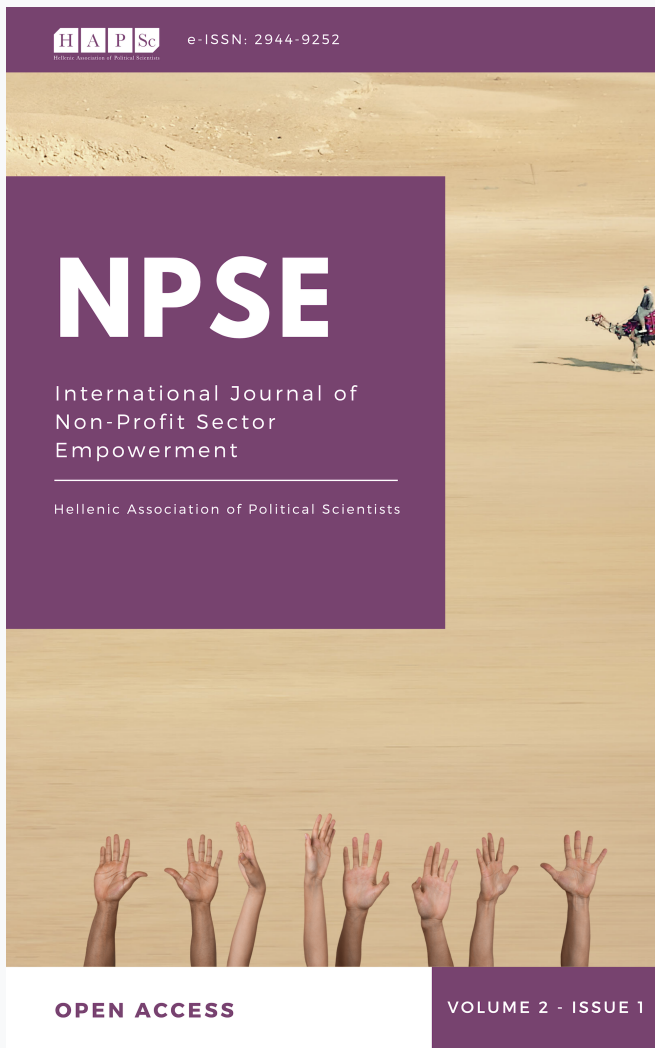


International Journal of Non-Profit Sector Empowerment

Vol 2, No 1 (2023)

International Journal of Non-Profit Sector Empowerment



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doi: [10.12681/npse.34182](https://doi.org/10.12681/npse.34182)

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of NGOs in Conflict Management

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Abstract

The changing environment of war and conflicts has exacerbated the need for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to intervene and play a key role in resolving conflicts and restoring civil society. NGOs are organizations that operate independently of any government and they are responsible for addressing social and political issues. Their role to resolve conflicts has emerged as an additional, yet essential part of the entire procedure of dispute management. This paper examines the place of NGOs in the global environment as well as the more specialized way in which they are involved in the dispute resolution process. It involves the theoretical part and the practical application of dispute management from NGOs in case studies and more specifically Bosnia, Georgia and Afghanistan, examining their degree of success in each of these cases.

Keywords: NGOs, track-II diplomacy, peacekeeping missions, conflict management

Introduction

The multiplication of conflicts at various levels has made conflict resolution more urgent than ever before. Conflict transformation encompasses all levels of society and includes at least two types of change. First, changes are supposed to be made in the society or societies in which the conflict is occurring in order to provide the possibility for retransforming the conflict into a productive phenomenon rather than immediately attempting to eliminate or resolve it (Stewart, 2004). The international community has realized that resources are imperative to achieve society transformation, immediate prevention, resolution and cessation of conflicts that nowadays have taken on different dimensions. Governments and official representatives of states are not able to successfully address questions and issues related to conflicts of a delicate or of a more complex nature. Resources with governments have also proved inadequate. Traditional diplomatic methods are more likely to fail without the involvement of additional actors responsible for conducting contacts beyond the formal diplomatic processes. Hence, there is a growing need for searching other tracks of conflict resolution which can complement government efforts. This can be found in the taking up of new roles by NGOs, with the most important being the one of dispute resolution. The decentralization of governments and

scaling-back of social spending throughout the last decades have created considerable space for NGOs, and made them key figures in a wide range of social sectors (Sarah, 2002). Their success is highly dependent on disposition of funding and resources, cooperation with the military, the government and other international organizations and agencies, donors and local communities. Political will has always been a significant trait for successful dispute management or prevention of conflicts.

This paper seeks to examine the nature and role of NGOs in contemporary conflicts. More specifically, there is a theoretical approach around the position of NGOs in our contemporary globalized society. Then, there is an analytical provision of information about preventive diplomacy and peacekeeping missions as new tools of conflict resolution with the research being mainly focused on papers documented by information provided in Boutros-Boutros Ghali's report *Agenda for Peace*. In order to provide a more holistic and a practical view of the NGO action in dispute settlement, the cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Afghanistan are described to examine the contribution of NGOs to the conflict management of the aforementioned situations. Lastly, a conclusion about the performance of NGOs in conflict management, based on the theoretical approach and the practical view of their action in the previous case studies, is extracted.

1. Nature and role of Non-governmental Organizations

The pace of globalization, which began to accelerate as early as the end of the First World War, has helped to maximize the role of non-governmental organizations across national borders. The organization of the international community and the creation of the United Nations, with the goal of establishing and maintaining peace among nations, made the role of NGOs more imperative and their involvement in international issues more vital to serve this purpose through the prevention and management of contemporary international conflicts. In this context, NGOs have three main characteristics: they do not seek to gain political power (non-partisan), they do not seek to make profit (non-profit) and they eschew criminal and violent behavior (Ward, 2008). Their difference with governments lies in the fact that the latter have a broader reach than do NGOs, as they target and reach society as a whole, both in social and in spatial terms, while NGOs, on the other hand, necessarily have more restricted and localized perspectives (Frantz, 1987).

It was not until after the Second World War that international political consensus agreed upon posing limits on the means and methods of warfare by ensuring active humanitarian assistance during wartime. The International Committee of the Red Cross was the first organization which established

humanitarian universalism and set the basic principles for humanitarian action, which are the principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity, and universality (Abiew, 2012).

During the Cold War, humanitarian relief organizations gained great importance due to their universalist approach and political neutrality. They provided relief during a time when the Western world would not show any interest in aiding (Abiew, 2012; Sidiropoulos et al., 2021). The main goals of NGOs, as opposed to those of other organizations, used to be almost always related to the problems of development, that is, to problems surrounding the economic, social, and cultural order of a country or region (Frantz, 1987). Ever since, NGOs have also been important and influential players in decision making and in setting up international governance to serve the public interest. Governments understood the importance of humanitarian action, treating it as an essential tool for the promotion of their strategic and foreign policy goals and viewed it as means of halting global terrorism (Abiew, 2012; Sidiropoulos et al., 2022).

The 1990s were significant in reshaping the role of NGOs in peace missions, making it more multi-dimensional. New kinds of NGOs have developed such as secular NGOs, apart from non-governmental organizations with religious affiliations that focus on mediation and conflict resolution, specializing in conflict prevention and resolution and operating independently of states and the United Nations (Stein, 2001). Moreover, the nature of conflict has undergone a transformative shift in the post-Cold War era (Ward, 2008). NGOs are implicated in more complex emergencies, becoming themselves more complex actors (Natsios, 2005). The expansion of civil communities into international and global civil societies, which NGOs actively promote, has provided the platform for further fulfilling their objectives. The *Agenda for Peace* by United Nations Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali outlines new approaches around the role of NGOs and preventive diplomacy, broadening the scope of UN action in conflict normalization in the context of protecting international security. As Boutros-Boutros Ghali (1998) characteristically states: "*If UN efforts are to succeed, the roles of the various players need to be carefully coordinated in an integrated approach to human security*". The legitimacy that NGOs receive within the United Nations, through the granting of new and broader roles to them, achieves the linking of local, state, and regional communities with the wider global civil society. Thus, the advantage of NGOs in conflict management is that they do not carry the 'government status' and they are better informed about development within the local communities and address functional problems often transcending ethnic boundaries (MacFarlane, 1998 as stated in Steward, 2004). The question of impartiality, however, is still controversial: as NGOs have changed from aid organizations to human protection organizations, impartiality is more fragile and less observable (Abiew, 2012).

It should be noted that the need for humanitarian aid has been accelerated, as the organization of the international community and the end of World War II have not completely ended international conflicts (Cousens, 2000 as stated in Tan, 2007). The changing nature of war is rooted in religious, ethnic, racial, and regional rivalries which have replaced the ideological rivalry that characterized the Cold War era. The consequences of the modern form of war are now well known to all humanitarian aid organizations that have been exposed, in the recent decades, to conflicts of this kind: the problems of refugee outflows and the massive influx of refugees into host countries, the economic collapse and destruction of state infrastructure, the food crisis and the collapse of institutions and governments precipitate the need to provide aid to the victims of war (Aall, 2000.). NGOs are instruments of human development and human rights counted on by the global society, governments, donor agencies and international financial institutions and have been categorized as the best providers of human security (Sarah, 2002).

It is a fact that most conflicts occur in “failed states” with hybrid regimes and non-existent political institutions. NGO activity has peaked in these areas to substitute for the dysfunction of government and political institutions or to assist in achieving stable political governments (Carey & Richmond, 2003 as stated in Tan, 2007). Indeed, it has been argued that NGOs have played a more important role than the state organization itself and any other state agency in the affected areas. On the other hand, their direct involvement in the conflicts raises debates about how intrusive or effective they are on the internal affairs of the state and on the resolution of the conflict in question in the distant future (Richmond, 2003) and thus further complicates the actual role of NGOs and the international community in conflict resolution, as they may in many cases go beyond the boundaries of their responsibilities.

The limited initiative for peace missions during the Cold War is the main factor in maximizing the role of NGOs in dispute settlement. Expectations of the effectiveness of their action have also peaked. One of these expectations is the reconciliation of NGOs with other local actors and organizations of the state concerned, as well as with military actors and international organizations involved (Richmond, 2003). However, Wainaina (2006) observes that NGOs often find it hard to work with national governments and international agencies, after becoming strong critics of their policies but yet providing in-depth analysis of deteriorating conflicts and their partnership with governments is, therefore, strongly reliant on the circumstances of particular conflict crises.

The changing nature of war and humanitarian aid delivery have caused reconfigurations in the wider NGO community to adapt their practices as much as possible to contemporary war conflicts. Member States and United Nations bodies have an active role in changing the way NGOs operate, to determine how NGOs prevent, manage, and resolve contemporary conflicts (Aall, 2000). The involvement of NGOs in war zones is largely ad hoc and they start with private initiative, receiving funding from private, public and international resources. Natsios (2005) observes that, although UN funds and programmes have increasingly been making relief grants to NGOs, these grants do not yet approach the level of donor government grant assistance. NGOs derive private funding resources from mass media appeals (most notably television), direct mail and major donor government contributions.

2. Peacekeeping missions, Preventive diplomacy and Track-II diplomacy Organizations

After the realization of the unsuccessful application of conventional military methods to counter aggression and secure peace, the world community has attempted to respond to violence in a collective manner with a great number of different approaches. Nowadays, international organizations have come to regard preventive diplomacy as their primary alternative in settling international disputes (Diehl, 1988). The modern post-Cold War era, characterized by crises caused by intra-state conflicts, has highlighted the role of NGOs as peacebuilding, peacemaking, and peacekeeping actors in cooperation with other military actors and international organizations.

The terms *preventive diplomacy*, *peacebuilding*, *peacemaking* and *peacekeeping* are closely linked and the one presupposes the other. As Ghali (1998) states in his *Agenda for Peace*, preventive diplomacy is the act of preventing disputes that may arise between two opposing parties to prevent them from turning into a conflict, as well as trying to contain a conflict to stop it from spreading further. Thus, the mere goal of preventive diplomacy is to create peace, and more particularly positive peace, that is, a stable social equilibrium in which the emerging new disputes do not escalate into violence and war (Haugerudbraaten, 2010). Ghali (1998) further adds that it aims at confidence building, early warning and formal or informal fact-finding, while Gaer (2017) includes further means such as preventive deployment of troops, establishment of demilitarized zones and formation of regional information or risk reduction centers. Where preventive action takes place, the aim is to encourage work among host governments and NGOs, regional organizations, and other countries to respond to first signs of a potential conflict.

As far as peacekeeping missions are concerned, the peace restoration process is based on instruments that are thoroughly described in General Assembly declarations such as the 1982 Manila Declaration and the 1988 Declaration on the Prevention and Removal of Disputes and Situations Which May Threaten International Peace and Security. The peacekeeping process is costly and relies on existing resources (Ghali, 1998). Diehl (1988) argues that the primary goal of a peacekeeping operation is to halt armed conflict or prevent its recurrence. It achieves this goal by acting as a physical barrier between hostile parties and monitoring their military movements and creating an environment for negotiations, which could lead to resolution of the underlying conflict.

Ghali (1998) defines peacebuilding as the act of reconciliation between two opposing parties through the achievement of an agreement by means provided for in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations. The aim of peacebuilding is to ensure that violence is not a means to resolve conflict (Gaer, 2017). However, Ghali (1998) admits that even when hostilities cease, the work of peacekeeping missions does not stop. It is necessary to ensure that the two opposing parties are disarmed, weapons are seized and destroyed, refugee flows are repatriated, elections are held, human rights are protected and guaranteed, stable institutions and governments are established, and citizens are encouraged to participate in political life. These practices are helping to build a sustainable peace with results in the long term. Haugerundbraaten (2010) further notes that peacebuilding should not be confused with nation-building.

The undertaking of the above-mentioned work of establishing and restoring peace is carried out by persons and organizations that are not part of any government. This practice has been rendered by the term 'Track II Diplomacy', a term referring to nonofficial interaction between members of adversary groups or nations which aim to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve conflict (Montville, 1987 as stated in Mapendere, 2000). It has also been defined as 'non-official diplomacy' (Saunders, 1987 as stated in Mapendere, 2000) and 'interactive problem solving' (Kelman, 1992 as stated in Mapendere, 2000). Dilek (2021) further mentions that Track II diplomacy offers a range of activities that broaden official negotiations, such as problem-solving workshops, conferences, seminars, training, and dialogue groups, aiming at building relationships and producing new ideas for conflict resolution.

After the end of the Cold War, there was a growing need for unofficial contacts, with the governments realizing that they cannot always perform well in conflict management in times of conflict and crises. In the field of diplomacy, decreased performance, focus and contacts among official diplomats

strengthened the need to expand diplomacy, out-source some of its functions and involve persons from the public to participate in the diplomatic process (Chataway, 1998). NGOs are one of the most effective means of exercising diplomacy.

Track II initiatives are facilitated by third parties, often being scholar-practitioners who are experienced in conflict resolution, are knowledgeable about international conflict and regional dynamics (Kelman, 1996 as stated in Dilek, 2021). NGOs have been regarded as important third parties in organizing and facilitating Track II diplomacy (Chigas, 2014 as stated in Dilek, 2021). Negotiations conducted through Track II Diplomacy are not a substitute for formal contacts conducted through Track I Diplomacy but are complementary to the constraints placed on the leaderships of the parties concerned (Chataway, 1998). The positive aspects of Track II lie in the fact that the contacts are not influenced by any political or regional power, while the organizations and individuals involved in the contacts provide social, economic, and political benefits to disadvantaged groups, who are given a voice in the resolution of the conflict through means appropriate to their nation or regional community (Mapendere, 2000). Moreover, this practice is appropriate for conflict prevention even during the period after the cessation of hostilities. Track II can also help resolve issues having been left off the negotiation table and addresses misunderstandings among individuals of the warring parties, contributing to developing relations on a deeper level with greater accuracy in addressing the real problems.

On the other hand, the work of NGOs presents difficulties in influencing political leaderships and exerting political influence where there is a lack of political will on the part of the opposing parties and the very persons undertaking the informal contacts. For example, in cases where there is a conflict in a country with a dominant authoritarian regime, the task of resolving it becomes even more difficult (Mapendere, 2000). Aside from the existing difficulties, Chataway (1998) mentions that Track II contributions have resulted in developing working relationships across conflict lines and have transformed societies by motivating individuals to understand the causes of the conflict more profoundly.

3. NGOs as Conflict Managers

Conflict resolution is often analyzed at the elite level, with communities receiving scarce attention, from whom the elite political actors derive their authority (Cochrane, 2000). It is important to point out that NGOs do not carry out the same missions everywhere and they have different institutional construction, depending on the area in which they operate. The NGO community is characterized by a

large variation in expertise, funding, staffing, organization, and management. In terms of categorization, NGOs can be divided into humanitarian NGOs, human rights NGOs, and conflict resolution NGOs. According to Aall (2000), conflict resolution NGOs are organizations which act as intermediaries in an active conflict. They take preventive measures to avert crises and initiatives to start and catalyze dialogue between the opposing parties. There are many factors which influence this type of NGOs, from social movements and social activism to alternative conflict management mechanisms, such as arbitration and mediation, or even the involvement of foreign policymakers and official practitioners experienced in negotiation and mediation both on a national and on a multilateral basis.

Stein (2001) observes that NGOs working to facilitate conflict resolution also seek to promote human welfare among distressed populations, become the object of military action in the context of civil wars and emergencies and take up roles of major powers when they disengage politically and economically from conflicts. In other words, conflict resolution NGOs often come to perform roles outside their area of activity. As far as their main action is concerned, Aall (2000) describes four roles that they perform during a crisis, which are human rights monitoring; early warning; mediation and reconciliation; relief and rehabilitation functions. Policy work is a significant method of NGOs to resolve conflicts by researching the root causes of the conflict and determining the reconstruction of social institutions to prevent it. As they have first-hand, on-the-ground experience and important awareness of the conflict by interacting with people during the crisis, they can provide crucial and expert advice to official policymakers and increase awareness of political issues before governments (MacFarlane, 1998 as stated in Stewart, 2004). This particular role has maximized the importance of NGOs in conflict resolution by increasing their influence and capabilities and by becoming central to international response to conflict.

Early warning and conflict resolution functions, such as mediation and reconciliation, are two of the most significant functions of NGOs. Their role in early warning is based upon preventive diplomacy, through which the international community has access to the potential of an outbreak of a conflict thanks to NGO contacts with the local community (Aall, 2000). In order to succeed in early warning, peacemakers need to be completely aware of the social, political and economic context of existing conflicts before attempting to intervene, as well as question themselves whether conflict prevention is desirable (Bakker, 2001). There are categories of NGOs offering contributions to conflict prevention: human rights and other advocacy groups; humanitarian and development organizations; and 'Track

Two' groups that help open the way to more formal internal or international peace processes (Carnegie, 1997 as stated in Bakker, 2001).

NGO workers are occupied with development and relief activities, which makes conditions of a possible conflict more identifiable beforehand and, therefore, makes prevention more achievable. This is practiced by means of fact-finding missions carried out by operational NGOs, which demand more formal approaches through peacemaking and peacekeeping operations. Their effectiveness is in correlation with their insight into complex emergencies and what issues they deal with (Aall, 2000). Their role as advocates to the governments is significant for maintaining their political will, without which provision of resources for the satisfaction of the needs of the crisis and responding to the early warning signals are impossible. According to the ICRC (2000), NGOs can enhance governments and international organizations in early warning and prevention by increasing access to parties in conflict and flow of information about them; improving the comprehensiveness of response; amplifying the impact of peace strategies through their own networking; and creating conditions for great power engagement in larger scale preventive and rescue operations.

The growing intervention of the international community in intra-state, ethno-nationalist conflicts and within the sovereign borders of war-torn societies has meant that NGOs have increasingly found themselves in a more central position vis-a-vis third party interventions (Cochrane, 2000). Hence, NGOs should develop new conflict resolution mechanisms to adapt their action to contemporary challenges. These new mechanisms should consist of techniques closely linked to sustainable development and long-term humanitarian relief activities for more durable results in the future. That would mean developing a new framework which would include activities envisioning more sustained and comprehensive reconciliation among the opposing groups and a longer perspective (Aall, 2000). Building a more sustained infrastructure would result in ameliorating the conditions and expunging the causes of the conflict. This is achieved through peacebuilding efforts which largely rely on external resources. Understanding the utility of internal resources is also significant for longer results in the conflict resolution and conflict management. Indigenous resources emerge from indigenous peoples' efforts to contribute to building peace among themselves in their own locales while the use of cultural resources emphasizes the importance of constructing healthy relationships. Resources are often hard to find and NGOs are sometimes left without any external or internal resource to perform their action (Stein, 2001).

Altogether, NGOs can have a huge impact on dispute resolution due to their ability to intervene where official persons do not have access to. As highlighted above, they also take up a variety of roles in conflict management. However, reality shows sometimes otherwise, as there is an inherent lack of coordination between the NGOs and the governments. This is due to a different way of thinking and function of NGOs and governments, which makes it difficult for them to work together. Governments often see themselves as the main responsible to contribute to agreements between the warring parties and emphasize long term macro issues, whereas NGOs are more involved in social issues and concern themselves with the impact of the agreements and their consequences on human rights and whether their terms are equitable. To confirm that their work is effective and their presence useful for the resolution of a crisis, they need to play a more active role in intra-state conflicts and find ways to compromise and coordinate when they cannot reach a common position (Aall, 2000).

4. Case Studies

4.1. Bosnia

The international response to the break-up of Yugoslavia is often connected to policy failure (Rieff, 2002 & Simms, 2001 as stated in Jeffrey, 2007). The declaration of Bosnian independence from Yugoslavia in 1992 started a brutal violence between competing nationalist projects (Jeffrey, 2007). Ethnic cleansing caused great damage to the Bosnian infrastructure and economy and killed many people from 1992 to 1995. The strategy employed by the West was to argue that the Bosnian war was not a European issue, but a product of an imagined 'Eastern Europe' or 'Balkans' (Todorova, 1997 as stated in Jeffrey, 2007). The collective conflict analysis led to the identification of five key conflict risk areas in relation to Bosnia which briefly are: weakness of the state and its institutions; the political culture reinforces the divisions and attitudes that led to conflict in the past; the failure to address critical issues from the past that perpetuate the legacy of conflict; the economic instability and the economic marginalization of certain groups; and education conducted in a way to promote attitudes that make future conflict between different identity groups possible (Sherriff, 2012).

The Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) in 1995 was the starting point for development and peacekeeping operations. International development assistance in Bosnia had three objectives: First, resolve post-conflict problems by reconstruction, refugee return and conflict resolution issues. Second, help transition from a centralized economy to a free-market economy establishing democratic institutions. Third, ameliorate conditions of poverty by providing the foundations for growth and welfare (Martin & Miller, 2003). In Bosnia, NGOs were the main components of international development assistance. Besides, in recent years, international agencies have been the main actors to reposition Bosnia as a

country 'in transition' in their effort to advance a series of initiatives aimed at democratizing Bosnian society (Jeffrey, 2007).

The Dayton Agreement managed to resolve only a small part of the issues. Its focus was to retain the ethnic integrity of Bosnia and not split it into three different ethnic areas (Serbs, Croats and Muslims). Compliance with the Dayton Agreement was supervised by NATO peacekeeping mission and the Office of the High Representative (OHR) (Bleiker & Evans-Kent, 2003). The negative element of the Dayton agreement was the legitimization of the three separate ethnic groups residing in Bosnia which resulted in each ethnic group controlling its own territory on the ground. This added further difficulties to the post-conflict reconstruction efforts which international and domestic NGOs have been struggling to work on (Martin & Miller, 2003), while the geopolitical framing of Bosnia had a profound influence on the development of NGOs (Jeffrey, 2007).

International assistance demands a high level of cooperation, the most important being the linkage between NGOs and donors, implementers, and contractors. Another crucial relationship was contacts between NGOs and peacekeepers, which was highly observed during the conflict resolution efforts in Bosnia (Ramarajan et al., 2004). Martin and Miller (2003) observe that high levels of cooperation ensure efficacy in implementing conflict management mechanisms and development assistance by initializing, negotiating, and problem setting; committing and direction setting; structuring positions, roles, and relations and selecting governance mechanisms; and implementing actual resource flows, actions, and executions.

International development assistance is unquestionably difficult in a post-conflict environment, which is often turbulent and chaotic. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, humanitarian relief actions began even before the 1995 DPA. The residents' lack of trust in the government prompted them to bargain with NGOs and participate in reform efforts. Refugee returns and reconstruction proved to be a difficult task due to donors' reluctance to demonstrate success as they would only concern themselves with people coming from third countries. Donors are generally important for the post-conflict reconstruction process, and they can be either states or individuals (Bleiker & Evans-Kent, 2003). The donor-NGO problematic relationship could not be contested within the great amount of aid provided to Bosnia, due to the different nature of aid they provided, the scarce funding which made them increasingly competitive, as well as the donors' continuous changing and inconsistent priorities. Martin and Miller (2003) note that NGOs blamed donors for not addressing immediate needs whereas donors blamed NGOs for inefficiencies, service overlap, financial waste, and mission creep. Donor funding cut

between 1999 and 2000 which affected NGO operations significantly in the region. Moreover, their attention turned to Kosovo, which slowed down the Bosnian process. As a result, the number of NGOs decreased from a handful to 1,500 within a decade (Bleiker & Evans-Kent, 2003).

Regarding peacekeeping missions, in cases such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, the rapid NGO mobilization is salient as NGOs provide critical resources to prevent civilian casualties and the collapse of social services (Ramarajan et al., 2004). Therefore, NGOs act in the same “humanitarian space” with peacekeepers and their roles often overlap, a case which was observed in Bosnia. Even though NGOs operated in regions most in need, which did not always fall within the peacekeeping priorities, they played an important role in implementing peacekeeping operations themselves. In Bosnia, the NATO IFOR and SFOR troops used the leverage of NGOs to encourage civilian support to the General Framework Agreements for Peace (Flint, 2001 as stated in Ramarajan et al., 2004). As regards civil-military cooperation units (CIMIC), they are generally part of the peacekeeping operations and work closely with NGOs. In Bosnia, the late arrival of CIMIC units hampered the development of a coordinating policy with them. That is why provision of training programs to regular troops was vital for conflict resolution, management, and communication. Training peacekeepers is also important to provide them with cultural-sensitivity awareness, communication, negotiation, and mediation skills through their cooperation with NGOs.

4.2. Georgia

The economic transition from a centrally planned to a market-based economy is a worsening factor in the humanitarian emergency provoked by the civil wars. The case of Georgia, which is one of the newly -former Soviet- independent states illustrates a humanitarian crisis arising from the coexistence of three different conflicts (MacFarlane et al., 1996). The three conflicts were between the Georgians and the Ossets, the Georgians and the Abkhaz and among the Georgians themselves. The peacekeeping operations and humanitarian assistance in Georgia faced problems which were based on two reasons: a) there was a need to control two simultaneous conflicts in different regions of the same country, and b) the UN and humanitarian organizations had little to no experience in a former Soviet state (MacFarlane et al., 1996) The collapse of the Georgian economy due to the economic transition had a significant impact on the Georgian population, aggravating poverty in the territory. Humanitarian action started after the open hostilities in the South Ossetia Autonomous Blast (SOAO), in 1989 and the conflict aggravated after the independence of the Republic of Georgia, in 1990. A positive feature of independence in the Caucasus was the increase of the number of NGOs (Matveeva, 2000).

The Osset and the Abkhaz conflicts caused the displacement of a handful of people. Refugee flows headed to government-controlled areas, such as Mingrelia, where the Abkhaz dispossessed population was located and which was affected by conflicts between the central government and supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, first elected President of the Republic of Georgia. MacFarlane et al. (1996) observed that the Georgian humanitarian crisis developed in three different phases: 1) the displacement of the Ossetian population in Tbilisi and Gori region (1990-1991), 2) the subsequent conflicts in Tbilisi, Mingrelia, and Abkhazia (1992-1993) and 3) the renewal of war in Abkhazia in 1993, which resulted in the displacement of around 250.000 Mingrelians. Humanitarian crisis ranged from food shortages and lack of fuel and transport to insecurity in the countryside and disruption of trading links.

In the beginning phase of the humanitarian crisis in Georgia, international response was scarce. NGOs had to fight for their existence and for recognition within most segments of society (Stewart, 2004). When the crisis worsened in 1993, a more rapid and broad humanitarian assistance was gauged from NGOs and various intergovernmental organizations. The most prominent forces involved in the peacekeeping missions in Georgia were the Peacekeeping Force (PFK) in South Ossetia, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the CIS Peacekeeping Force (CISPKF). OSCE was the biggest and the main peacekeeping mission in SOAO (MacFarlane et al., 1996). Its mission was to establish a peaceful political settlement in South Ossetia by facilitating contacts between the warring parties, collecting information on the military mission, and securing contacts between the population and the political circles. According to MacFarlane et al. (1996), peacekeeping in Abkhazia is divided in two phases: the first was based on maintaining the Sochi cease-fire agreement, monitored by a small group of Russian observers. The displacement of the population from Abkhazia created a new emergency and a need for more peacekeeping forces. The second phase brought the need to expand UNOMIG's mandate under the parties' request, which was adopted by the UN Security Council Resolution 937. UNOMIG and UNHCR's international personnel enhanced local authorities' understanding of human rights and established a greater amount of transparency.

UNOMIG tried to contribute to the safe return of refugees and displaced persons, cooperating with CISPKF, though with no success. Even so, it stipulated attention to population displacement. Reintegration of the displaced population constituted a major challenge. This is one of the aspects of conflict prevention, that is, to integrate the displaced population in the social and political debates. ICCN was in the case of Georgia the main responsible for running the Program of Training in Conflict

Resolution Skills and Methods in Tbilisi and Zugdidi, where there was a high concentration of displaced people (Matveeva, 2000). This work proved significant to mitigate tensions.

The interaction between the humanitarian activity and the peacekeeping forces, in the case of Georgia, was generally limited. That was due to the involvement of humanitarian action outside zones in which peacekeepers were operating. The peacekeeping forces contributed best to the monitoring of violence, unlike humanitarian assistance which did not provide adequate supplies. In addition, humanitarian assistance was limited only to the territory of South Ossetia, whereas less attention was given to Abkhazia (MacFarlane et al., 1996). Abkhazia was mostly monitored by agencies which did not view humanitarian aid as part of the largest effort to achieve a political settlement. Only UNOMIG was the most important contributor of international aid in Abkhazia and provided significant amounts of supplies in the region, monitoring human rights, and cooperating with UNHCR. The supply of security information, advice and contacts was an important undertaking during the conflict. As regards the peacekeeping effort, the biggest contribution was the cessation of open hostilities, the free movement of goods and personnel in the conflict lines, providing them the right level of security. OSCE was the most active actor in the conflict, as it was the link between humanitarian assistance.

The consequences of the war for Georgia were multiple. For instance, losing a de facto control over Abkhaz territory exacerbated the Georgian government's difficulties in building a functioning state. Despite Georgia's entry into the United Nations in 1992, the question of the separatist regions was neglected in the Georgian constitution and the issue of territorial integrity remains unresolved to this day. Therefore, Abkhazia is an isolated region prone to increasing its ties to the Russian Federation. (Stewart, 2004).

4.3. Afghanistan

Peace in Afghanistan has not yet been established due to the long war and the occupation of its territory by the Taliban. Little has been done to promote peaceful coexistence of families, tribes, and communities, which are fundamental components of Afghan society. There is no effective strategy to encourage Afghans to deal with disputes in a peaceful and constructive way (Waldman, 2008). Decades of war have exacerbated poverty, violence, corruption, and criminality, undermining social cohesion. Taliban are portrayed to be the only threat, but reality is far from it. National and international forces, warlords, and criminals play an important role in strengthening the threat and aggravating the problems of the Afghan society. Peacebuilding is, therefore, one of the most important means of addressing insecurity and issues caused by local factors.

Afghanistan is undoubtedly one of the most difficult countries for NGOs to operate in (Jelinek, 2006). Peacemaking in the country dates back to June 16th 1982, with the initiation of the Geneva negotiations, when there were hopes of the Afghan nation for cessation of hostilities (Khan, 1995 as stated in Zia, n.d.). During the Soviet occupation, peacebuilding was highly reliant on political conditionalities and humanitarian aid was hampered by political disinterest to resolve the conflict (Barakat and Strand, 1995 as stated in Zia, n.d.). In the course of time, even though peacebuilding efforts have not led to success, several organizations managed to implement various aid projects, including some local NGOs such as the Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU) and the Sanayee Development Organization (SDO) (Waldman, 2008). Local peacebuilding has had a significant impact on peace and development in Afghanistan, yet it continues to benefit a small portion of the population. As stated by Waldman (2008), in order for NGOs to positively influence the outcome of their endeavors, they need to contribute to the development of a national strategy aiming to establish a framework of community peacebuilding in cooperation with other civil-society actors as well as the Afghan government and officials. Jelinek (2006) observes that while some NGOs are indeed involved in national priority programs, providing training and helping to improve the planning processes, collaboration with the government poses a great number of problems for NGOs. For example, they often come to question their roles due to uncustomary collaboration with the government and the undertaking of humanitarian projects by military or quasi-military actors (Jelinek, 2006).

Waldman (2008) gives an insight on existing initiatives and projects undertaken by government and international actors, which are still making efforts to strengthen peace in the region, such as the Afghanistan Action Plan on Peace, Justice and Reconciliation. The government has also established an Independent Commission on Strengthening Peace to foster dialogue between the combatants and engage in lawful political practices with the participation of foreign diplomats and international organizations. As regards capacity building, Jelinek (2006 :5) highlights that *“Capacity building has been mainly devoted to the central level ministries led by ministers, whose importance is recognized by the international community. Priority has been given to ‘getting the job done’, outpacing time and resources for the transfer of knowledge and skills. It is critical that the efforts in the future should focus on long-term and sustainable capacity building.”* written in *«The Joint Evaluation: Humanitarian and Reconstruction to Afghanistan»*. This observation is rooted in the fact that lack of services provision and inadequacy of government capacity hampers the effectiveness of capacity building workshops by NGOs and undermines the legitimacy of the state. Besides, lack of coordination is one of the major weaknesses of the aid community in Afghanistan, which undermines the work of

NGOs to develop a local mechanism for conflict transformation (Strand, 1998 as stated in Zia, n.d.). Therefore, NGOs must find an appropriate balance whereby they rely both on the government, by understanding its need to develop its capacities, and their own experience in assisting people.

According to Zia (n.d.), peacebuilding in Afghanistan is distinguished in two categories: direct peacebuilding and indirect peacebuilding. Direct peacebuilding is carried out by indigenous organizations which emphasize strengthening local capacities at the community level, through the process of understanding the Afghan social, political, cultural and economic reality. Such organizations are Co-operation Center of Afghanistan (CCA), Sanaee Institute of Education and Learning (SIEL) and Co-operation for Peace and Unity (CPAU). The local operations of these organizations target efforts to develop the community's capacity for peace transformation and grow civil society in Afghanistan mainly through educational projects. Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) is an international donor agency also involved in direct peacebuilding, without showing, though, any effectiveness in allocating financial resources or in supporting locally initiated efforts in Afghanistan. Indirect contribution to peace, as stated by Zia (n.d.), involves NGOs which are primarily directed towards community-based rehabilitation and development programmes. Using peacebuilding is a tool for resolving inter-communal conflicts and promoting community cohesion. The major weakness of this group of NGOs is the short-term projects which limit the development of a local mechanism for conflict transformation as well as lack of meaningful co-ordination (Strand, 1998 as stated in Zia, n.d.).

Waldman (2008) also reports some positive developments from the contribution of NGOs in peacebuilding. He provides some examples which are the development of cohesion and understanding within and between communities, allowing for more positive interaction between the ethnic groups, easier reintegration of returnees and mitigation of oppression. The overall conclusion is, however, that peacemaking efforts in Afghanistan suffered due to the international apathy for conflict resolution in Afghanistan, which hampered efforts of various aid organizations to fully engage in the peacebuilding process.

Conclusions

It is evident that without NGOs, conflicts would persist in major areas of the world where progress has already been observed thanks to the NGO staff operating in them. After being ignored for so many years by states, NGOs are now viewed as actors possessing unique capacities that can facilitate peace and reconciliation in societies hit by conflict and war (Tan, 2007). Their work, though, continues to meet multiple challenges and the result of their action has not always been successful or ideal. As seen

in the cases of Bosnia, Georgia and Afghanistan, local and international NGOs faced difficulties mainly of funding, political will, resources and cooperation. In order to make their work successful, they have to ensure that everything functions in harmony, since all factors are part of the dispute settlement process. According to Anderson (n.d. :642, as stated in Tan, 2007: 53), ‘*The most exciting challenges facing international NGOs today*’, according to one analyst, ‘are to recognize where things go wrong in order that they “do no harm” and to explore, develop, and implement programs that support the shared interests and interconnectedness of people divided by war’. That was indeed what NGO staff tried to implement in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Georgia, as all three examples are representative of ethnic segregation which international agencies and NGOs tried to fix by bringing people together, leaving them room for cooperation and integrating them into the entire dispute settlement process.

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