

Building Civil Society in Post- Conflict Environments: From The Micro to The Macro

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Post-conflict

- Importance of democratic alternation
 - On the cheap (Ottaway)
 - Fast (Paris)
 - Externally defined (everyone else)
- But good reasons:
 - Often desired by many people
 - Lack of it clearly a cause of violence
 - What if we did *not* have them?

Civil society

- Crucial element of democracy agenda
 - Also of human rights agenda
 - Sense that its weakness has contributed to violence
 - Crucial to achieve development goals
 - Especially with weak states and major immediate needs
- one stone, many big dead birds

RWANDA and BURUNDI

- sub-contracting aid through NGOs
 - Incl. in conflict-specific new sectors (justice, reconciliation, trauma, governance)
 - Dominated by foreign ones
 - Decreasing importance
 - As emergency went away
 - As government became more assertive
 - As harmonization and state-strengthening agenda is moving up (post-Washington consensus)

- Promotion of grassroots organizations in emergency or development projects
 - Like before the war, but much harder to do
 - Social divisions and distrust; little community
 - Fewer projects in rural areas, with weak skills
 - Poverty and misery
 - Serve to capture aid benefits, little sustainability
 - Weak representation, often controlled by elites

- Support to selected local NGOs as tool for democracy
 - Foremost women, human rights, but also conflict resolution, development
 - Institutional, program, or advocacy support
 - Strong resistance by state
 - Deep divisions between NGOs and within them
 - Low internal democratic quality
 - Removed from the field
 - Failure of networks

In short, few results...

- ← Difficulty of the context and the aims: we over-promise and over-reach
- ← Project aid is a very weak tool
- ← Politically extremely difficult to make it work
- ← Fundamentally misunderstands how civil society develops

Aid as Institutional destruction

- projects are small, short periods of time, administratively heavy and costly, large delays between identification and implementation, little flexibility, non-transparent selection and design criteria.
 - keep many NGOs and CBOs alive
 - But dependent, weak, and outward-oriented
 - tremendous competition between them
- weaken rather than strengthen civil society.

Politically untenable

- Highly political

- Simplistic dichotomies between “good” civil society and “bad” state
- Only those opposed to state are civil society
- Misunderstands roots of state behavior in society
- Internal political games inside NGOs

→ highly confrontational (which aid projects are bound to lose) and with tenuous results

Deals with the symptoms, but not the causes of civil society

- Building a genuine civil society is not same as funding popular or “good” NGOs (even if these NGOs could somehow be objectively proven to be the “best” money can buy).
- Requires people to engage in collective action, to build trust and confidence in their own capacities and the actions of others, to develop the ability to oppose and negotiate and ally themselves with other groups within civil society and with government as need requires, to learn from mistakes.

→ transition from a set of highly personalized relationships, in which individuals and organizations seek access to ad hoc benefits as clients (of the state, of local elites, *and of the development aid system*), to much more institutionalized relationships governed by predictable, transparent rules, in which individuals and groups are able to demand access to rights as citizens

Step back: recent IDS work on building effective states

- In quick succession, donors have advocated state-led development, then marketization and the retrenchment of government from core functions, followed by democratization, decentralization, the establishment of autonomous agencies, the creation of public-private partnerships, and civil society participation in the delivery of core services. All this has been imposed on poor countries with weak institutions, many of them still in the process of basic state-building, and in the context of a rapidly changing global environment.

- Donors have consistently been unrealistic about the capacity required to manage complex processes of change, and have virtually ignored the need to build a social and political consensus for such change. They have expected poor countries to put in place a range of 'best practice' institutions, which are far more sophisticated than those present in OECD countries at a similar stage of their economic development. And they have assumed that creating those institutions involves little more than the supply of material resources and technical assistance.

Crucial elements

- Social bargaining
- Social learning
- Especially, but not only, poor people

Concretely: civil society strategy

- Incentives for collective action by poor people acting as citizens rather than clients
- medium-term and structural, rather than only direct short-term support for CSOs;
- cut across all fields of development, not only civil society sector work;
- focus as much on the state as on existing civil society organizations;
- program design (our behavior) is crucial
- Adapted to local circumstances: no best practices possible

examples

- Decentralization/ubudehe in Rwanda → Unsworth + Uvin 2002, for DfID
- Communal support in Burundi → Uvin 2005, for DfID

Rwanda: ubudehe

- Essentially Community-Driven Reconstruction scheme
- Block grants to lowest level of state, collines
- 1 province, to be scaled up nationwide
- EU prime donor, but others too, all with their own amounts, methodologies, levels of intervention, (overlapping) partners

Unsworth/Uvin recommendations

- For donor support to decentralization / ubudehe to contribute to civil society building and changed state / society relations, it needs to have four crucial features.
 - Predictable
 - Pooled
 - Locally accountable
 - Facilitated.

Predictable (and long-term)

- creates incentives for wider range of people to mobilize
- allows people to acquire the experience to plan for, manage, and monitor resources, to learn from mistakes, to gain confidence in their capacities.

Pooled

- obvious ethical reasons
 - reduce incentives that undermine collective action
 - international community is reinforcing clientelist system and power of intermediaries
 - Predictable + pooled funding can provide the basis for collective action towards the state and for learning
- Rights and citizenship

Local accountability

- accountability mechanisms not of or to donors but those envisioned by the law: local committees, audit systems, elections, etc.
- Better public expenditure management is an essential building block for reducing distrust of government, and providing entry points for civil society to challenge misuse or perceived unfairness.

Burundi : Local governance

Two main approaches:

- channel support (training, TA, investment funds) through the government machinery down to the communes and local technical services (UNDP, EU, DfID, etc.)
 - in a few provinces
 - training to newly elected leaders
 - investment in communal and community infrastructures
- bypass the public structures and directly interact with the population, typically through the creation of committees or associations (Bank, NGOs, ...)
 - Ad-hoc, set-up by themselves
 - In a few communes or provinces
 - Bypassing local administration

Uvin recommendations

- *The creation of better institutions in Burundi cannot but be the result of internal politics, bargaining, and social learning: this will take a lot of time, and the main question for donors is how they can promote it without controlling it.*
This does not mean that there is no place for donor activism in this field, but it must take the form of guaranteeing a process, a space in which people can learn and bargain, rather than creating the actual final institutions.

- anchor projects in citizens' representative institutions –do not create your own: e.g. conseil de colline
- reflect critically on the way much development aid directly contributes to weak governance : one thing we do control is our own behavior
- Multiply opportunities for meaningful bottom-up planning : runs counter to history in Burundi
- utmost transparency towards and from *all* players
- Build on already ongoing *local* dynamics (new local institutions; free press; new politicians; anger...)

