



ASHGATE

# Subcontracting Peace

## The Challenges of NGO Peacebuilding

Edited by  
**Oliver P. Richmond and Henry F. Carey**

## Contents

<i>List of Contributors</i>	xv
<i>Foreword</i>	xv
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xvii
<b>Part One: Concentralising NGO Roles in Peacebuilding</b>	
1 Expanding Involvement of NGOs in Emerging Global Governance <i>Chabwick F. Alger</i>	3
2 The Dilemmas of Subcontracting the Liberal Peace <i>Oliver P. Richmond</i>	19
3 Up to No Good? Recent Critics and Critiques of NGOs <i>Kim D. Reinman</i>	37
4 Politics Beyond the State: Globalisation, Migration and the Challenge of Non-State Actors <i>Fiona Adomson</i>	55
<b>Part Two: NGOs in Peacemaking</b>	
5 Building Peace Norwegian Style: Studies in Track 1½ Diplomacy <i>Ann Killeher and James Larry Taubert</i>	69
6 Voices from the Parallel Table: The Role of Civil Societies in the Guatemalan Peace Process <i>Susan Bergerman</i>	85
7 Practicing Peace: The Role of NGOs in Assisting 'Zones of Peace' in Colombia <i>Catalina Rojas</i>	93
8 The NGOs' Dilemmas in the Post-War Iraq: From Stabilisation to Nation-Building <i>Mahmoud Monshipour</i>	101
9 A Necessary Collaboration: NGOs, Peacekeepers and Credible Military Force – The Case of Sierra Leone and East Timor <i>Michael Gordon Jackson</i>	109

		vii
		229
<b>Part Three: NGOs in Peacebuilding</b>		
10	When Civil Society Promotion Fails State-Building: The Inevitable Fault-Lines in Post-Conflict Reconstruction <i>Jalil Mertus and Tazveena Sajjad</i>	119
11	Private Military Companies in Peacebuilding <i>Morek Pavka</i>	131
12	Promoting NGOs as Agents of Social Stabilisation: Trauma Management and Crime Prevention Initiatives in the Southern African Region <i>Wolke Olaleye and David Becker</i>	143
13	A Rights-Based Approach to Natural Resources Management: Roles and Responsibilities of IGOs, States and NGOs <i>Clark Efew and Aytar Kazil</i>	155
14	The Challenges of an NGO in Post-Communist Europe: The Soros Health Education Program <i>Susan Shapiro</i>	161
15	Community Peacebuilding in Somalia – Comparative Advantages in NGO Peacebuilding – The Example of the Life and Peace Institute's Approach in Somalia (1990–2003) <i>Thania Paffenholz</i>	173
16	The Role of NGOs in Institution-Building in Rwanda <i>Jocanna Fisher</i>	183
17	Orangi Pilot Project: An NGO Helping to Build Community <i>Steven Barmaaz</i>	191
	<b>Part Four: NGOs and Norm Development and Monitoring</b>	
18	Transnational Activism Against the Use of Child Soldiers <i>Heather Heckel</i>	201
19	NGOs and Depleted Uranium: Establishing a Credible and Legitimate Counter Narrative <i>Chenaz B. Soelarbohas</i>	209
20	Postconflict Election Observers <i>Henry F. Carey</i>	221
21	NGOs and the Rule of Law in El Salvador and Guatemala <i>JoAnn Faggot Aviel</i>	229
22	Conclusion <i>Henry F. Carey</i>	237
	<b>Index</b>	251

# When Civil Society Promotion Fails State-Building: The Inevitable Fault-Lines in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Julie Mertus and Tazreena Sajjad

Over the past two decades, the clarion call for civil society to consolidate the nation-building process has grown louder. The space between the government and the people has been rapidly filled with institutions, organisations and movements with increasing legitimacy to voice the concerns of those outside power structures. Today, global trends of promoting democracy and the vehicle of democratisation in the process of state-building, either from the ashes of protracted violent conflict or from the ruins of authoritarian regimes, are incomplete without the component of civil society promoting the interests of the general public. In this framework, most often the focus is on the development of NGOs, at times to the extent that the term NGO is equated with 'civil society'. As a result, grassroots organisations and other alternative forms of social arrangements are squeezed out. In this climate the measure of a healthy democracy has, to a great extent, implied the NGO-centered infrastructure for elections and the establishment of a civil society network that challenges government and fills in the gaps in the provision of public services ... Civil society has hence emerged as a crucial component of democracies, and has been seen as one of the most essential elements for assisting a society into making the transition from conflict into the post-conflict stage and consolidating the peaceful politics.

In the heady democratisation climate, civil society tends to be invoked triumphantly, as a panacea to all that ails a state. States should be more wary, however, before they jump on the civil society bandwagon. A strong civil society and vibrant NGO sector has the potential to hinder, rather than enhance, civic nationalism and, thus, to create a weak state. This chapter explores the emerging tensions between civil society and nation-building in post-conflict situations. We argue that in several cases, civil society in fact fails the project of nation-building through undercutting the legitimacy and the potency of new states. Among other suggestions we urge patience in democratisation. Weak states, we believe, need time to consolidate its own institutions and gain legitimacy in the eyes of its constituents rather than following the continuing largely western dictated formula for functional and open societies.

### Achilles' Heel: Questioning the 'Good' in Civil Society

Numerous actors at work on peace-building, ranging from the World Bank,<sup>1</sup> to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID),<sup>2</sup> to the Open Society Institute<sup>3</sup> have embraced the notion that state building and civil society go hand in hand. To take just one illustration, a recent USAID publication proclaims that civil society plays a critical role in democracies by 'informing citizens about their rights and responsibilities and ensuring that governments meet citizen needs'.<sup>4</sup> If all goes well, then the growth of civil society should support the development of a strong state, defined in terms of capacity (ability to devise policies and to see them through), autonomy (ability to independently of local and international actors) and legitimacy (defined in terms of acceptability of process and normative content).<sup>5</sup> Yet this is not always the case.

The experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and more recently Afghanistan proves that civil society building may fail to support and, in some cases, even undercut state capacity, autonomy and legitimacy. The democracy template,<sup>6</sup> comprising of free and fair elections and state institutions and grounded on a diverse, active and independent civil society that articulates the interests of citizens and holds government accountable to its citizens seems rather incomplete, and devoid of an ingrained connection with local expectations and needs. Interestingly enough, looking through aid documents from the 1960s, one has a strong sense of *déjà vu*, reading about the importance of increasing participation, strengthening local governments, building community based advocacy groups, training women civic leaders, and the like.<sup>7</sup> Today, these visions have taken on more consolidated forms. More efficient, sophisticated NGOs and INGOs with strong bargaining positions can lobby for and help implement well-defined strategies and coherent timelines about how they could assist countries make permanent transitions from war, divisiveness and anarchy into functional, accepting, pluralistic nations of peace.

The problem lies in expecting civil society to take charge of, and transform overnight, the extent of this destruction and lead the way for social reconstruction. However, the sociopolitical nuances that need to be taken into consideration are for the most part denied to many of the forms of civil society, making its task largely unsustainable and impractical. Instead of challenging the particularly virulent forms of nationalism prevalent at that time, many social organisations were either actively complicit in spreading nationalisms or were indirectly supportive, by failing to offer direct challenges and by organising themselves exclusively on ethnic lines.<sup>8</sup> It is for this reason that some commentators point to a 'stunted civil society' as a causal factor in both war and reconstruction reform.<sup>10</sup>

### Civil Society as NGO Proliferation

Effective and functioning NGOs are said to contribute to a civic culture, and thus serve as precondition for and the result of effective and legitimate democratic institutions. NGOs are supposed to act as a counterweight to state power,

protecting human rights, opening up channels of communication and participation, providing training grounds for activists and promoting pluralism. As a result of these developments, governments are prepared to provide increasing amounts of official aid to and through NGOs since they are seen to be effective vehicles for the promotion of economic and political objectives of aid packages. Consequently, today, nation-building processes working with the underpinning of democratic values and norms have led to the inevitable outcome – NGO proliferation. In developing countries as well as in post-conflict societies, international reformers conflate 'civil society' with NGOs and then use a head count as a crude index of the health of a civil society.<sup>11</sup> For the social and economic side of development, working with NGOs was thus often a means of avoiding governments rather than engaging them.<sup>12</sup>

If numbers of NGOs are indeed a lodestar of success, then civil society in post-conflict societies such as in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan are indeed thriving. Effective and functioning NGOs are said to contribute to a civic culture, and thus serve as precondition for and the result of effective and legitimate democratic institutions. On the whole, the local NGOs at work in post-conflict societies can be divided into two broad categories: development or service NGOs and democracy NGOs. As the name suggests, development or service NGOs provide services that the state either cannot or will not provide, such as psychosocial counseling, prenatal health care, or specific programs for the disabled, youth, women or the elderly. In the short term, however, service-oriented NGOs serve to energize the local population and encourage them to participate in their communities, thus readying them to be good citizens once their democratic state is up and running.<sup>13</sup> The problem, as one can predict, lies more in the long run, with civil society creating greater reliance on NGO services than on those provided by the state. This also means that to some extent, the state is disinclined to provide centralized public services to its constituencies. Consequently, when NGOs become cheap service providers and, in some cases even replace the local public sector, they undermine the country's long-term ability to develop an efficient state.<sup>14</sup>

Democracy NGOs, meanwhile, assume the functioning of a democratic government and seek to advance political agendas and influence policy formation and implementation.<sup>15</sup> By representing diverse interests and traditionally marginalized groups, they serve to undermine divisive nationalism and create a culture of tolerance necessary for participatory democracy to take root.<sup>16</sup> Given their close and immediate tie to democracy-promotion, democracy-NGOs are generally thought to be more important for state building than development or service provision NGOs.<sup>17</sup> The reality of power politics, continued ethnic tensions, poor economic performance and high levels of corruption indicate that the assumption that local NGOs will take on these tasks appears to be unfounded.

The increasing availability of official funding for both service and democracy NGOs and the popularity they enjoy can be viewed as 'both an opportunity and a danger'. Some NGOs may have the opportunity to scale-up their operations, and to demand more decision-making authority and autonomy from their donors. But for many others, more resources means even greater dependence and co-option into international agendas, erosion of local capacities and the

weakening of state structures. Drawing from field research conducted in Bosnia in 2003, as well as from other field reports,<sup>18</sup> we now consider some of the reasons civil society projects have failed, on the whole, to make a significant contribution to the building of a strong state.

The focus of civil interventions under these circumstances should be on building a strong governmental infrastructure, legitimate in the eyes of, and accountable to its *local* constituency. Instead, the dynamics surrounding civil society seem to leapfrog beyond the intermediate stages of statehood into the realm of far more politically advanced countries where the public infrastructures are already established and where civil society has a long tradition of complementing the process of participatory governance.

The formula of transplanting American-style advocacy NGOs to other countries is often unsuccessful, since advocacy NGOs are a product of the American experience and are alien to many socio-political cultures.<sup>19</sup> As Thomas Carothers has observed, American NGOs 'have grown out of particular aspects of America's social makeup and history – whether the immigrant character of society, the "frontier" mindset, the legacy of suspicion of central government authority, or the high degree of individualism'.<sup>20</sup> The political culture in many post-conflict societies on the other hand is decidedly different stemming from collective identity rather than the focus on individuality and individual's claims on the state.

Advocacy NGOs are not always an effective mechanism for voicing the general concerns of a population and for example, in many instances in the former Yugoslavia they are inappropriate. Advocacy NGOs are said to work when they promote civic participation and general human rights norms, as well as more specific expressions of public interest. However, advocacy-NGOs often promote the most 'popular' (that is, moneyed) causes, often at the expense of the real public interest. The problem is particularly acute in cases like Bosnia and Herzegovina where new NGOs emerged almost overnight, propped up by foreign dollars. While some of these NGOs perform admirable functions, the public see many of them as reflecting the values and interests of foreign governments and foreign NGOs, and not representative of the most pressing local concerns.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, many Bosnian NGOs lack ties to any grassroots base and instead reproduce concerns of elites.<sup>22</sup>

Observations from the field indicate that in a climate where Western models dominate, the imposition of inappropriate models may be difficult, if not impossible, to avoid. CARE has attempted to counter the Western development model with a 'non-directive' approach, which seeks to fund the activities of existing grassroots associations and self-help groups without requiring the sustainability of a particular structure. This allows CARE to be 'more concerned with the human resources and energies of the group and, in particular, its volunteers'.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, despite the efforts of CARE and some other donors to resist imposing Western models, the possibility of indirect promulgation exists. As Aida Bagic and Paul Stubbs write, 'The role of local staff, themselves trained in Western models of NGOs, and with their own preferences for particular kinds of groups, cannot be considered as neutral by definition, but needs to be looked at in practice'. In addition, international involvement in civil society development programs tends to be predominantly from Western European and North American

traditions.<sup>24</sup> The priority given to NGOs may detract from other important voices such as official representatives and other community leaders who either have failed at attracting international support or who have chosen to not operate through an NGO.<sup>25</sup>

### Dependency Syndrome/Imposition of Agendas

Drawing from the experience of developing countries, states making the transition to peace too are vulnerable to the political economy of aid dependence. Large amounts of aid delivered over long periods have the potential to undermine good governance and the quality of state institutions.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, donor agencies and foreign experts often take over many of the critical functions of governance: substituting their own goals for an absent leadership vision, using foreign experts and project management units in place of weak or decaying public institutions. In these countries, aid has been part of the problem. And long-term dependence on aid creates disincentives for both donors and governments to change the rules of their engagement.<sup>27</sup> It may be asserted that the international community's traditional strategy of trying to bring an end to the conflict by backing a proposed winner does not take into account precisely those people, who unlike warring factions have a stake in the rebuilding of institutions and the creation of a state responsive to their needs – a state with which they can interact as citizens.<sup>28</sup>

The cycle of dependency that emerges in post-conflict states as a consequence of foreign donors deciding and controlling agendas for local NGOs therefore, creates sharp division between the local populations and the well-intentioned bodies designed to serve them. Dependency on international actors draws the focus of accountability toward the international donor and away from the organisation's social base. In other words, donor-imposed systems of accountability do more than divert attention away from local constituents. In this new politics of accountability, the two dimensions of accountability – horizontal (concerned with the effective operation of the system of checks and balances and with due process in government decision-making) and the vertical (focused on the ways in which citizens control the government)<sup>29</sup> – are skewed. Ultimately, local communities may have a higher degree of accountability to an audience that is not on the receiving end of the services.<sup>30</sup> The consequences and implications for the state are clear: 'In this context, the advocacy role of civil society is better exercised by pressuring international civil servants rather than local political leaders'.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, the outcome-oriented nature of Western accountability models tends to restrict local creativity. As one influential study of NGOs concludes: 'Deriving from linear world views, with targets and sanctions to be imposed in the event of non-achievement, [Western accountability models] reinforce pressures for NGOs to transform themselves into routine service providers, reducing in the process their capacity to explore new ideas, or to tackle the more deep-seated or intractable problems of institutional development'.<sup>32</sup> Instead of long-term social change, emphasis is placed on immediately quantifiable results. What is expected is for local NGOs to speak the language of the donor community. While there is