



Civil Society and Peacebuilding: Project Summary

GENERAL INFORMATION

The objective of this three-year research project is to contribute to a better understanding of the role of civil society in support of peacebuilding - during and in the aftermath of armed conflict. The key research questions are: What are the constructive roles/functions of civil society in support of peacebuilding? What are the main supporting factors, and what are the main obstacles that hinder civil society to fulfil these functions?

The main approach of the project is applying a common theory-based analytical framework in 13 country case studies. The research is accompanied by a joint process of reflection and exchange with all involved researchers over a series of workshops. Policy transfer is in-built in the research: the results of the project will not only be published in form of an academic book, but also as a policy paper to support donors and agencies in their work.

BACKGROUND

With the proliferation of armed conflicts in the 1990s and the rising complexity of peacebuilding efforts confronting the international community, the attention of donors and the peacebuilding discourse have increasingly been focused on the potential role of civil society. The massive rise in civil society peacebuilding initiatives, however, was not matched by a corresponding research agenda. Little systematic analysis has been done on the role of civil society in the context of armed conflict, and even less so with respect to its capacity, limitations and critical factors.

The first phase of the project (2006) provided an overview of the concept of civil society, its history and understanding in different contexts. It elaborated an analytical framework of civil society functions derived from democracy theory, development and peacebuilding discourse, as well as from existing case study knowledge. This process was accompanied by an international expert panel, with the results being published in a research study (see Paffenholz/Spurk, Civil Society, Civic Engagement and Peacebuilding, the World Bank Social Development Paper No. 100/2006 and Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction paper 36/2006).

During the second phase of the project (2007-2008) the analytical framework was applied in 13 case studies (Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Nigeria, Somalia, DR Congo, Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, Kurdish conflict, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Guatemala and Tadjikistan). A number of workshops were organized together with all researchers and a few external experts to discuss the analytical framework, the drafts of the case studies and the conclusions.

The case study research focuses on an analysis of:

- The context and the conflicts and the understanding of peacebuilding in each case;
- The status and composition of civil society in each case;
- Other relevant factors such as the state, the media, gender issues;
- The seven core functions of civil society in peacebuilding: (i) protection (ii) monitoring (iii) advocacy and public communication (iv) in-group socialization (v) inter-group social cohesion (vi) intermediation and facilitation and (vii) service delivery.
- The main supporting and hindering factors for civil society to fulfil these roles.

■ CURRENT RESEARCH

The project is currently at the end of the second phase with case studies being finalized and work commencing on the overall conclusions. The book publication is also in preparation.

We already see that the mere existence of, and support for, civil society does not automatically lead to peacebuilding. Rather, a good understanding of civil society's roles and potential for peacebuilding is required. It is equally important to recognize that certain roles and functions of civil society vary depending on the phases of conflict and are not all equally relevant and effective in all conflict phases. It is crucial to have a better understanding of the conditions and obstacles that affect civil society's ability to play a constructive role in peacebuilding. This includes the role of fragile or authoritarian states, the functioning of the media, spoilers such as an education system that fosters hate, or violence and crime as major limiting factors for civil society's action as well as the behaviour of potential or existing 'uncivil' society actors.

The third phase of the project will be dedicated to the dissemination of results in the form of a policy paper. To this end, a number of launching events/workshops will be organized in close cooperation with donors, international organizations, UN agencies and civil society organizations.

■ PROJECT STAKEHOLDERS

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Partners:

- American University, Beirut
- Bilkent University, Ankara
- Department of Peace and Development Research, Göteborg University
- International Peace Research Institute (PRIO), Oslo
- Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, Washington
- Institute for Development and Peace, University of Duisburg
- Institute for Peace and Development, American University, Washington
- International Crisis Group (ICG), Nepal
- The Life and Peace Institute (LPI), Uppsala, Nairobi, Bukavu
- The Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala
- Queens University, Belfast
- Sabanci University, Istanbul

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