

Geneva Peacebuilding Platform Workshop “Peacebuilding and Civil Society”

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Hosted by the GCSP, Geneva

Background

Role of civil society is cited as very important. Connectedness of strands of peacebuilding. We look at work and contributions of civil society.

Main question: What civil society can and did contribute to peacebuilding

Summary of Discussions – First segment

Thania Paffenholz: 13 case studies from all continents¹.

What's important is how organisations are relevant to peace consolidation, not to look only at peace organisations. If you map organisations that matter to peace in a given context, only a small minority call themselves peace organisations.

Main findings:

Civil Society is a mirror of society: civil society organizations are as divided as society along power, hierarchy, ethnic or gender lines and are showing moderate, as well as radical images and behaviours. In deeply divided societies civil society organizations bridge these gaps within their memberships. The norms and values permeated into members of important civil society organizations determine to a large extent the behaviour of its members, and in some cases, those norms, values and interests are undemocratic, repressive and intolerant.

Overall civil society organisations can play an important and often effective role peacebuilding, in all stages of conflict, but their contributions are not necessarily decisive, rather it is more of supportive nature. The central impetus for peacebuilding comes in most cases from political actors - above all from the conflict parties themselves. This impetus is often reinforced by strong regional actors

Many activities performed by civil society focus on dominant conflict lines within a given society, disregarding other cleavages and tensions in societies, which sometimes lead to future, additional outbreaks of violence.

The context in which COSs operate is essential for the effectiveness of their activity. The level of violence, the State's behaviour vis-à-vis civil society, the extent and

Civil society is defined as composed of voluntary organisations independent from the state, business, and private actors like unions, professional associations, sports clubs, traditional actors, religious groups, NGOs, community groups, etc. Political parties, media and business are excluded from this definition (with the exception of journalists or private business unions). Focus of analysis: local and national civil society groups, not international civil society organisations.

¹ Guatemala, Afghanistan, Israel/ Palestine, Kurdisch Question (Turkey), Cyprus, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bosnia&Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, Nigeria, Somalia, DR Congo, Tadzhiq istan

orientation of media coverage, are some of the decisive factors that influence the impact of civil society on peacebuilding.

Obviously, donor trends and their resources allocation strategies greatly influence the nature of CSOs' activities, and therefore their potential relevance. Oftentimes, however donor support does not target relevant activities, or loses relevancy because of a bad timing of their initiatives.

Civil society appears to be more effective in particular functions. Protection of civil population, monitoring of human rights are two functions where civil society performs well, and even better when combined. The role of civil society in advocacy is especially relevant for relevant peacebuilding topics, such as in agenda setting for peace talks, and in the mobilization of mass protests/peace movements. The impact of civil society activities related to facilitation at the local level proves to be interesting only at the local level. Service delivery contributes to peacebuilding only when systematically used as an entry point for other functions

Socialization of the population at large with generic democratic and peace values has little effect in times of armed conflict and war due to the high level of violence and the radicalization in society. Activities supporting social cohesion between adversary groups are also of limited effectiveness because they tend to focus on dominant lines of conflict and usually targets people that are already converted, failing to include the hard-liners.

The research findings suggest that a profound rethinking of support strategies is needed! There is currently a discrepancy between activities that appears to be peacebuilding-relevant and the direction of donor support. To address this __, a solid analysis of the enabling conditions for civil society to work, along functional lines and phases, implying a work in scenarii is crucial. Engaging civil society also requires thinking beyond the classical, western-oriented definition of NGOs, and looking at non-professional, less visible agents of change are needed on and voluntary level. Activities for the prevention of potential future conflicts in society and long-term work with strong socialization institutions should be given more support.

Overall, civil society support cannot replace political action. It has become clear through the study that the main enabling and disabling conditions are a coercive state and a high level of violence. Thus the engagement of the international community in initiatives to reduce violence and enhance protection, as well as putting pressure on repressive governments, would ensure the fundamental preconditions for civil society to fulfil a role in peacebuilding.

Second Segment – general discussion

Although the key findings of the research may seem to be common sense, stating clearly their implications is very necessary. A thorough analysis of the context against specific functions and phases of conflict, produce up-to-date conflict analysis, and needs assessment, a careful search for the right partner, are obvious necessities but they are often by-passed

For conflict resolution to be lasting, grievances of spoilers have to be taken into account. It is easier to work with people who thinks along the same lines as donor and international actors, but it is not enough. We do not understand how to work with spoilers. Post-conflict environments always involve some form of violence, which we usually do not address. Very often sources of violence change in pace with processes of post-conflict social changes. What we need to understand are the factors that lead civil society actors to become violent or to work for peace.

International organisation have sometimes a schizophrenic relations with civil society. They are extremely sensitive to capacity-building and ownership but their primary interlocutor remains the government, whose acceptance is critical to their work.

The selection of the right partner is very often biased by international cooperation machinery. Oftentimes, CSO that get funding are those that have the capacity to speak donor's languages and write project proposals. Even when international staff on the ground have identified an outstanding partner, they cannot impose their choice because they have to be transparent and make a bid.

It is important to focus on CSO that do not call themselves peacebuilding organisations. Local CSO usually do not have a high level of "peacebuilding" specialisation. Their role is over fluid, evolving according to the context and across sectors of activity. Even when they are doing core peacebuilding activity, they usually don't see themselves as "peacebuilding organisations".

In post-conflict situation, there is a lack of social cohesion and peacebuilding projects are very influenced by how NGOs align to actors in conflict. Social capital and social cohesion is not the same. How do you link both. The definition of social cohesion is very important for identifying and operationalising the type of support that needs to be delivered. The link we make between social capital and social cohesion, between service delivery and socialisation is critical. Projects that make groups in conflict financially co-dependant are usually more effective than any kind of trainings or workshops.

The gender aspect of peacebuilding is a theme in itself. What dominates now is a masculine vision of peacebuilding. The Feminist literature of peace is very western-oriented. The reality is that there are very different dynamics that we do not understand enough. Women are not only victims of war, they are actors of peacebuilding and they can make different types of contribution depending on the context. j

Cumulative effects of peacebuilding projects: it is very difficult to see the impact of a single peacebuilding project, there is a need to look at the interface between different actors and in different countries.

Implications

More research is needed: look at the model of social change, what promote and generate change, what are the critical triggers for social movements to consolidate efforts to work for peacebuilding: weakness, environment, gender, strong movements