

# 1 CSOs, PEACEBUILDING AND THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

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## 1.1 Civil society: more than NGOs

‘Civil society’ resists easy definition, especially when discussing it as a global development. Every society has its own distinct forms of social organization, cultural and political traditions, as well as contemporary state and economic structures – all of which are central to the development of civil society and shape its specific features. Most broadly understood, however, civil society refers to the web of social relations that exist in the space between the state, the market (activities with the aim of extracting profit), and the private life of families and individuals. Interlinked with the concept of ‘civil society’ is the idea of social capital: the values, traditions and networks that enable coordination and cooperation between people. Civil society therefore involves qualities associated with relationships, with values, and with organizational forms. Civil society takes form through various types of association. Ranging from officially constituted institutions to small, informal community groups, these associations give expression and direction to the social, political, spiritual and cultural needs of members. By reflecting diverse interests and values, they enable the articulation, mobilization and pursuit of the aspirations of the different constituent elements within a society. As such, civil society groups can be a factor in war as well as a force for peace.

Figure 1 illustrates many – though not all – of the types of groupings that can potentially comprise civil society, broadly understood. Some would contest the inclusion of some of these groupings as a part of civil society, more narrowly defined. Yet all have played important roles in responding to conflict. What becomes clear is that civil society is far more than public benefit non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Yet NGOs with

technical-professional skills play an important role in providing services, promoting change and working with conflict. A comprehensive exploration of the roles played by civil society in conflict and peacebuilding is presented in *Agents for Change: Civil Society Roles in Preventing War and Building Peace*<sup>2</sup>.

Some stress the political role of civil society, viewing it as the space for cultivating ‘civic’ values and processes for citizens to engage in public life by channelling their interests and aspirations through peaceful deliberative processes. Civil society interfaces with the state through parliamentary institutions (with parliamentarians often seen as serving a bridging role as the elected representatives of civil society), through other forms of policy dialogue, and even through direct displays of power through protest movements and activism. Furthermore, civil society groups can help to monitor and constrain the arbitrary exercise of state power and, increasingly, the behaviour of private businesses and even multinational corporations. Therefore civil society enables different groupings in society to debate differences, reach compromise, form priorities, and – sometimes – develop consensus on a higher common purpose. Civil society does not replace the state. At its worst, an authoritarian government can constrict – or even crush – the functioning of civil society through methods that violate human rights. Yet it is difficult for civil society to thrive amidst lawlessness and widespread violence. A flourishing civil society typically depends upon the security and predictability provided by an effective state run by democratic governments that ensures the rule of law. If these conditions are not present, people – through civil society organizing – strive to create the elements of self-governance and security. In so doing, they are recreating the basis for democratic government, which rests on the consent of the governed. Thus civil society and democratic states are highly complementary and even interdependent. Protracted conflict affects the ways CSOs operate, often fragmenting and undermining an already weak civil society. It furthermore tends to polarize groups along conflict divides – sometimes to the point where seemingly independent CSOs become highly partisan organizations in support of the war effort

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2 *Agents for Change: Civil Society Roles in Preventing War & Building Peace*, by Catherine Barnes. GPPAC Issue Paper 2, September 2006.

of one of the parties. Furthermore, armed conflict tends to constrain the ability of civil society to act autonomously, as governments and armed groups exert pressure on those under their control to conform. One of

the goals of applied initiatives can be the long-term objective of strengthening an independent civil society structures that help to bridge conflict divides.



Figure 1: Civil society: diverse sectoral and organisational forms

## 1.2 CSO roles at different stages of the conflict cycle

### **Civil society roles in structural prevention to address the causes of conflict**

1. Addressing structural violence & promoting human security – through development, human rights monitoring & promotion, preventing environmental degradation.
2. Making governments & state structures more responsive – through participation in political processes, policy dialogue, monitoring, advocacy campaigns, and protests.
3. Alleviating social tensions and conflict – through challenging xenophobia and discrimination, facilitating dialogue, promoting tolerance and a culture of peace.
4. Strengthening capacities to mediate conflict and manage differences – through conflict resolution training, mediation services, education, promoting rule of law.

### **Civil society roles in early operational crisis response and during violent conflict**

5. Early warning of emerging crises – monitoring, analysis, and communication strategies to raise awareness and generate attention.
6. Developing options and strategies for response – formulating recommendations, engaging in policy dialogue, problem-solving workshops.
7. Mobilizing political will for response – lobbying and campaigning, sensitizing domestic audiences.
8. Developing & strengthening ‘constituencies for peace’ and public awareness work, facilitating social dialogue, public protests.

9. Violence reduction and monitoring; creating ‘zones of peace’
10. Humanitarian relief & support to war-affected communities.

### **Civil society roles in peacemaking**

11. Facilitating communication and generating alternatives – Track II dialogue processes.
12. Creating a ‘pragmatic peace’ at the local level, strengthening local CSO capacities for conflict transformation & peacebuilding through public dialogue.
13. Developing a negotiation agenda and vision for the future that addresses the causes and consequences of conflict.
14. Participating in the political negotiations.
15. Facilitating / mediating political negotiations process.

### **Preventing reoccurrence and post-settlement peacebuilding**

16. Public education & awareness-raising on the peace agreement and consolidating support.
17. Facilitating the rehabilitation of war-affected relationships & communities; laying the groundwork for reconciliation.
18. Contributing to transitional justice processes.
19. Resumption of initiatives contributing to structural prevention – encouraging good governance, reconstruction and development, mediating social conflict, promoting human rights.

### 1.3 Partnerships for peace

While it is rare for grassroots efforts to transform wider systems of conflict and war, it is also not possible for these wider systems to be transformed without stimulating changes at the community level. Therefore many analysts and practitioners are agreed with John Paul Lederach's observation that there is a need to build peace from the bottom-up, the top-down and the middle-out.<sup>3</sup> Yet the methodologies for crossing the scale barrier, simultaneously and in a coordinated manner, are not well developed. Therefore the key seems to be in negotiating dynamic and strategic partnerships between different actors concerned about the conflict – including governments, IGOs and CSOs. This can then be operationalised through stronger mechanisms and resources for interaction between IGOs, CSOs and governments in order to institutionalize the capacity for prevention.

Partnerships for peace may be the antidote to systems and networks sustaining war. To achieve this potential, there should be increased acknowledgement of the legitimate role of CSOs in peace and security matters. However CSOs should not be considered instruments to carry out agendas set by others. Rather they should be seen as complementing partners with valuable contributions to make in providing information and analysis, policy development, strategy design and program implementation. As noted, the potential of such partnerships has been increasingly acknowledged in the past few years.

As concluded by the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict that “the prevention of deadly conflict is, over the long term, too hard - intellectually, technically, and politically- to be the responsibility of any single institution or government, no matter how powerful. Strengths must be pooled, burdens shared, and labour divided among actors.”<sup>4</sup>

This necessity to work together in partnership, and to complement each other is also stated in the recent UN Progress Report on the prevention of Armed Conflict, in the Secretary-General urges “Member States to consider

innovative means to intensify the dialogue with civil society.”<sup>5</sup>

Also discussions within the EU are taking place in the framework of the ‘Action Plan for Civilian Aspects of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)’, acknowledging the importance to include views of civil society in civilian crisis management policy orientations. Experience on the ground shows that the necessity of multiple actors urgently requires rethinking in how to intensify inter-agency cooperation in planning and implementation, also in order to avoid duplicating efforts by others. Under the Finnish Presidency of the EU, some recommendations were agreed by the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM) in November 2006 and subsequently endorsed by the Political and Security Committee of the Council of the European Union. Importantly, the recommendations envisage regular information exchange, inclusion of NGO expertise in fact-finding or pre-planning missions, feedback from NGOs in lessons learnt processes, the establishment of NGO liaison functions at headquarters and mission level, some degree of collaboration on training, the possible inclusion of NGO experts in national rosters for ESDP missions, and pro-active engagement at policy and operational level.<sup>6</sup> These recommendations, jointly developed by the EU and

3 Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies, by John Paul Lederach. Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1997.

4 Final Report, with Executive Summary, by the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, Preventing Deadly Conflict, p.xiv. Carnegie Cooperation of New York, 1997.

5 Progress report on the prevention of armed conflict, Report of the Secretary-General, A/60/891, p. 29. 2006.

6 Recommendations for Enhancing Co-operation with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the Framework of EU Civilian Crisis Management and Conflict Prevention. Adopted by CIVCOM and endorsed by PSC (November 2006). Available on [www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/en/Aussenpolitik/FriedenSicherheit/Krisenpraevention/Konf-EU-NGO-Konfliktpraev-EU-Papier.pdf](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/en/Aussenpolitik/FriedenSicherheit/Krisenpraevention/Konf-EU-NGO-Konfliktpraev-EU-Papier.pdf)

7 Partners Apart: Enhancing Cooperation between Civil Society and EU Civilian Crisis Management in the Framework of ESDP, by Catriona Gourlay, p. 5, 14. Civil Society Conflict Prevention Network (KATU), Crisis Management Initiative, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, September 2006. See also Partners in Conflict Prevention & Crisis Management: EU and NGO Cooperation. Crisis Management Initiative, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, Bertelsmann Stiftung and German Presidency of the European Union, August 2007.

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NGOs<sup>7</sup>, started to be implemented under the German and Portuguese Presidencies of the EU and will be revised after an assessment under the Slovene Presidency during the first half of 2008. The EU also adopted recently a new Civilian Headline Goal for 2010, which will “identify and exploit possible synergies” with NGOs and CSOs.<sup>8</sup> Finally, under the new Instrument for

Stability, the European Commission has established a Peace-Building Partnership. This Partnership aims to build capacities of EU’s partners in crisis response, including NGOs, and to improve the dialogue between NGO actors and policy makers at the level of the European Union. All these initiatives are still very new and are currently under development.

A useful overview of the strengths and weaknesses of civil society organizations and the challenges they face

in peacebuilding work was included in a recent World Bank report on civil society and peacebuilding.

### Summary of CSO Strengths, Weaknesses and Challenges

<b>Strengths</b>	<p>Better information on ‘reality on the ground’</p> <p>CSOs can work where government can not (areas)</p> <p>CSOs can speak to parties government can not reach</p> <p>CSOs can work on social change issues government often can not</p> <p>CSOs are better grounded; particularly CBOs enjoy trust and legitimacy</p> <p>CSOs can inform and monitor policies (the view from below)</p> <p>CSOs operate more flexibly and adapted to the context</p>
<b>Limitations/weaknesses</b>	<p>Limited organizational capacity, internal governance, funding.</p> <p>Often a local focus (particularly CBOs).</p> <p>Weak networking and coordination mechanisms among CSOs</p> <p>Questionable constituency base and legitimacy of NGOs</p> <p>Often tense relations with, disregard &amp; mistrust from government</p> <p>Capacity to act in situations of violent conflict equally hampered</p> <p>NGOs may weaken the state, by substituting service delivery for too long</p>
<b>Challenges</b>	<p>Sheer diversity of CSOs: different motivations, capacities, contributions</p> <p>Effectiveness of CSOs peacebuilding initiatives difficult to measure</p> <p>Tension between having constituency ties (leading partisanship) and impartiality/ neutrality considered crucial for effective civil society peacebuilding</p> <p>Key conditions for peace are often out of reach for CSOs</p>

Source: Civil Society and Peacebuilding. Potential, Limitations and Critical Factors, Social Development Department Sustainable Development Network Document of World Bank Report No. 36445-GLB, June 2006.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> New Civilian Headline Goal, by Council of the European Union, p. 6 available on: [www.eplo.org/documents/CHG2010.pdf](http://www.eplo.org/documents/CHG2010.pdf). 9 November 2007.

<sup>9</sup> The final report of the World Bank was published in December 2006. It is however not available on the World Bank website.