

PEACE-BUILDING AND THE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

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To begin with, there are two quite different civil society roles in peace-building: the role of local civil society; and the role of global civil society.

Local Civil Society

Local civil society is often the first target and victim of conflict, and what role it plays depends on whether peace-building is undertaken during the conflict or after the conflict ends, as well as the level of support it receives from global civil society.

During a conflict phase local civil society is generally polarized along lines of support for warring parties, and civil society groups that initiate peace-building in this phase can find themselves pitted against warring civil societies as well as warring parties. They tend therefore to be marginalized but symbolize a hope for the future and a potential for peacemaking (as the intelligentsia of Sarajevo did, by keeping the spirit of pluralism in public gaze). They are therefore of critical importance for peacemakers – a position which is often insufficiently recognized by formal peacemaking in both its strategies and structures.

In the peacemaking phase, during which conflict has not yet ended, local civil society can become a key constituency of support for a peace process, and a key pressure on the conflicting parties to find a mutually acceptable peace agreement. The role of Irish civil society in pushing for a durable solution is a case in point; less known but equally important is the role of Naga civil society in India's north-east.

In the peace-building phase local civil society can make or break a peace agreement. It is now well recognized that post-conflict recovery is crucially tied to the development of an active civil society and its institutions – hence the funding in Afghanistan for a range of civil society reconstruction, from schools to parliament to human rights institutions and NGOs, and the broader support for strengthening of traditional mechanisms for public participation and monitoring, through the *jirgas* and *shuras*. (In passing we should note that civil society's role in post-conflict reconstruction should not be assessed by the yardstick of modern democracy, so long as fundamental human rights are observed).

Yet there are many flaws in the ways in which this recognition translates into policy and even more in its implementation on the ground. Since the end of the Cold War, peace-building by the international community has tended to oscillate between state-building and civil society reconstruction, without initiating the two in tandem and thus strengthening the dynamic relation between them. An effective local civil society requires an effective or performing state, and vice versa, most especially if the goal is peace-building (i.e., stabilization, post-conflict recovery and prevention of the recurrence of conflict).

The evolving policy in Afghanistan suggests a dawning effort to bring state-building and civil society reconstruction into tandem. While much of the big picture focus is likely to remain on reconciliation and reintegration, for both to take root, a twin-track focus on the development of government and civil society institutions could be the median term game changer.

Global Civil Society

By contrast, global civil society has played an important peace-building role in two separate capacities: humanitarian aid and support for local civil society (including representing their concerns to international policymakers). It has had notable successes in the areas of human right and civilian protections, gender mainstreaming and the creation or maintenance of pluralist and inclusive networks. Institutions such as the UN Human Rights Commissioner or the new UN Special Advisors on Prevention of Genocide and R2P would not have come into being had it not been for global civil society. More broadly, the local civil society components in most peace-building initiatives today would not have been included had it not been for global civil society campaigns.

Nevertheless, global civil society also often divides along ideological, ethnic or national and/or regional lines. It sometimes runs the risk of over-riding local civil society concerns while attempting to represent them – a problem of cultural misinterpretation – and sometimes its concerns trump those of its local partners. As regards Afghanistan, for example, large sections of global civil society want NATO and ISAF to leave; but most local civil society would prefer them to stay. Sudan and Myanmar, in their different ways, also indicate regional disagreements within global civil society, not so much on the goal of protecting human and civil rights as on the means to get to the goal.

Civil Society and Development

Notably, the global civil society groups that have attracted more attention for their impact on peace-building policy are those that focus on peacemaking and human rights, including gender. But those that are absorbed into the peace-building implementation process tend to be the development groups – dealing with migration and returns, food and essential deliveries, education, election assistance, human resource and skills development, to mention but a few.

These groups do not appear to create peace-building policy but they do; they create the warp and woof of international policy towards post-conflict reconstruction, that comes out of structures and practices on the ground, in rather the same way as case law forms the body of law. Unlike the more political strands of global civil society, they lack the connection to local civil society that political groups have, and as a result the peace-building-development-civil society nexus tends to be segmented into technical, social and political categories rather than interwoven.

To some extent this segmentation is unsurprising. The human rights versus development debate dominated conflict management discussions during the Cold War, and have only gradually begun to lose the versus tag. Nevertheless, state-building is still rarely seen as a part of development in Europe and the US, which tend to focus on poverty indicators, whereas it is still seen as a key element of development in the post-colonial world, whether this comprises emerging powers or weak states. The new marriage of peace-building with post-conflict reconstruction offers a space for these two divergent views of development to coalesce, but it will require a more concerted effort on all parts to do so.