4 Mainstreaming Human Rights in Responding to the Conflict Cycle: The Role of NGOs

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1. Introduction

As tensions and conflicts escalate, human rights are continuously and increasingly violated through structural and direct violence committed against parts, or all, of the population. In turn, at the same time as human rights are violated, the likelihood and potential for tension and conflict rise. Violence breeds counter-violence. Over time, structural violence breeds direct violence and vice versa. In contrast, a decrease of direct and structural human rights violations diminishes the potential and occurrence of violent conflict.[93]

Thus both the provision and violation of human rights play important roles at every stage of the so-called 'conflict

[93] See Horowitz, S. and Schnabel, A. eds. (2004) **Human Rights and Societies in Transition: Causes, Consequences, Responses.** Tokyo, United Nations University Press. However, falling levels of conflict and direct violence towards the end of and after armed violence do not necessarily translate into an equally positive drop in structural violence and human rights infringements. To the contrary, for instance, small arms violence against women tends to increase after war. See Farr, V. , Myrttinen, H. and Schnabel, A. eds. (2009) **Sexed Pistols: The Gendered Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons.** Tokyo, United Nations University Press; and, by the same authors, **Sexed Pistols: The Gendered Impacts of Prolific Small Arms.** (2010) Policy Brief 1. Tokyo, United Nations University.

cycle' – focusing on human rights reduces conflict escalation, reduces the 'longevity' of protracted conflicts, supports conflict settlement and eases and supports post-conflict peace-building and consolidation. It helps mainstreaming human security provision[94] in response to the conflict cycle, while the latter, in, turn mainstreams continuous attention to human rights. NGOs possess comparative advantages vis-à-vis other actors' contributions to conflict management and peace-building[95]; and they have numerous important roles to play in mainstreaming human rights as part of their efforts to de-escalate tensions and violent conflict along the various stages of the 'conflict cycle'[96]. In his discussion the author will draw on activities and approaches by organizations in whose activities he was directly involved.[97]

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[94] Schnabel, A. (2008) The Human Security Approach to Direct and Structural Violence. In**: SIPRI Yearbook 2008: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security.** Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 87-96.

[95] The term 'peace-building' shall be used throughout the chapter as a synonym for all constructive efforts towards the prevention and management of conflict and the consolidation of negative and positive peace. For the author's use of terminology, particularly the relationship between various approaches to the concepts of peace, security, violence and conflict, see Schnabel, A. (2008) The Human Security Approach to Direct and Structural Violence. In **SIPRI Yearbook 2008**, Oxford, Oxford University Press. pp.87-96.

[96] The term 'conflict cycle' will be commented on and defined for the purpose of this chapter immediately following the introductory section.

[97] This includes Swiss Peace Foundation (Swisspeace) and its Early Analysis of Tensions and Fact Finding , Centre for Peacebuilding , National Centre of Competence in Research North-South and Afghan Civil Society Forum programmes and Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces and its International Secrutiy Sector Advisory Team programme.

2. The conflict cycle, human rights, human security and the role of NGOs

Although we speak of a conflict cycle, this is a misleading term. The term suggests a cyclical relationship of conflict and peace. It presumes it to be necessary that peace eventually evolves into conflict, and conflict back into peace. Yet peace and conflict are highly dynamic processes that do not follow cyclical patterns of life and death (such as is implied in the term 'life cycle of conflict'). Moreover, there is no linear progression from peace to conflict or, in reverse direction, from conflict to peace. Thus, the discussions in this chapter will discuss developments along what could be more adequately described as 'stages of conflict escalation and de-escalation that characterise and are characterised by non-linear peace and conflict dynamics'.

2.1 The conflict cycle as 'peace and conflict dynamics'[98]

The various stages of conflict escalation and de-escalation can be defined and labelled in a variety of ways. Earlier in the book, Monika Wohlfeld has discussed several variations of the conflict cycle, each of which reflects a different conflict context, configuration and correlation of conflict parties or sequence of escalatory and de-escalatory patterns. I would like to base my discussions on a model that was originally developed for a UN System Staff College (UNSSC) training course on 'Early Warning and Preventive Measures: Building UN Capacity'. The model was

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[98] The following comments are based on the explanatory text adapted by the author to accompany the 'peace and conflict dynamics' model. For further details, see [Internet] Available from:
<http://www.unssc.org/web/programmemes/PS/>.

subsequently revised and updated by the author of this chapter for use in UNSSC follow-on training activities labelled 'Conflict Prevention: Analysis for Action'.[99] The model is meant to aid those involved in conflict prevention activities to structure both their analysis as well as their specific policy and programme activities along a number of dynamic stages of conflict escalation and de-escalation, with a focus on UN contributions to the de-escalation of violence and the return to peace and stability. The trainers involved in the exercise are mostly members of NGOs, while the recipients of the training come from the UN, regional organizations and partner NGOs in the field. Throughout the training human rights issues are treated as one of three major crosscutting themes, along with gender and HIV/AIDS.

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[99] Ibid. See also Dufresne, C. and Schnabel, A. (2004) Building UN Capacity in Early Warning and Prevention. In: Schnabel, A and Carment, D. eds**. Conflict Prevention from Rhetoric to Reality: Organizations and Institutions.** Lanham, Maryland, Lexington Books, pp. 363-385.
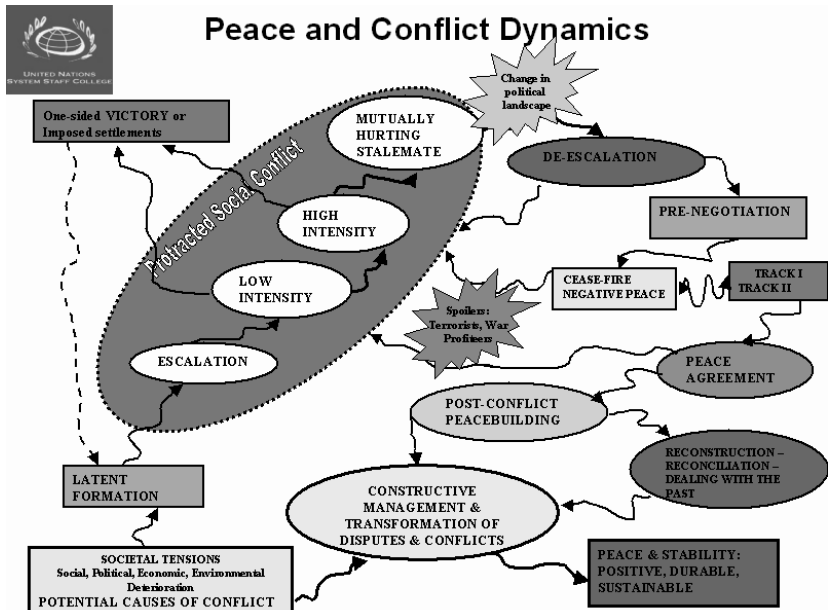
Figure 1: Peace and Conflict Dynamics, UN System Staff College Training on *Conflict Prevention: Analysis for Action*.

Ideally, tensions and conflicts are resolved at the lowest escalation level possible. Conflict dynamics do not escalate to higher levels of violence if mitigation measures are taken and are effective. Without such measures conflict is bound to intensify. The speed and direction of conflict dynamics depend on intentional and unintentional decisions and acts by internal and external actors. Conflict dynamics can be manipulated (i.e. escalated or de-escalated) at any time and at any conflict stage. Being properly prepared to deal with expected and unexpected drivers and triggers of conflict escalation, and to take advantage of opportunities for positive 'manipulation' is key to successful conflict prevention. Identifying, monitoring and acting upon

systematic human rights violations are part and parcel of such preparedness.

In order to plan and implement suitable and effective preventive and de-escalatory action, there must be a common and thorough understanding of the roots, possible dynamics and consequences of the conflict and its potential for escalation, including the role of human rights violations in causing, triggering and escalating, as well as preventing, violent conflict. Otherwise, diverse and mutually exclusive stakes and interests will stand in the way of successful prevention.

Ideally, the state and its institutions should be able and willing to fulfil their responsibility to mitigate conflict, address adaptation needs and de-escalate tensions as they arise. However, all too often the state is unable or unwilling to manage conflict and requires assistance or forceful encouragement from external actors. Usually, no one single actor is best placed to lead efforts in addressing conflict situations and resolving conflict causes. Individual actors are uniquely placed and equipped to meet particular prevention and adaptation needs – at different levels, times and in different roles. While all actors with a potentially constructive role (civil society, government agencies, regional organizations or the UN) need to join efforts to tilt the conflict cycle towards dynamics that support peace and stability, NGOs in particular ensure the inclusion of a wide variety of stakeholders below and beyond the state.

2.2 The link of human needs, human rights, human security

The dynamics of the conflict cycle are closely linked to the provision (or lack of provision) of human security; while the level of human security depends on the degree to which human needs and human rights are provided. Peace results from human security provision, while conflict results from human insecurity that is characterized largely by direct and indirect human rights violations. The denial of rights can be a powerful cause, driver or trigger of counter-violence by those who are deprived of their rights. In turn, escalating violence leads to further human rights violations. As Omar Grech has rightly pointed out in his chapter earlier on in the volume, human rights violations are indeed both a cause and result of conflict.

A particularly dangerous stage in the life cycle of a conflict is the stage of protracted conflict: Low but consistent levels of direct violence alongside high levels of structural violence are a consequence – as well as cause – of persistent human rights violations. This can also result in highly destructive 'violation fatigue', the acceptance and toleration of violations – and violence – as 'normality'.

On the other hand, human rights provisions cause peace and result from peace: Human rights are closely linked to the notion of positive peace, much beyond the much more limited notion of negative peace. Levels of human rights provision can serve as indicators of societal stability and the provision of positive peace, an argument presented by Monika Wohlfeld in her comments on the link between human rights and early warning. Once basic security needs, such as human, intergroup and societal security are satisfied,

accompanied by a basic level of economic security and well-being, citizens will be eager to express their political and communal needs, and they will demand to participate in social and political life, which allows them hold their governments accountable for the provision and protection of their rights and needs.[100] The provision of human rights therefore not only helps minimise the potential for violent conflict, but it also facilitates maximising opportunities for the early resolution and peaceful channelling of tensions, disputes and other drivers of armed conflict. Table 1 outlines some basic priority areas of human right provision and protection at each stage of the peace and conflict dynamics model.

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[100] Op. cit. Schnabel. In: Carment and Schnabel eds (2004) p.114

Table 1: Role of human rights work at various stages of a *Dynamic* Peace and Conflict Model

Conflict Stage	Focus of Human Rights Work by NGOs (and other actors)
Positive & Sustainable Peace	Promotion of human rights of general population, both nationally and internationally
Societal Tensions & Constructive Conflict Management	Promotion of human rights of general population
Latent – Formation	Special attention given to minorities & marginalised & vulnerable groups
Escalation – Confrontation	Special attention given to political movements and opposition groups and parties
Low Intensity	All of the above
High Intensity – Endurance	All of the above + special attention given to persecuted groups & civilian population abused as instruments of war
Imposed Settlement – Negative Peace	All of the above + special attention given to persecuted groups & civilian population abused as instruments of war
Protracted Social Conflict	All of the above + special attention given to persecuted groups & civilian population abused as instruments of war
Mutually Hurting Stalemate	All of the above + special attention given to persecuted groups & civilian population abused as instruments of war
Change in Political Landscape	Special attention given to 'new' opposition movements and groups

De-escalation – Improvement	Special attention given to civilian population & demobilised state & non-state combatants
Pre-negotiations	Special attention paid to formulating and including new standards of human rights protection & human needs/security provision in national dialogues, peace processes, cease-fire and peace agreements
Track One & Track Two Diplomacy	Special attention paid to formulating and including new standards of human rights protection & human needs/security provision in national dialogues, peace processes, cease-fire and peace agreements
Cease-fire	Special attention paid to inclusion of human rights protection of civilian population, demobilised combatants, veterans & often neglected female combatants and child soldiers and their communities
Settlement – Negotiation – Peace Agreement	Special attention paid to inclusion of international human rights standards and procedures in peace processes; and specific references made to, for instance, security sector reform (SSR) principles in peace agreements
Post-conflict Peacebuilding	Promotion of human rights of general population along with

	continued special attention paid to all groups mentioned above
Reconstruction/Reconciliation	Promotion of human rights of general population along with continued special attention paid to all groups mentioned above
Positive & Sustainable Peace	Promotion of human rights of general population, both nationally and internationally

The provision of human rights can never be taken for granted – not at any time and in any society: particularly the silent, structural violence caused by the persistent denial of human rights and people's ability to meet their human needs can happen so slowly and invisibly that human rights violations and resulting structural violence become embedded in daily social, economic and political life. This can reach a point where they are not anymore perceived as outright injustice committed by an incapable or negligent state, but as a matter of destiny. It is the responsibility of politically alert NGOs to avoid such inertia by drawing the population's attention to the rights they are supposed to enjoy and call upon those authorities inside and outside the state that can assist in securing the respect of such rights. This can significantly reduce levels of human suffering – levels that might be tolerated by official government authorities but are never desired by those who are affected.

3. The conflict cycle and the role of NGOs in promoting human rights: Opportunities and limits

The effectiveness and efficiency, and thus the potential contribution to human rights promotion at various stages of the conflict cycle, depends on a number of characteristics and qualities of an NGO: including its thematic expertise; its core competences and core activities; the main 'instruments', tools and approaches it utilises in its work; its means and resources; and a number of external factors, such as the nature and characteristics of the relevant stage of conflict and its comparative position, condition and performance vis-à-vis other national and international actors that are involved in peace, security and human rights promotion.

3.1 The roles of NGOs in promoting human rights

Today's international human rights regime consists of an accumulating body of internationally accepted norms and legal instruments, along with efforts by Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs), NGOs, and national governments to promote improved human rights practices. Unfortunately, the process of abstract standard setting has made more rapid progress than efforts to legitimise and enforce the standards in practice. Practical efforts by intergovernmental organizations and governments have been slow as states still give priority to the principle of non-intervention. Moreover, their own security and economic interests constrain their promotion of human rights abroad. This is where NGOs come into the equation. The work of human rights NGOs and their individual and organizational supporters are crucial for a more effective functioning of the international human rights regime. NGOs are engaged in popularising and

advancing human rights causes nationally and internationally. Moreover:

"[t]hese informational and advocacy functions can potentially have significant impacts on elite and public opinion, fertilising and organising local human rights traditions and movements to the point where they become prominent and influential in domestic culture and politics.

"This slow, decentralised process of building human rights awareness through local contacts is probably the international human rights regime's most powerful and consistent force for positive change."[101]

As the results of a previous study suggest, the work and impact of NGOs' human rights work are indeed effective. The creation of international human rights norms and decentralised propagation of these norms by NGOs seem to have a greater impact than actions taken by states – whether individually through their own foreign policies or collectively through decisions, practises and norm-setting of international organizations. In large part as a result of the work of local and international NGOs:

"even for the most repressive regimes human rights norms have become difficult to ignore …[as they]… feel compelled to make up excuses for their abuses, thus implicitly admitting fault and accepting the need for remedial action."[102]

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[101] Schnabel, A. and Horowitz, S. (2002) NGO's Critical Role in Advancing Human Rights in Transition Societies. **Podium**, 2 (December), p.1.
[102] Ibid. See also Op. cit. Horowitz and Schnabel eds. (2004). These conclusions are based on findings from the study on Human Rights and Societies in Transition, jointly undertaken by the United Nations University and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and co-directed by one of the authors of

The United Nations "Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms" outlines and recognises the position and contribution of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the promotion and protection of human rights.[103] The Declaration recognises the right both for individuals and CSOs to promote and campaign on human rights issues. States shall adopt legislative and take administrative and other steps to effectively guarantee these rights (Article 2). Among the rights specified are:

- The right to form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups to promote and protect human rights both at national and international levels (Article 5);
- The right for CSOs to participate in government and the conduct of public affairs, including to submit to

this chapter. The results of the study culminate in country- and region-specific recommendations for state, non-state and intergovernmental actors actively involved in assisting political, social and economic transition processes. The study found that, wherever regimes allow sufficient freedom, and as long as human rights norms can be plausibly presented as consistent with local traditions and widely held collective goals, they tend to be supported by wide segments of public opinion – including the political opposition and important elements traditionally allied with authoritarian rulers. In this way, human rights norms have been widely embraced in post-communist countries, in many parts of post-Cold War Africa, in Argentina (and most of the rest of Latin America), in Turkey, in South Korea and Taiwan, and in India, the countries and regions on which the study focused. Even in highly authoritarian countries such as Iran and the PRC, to further cases covered in the study, human rights norms have been widely accepted by the opposition, much of the population, and influential segments of the elite. See also, by the same authors, Transitions to Democracy and Rule of Law. In: Forsythe, D ed. **The Human Rights Encyclopedia** Vol. 5, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 87-92.

[103] See: United Nations (1999) **General Assembly Resolution 53/144** (8 March), [Internet], Available from:
<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N99/770/89/PDF/N9977089.pdf?OpenElement>.

governmental bodies and agencies and organizations concerned with public affairs criticism and proposals; for improving their functioning, and to draw attention to any aspect of their work that may hinder or impede the promotion, protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Article 8);

- The right to complain about the policies and actions of individual officials and governmental bodies with regard to violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, by petition or other appropriate means, to competent domestic judicial, administrative or legislative authorities or any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State (Article 9(3)(a));

- The right to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Article 12).

The Declaration recognises the important role of NGOs in human rights education, training and research (Article 16). Given the freedom and opportunity to carry out those rights, most NGOs have the potential to play a constructive role at most conflict stages, although their strengths can be played out best before the outbreak of armed violence and after armed violence has ended, as they depend on a reasonably stable and peaceful environment – in a context of negative peace they can focus on improving conditions for and addressing violations of positive peace.

Non-governmental organizations, "private, self-governing, not-for-profit institutions dedicated to alleviating human suffering, promoting education, health, economic

development, environmental protection, human rights, and conflict resolution, and encouraging the establishment of democratic institutions and civil society"[104], are actively engaged in peace and security promotion through a variety of activities. They include the provision of humanitarian assistance in emergency situations; the promotion / advocacy and monitoring of human rights; support and assistance for civil society and long-term social and economic development in countries suffering from poverty; support in peace promotion, conflict management and resolution (particularly non-violent conflict management); and capacity-building and the strengthening of local capacities and competencies.

One can distinguish the nature, roles and functions of NGOs according to different key characteristics: There are international, national and local NGOs; there are secular and religious NGOs. They can be distinguished according to organizational structures, cultures, size, staffing, geographical reach and financial wealth. NGOs differ according to their thematic focuses – there are humanitarian NGOs (focussing on relief and development), human rights NGOs (focussing on the identification and alleviation of political, economic or social repression), civil-society building NGOs (supporting and nourishing the growth of local civil society and democratic culture), and conflict resolution NGOs (focussing on formal and informal dialogue and negotiation between conflictive parties).[105] Although the types of organization, sense of purpose and areas of expertise

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[104] Aall, P. R (2004) Non-governmental Organizations and Conflict Prevention: Roles, Capabilities, Limitations. In: Carment, D and Schnabel, A. eds. **Conflict Prevention from Rhetoric to Reality: Opportunities and Innovations.** Lanham, Maryland, Lexington Books, p.178.
[105] For a more detailed discussion on these characteristics and distinctions, see ibid.

and thematic focus differ between individual NGOs, most view each other as part of a larger community of actors in conflict prevention, management and resolution. There are a number of attributes that they have in common; attributes that can, as we will see further down, be advantageous or disadvantageous in their efforts to make constructive contributions to conflict management in general, and to contribute to human rights promotion in particular. Those attributes include the following:

First, they do not have the official status of a government agency or intergovernmental organization. *Second*, they serve as bridges and intermediaries between official circles and actors (Track 1) and grassroots level actors (Track 3). *Third*, they tend to take pride in being organizations that think, plan and act independent from official political, economic or ideological agendas. *Fourth*, they lack political and economic influence – and thus the ability to back their demands and expectations with the powerful 'carrots/incentives' and 'sticks/penalties' states and international organizations apply.[106] *Fifth*, they are often working on sensitive and politically delicate issues, especially in situations when focussing on a subject such as human rights, which requires them to criticise and directly oppose government policies, behaviours and actions. NGOs are political actors; and in a society where repressive governments might not serve the interests of their population, some NGOs will take it upon themselves to represent those interests and thus put themselves at great risk of government reprisal. *Sixth*, when working in insecure environments – either in oppressive authoritarian political contexts or in conflict and post-conflict contexts marked by instability, insecurity and crime – local as well as

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[106] Ibid. p.180

international NGOs depend on protection, sometimes provided by private security companies or peacekeepers. For many NGOs this is a mixed blessing, as they fear that reliance on armed protection puts their independence and impartiality at risk. *Seventh*, they depend on creative and flexible strategies, particularly as they tend to operate on short-term financing and under pressure for quick results-based delivery. And, *eighth*, as they often fulfil public service roles that should have been provided by government agencies – and thus draw attention to the government's inadequacies and neglect – they are not always considered to be assets but instead nuisances by government authorities.

3.2 General strengths and weaknesses of NGOs vis-à-vis states and intergovernmental actors

Compared to state and intergovernmental actors, NGOs display a number of very specific strengths and weaknesses that define the extent to which they are in a position to monitor, promote and advocate as well as positively reinforce respect for human rights.

3.2.1 Strengths

The particular strengths of NGOs include the following characteristics: They tend to be less bureaucratic than government agencies (or programmes of international organizations), relatively small in size and staffed by relatively young, idealistic, open-minded and motivated individuals, all of which adds flexibility to their responses within constantly evolving local environments. They tend to be bound less by official policies, ideologies and political

objectives. International NGOs tend to be eager to cooperate with local actors and to take advantage of their informal status to cooperate with and across all formal and informal actors through interactive activities such as workshops, meetings, conferences, mediation or inter-group dialogues. As noted by Marina Caparini and Eden Cole in their examination of civil society organizations in security sector governance, an important component on the post-conflict peace-building agenda is the fact that:

"[m]oreover, independent CSOs can remain untainted by party politics and often have public credibility since they are seen to be independent of government. Some larger NGOs dealing with single issues achieve public recognition because of their acknowledged national or international expertise. These groups, such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, may have a well-developed international profile that enables them to speak on more than equal terms with governments and international organizations. This expertise is a valuable resource in the policy-making process since it gives policy makers and legislators access to information that is credible but independent."[107]

3.2.2 Weaknesses

Some of the strengths of NGOs can easily turn out to be weaknesses: due to their preference for independence, there is often very little coordination and cooperation among

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[107] Cole, E., Eppert, K. and Kinzelbach, K. eds. (2008) **Public Oversight of the Security Sector: A Handbook for Civil Society Organizations.** Geneva, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces and Bratislava, United Nations Development Programmeme Regional Centre.

NGOs, as well as between NGOs and other actors. Competition between NGOs can be significant, particularly for scarce financial resources offered by a limited number of donors to a growing number of NGOs working in similar thematic areas. Often, financial support is available only for short project durations and only for very specific tasks, objectives, themes or regions, sometimes depending on a particular donor's – changing – preferences. This last point highlights a significant vulnerability of NGOs: They depend greatly on the good will, support and interests of their donors. Many NGOs are partly or entirely supported by government agencies. As a result they stand to compromise some of the neutrality, objectivity and independence they so highly value. Their supposed independence is often little more than a romantic illusion, which, especially in the case of international NGOs, is often not properly understood by their local partners. An NGO and its individual projects often receive funds from a diversity of donors, which further complicates matters. Their financial fortunes depend greatly on their founders, political connections and influential contacts within the donor community, without which they might not have come into existence in the very first place. Their financial destiny and political clout (and thus opportunities for 'impact') can be highly personified and closely linked to individuals, particularly in cases of smaller NGOs with a limited and narrow financial support base.

Moreover, many NGOs suffer from an accountability problem. Particularly, smaller NGOs do not follow basic good governance principles. They are run quite hierarchically by a limited number of persons who are often drawn from a small group of founders or their immediate circles of confidants. In practice this might not be particularly problematic as long as the latter are dedicated to

such principles as transparency, inclusiveness or accountability not only to the donors but also to the audiences they serve. On the other hand, many NGOs are committed to good governance principles and, for instance, install councils or advisory boards that perform external and – somewhat impartial – oversight functions.

Many NGOs walk a thin line between welcoming outside financial support to fund government-critical activities in the name of human rights, democracy and development, and of being instrumentalised by external actors in subverting state sovereignty. This has for instance been an issue in the context of early warning activities that rely on information collected by local NGOs. Even if the focus of information collection is on open, publicly available sources, such NGOs are eyed with much suspicion by government authorities who suspect them of providing intelligence services for external actors that might be set on changing political, economic or social conditions against the wishes and preferences of the country's political authorities. NGOs that collaborate with those external actors run the risk of being accused of treason, particularly if they collaborate with external actors while carrying out domestic advocacy work.[108]

As is the case in all fields of non-governmental activity, when conflict management NGOs' competencies, thematic

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[108] Several of the local coordinators and field monitors of FAST International, an early warning system serving a number of Northern development agencies as well as NGO and IGO communities worldwide, had to struggle with such security problems, as their work was eyed with much suspicion by their government authorities. For more information on FAST which operated from 1998 to 2008 but was suspended due to lack of funding, see [Internet], Available from: <http://www.swisspeace.ch/typo3/en/peace-conflict-research/previous-projects/fast-international/index.html >.

priority areas and capacities overlap, effectiveness suffers. While NGOs compete for the most visible and – in terms of funding prospects – lucrative assignments, many donors prefer to work with established, large NGOs, partnering up again and again with small groups of 'usual suspects.' Cooperation with the most powerful actors (governments, regional organizations or the UN) thus becomes a possibility only for the very largest, international NGOs. For instance, while there have been hearings of the UN Security Council with NGOs, it was primarily organizations like OXFAM, CARE and similarly large (Northern!) NGOs with global reputation and reach that were given the opportunity to speak at these fora. From currently approximately 3,200 NGO with consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), in addition to tens of thousands of other NGOs, only few of them have the opportunity to participate in UN meetings in New York or Geneva or boast offices in those places. For instance, throughout 2009 about one-third of all ECOSOC-accredited NGOs participated in UN meetings. Of these 1,065 organizations, 68 organizations came from Africa, 59 from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 75 from Asia. In contrast, 198 organizations came from Europe and 283 from North America. 39 percent of the 4,144 representatives sent by those NGOs came from North America, while only 11 percent came from Africa, 7 percent from Asia and 6 percent from Latin America and the Caribbean.[109] The global NGO community is not very representative, especially geographically. The richest and largest NGOs come from the North, while Southern NGOs heavily depend on funds from Northern foundations, government agencies or partner NGOs.

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[109] These and further statistics are available on the website of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs – NGO Branch. [Internet] Available from: <http://esango.un.org/irene/index.html?page=static&content=stats>.

For many potential donors and partners, NGOs project an image of being chaotic, poorly organised and undisciplined institutions, organizations without much structure and purpose. However, those stereotypes do not apply to an increasing number of very well and professionally run NGOs. Still, many NGOs suffer from a democratic deficit: there is little accountability, they lack transparency and it is not clear whose interests they represent (ECOSOC UN accreditation standards and procedures, as well as other accountability measures attempt to change these impressions[110]). Many NGOs suffer from a legitimacy problem: in their role and function as public 'watchdogs' of the practices of governments and corporate business they criticise behaviour and preach and demand standards that they themselves cannot always honour.

In addition, many NGOs, particularly smaller, local organizations and those working in post-authoritarian, conflict and post-conflict environments, face considerable security and safety risks.[111] In their work, human rights NGOs and their supporters "are strongly constrained by local conditions. Most importantly, ruling regimes may impose strong restrictions against organised human rights advocacy, to the point of imposing arbitrary, draconian punishments on all those who try. There are also other types of barriers. Based on past national and local experiences, human rights NGOs may be associated with undesirable imposition of alien standards and policies. And even when the will is there, more pressing needs and threats – such as poverty, economic

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[110] For instance, **Humanitarian Accountability Partnership.** [Internet], Available from: <www.hapinternational.org>. For publications on the HAP's approach, see [Internet], Available from:
<http://www.hapinternational.org/projects/publications.aspx#Bib>.
[111] Op. cit. Aall (2004) In: Carment and Schnabel eds. pp. 178-179

instability and civil conflict – necessarily limit locally available audiences and resources."[112] NGOs advocate human rights and 'name and shame' those involved in violations (such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch), and they promote open political and economic systems (such as the Open Society Foundation). Other NGOs work in conflictive and violent environments, where the risk of daily crime and violence meets the risk of acting and advocating against the interests of powerful local authorities or criminal networks (such as in the case of human rights NGOs opposing human trafficking). NGOs are working on their own guidance tools[113] or depend on the services of private security companies or support from international peace operations for security support. Security and safety concerns definitely limit the extent to which NGOs can effectively pursue their missions on the ground, particularly when acting against the interests of local and national political, economic and social elites.

The particular strengths, competencies and opportunities for NGOs to facilitate peace, development and stability, human rights promotion and human security provision are constrained and often stymied by their very weaknesses, particularly their lack of public accountability, their small size, unpredictable financial support and limited political clout. Lacking accountability leads, especially among smaller NGOs, to the pursuit of private, sometimes erratic agendas that are counterproductive to long-term engagement on behalf of society overall. Their small size limits the extent to which most NGOs can have an impact on larger trends

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[112] Op. cit. Schnabel and Horowitz eds. (2004) p. 1

[113] Van Brabant, K. (2000) Operational Security Management in Violent Environments: A Field Manual for Aid Agencies. **Good Practice Review, Humanitarian Practice Network.** June**.** London, Overseas Development Institute.

and developments beyond the confines of particular projects and sites of activity. Their dependence on external financial support limits the size and extent of activities they are able to support, while creating enormous pressure to please and satisfy donor interests and agendas that might run counter to project objectives. Moreover, dependence on short-term funding requires many NGOs to spend an unreasonably large amount of time on fundraising and reporting, or on the pursuit of readily measurable and impact-friendly activities that run counter to long-term agendas of sustainable conflict prevention and peace-building. Furthermore, projects with positive long-term potential are unlikely to be carried through to reach their intended objectives when erratic funding decisions driven by donors' political preferences and decisions leave NGOs no choice but to terminate activities and investments that render no quick and measurable result. In the end, many NGOs find themselves in the unfortunate situation of having to betray their own principles in order to stay in business: Their paymasters (often states and major foundations) leave them little other choice.

Finally, frustrated either by the repeated inability to facilitate long-term change or the precarious and unpredictable employment or contract conditions, many of those working in NGOs leave for more promising pastures in governmental and intergovernmental institutions. This is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand this capacity transfer strengthens the competence and capacity of governments and intergovernmental organizations to make better informed, more effective and meaningful contributions to peace-building. On the other hand, however, it deprives NGOs – especially local and small NGOs in the Global South – of talented, experienced and well connected,

'established' and respected individuals, further weakening their own capacity and political clout.

4. Conclusion: Towards effective NGO strategies in prioritising human rights along the conflict cycle

In the discussion above we have explored the opportunities and obstacles experienced by NGOs in their contributions to peace-building, including the promotion and protection of human rights. Compared to state and intergovernmental actors, NGOs have less political and financial clout with which they can reinforce their requests and demands. In advocating human rights, NGOs have to rely on the capacity and willingness of local and national civil society organizations, political parties or public officials to support their demands for human rights improvements. NGOs contribute to mainstreaming and embedding a deeper appreciation for and commitment to human rights provisions through their various functions: by monitoring human rights standards and performance; through advocacy; through education and training of officials, practitioners and academics; and through their efforts in sensitising and familiarising public audiences as well as political, cultural and religious authorities or private businesses. Some main lessons have emerged in the preceding examination of NGOs' contributions to embed human rights in responses along the conflict cycle. The remainder of this section will highlight those lessons.

The importance of collaborative efforts

NGOs realise that they can only be effective in a sustainable manner, particularly in situations of increased levels of violence and in closed societies with authoritarian rule, when they collaborate with other like-minded NGOs, with state actors or international organizations. Still, for some of the reasons already mentioned above, many NGOs are not used or ready to coordinate their work with others. They are afraid of losing their independence, flexibility or financial backing as a consequence of unfavourable divisions of labour. They also fear losing control over their own programmes, instead becoming small and insignificant contributors to the efforts of larger and more influential actors whose approaches and objectives they might not even condone.

The importance of local NGO efforts

It is often the sum of many small and silent violations out in the countryside, unnoticed by failing or failed states who do not have the means, will and physical presence to see and mitigate the violation of human rights and enforce their provision, that create the monstrosity of overall levels of rights violations. The efforts by local NGOs and other civil society and grassroots initiatives contribute greatly to rights promotion at all levels of the conflict cycle. If they want to contribute more than symbolic gestures, they need to collaborate with other actors to assure that, for instance, locally successful programmes secure the necessary financing to be maintained, and that successful initiatives are carried to the rest of the country. While particularly small local NGOs might make extremely helpful contributions in

furthering awareness of human rights violations and respect for human rights provision, they need partners to carry their successful experiences beyond the limited confines of their own activities. They might be willing to join larger-scale efforts that are initiated and financed by larger national and international NGOs who can secure funds, political clout and contacts with broader NGO networks and international organizations. Together, they might have enough power and influence to help translate real needs into official government policy, thus aligning local and national practice with international standards.

The deterrent role of NGOs' human rights advocacy

NGOs – small and large, local and international – play important roles in securing human rights a central place in peace and conflict management (whereas, as is all too often forgotten, the management of peace is as critical and challenging a task as that of managing conflict!). Highlighting international human rights norms and the presence and consequence of their violation can serve as a powerful deterrent. It forces states and the international community to consider shared norms, apply them at early stages and by doing so, prevent crises and avert much suffering. It also alerts populations to the existence of and their rightful entitlement to a wide range of social, economic, political and civil rights created to meet their basic human needs and provide for their basic human security requirements.

The positive impact of human rights promotion on the conflict cycle

The promotion, provision and protection of human rights fosters and reinvigorates democratisation; facilitates economic development and thus narrows the inequality gap; addresses and prevents violent conflict; and thus reduces conflict-related violations. These are all important contributions to breaking out of the vicious conflict 'cycle'. In addition, as mentioned previously in the chapter, the creation of international human rights norms and the decentralised promotion of these norms by NGOs tend to have a greater impact than actions taken by states – whether individually through their own foreign policies or collectively through decisions of intergovernmental organizations. In large part thanks to the work of local and international NGOs, human rights norms have become difficult to ignore for even the most repressive regimes.[114] As a result, as Aall notes, NGOs' "ability to gain the ear of influential decision-makers in the national capitals of powerful states is important as a prod to action in responding to early signs of conflict."[115]

NGOs' comparative advantages

NGOs tend to be smaller, more flexible, informal and adaptive than state and intergovernmental actors. They tend to be primarily focused on the provision of human security, unlike state and intergovernmental actors whose actions are also heavily influenced by larger political or geostrategic interests. NGOs are thus destined to allow more effective

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[114] Op. cit. Schnabel and Horowitz (2002) p. 1
[115] Op. cit. Aall (2004) In: Carment and Schnabel p. 183

and sustainable engagement in human rights promotion and provision at all stages of the conflict cycle. The greatest challenge in the consolidation of sustainable and positive peace is the ability to establish and maintain institutions, structures and processes that allow for the non-violent and non-aggressive channelling of tensions and conflicts. That challenge could be mastered with the help of effective 'oversight' and support from non-governmental actors that are sufficiently detached from elite-driven economic and political interests, which often stand in the way of the provision of populations' human (security) needs.

In order to analyse, select and design NGO's options for engagement along the stages of the conflict cycle – or, as is the preferred term in this chapter, along the stages of peace and conflict dynamics (see Table 1) – and subsequently design and carry out the most effective engagement strategies it is important to collect, assess and understand for each individual stage the following information:

- the specific nature and characteristics of the specific stage;
- the relevance of human rights provision and violation as both cause and consequence (and thus evidence) of violence and tension, but also of peace and stability;
- the actual potential roles of NGOs for human rights promotion;
- the actual potential positive impact of NGOs' human rights work on human security, peace and stability;
- and the specific requirements for cooperation and coordination of NGO activities among themselves and in partnership with state and intergovernmental actors.

If donors (mostly government donors) embrace a similarly inclusive and coordinated approach in planning and funding their support for NGOs, a significant step would be taken towards ensuring that human rights and human security concerns are adequately embedded along the conflict cycle as the core driving forces of conflict prevention, management and peace building activities.