

5. The Role of Civil Society, Media and Education in Post-Conflict Rehabilitation Activities

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Introduction

In various locations on the globe, the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), among other organizations, have been engaged in multidimensional peace and consequently post-conflict rehabilitation (PCR) activities and operations. In a 'Framework for cooperation in peace building'¹²⁷, the UN Secretary General stipulates that peace building is a home-grown process in which international actors support national endeavors to prevent the outbreak or recurrence of conflict. It identifies five key areas of peace building: 'negotiation and implementation of peace agreements; security stabilization; good governance, democratization and human rights; justice and reconciliation; and humanitarian relief and sustainable development' (United Nations 2001, Annex 1:1). All this, in general, corresponds to the notion of the PCR. The notion of a democratic peace, suggesting that democratic countries virtually never go to war with each other, has prompted policymakers to argue that the spread of democracy will prevent conflict. Accordingly, peace building through democratization, institution building and economic development is essential part of PCR.

In war-shattered societies the conditions associated with successful democratization are often lacking. Numerous conditions have been suggested to affect the likelihood of successful democratization. Conducive conditions for democratization include low levels of violence, the development of political contestation before the expansion of political participation, absence of foreign domination, an efficient economic system, high economic development, cooperation that cuts across subcultures, political trusts and beliefs in compromises and the legitimacy of democ-

¹²⁷ K. Annan, Framework for Cooperation in Peacebuilding, UN Website, at: www.un.org/documents/go/docs/55a55783.pdf (February 2001.).

atic institutions. However, after a violent conflict, these conditions are typically absent. Insecurity also affects the levels of investments and economic development, which produces high level of unemployment. Civil society organizations tend to be divided and polarized and political trust becomes low, which hinders cooperation across subcultures.

Peace agreements often stipulate democratic governance for post-conflict societies. Some tasks, which are problematic in any democratization process, are especially difficult after a violent conflict. After such conflicts the following conditions often prevail: contested borders and citizenry, weak and poorly supported institutions, political exclusion, ethno-chauvinist parties, lack of inclusive civil society organizations, exclusive identity, mistrust, fear, intolerance and polarization. These conditions provide obstacles for peaceful democratization and successful PCR, as well. As peace building is expected not only to address violent behavior, but also the root causes of conflict, the democracy assistance after violent conflicts needs to support the transformation of norms (attitudes) and compliance to these norms (behavior), the PCR through building institutional capacity supports the efforts for dealing with conflicting issues.

Hence, both institutional and normative components of democratization need to be engineered with the legacies of violent conflict in mind. The institutional components include the construction of physical institutions, the democratic constitution and legal system as well as capacity building. The normative components refer to development of legitimacy of, or to phrase it differently, public support for, the state as well as the institutions and a culture of moderation.

Another type of legitimacy, which is also pertinent for a functioning democracy, is institutional legitimacy, which refers to a popular notion of just and representative institutions. Participation in elections and compliance with democratic rules can be seen as manifestation of institutional legitimacy. Conversely, boycott of elections, low turnout, and parallel political structures may reflect disbeliefs in the institutions.

A culture of moderation is another important ingredient of democracy. Democratic institutions are based on norms such as political trust, tolerance, willingness to compromise, and, most of all, belief in democratic legitimacy.

Beliefs, conducive for democratization, refer to institutional legitimacy, the belief in institutional efficacy, trust in others, the conviction that compromises are necessary and desirable and that political relations are simultaneously cooperative and competitive. The consolidation of democracy requires the emergence of a widespread democratic culture encompassing not only the elite level, but also the entire society. After ethnic conflict, the perceptions of former foes are often still hostile. Thus, the development of a culture of moderation often necessitates a complete change of ideology. The transformation from ideologies based on ethnic superiority (which often have spurred ethnic cleansing) to inclusive ideologies based on appreciation of diversity or *civiness*, is one of the most difficult tasks of democratization. Because the development of a culture of moderation is difficult to measure, interethnic cooperation is analyzed as a proxy for a culture of moderation.

In this context it is very useful to underline the importance of the role of civil society, media and education in the process of post-conflict reconciliation and democratization in general.

The Civil Society

There are many definitions of *civil society* but most are based on the concept of a public space between the individual and the state where a variety of actors seek to mediate relations between citizens and state authorities. It is a space for communication that creates opportunities for broad public involvement and therefore has a potentially important role in preventing and resolving conflict and making PCR more sustainable. A peace process that involves only elite decision-makers can be disrupted by political events, leaders' pursuit of self-interest, or external interference. It is therefore important to assess the contribution of civil society actors to the peace process and to the process of reconciliation.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in this sense. Article 71 of the Charter of the UN¹²⁸ recognizes the contributions that civil society can make in achieving the goals of the UN. In its resolution 57/337, the General Assembly recognizes the important supporting role of civil society and invites it to continue to contribute to efforts to prevent armed conflict and reconciliation. The resolution also encourages the civil society to pursue practices that foster a climate of peace and help to prevent or mitigate crisis situations and contribute to reconciliation.

In the Security Council, interaction with civil society increased in the 1990s as a result of changes, brought about by the end of the Cold War and the influence of increasing globalization. The Gulf War in 1991, the Somalia crisis in 1993, the Rwandan genocide in 1994, as well as the Bosnia and Herzegovina situation, the Palestinian crisis, and the conflicts in Central and Western Africa, were salient international crises that galvanized Security Council's civil society interaction. CSOs also monitored the Council's work in the areas of sanctions, peacekeeping, election monitoring, policing, and post-conflict peace building. They were also present in feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, sheltering the homeless, and protecting the vulnerable in many crises areas, including civil wars. In many of these instances, the civil society played important role in the mobilization and utilization of resources, as well as in the delivery of assistance in post-conflict reconstruction.

The involvement of the civil society groups in these events has provided them the opportunity to assume greater role in international affairs and greater influence in shaping public opinion on international policy issues. Many CSOs remain active on the ground in many crisis areas, even after the UN and government agencies had left the scene. As a result, the civil society has gained high institutional reputation and has maintained wide public support.

Governments alone cannot resolve today's global challenges including the PCR. It is not realistic to expect that governments and international

¹²⁸ www.un.org/aboutun/charter

organizations alone can respond fully and effectively to everything the process of PCR requires, especially in such broad and varied fields as repatriation and resettlement of refugees, restoration of public security based on the rule of law, economic reconstruction, rehabilitation of local communities, national reconciliation, and so on. CSOs, which have been engaged for a long time and with strong commitments in those fields of activities, have an important complementary role to play in the peace-building process¹²⁹. Cooperative interaction between those civil society organizations and humanitarian and resident coordinators of the UN agencies make it easier to achieve common objective: to create an environment where the people in a post-conflict country can have a hope that they will be able to enjoy better lives tomorrow.

Aside from their contributions to the peacekeeping, relief, and humanitarian efforts, CSOs are also a source of information on the ground. By their sheer number, dedicated membership, and unique advocacy roles, the CSOs have become a force to reckon with in post conflict areas. Their public advocacy role and media campaigns often help shape public understanding of the crises and create pressure on governments to act. Thus, civil society has become the actor in the policy process that cannot be ignored and whose goodwill and support have proved useful, and at times even essential to the success of government policies and Council initiatives.

In other words, when we speak of the role of civil society organizations in the PCR process, it is useful to emphasize two additional points, which are important. The first point is that civil society organizations can serve as educational fora for the members to deepen understanding of their relations to the international community. Through participation in the activities of such civil society organizations, ordinary people come to realize how deeply they are connected to the international community, and develop stronger commitment to international cooperation. Thus, civil society organizations can be reliable supporters and valuable part-

¹²⁹ They are not only precious additional assistance forces but often have intimate knowledge and valuable experience, which can be useful for effectively carrying out aid activity.

ners to the governments, which are promoting PCR process in a post-conflict society. Where there is not much history of civil society organizations, therefore it is sometimes appropriate to nurture and strengthen their local civil society organizations, while respecting their status as non-governmental organizations.

The Media

Communication has been described as the 'mechanism through which human relations develop all the symbols in mind, together with the means of conveying them through space and preserving them in time'.

The media are the social constructions that house and facilitate mass communication; they are the institutions and forms in which ideas, information and attitudes are transmitted and received. It creates the space for communication within societies and among communities and between nations. When infused with a sense of social responsibility, it can provide tools and strategies to manage and process the myths, images, collective memories, fears and needs that shape perceptions that drive human behavior. The media reflect and create this myriad of internal complexities within society.

It can help turn collective storytelling into public acts of healing. People need opportunity and space to express to and with one another the trauma of loss and their grief at that loss, the anger that accompanies the pain and the memory of injustice experienced. Acknowledgement is decisive in the reconciliation dynamic. Acknowledgment through hearing one another's stories validates experience and feelings and represents the first step toward restoration of the relationship.

The media, through the telling of stories, can assist in the releases of feelings of shame and humiliation in victims, so that the story becomes one of dignity and virtue. Transferring the shame from the victim to the perpetrator creates a sense of justice and retribution. The media's capacity for public shaming is an extremely important one, especially in more traditional societies where concepts of honor and reputation still drive behavior.

The media in the volatile post-conflict atmosphere must not succumb to pressure to exploit or sensationalize stories, which would only re-traumatize victims as well as society in general. Nor should they reduce testimonies to mere lists of atrocities, which remove vital context and accountability. Careful reporting must facilitate the societal conversation, respecting victims and the effects of trauma on themselves as well as society.

Vengeance and forgiveness are marks along the spectrum of human responses to atrocity. Yet they stand in opposition: to forgive is to let go of vengeance; to avenge is to resist forgiving. Perhaps justice itself partakes of both revenge in the form of punishment and forgiveness. In order to affect lasting change and reconciliation, larger patterns of atrocity and complex lines of responsibility and complicity must be investigated, acknowledged and documented. Finding alternatives to vengeance - such as government-managed prosecutions, institutional reforms or other social processes - is a matter, then, not only of moral and emotional significance, but it is urgent for human survival.

In conflict areas, information is very often replaced by rumors and propaganda. For this reason, the various international organizations have been supporting media in conflict areas that are providing non-partisan information to the population. The reporting by independent media based in conflict zones fulfils a fundamental role in the democratization and PCR process.

Conversely, international organizations are aware of the negative part played by warmongering, hate-inciting propaganda in triggering or aggravating conflicts. They will therefore continue to support, as in Bosnia and elsewhere, local media whose independence of the parties to the conflict is acknowledged, which provide non-partisan information and which defend the values of peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding.

Freedom of the press and assistance to independent media is the essential tool for reconstructing civil societies torn apart by conflict. An independent and pluralist media, and the development of community news-

papers and radio stations, are crucial for the building of a democratic society re-establishing social bonds and to the process of reconciliation.

Education

Mostly during the reconstruction period following the conclusion of peace agreements, however, the vast fields of action open up: peace-building, especially the building of civil peace can rest only on genuine national consensus that is on the widespread desire to plan and construct peace together. That implies a considerable effort to sensitize and educate the main actors in civil society, and here education, science, culture and communication all play their part. It does not just mean rebuilding the institutions destroyed during a conflict – even if that is a priority objective; it means doing so in such a way that the foundations of a democratic, pluralist and participatory society are laid at the same time.

Here again, education – in its broadest sense – has a key role to play, not only in building the bases of democratic citizenship; not only in alleviating the psychological after-effects of conflict for young people; but also in ensuring that all sections of the population who have been excluded because of their age or sex, their ethnic origin or religious beliefs, their political or economic situation or their geographical position are given a real opportunity to be brought back into social and working life. It is in that context that the concept of *learning without frontiers* will find its most innovative field of application, the idea being to set up systems of intensive and varied training adapted to the needs of each learner that would enable everyone – and most particularly those who, because of the conflict itself, have *missed* the education train – to enjoy a second chance of developing their full intellectual and human potential.

So, it is obvious that human rights education, training and public information were essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace. Not only post-conflict societies, but all of them should strive to eradicate illiteracy and should direct education towards the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as

to include human rights, humanitarian law, democracy and rule of law as subjects in the curricula of all learning institutions in formal and non-formal settings.

In a world of rapid change and increasing diversity, the need for an active, informed and responsible citizenry is greater than it has ever been. The role of education in creating such a citizenry is now almost universally acknowledged¹³⁰.

Education for democratic citizenship needs to be a feature of formal as well as informal education, and an entitlement for all citizens in a democratic society.

There has been an element of civic or citizenship education in various European countries for many years. This has mainly consisted of informing learners about the political system – that is to say, the constitution – in place in their country, using formal methods of instruction. The underlying model of citizenship has therefore been a passive and minimal one. Citizenship for the vast majority of ordinary people has consisted in little more than the expectation that they should obey the law and vote in public elections.

In recent years, however, events experienced and changes taking place across Europe have challenged this model of citizenship. They include: ethnic conflicts and nationalism; global threats and insecurity; development of new information and communication technologies; environmental problems; population movements; emergence of new forms of formerly suppressed collective identities; demand for increasing personal autonomy and new forms of equality; weakening of social cohesion and solidarity among people; mistrust of traditional political institutions, forms of governance and political leaders; increasing intercon-

130 The ability to engage in public life and affairs intelligently and responsibly is something that has to be learned. While a certain amount may be picked up informally in the family, the nature of life today is that this can never be sufficient to produce the kind of informed and effective citizens that modern democracies require to maintain their continued existence.

nectedness and interdependence – political, economic and cultural – regionally and internationally.

In the face of challenges such as these, it has become clear that new kinds of citizens are required: citizens that are not only informed, but also active – able to contribute to the life of their community, their country and the wider world, and take more responsibility for it.

Traditional models of education are simply not equipped to create the kind of active, informed and responsible citizenry that modern democracies require. In important ways, they are failing to respond to the demands of a rapidly changing social, economic, political and cultural environment.

What is required are new forms of education that prepare learners for actual involvement in society – forms of education that are as much practical as theoretical, rooted in real life issues affecting learners and their communities, and taught through participation in school life as well as through the formal curriculum.

The need to provide such teaching presents important challenges for the teaching profession. It means learning new forms of knowledge, developing new teaching methods, finding new ways of working and creating new forms of professional relationships – both with colleagues and with learners. It emphasizes teaching based on current affairs over the understanding of historical systems, critical thinking and skills teaching as well as knowledge transmission, co-operative and collaborative working rather than isolated preparation, professional autonomy instead of dependence on central diktat. It requires a change in how we perceive learning, from an idea of learning as teacher-centered to learning through experience, participation, research and sharing.

Conclusion

Regarding the importance of the role of civil society, media and education in the PCR activities, it is more than obvious that there is a huge need for development of the climate for their unobstructed work. In this

sense, it is important to properly tackle the main obstacles standing on their way, and these are doubtlessly accumulation of corruption and ineffectiveness of bureaucracy, that are drastically disabling the mentioned elements of civic society to act properly in the post conflict ambient. Also, it is important to gain transparency in project approval in order to help solving the issue of the CSOs' inadequate funding, which is one of the main problems they are facing in most conflict-affected regions.

Some research indicates that only seven per cent of organizations have received state subsidy. It is important to note that in the past the system of allocating state funds on various levels was completely non-transparent, although this has improved over the past years. Findings also indicate that few CSOs depended on indigenous private financial supports (83.23 per cent), largely because there is, at the time, no favorable tax framework for donations. There is a growing consensus that CSOs depend primarily on foreign funding to maintain their operations. Foreign funding programs play such a fundamental role in financing CSOs that the development of a civil society infrastructure strongly rests upon this source of funding. The CSOs receiving foreign grants are mostly located in bigger towns or in areas affected by the war. The problem of financial sustainability is likely to remain one of the vital issues facing each organization. To improve this situation, CSOs will have to find financial resources inside the country: donations, subventions and income generated from their own services.

Having in mind the experience of the PCR process in South-Eastern Europe, as a blueprint for the global model, one can as a conclusion state that at the moment CSOs play only a modest role in supporting that process on the ground. This research has evidenced that the most critical challenge for civil society development in the region relates to the limited space in which it has to operate, as defined by the legislative, political and social-cultural framework. Civil society in region needs to engage more with public policy issues in an attempt to establish a place for itself in the policy-making process.

As to the foreign financial assistance there is a serious criticism related to the visibility of the EU's Community Assistance for Reconstruction,

Development and Stabilization (CARDS Program) in the region especially at local and regional level. CSOs in particular were concerned with the fact that only limited number of people, apart from those directly involved, is aware of this part of the CARDS assistance which makes it difficult to communicate a multitude of benefits received through the Program. Government stakeholders also underlined the fact that the lack of visibility of CARDS in the country results not only in the lack of public support, but also in the lack of peer support within the institutions they work in.

CSOs suggested that a special effort should be made in order to inform various beneficiaries working in one sector of activities funded through CARDS in the same sector. They think that coordinated and complementary activities would yield better results by increasing efficiency while at the same time reducing the overall cost. CSOs representatives also questioned a requirement to submit joint proposals with partner CSOs or concerned Government body in order to increase the likelihood for their project to be accepted. Although they endorse the idea, they think that formal persistence on having joint proposals leads to a situation in which most energy is spent on finding and lobbying a potential partner instead of channeling energy into preparing a good project proposal. Once a partner project is accepted, there is once again a problem with the distribution of funds where the biggest portion is spent on multiple administrative hurdles leaving a substantially reduced amount to be actually used on the ground.

A different kind of criticism related to the partnership requirement revolved around the fact that only CSOs are conditioned on having partner institutions, while government institutions are not required to work in partnership. This significantly undermines CSOs to carry out projects that are in line with CARDS's objectives – consolidation of democracy, social development, gender equality, etc.

There were also complaints, again on the part of CSOs, that the foreign financial assistance procedure is not only long and complex, but also expensive for many small CSOs who do not have lawyers and translators on their pay lists to attend to all little details contained in procedures.

There should be an attempt to find a way to ease the procedure for CSOs (for example, canceling the requirement to submit three copies of their statutes translated and each copy certified by a public notary or to introduce a provision that NGOs are eligible for re-compensation for the cost incurred in submitting a project proposal if the proposal is rejected).

As to the role of CSOs in the process of respecting human rights, as one of the main elements of the PCR process, considerable effort must be invested in promoting human rights education and training across the spectrum of key actors in PCR process, and indeed in a broad-based approach across society.