the wisdom of this needs to be raised. A lack of understanding of the realities of each conflict can prove disastrous for any hopes of building sustainable peace. The cleavages that fueled conflict to start with will tend to endure even after the cessation of war, and have the potential to be reified through a poor understanding of local realities. Third parties must be wary of the

political, military, economic, or personal interests that potential cooperative partners may have. There needs to be careful consideration and research regarding the identity, motives, and backgrounds of project partners, increasing involvement slowly as experience and trust grows in order to avoid advancing the interests of the most opportunistic members of society (Smith 2004).

2. *Conflict – weak civil society.* In active conflict cases where civil society is weak, the challenge for outside actors is twofold: address the needs of communities impacted by conflict, and; work to develop civil society institutions that can serve as the foundation for sustainable peacebuilding. These may initially appear to be separate objectives, but can in reality constitute two sides of the same issue. Alleviating the immediate effects of conflicts may entail engaging the same parties and addressing the same issues that will likely manifest themselves during the reconciliation process. That is, the search for long-term sustainable solutions should be taken into consideration at an early stage, rather than through a series of ad-hoc arrangements.

International and Local Linkages in Angola

Due to its colonial legacy under Portugal, Angola is characterized by a weak and poorly developed civil society. Years of civil conflict created an atmosphere of mistrust between warring factions (Cain 2001). In order to hinder the outbreak of renewed violence, an outreach program through *Caritas*, financed by Norway and Canada, was initiated in 1998 with the objective of instigating reconciliation. This initiative resulted in a broad mobilization of *Sobas* – traditional community leaders – and local leaders, instigated following a meeting with the minister with responsibility for the province. Building on local customs and tradition, a series of peace marches were held. In order to foster the community's stake in the process, *Caritas* kept a low profile. The result was to put considerable pressure on President Dos Santos, who appeared moved by the peace marches, and the process eventually culminated in a number of political initiatives. The fact that the church seized the opportunity and took a leading role lent the process greater legitimacy, while established figures of trust and authority were drawn in through the involvement of the *Sobas*. The Angolan example demonstrates the manner in which what appears to be a weak or even non-existent civil society can be mobilized and play an important role in the peacebuilding process. Particularly important was the engagement of international church networks with local networks, thereby demonstrating the strength of linking global and local civil society. Reestablishing this link was vital since the international community had largely failed in its effort to establish an effective operational program (Cain 2001). By drawing on established traditions and leaders, these were effectively placed at the forefront, while local communities were provided a stake in the outcome of the process.

Local Involvement in Monitoring the Nuba Mountains Ceasefire

The Nuba Mountains Ceasefire in the Sudan has been seen as instrumental in fostering confidence that peace is possible, both domestically and internationally. The ceasefire has been monitored by the Joint Military Commission (JMC), an extremely light international presence in an area the size of Austria, relying heavily on local engagement, and with mobile monitoring teams consisting of one international and one representative from each side to the conflict. The JMC mandate includes assistance to the parties in implementing the Ceasefire Agreement; to serve as a dispute resolution mechanism; and to assist in confidence building between the parties (Jenatsch 2003). In line with the "light footprint" concept, the basic operating principle of the JMC emphasized resolving all issues at the lowest possible level, flexible response, joint problem solving, and learning from experience. The "Friends of the Nuba" - which is chaired by a troika of Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States – provides the JMC with international support. The work of the JMC has been made difficult by a poor infrastructure in the area, and not all residents are aware of the ceasefire. Yet, there have been no major ceasefire violations, both sides have participated, and local groups that have been in touch with the JMC have generally been positive. The JMC, and international agencies have been criticized both for treating the government side favorably, and for underestimating the cultural particularities of the Nuba. There is consensus that traditional means of conflict resolution needs to be revived, but little has been done. More generally, however, the JMC has been successful in maintaining a ceasefire at a low cost, while minimizing the negative impacts of a large international presence. At the same time, it has fostered a sense of ownership – both nationally and in the Nuba - through the active involvement by local representatives.

The challenge in conflict situations where civil society is weak is identifying existing resources. While conflict disrupts civil society, there will always be vital elements of civil society that can be mobilized. During conflict, there will be a tendency to use traditional kinship, tribal, and religious structures as a means of coping with the effects of war, institutions that help provide a sense of social stability that would otherwise not exist. In Afghanistan, for instance, traditional *shuras* have been important in retaining trust throughout times of war (Harvey 1998:207). The emergence of fundamentalist religious organizations in countries such as Somalia is yet another indication of the way in which traditional structures may be reinforced during conflict. That not all elements of civil society are inherently positive forces underscores the need to understand the potential for uncivil roles.

3. *Post conflict – strong civil society.* The aftermath of armed conflict presents a host of challenges, ranging from reconciliation between former warring factions to long-term sustainable development. Where civil society is strong, local civil society groups, due to their close proximity to the implementation level, can play a key role in ensuring a sustainable peace. Local civil society groups can strengthen peace agreement by providing a sense of local ownership in the peace process (Prendergast & Plumb 2002). Grassroots civil society organizations in particular have demonstrated their importance in forging lasting peace. In South Africa, for instance, it was not only sanctions and international pressures that ended apartheid, but also the activity of hundreds of local civil society groups. Moreover, these groups were instrumental in facilitating the largely peaceful transition to post-apartheid democracy. In El Salvador, the gradual manner of the UN's withdrawal, with increasing ownership of UN-led processes by local actors facilitated the building of sustainable peace (Kumar 2001). Contexts where civil society organizations are developed and there is social capital upon which to draw, present the potential for the active involvement of civil society actors for long-term peacebuilding. In particular, local groups and associations hold the most promise for building sustainable peace due to their knowledge and contextual understanding of barriers and opportunities at the local level. Local groups can serve as linkages between international actors, governments, and local communities, and can be instrumental in policy debates, dialogue, and the implementation of peace agreements.

Guatemala's Civil Society Assigned a Formal Role in Negotiations

Despite repression by successive governments, civil society came to play a vital role in peace negotiations in Guatemala during the 1990s. The process begun by the 1990 Oslo consultations between the government and the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG) entered into a stalemate in 1991. The process was kept alive through reform pressures from civil society organizations. Bishop Quezada, who was backed by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), was a key figure in the process (Hauge 1998). Negotiations reopened early 1994, and the "Framework Accord for the Resumption of Negotiations" established a formal role for a Civil Society Assembly (CSA). The CSA was mandated to present position papers on key issues in the negotiations between the government and URNG, most of which were eventually adopted (Alvarez 2002). In the Guatemalan case, civil society engagement was extremely broad, including political parties, religious groups, trade unions, Mayan organizations, women's groups, development organizations, human rights groups, research centers and the media, as well as business associations. The so-called "Group of Friends" – the governments of Colombia, Mexico, Norway, Spain, the United States, and Venezuela – offered funding as well as protection and access to international networks. By late 1994, the SCA had handed over its proposals, and Bishop Quezada resigned. Deep disagreements surfaced, particularly regarding whether the SCA should take a formal role in implementing and monitoring the peace accords. In sum, most observers would credit the strong and variegated civil society engagement for a good part of the success in brokering peace in Guatemala. Following the 1996 peace accords, various civil society organizations continue to be key actors in ensuring progress (Russell 2000).

4. *Post-conflict – weak civil society.* Once a country enters into a post conflict phase, utilizing existing elements of civil society becomes important in maintaining the momentum of peacebuilding. Protracted armed conflict undoubtedly stretches the capacities of civil society. While this does not necessarily mean that lengthy conflicts will automatically lead to a weakened civil society, it is nevertheless likely that, once a country has begun the shift towards a post-conflict situation, civil society has been adversely affected. The challenge in such situations is to both strengthen civil society in such a way as to contribute a sustainable peacebuilding process. In this regard, one of the central discussions within peacebuilding initiatives and humanitarian assistance in general is whether or not external NGOs further undermine efforts at strengthening an already weakened civil society. For instance, do NGOs seek to draw on the knowledge possessed by local communities? Do international actors seek to build long-term capacities? Will local communities be forced into unsuitable models of democracy for that specific context? Can NGOs be said to be neutral, or do they appear as advocates for one part in a conflict?

Traditional Village Councils Key to Afghan Recovery

Afghanistan is commonly associated with a weak civil society. The national NGO sector dates back only to the late 1980s. Other forms of civil society, however - including religious networks, tribal structures, and community councils (*shuras*) – are rooted solidly in Afghan society. The National Solidarity Program (NSP) is a prominent part of the country's post-9/11 recovery strategy (*Securing Afghanistan's Future*, 2004). The basic idea of NSP is to provide cash grants to communities, and to make the *shura* responsible for the selection and implementation of projects. An established institution in Afghan society, the traditional *shura* is reactive and focused on conflict resolution, rather than proactive and focused on planning and implementation (Harpviken et al 2002: 5-7). Over the past 15 years, the *shura* has increasingly come to function as village development organizations, encouraged by international aid providers. NSP adds a new and explicitly political dimension, insisting that *shura* members are elected by secret ballot, in an effort to foster local level democracy, which also serves as basic democratic education conducive for the larger state-building effort. The use of the *shura* in Afghanistan is an interesting example of how traditional forms of organization may be built upon in post-conflict recovery. The success of the NSP, however, relies on the ability to mediate tensions inherent in taking an established institutional form, assigning it fundamentally different tasks, and changing its mode of organization.

NGOs are becoming more prevalent within peacebuilding as the result of the vacuum left by the absence of local authorities, the preferences of donors, and the limited capacities of international institutions (Abiew & Keating 2004). The good governance agenda, for example, has entailed an increase in donor support to NGOs within development planning in general (Lewis 2002: 571-572), and the increasing involvement of NGOs within peacekeeping can be seen as an extension of this mandate. There is, however, reason to raise concerns about the reliance on NGOs, particularly in post conflict situations. NGOs can at times exacerbate divisions and conflict rather than mediating them, while questions as to the neutrality of many NGOs have also been raised. For instance, in providing relief to Rwandan refugees in Goma, assistance was delivered to camps controlled by the Hutu militia; in so doing, NGOs may have impeded peacebuilding by aiding the military objectives of the militia (Abiew & Keating 2004:106). Concern can also be raised about the efficacy of NGOs in the long-term. For instance, the many professional NGOs that have sought to promote democracy in Nepal have not succeeded; meanwhile, it was township organizations and civic groups that played a central role in the struggle against South African apartheid in the 1980s (Ottaway 2001). A further dilemma is the influence donors have on NGOs. Recipient NGOs may tailor their programs and ideas to suit those of the donors rather than addressing real needs, thereby turning civil society organizations into “creatures” of the

donors. Donors have also had an underlying ideological agenda, providing support to NGOs that seek to oust what is perceived as unfriendly governments and regimes. For NGOs to avoid such traps, they must demonstrate political savvy and the understanding that their personnel are operating in a highly politicized arena. One lesson to be gleaned from all of this is that NGOs must adopt a “do no harm” approach, and develop programs that support those who seek an alternative to conflict (Anderson 1999). Ultimately, the greatest promise lies in investing in local groups and organizations; outside NGOs, meanwhile, can play a supporting role in building a sustainable peace.

Analyzing Civil Society

Civil society is always present in some form. Recognizing informal networks can pose a considerable challenge since they are less visible, particularly in conflict or post-conflict contexts. One reason for this is that conceptualizations of civil society are generally derived from the experiences of industrialized Western democracies. They often presume a relatively high degree of organization that is readily identifiable, and may in this sense obscure traditional linkages and forms of organization found in the developing world. Conflict itself will alter the composition of civil society, making it appear considerably different from those found in Western democracies. There is an inherent danger in forcing non-Western societies into assuming an organizational form that is recognizable from a Western viewpoint. One prominent example of this is the normative assumption that local networks will and should resemble an NGO organizational form –the “NGO-ification” of traditional societal structures. In African nations, for instance, there has been a tendency among policy makers to conceive of civil society primarily as a set of bilaterally or multilaterally funded development NGOs with broad transnational networks. These have increasingly assumed responsibility for many of the state’s functions within health and education. While these NGOs are certainly a vital component of civil society, they do not challenge the state from below, being instead horizontal contemporaries of wider institutions of transnational governmentality (Lewis 2002: 577-578). Effectively, a singular focus on NGOs can come at the expense of the identification of local networks that, in the long run, may possess the local knowledge and competence needed to create sustainable initiatives.

While discussions of civil society may be interesting on their own, they are purely academic unless they can be translated into practice. One of the central challenges of parlaying conceptualizations of civil society into policy is finding ways of identifying and measuring its features in specific contexts. However, measuring civil society presents practitioners with a somewhat ironic dilemma: the more one includes under the rubric of civil society, the more difficult it is to measure; the more that is excluded, the less useful the measurement (Batliwala n.d.). This is a particularly important consideration when one defines civil society rather broadly as is the case here. Two approaches to measuring the strength and composition of civil society – the Johns Hopkins University Nonprofit Sector Project (JHU), and the Civil Society Index (CIVICUS) – illustrate the dilemmas associated with attempting to gauge civil society. While it would be impossible to describe each of these approaches within the scope of the current paper, each entails the application of multiple methodologies and data in order to map the state of civil society in a specific context. The JHU approach seeks to build a quantitative set of indicators that can be extrapolated for use in comparing civil society across multiple cases. The CIVICUS approach, in contrast, attempts to pool secondary data in order to develop mechanisms for self-assessments of civil society.

Neither approach, however, can be said to be entirely effective. The JHU approach has been criticized for being overly rigid, Eurocentric, highly economic, and

with limited policy value. The CIVICUS approach, it has been noted, may be methodologically questionable, overly subjective, does not reflect uncivil and informal aspects, and is difficult to parlay into policy. More generally, measurements of civil society are in their early stages, and are currently far from what could be described as a precise science. Common to both is that, larger, diverse civil societies and the informal sectors of civil society are relatively difficult to measure, while smaller, less diverse, and more regulated environments are comparatively easier to measure. Generalizations and comparisons are also difficult and should be approached with caution, and civil society in each individual case may be better understood on its own. Perhaps most importantly, the questions that have been raised about the policy value of these approaches, along with the gap between measuring civil society and action, remain serious concerns (Batliwala n.d.).

What Can External Actors Do?

What can external actors and agencies do to both strengthen and utilize civil society in peacebuilding? The peacebuilding resources possessed by the international community are considerable when compared to those that are likely to exist in conflict-ridden areas. While conflicts entail a multitude of dimensions and aspects – and thus must be assessed individually – donors, governments, and other agencies have a number of means at their disposal that can function to support civil society in peacebuilding.

- Resources in the form of money can help provide much-needed immediate relief in complex emergencies, but excessive financial support may be detrimental in the long run. Because civil society remains weakened following armed conflict, its capacity to absorb resources quickly is reduced. An influx of money runs the risk of shifting priorities to satisfy donors, and invites the establishing of organizations that exist primarily to tap into sources of funding, or encourages mismanagement and corruption.
- External actors possess knowledge and competence that can be invaluable in both conflict and post conflict situations. This can take the form of research, experience from a variety of contexts, or utilizing knowledge to facilitate capacity building.
- Protecting civil society from parties to the war, including repressive states, is a challenge for external actors. External actors can offer protection through a variety of means, ranging from political dialogue to safe accommodation during emergencies.
- External actors have international links and networks that can be used for advocacy, mobilizing resources, or serve as a bridge between external actors and local civil society groups.

The lessons learned outlined in the opening parts of this paper provides a number of specific suggestions as to how to best approach civil society and peacebuilding. Taken in conjunction with the points outlined above, donors, agencies, and governments are in a position to find ways of developing suitable policy that addresses the needs of each case, and that recognizes the unique challenges inherent to civil society and peacebuilding.

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