THE ROLE OF NGOS AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES

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Introduction:

Wars leave societies destroyed and post-conflict recovery requires a lot of financial resources. Currently, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, nearly 60 countries are in conflict or have recently come out of conflict; for the most part, these countries are the poorest on the planet.¹ Helping these states in their reconstruction processes is one of the most complex challenges that the international community faces.

The majority of these conflicts and the eventual reconstruction processes take place in fragile states, which do not have the necessary resources and require external financial assistance in order to get through this phase. States fail when they cannot provide political goods to their society and lose legitimacy in the face of their citizens. Approximately half of the states of the world are in a “weakening” process, i.e. they are becoming “fragile”. Some, like Somalia, have reached collapse. The governments of most of these states confront armed revolts, with long-term violence (like in Angola, Burundi and Sudan), directed towards the government and justified by demands for political or geographical autonomy, discrepancies between different communities for ethnic, religious or other reasons, and/or the attempt to control the scarce resources available. These states do not control their borders or their territory, their elite classes are corrupt and establish client networks that absorb or exclude their citizens so that they allow themselves to be co-opted by the regime, they are not capable of offering them security or guaranteeing them the application of the law. The citizens, then, transfer their loyalties to other sub-state actors (religious leaders, clan chiefs, mafia bosses, warlords) in search of security. Supporting the strengthening of these states to prevent their fall is a lot easier than reconstructing them once they have collapsed, as is evidenced by Afghanistan: the reconstruction is long, expensive and difficult.² And in the current international context, the commitment of central states to these situations is oscillating and, in the majority of the cases, is non-existent.

The civil wars, characteristic of the current international context, are more harmful than international wars because they take place within the territory of a single state and contribute to weaken its institutions. The social capital can remain irreparably damaged because societies, neighbors and even families are often divided by war. In contrast, international wars can strengthen the state, provide social cohesion and mobilize certain economic sectors despite the loss of human lives and material destruction. Therefore, reconstruction is more difficult in the case of civil wars. Each post-conflict situation is different but can some common characteristics can be identified (some of which are also found in countries without conflict, but their impact is greater in times of post-conflict):³

- Control of the state by the elite, especially the military but also the oligarchy associated with the government;
- Fragile process to consolidate peace, and rivalries between former enemies that encourage political instability. Added to this is the culture of violence inherited from the war or conflict and a large quantity of light weapons among the population;
- Lack of confidence by the socio-economic actors, which do not want to invest in basic sectors like agriculture; and

³Interworks, World Bank Post-Conflict Unit, The transition from War to Peace: An Overview, World Bank, April 1999.
State is weak in its judicial, fiscal and administrative capacities.


During the 1990s, the international donor community pledged more than one hundred billion dollars in aid to three dozen countries recovering from violent conflict. From Cambodia to Bosnia, El Salvador to Rwanda, and Tajikistan to Lebanon, multilateral and bilateral donors have supported conflict resolution and peace-building with generous grants, loans and technical assistance. The extent of work and the international community’s involvement varies from country to country, but in situations where an armed conflict has come to an end, the rehabilitation and reconstruction activities fall within a larger and more complex peace-building framework. Rehabilitation incorporates all of these processes, approaches, activities, instruments and resources that are necessary to turn the conflicts and their risks of erupting into violence, into situations of stable, just and lasting peace. It is presented in three phases:

- Short-term: crisis management and the establishment of agreements among the parties;
- Medium-term: post-conflict rehabilitation; and
- Long-term: transformation of the context, attitudes, behavior and incompatibilities, which led to the outbreak of violence.

Sustainable Peace building implies a complete re-constitution of the state and the society, which includes socio-economic reforms to overcome the “profound causes” of the war and broad political and institutional reforms meant to democratize the country and establish a new political system and representative governing institutions that are legitimate and effective and capable of channeling the social tensions and allowing for a peaceful resolution, thereby making it possible for a stable and lasting peace. Additionally, there is the challenge of national reconciliation, which seeks to overcome the divisions and the hatreds of the war and create a new climate of confidence and a culture of peace.

In the peacebuilding process five major dimensions can be identified:

1. **Political and Institutional Dimension**: democratization, state reform and “good governance”, respect and the upholding of human rights and national reconciliation.
2. **Military and Security Dimension**: demobilization, demilitarization, disarmament, reintegration of the former combatants and de-mining.
3. **Social Dimension**: return and reintegration of displaced and refugee populations, rehabilitation of basic social services, attention to the needs of the most vulnerable groups (women, children, groups in situations of extreme poverty, those handicapped by the war), reactivation of the social fabric.
4. **Economic Dimension**: overcome the distortions of the “economy of war”, reestablish a stable macro-economic framework, reconstruct the basic infrastructure.

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4 “Rehabilitation” is understood as the overall scheme of actions carried out after a disaster to re-establish the functioning of essential services, support the efforts of the victims to repair on their own accord the material damages and community facilities, re-start economic activities and provide the necessary aid for the psychological and social well-being of the survivors. The Development Aid Committee of the OCDE (1997: 10) provides the following definition: actions that seek to initiate the reconstruction of social infrastructure and productive base at the national and local levels, with the aim of allowing for life and work possibilities to be established and the conditions of self-sufficiency of populations affected by humanitarian crises.

5 Jose Antonio Sanahuja, *La vinculación entre los socorros, la rehabilitación y el desarrollo: más allá del continuum humanitario*, Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja, Mimeo, 1999
productive infrastructure, reactivate the production, demand and the local markets, strengthen food security, promote structural reforms – fiscal reform, agricultural reform – that allow for the situations of poverty, inequality and exclusion to be overcome, which in many cases instigated the war and worsened during it.

5. **Environmental Dimension**: ensure a sustainable management of the natural resources as of equitable landlords / access to these resources.

Therefore, the concept of sustainable peacebuilding is not limited to physical infrastructure or the re-launching of the economy, as it addresses national reconciliation and the establishment of a new institutional and political framework to resolve conflicts peacefully and to definitively break the cycle of violence.

Sustainable Peacebuilding process should be designed while taking into consideration the links between different types of aid (emergency – post-conflict rehabilitation – development). It is necessary to link together emergency situations with development and both must be linked with post-war rehabilitation. The three dimensions are interrelated. The ultimate objective is the transformation of the context, as well as the attitudes, behavior and incompatibilities of the groups, so that they are turned into an engine for peace. Rehabilitation is considered a phase that immediately follows the emergency, in which short-term and medium-term actions are taken to reestablish services and basic infrastructures.

Peace-building forms part of a development strategy at the medium and long-terms. Therefore, some basic principles are presented:

- Physical reconstruction at the short-term should not go against the medium-term objectives of reconciliation and resolution of the underlying incompatibilities.
- Throughout the entire process the local population should be empowered with the long-term aim of it being autonomous in the handling of its own peace-building process.

An important element highlighted by the DAC and SDDIR in this process is the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants; the voluntary resettlement of refugees or internally displaced persons. Reinsertion is the first important step towards national reconciliation and must take place within a legal framework that includes guarantees for the return of the refugees and former combatants, but it cannot be initiated on a wide scale until zones for return without security risks have been identified. Another area of action of rehabilitation is the society: supporting the re-composition of the social fabric, the overcoming of psychological effects of war and the promotion of the most vulnerable and affected sectors, like women and children.

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8 The Stockholm Initiative on Disarmament Demobilisation Reintegration was initiated in November 2004, by State Secretary for Foreign Affairs; The aim being to propose ways and means that can contribute to an improved framework in which DDR processes can be planned and implemented. More information: http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/4890
Some open issues with regard to reconstruction processes and peacebuilding

Firstly, it is necessary to point out that there is no definition for post-conflict rehabilitation and peacebuilding that has been agreed to by the consensus needed in order for them to be used by the different actors that participate in the process. Integrated perspectives in terms of what is referred to as the causes of the conflict or the temporary phases that are designed and implemented for the different tasks of aid do not exist either.

On the other hand, it is important that there be a greater coherence among the policies of prevention and reaction at the system and structural levels. This means taking on a larger commitment with the structural factors that fuel the outbreak of violence: in that, with the reduction of inequalities at the world level, greater respect for international laws, greater control on the exportation of arms, diamonds and other natural resources like petroleum and gas, and a much stricter regulation on commercial and financial flows.\(^9\)

International NGOs as an Actor in peace-building in peacebuilding processes

There is no international actor that can take on single-handedly, the weight of managing post-conflict rehabilitation aid in terms of peace-building. There is a clear lack of definition with regard to who, within the international community, should lead the coordination of post-conflict rehabilitation aid.

Among the various actors that participate in these processes are the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which fulfill a pivotal role in terms of establishing and maintaining essential services, assisting the refugee and internally displaced populations and helping to strengthen societies. The NGO sector is gaining importance in the framework of official aid.\(^10\)

Rehabilitation and reconstruction programs, from the perspective of the NGOs, should not have as their aim the mere substitution or reparation of the infrastructure and the material resources damaged by a disaster. They should be presented in such a way that they strengthen administrative, social and economic administrations of the affected communities and contribute to reestablish psychological well-being.

The NGOs, therefore, must orient themselves, preferably, towards those projects that allow the affected population to overcome by themselves the situation, which contributes to a large extent to increase the capacities of the people to be self-sufficient and to be able to get on by themselves. Using as much as possible the local resources and capacities is the starting point of a development process. These are some examples and criteria for intervention that are important to point out:

- The intervention of the NGOs is more effective if it is placed in a general framework of sustainable peacebuilding, if it is based on its capacities and the priorities and it allows for the people affected by war to be attended in a neutral and impartial manner.
- The identification of projects and programs of the NGOs and other actors must be based on the careful review of the national context and the international initiatives, to ensure coordination and prevent duplications.


\(^10\) David Sogge, *Compasión y cálculo*, Icaria/ Transnational Institute, Barcelona, 1998, p. 36
Among the interventions of great interest for the NGOs, due to their local nature, are the “area-based rehabilitation and reintegration schemes at the local level” according to the classification of the DAC of the OCDE\textsuperscript{11}, which are oriented towards the reintegration of displaced populations and/or former combatants, and have a community nature and an integrated approach.

In the area of national reconciliation, the development NGOs can carry out contributions of major importance by promoting forms of community organization around rehabilitation, reconstruction and development projects, which involve vulnerable people that belong to different groups, encouraging dialogue, communication, the coming together of the parties, peaceful resolution of disputes and inter-community relationships based on mutual trust and shared values\textsuperscript{12}.

The promotion of the participation and the strengthening of the organizations of the civil society at the local level represents, in this context, a positive contribution to the aims of democratization and good governance that usually prevail in the post-conflict reconstruction processes.

The process of empowerment\textsuperscript{13} is, in consequence, the crux of the work of some NGOs that try to strengthen the abilities of people, communities and institutions, in order to help the people be stronger and less vulnerable and to have greater control over everything that affects their lives. This approach considers that situations of vulnerability and poverty are often caused by situations of discrimination or by the exclusion of certain groups of the population from public matters and from decision-making processes. The development of capacities and the empowerment is equally applicable to humanitarian aid and rehabilitation situations, to prevent that the people and communities affected are treated as passive, dependent and desperate receptors of aid, which would later worsen their vulnerabilities\textsuperscript{14}.

Emergency, rehabilitation and development activities usually involve transfers of resources, technical and knowledge, but should be also based on the use of local resources, wisdom and aptitudes, and in turn contributing to strengthen them and re-value them. Even the weakest and most vulnerable people of a community have resources, aptitudes and practical knowledge that, while limited, can help them to value themselves and help others, decreasing their vulnerability. With the same logic, the interventions will seek the support and the collaboration of the organization that already exist in the community or will try to promote them.

The participation is an essential component of the development process of capacities and empowerment.\textsuperscript{15} The strengthening of the capacities requires that the beneficiaries participate in the activities of rehabilitation and development, and beyond the short-term


\textsuperscript{12} OCDE, 1997, \textit{opus cit.}, pp.45-46.

\textsuperscript{13} We understand empowerment as the process through which people, organizations and groups that lack power become aware of the dynamics of power that affect their fundamental contexts; they obtain recourses and develop the skills and the ability to gain a reasonable level of control over their own lives; they exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and support the empowerment of other people in the community. (Rowlands 1998).

\textsuperscript{14} Martha Thompson, “Empowerment and Survival: Humanitarian Work in Civil Conflict”, \textit{Development in Practice} vol.6, número 4, noviembre 1996 (parte!) y volumen 7, número 1, febrero 1997 (parte2).

\textsuperscript{15} We understand participation as a process through which the people and communities with legitimate interests in a project or operation influence the decisions that affect them, both in the action itself and in the environment in which it is carried out.
humanitarian imperatives, in the distribution of assistance, with the aim of respecting their needs and priorities.

The NGOs have a broad range of options, still to explore, so that their development activities converge and mutually reinforce each other, with the purpose of peace-building. Actions that confront structural factors of vulnerability and are oriented to the strengthening of the capacities of local organizations to confront the crisis, and especially the "peace capacities", as Mary B. Anderson affirms 16, which encourages dialogue and negotiation and links people together, weakening the dynamics that push a society to divide and confront itself in a bloody armed confrontation.

Some risks of the actions of the NGOs

The work of the NGOs allows the public to have the impression that it is doing something and in many occasions it is quite effective work. But there is the risk that this work frees the public authorities of their responsibilities. In certain contexts, the NGOs are assuming tasks and providing services that would be the government's responsibility. Another problem is the large number of NGOs that appear in the field, some of which do not have any experience.

On the other hand, there is the risk that the donors provide funds to the NGOs so that they simply work as implementers of projects, which can lead to these organizations to become mere agents of governmental policies, both in terms of international and local NGOs.

Civil Society and Local NGOs

One of the most devastating legacies of violent conflict is the polarization of social relationships. The conditions of insecurity contribute to the creation of a lasting social mistrust. Extending communication bridges again between the social groups and promoting participation in political life are essential requirements for social reconciliation.

The support of the civil society must contribute to conciliate the interests of the different groups over the long-term. It is necessary to determine who the actors of the civil society are that can drive the mechanisms that are key to consolidating peace and reconciliation within the communities and avoid involuntarily backing the forces that instigated the war.

Civil society is a concept with different meanings and approaches. In the institutional fragile states of the international system, civil society is the collection of diverse groups and social organizations that is strong enough to provide autonomy and protection to individuals from the authoritarian and hegemonic tendencies of states. But if on the one hand civil society is regarded as antithetic to the state, on the other it is the state that protects and makes the civil society possible. 17

A modern and comprehensive interpretation of civil society gathers the concepts and sectors of the rule of law, organized forms of social and family life, social movements and civic activists, charities, voluntary associations, third sector and identity groups. At the end of the day, civil society is an arena of social actors that have an open dialogue as part of


social relations, in which they manage the public affairs using reason and Law instead of violence.\(^{18}\)

According to Mary B. Anderson\(^{19}\), in all civil wars there are elements that connect the people with the fight. This means that in all societies, capacities for peace exist. In order to work for peace it is important, therefore, to identify the elements that provoke tension and those that offer opportunities for peace.

Among the elements that divide are the armies or gangs, the production and distribution of arms, the war propaganda apparatuses, and the institutions or systems that have traditionally separated the groups of people, thereby causing tension between them (walls, systems of apartheid, unequal rights, etc.). These elements also include:

- Violence, threats, torture, brutality, displacements and expulsions of people, collective punishments, etc.
- Diverging interests in the access to power and resources.
- Values like religion, ethnicity, language, which can be used to separate.
- Different perceptions of the world, regarding good and evil, what is fair and unfair, which is explained by different frames of reference.
- Some symbols can contribute to accentuate the differences and provoke suspicions and fear among groups.

And among the elements or capacities for peace, the following are highlighted:

- In many societies where civil wars break out, some institutions like the communications system, for example the Internet or the media, help people to remain connected with the "other side".
- There are always people that do not accept the demonization of the other, recognizing mistakes.
- Respect for children, religion, the maintenance of the basic services can act as an element of connection between the two sides.
- A common experience can serve as a starting point to connect groups in conflict.
- Art, music, literature, ceremonies can all help to establish links among the parties in conflict.

Peace-building and reconciliation must focus on promoting social networks and organization that can act as elements of stability in the society. It is important to provide support for local community organization to help them increase their capacities and be receptive to the needs of their social environment. Local NGOs, women’s associations, multi-ethnic groups, can help excluded groups to get better access to the judicial, administrative, and communications systems.

Certain actors of the civil society (networks of human rights and peace groups, the independent media, community leaders, unions) can play an important role in building bridges between polarized groups, promoting dialogue and reconciliation.

\(^{19}\) Mary B. Anderson, *Do no Harm*. How aid can support peace or war, Lynne Rienner Publisher, Estados Unidos/Reino Unido, pp.23-33.
The local traditional authorities, at the same time, are institutions that have evolved over time to help manage the tensions in the community. The informal mechanisms for the resolution of disputes have an enormous influence on the political leaders. Support of traditional initiatives for peace-building, like advice from elders or religious leaders, is important in peace-building and reconciliation processes. It is a question of fomenting a relationship of trust with local partners.

With relation to the NGO’s, many of the NGO’s of the states that experience a post-conflict situation were born out of an emergency context and face huge problems. Amongst them we could mention: lack of means to act and utter dependence on external financial resources; lack of qualified human resources; vulnerability to governmental pressures; deficient level of articulation between themselves and with international networks. All of these factors make it hard to create a civil society’s “agenda” for their country’s future. But the NGOs play a crucial role in raising public awareness and prompting action for the promotion of certain values, ideas and actions.

In general, NGO’s and social movements need to explain the themes they work on and the activities they pursue to the society, public authorities and other social sectors. The information they produce is instrumental and has a purpose: to improve the quality of people’s lives.

In a transition context, it is urgent to develop NGOs and the civil society’s capacity to elaborate and disseminate their messages and priorities, as well as the media’s capacity to convey different perspectives from the dominant discourse, alongside the priorities of the different groups in society.

The Media in Post-Conflict Situations

The media is an important instrument in post-conflict situations. Experiences in Central America and some African countries show that the most powerful economic and political domestic and foreign actors are also aware of its importance. As wars or conflicts come to an end, these actors create newspapers, weekly magazines, TV and radio stations; they absorb or destroy the independent critical media (if it ever existed) and take advantage of or manipulate the democratic media while social groups, NGOs, intellectuals and progressive sectors discuss reconstruction projects and fundraising processes.

In the name of free media and the right of free information, the market and private actors with selfish and monopolistic interests gain the informative ground. In a short period of time the media world belongs to them. Politics turns into a form of entertainment; social life events; anecdotes; and the needs of the people are replaced by demagogic TV programs. In a post-conflict situation the media can then play a positive or an improper role, promoting peace and reconciliation or perhaps hatred and further disintegration. Nevertheless, there is a need for democratic social actors to have access to the media and to establish strategic communications projects that are intimately linked to the civil society.

The media sector has an important role to play in reconstruction processes. Media outlets are the instruments that can or cannot:

1. provide information about the society and economic and political structures to a fragmented society;
2. create social cohesion and social human capital;
3. show the links and connections among different social actors;

4. help to identify particular crucial actors and their roles, e.g. women;\textsuperscript{21}
5. explain the connections of the country and its economy to the international economic and political system;
6. provide information about other experiences of post-conflict, reconciliation e.g. examples of Central America;
7. help to create a common identity under a plural democratic system and how to integrate its vision of the country into the international context;
8. help the social actors of the civil society to express their needs, perceptions, fears and expectations; and
9. facilitate the reintegration of hundreds of thousands combatants and refugees.

The significance of the media is obvious: a reliable news media enables well-informed citizen decision-making that, when freely exercised, contributes to the democratization process. In societies emerging from conflict, an independent media can also play an important role in conflict resolution and reconciliation. Reliability refers to journalism that is accurate, impartial and socially responsible. However, particular post-conflict situations such as state-controlled ownership, lack of appropriate equipment and (self) censorship have often hampered the development of local institutional capacity in the field of communications. Where the diversity of media does exist, it has proven to be a minefield of highly ‘partisanized’ outlets producing unreliable journalism, which may in turn destabilize the fragile democratic process. The establishment of a well-functioning media sector, therefore, requires a long-term commitment from the international community and more attention devoted to the economic viability of independent media as a factor in their sustainability.\textsuperscript{22} Since free, independent and reliable news media entities play such a crucial role, media assistance has become a key priority for any donor promoting democratization.

As a result, international organizations, bilateral donors and NGOs have begun to explore opportunities for media support programs (also called media assistance). The UN included a major media initiative in the transitional process in Cambodia (1992-1993) and in almost every other UN intervention since then. Interest in the media’s role in sustaining peace and democratic transitions continues to increase.

The media can play a critical role in exacerbating war or consolidating peace. On the one hand, they can incite violence or distribute biased information. At the extreme there is hate media, which can directly incite a population toward genocide or ethnic cleansing, as did Radio Mille Collines in Rwanda in 1994 and Serbian and Bosnian-Serbian media during the early 1990s. On the other hand, they can be a powerful tool in peace-building and democratic development by denouncing abuses, holding the powerful accountable, providing information and serving as an outlet for different opinions and perspectives. At its best, it is the safeguard of democratic governance because it means accurate and balanced reporting, which fairly represents a diverse range of views sufficient for the public to make well-informed choices. Without reliable news and information, people in conflict and post-conflict zones are forced to rely on rumors, and rumors invariably spread distrust and stereotypes, which in turn fuels the war.\textsuperscript{23}

The media can also have a role in terms of social education, addressing many issues of concern to the target audience, and in the process helping to reduce tensions and build trust within the society. Important information can be relayed to the populations regarding

health, literacy, the environment; in areas of conflict or post-conflict, this can include information on landmine awareness, war trauma, the Geneva Conventions or the peace accords and demobilization processes, and it may also ensure that each side to a dispute is allowed to hear the other’s position, thereby opening lines of communication between them. The DAC highlights that donors need to contribute to the development of those institutions and processes, within the state and civil society, which will stimulate and sustain democratization. In relation to the media there are some areas of donor support.

- Assistance in establishing or revising appropriate laws on the independence and freedom of the media;
- Training for local staff in reporting on conflicts, to help develop high quality and accurate coverage;
- Establishment or maintenance of autonomous national and local media institutions and their commitment to high professional and ethical standards;
- Local coverage of events by the international media; and
- Projects and programs that assist state actors to understand and support the role of the media in a democratic society, and which provide material, financial and legal assistance to the media to pursue the same goal.

These are some examples of media for peace:

- The Center for Conflict Resolution in Uganda holds workshops for media outlets and members to examine their roles in peace-building and to develop conflict resolution skills, including sensitizing reporters to traditional African mechanisms of dealing with peace and reconciliation;
- Studio Ijambo was created by Search for Common Ground to specifically counter a recurrence in Burundi of genocidal hate radio in Rwanda. The production studio uses teams of Hutu and Tutsi journalists to produce multiple language programs fostering reconciliation through public affairs and entertainment programming for local stations’ use;
- Radio Blue Sky was established for the UN in Kosovo by Foundation Hirondelle in 1999, as an emergency source of information programs to specifically open dialogue and democratic debate in Albanian, Serbian and Turkish communities. In July 2000, it achieved local sustainability as the second network of public service broadcaster RTK;
- UNTAC Radio was a UN intervention to inform the people of Cambodia about the United Nations Transitional Authority and the introduction of free elections. It expanded from modest broadcasting of basic primers on the democratic process in 1992 to country-wide educational, news, entertainment and public affairs radio programming promoting reconciliation.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the post-conflict reconstruction processes and the international involvement of the last years, it is deduced that there is a gap between the problems detected and the lessons learned and applied. There is growing media and political attention with respect to humanitarian issues, in comparison with the scarce political will that certain international actors has shown, especially governments, in terms of investing in peace-building processes at the mid- to long-term (processes that receive little media coverage). This is due to the fact that the decision-makers are more concerned about the short-term internal profitability that an action will give them and therefore do not take the

25 Ibid.
26 These examples, and many others, can be found in Ross Howard and others, Op. Cit.
lessons into consideration. For their part, those that prepare and write reports and suggest structural and operative changes do not have the political support that is desired.

This situation has become even worse with the changes in the international system since “September 11th”. The re-orientation of aid in terms of geography (towards those states that are considered “key” in the war against terrorism) and sectors (towards security and defense) leaves major areas in Africa, Latin American and Asia and large numbers of populations even more vulnerable than they were prior to this new international scenario. Besides this, the discourse on security and force creates a situation in which the roots of the crises, the disintegration and the violence are not analyzed and closes the door to a negotiated exit of numerous conflicts. The involvement of central states and international institutions in terms of their support towards post-conflict peace and peacebuilding processes is becoming, due to all of this, more and more selective. Nevertheless, the fact that these global problems are not being addressed and their post-war processes are not being supported, can lead to the deterioration of these crises and the outbreak of new conflicts.

On the other hand, it is still unclear, within the international society, who should lead the coordination of activities on the ground. Consequently, this leads to frequent conflicts in terms of the roles and functions of those working on the ground. There are increasingly more and more international aid actors that assert that their ultimate goal is to guarantee the empowerment of the local institutions and civil society so that they are the ones that end up taking control of the peace-building processes. However, the broad support for the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission and related mechanisms reflects the interest to strengthen international efforts to rebuild societies damaged by war and to establish mechanisms of coordination among the different actors.

In practice, the aid creates a certain culture of dependency, considered by some to be a type of “neo-colonialism”. One example is the fact that the local actors, frequently, do not participate in the design, implementation and especially the evaluation of the programs and projects that affect them. Besides, both the major donors and certain NGOs are usually reluctant to be accountable to the affected population, limiting themselves to answer only to their headquarters or, in the case of the NGOs, to their funding partners. Instead of making the local population the main actors in the post-conflict rehabilitation process, this relegates them to mere receptors of aid, or the counterparts in charge of carrying out programs prepared by external experts.

A more positive action by the international NGOs must be directed towards the strengthening of local capacities, especially those groups, NGOs and organizations that can actively contribute to peace-building. In post-conflict situations the civil society is normally weak and poorly structured, and suffers from strong pressures from the governmental powers and, sometimes, from the groups that instigated the violence. The strengthening of the civil society is key so that it assumes responsibility for the process and participates in defining the reconstruction agenda, the development model and the future of the country. A key actor of the civil society is the media. The pluralism of the media outlets is basic for an exchange of information and perspectives regarding the type of society that is to be constructed, to denounce abuses and promote transparency, spread information on key aspects of the process and strengthen social groups that support the peace-building efforts. In sum, to create citizen awareness in societies where it is very weak or non-existent. The civil society and the media can mutually reinforce each other if they establish a constructive relationship: the media as a privileged channel so that the NGOs and other civil society groups make their demands and opinions known to the population; at the same time, the NGOs are a source of information on the reality experienced by the population, even in areas where other actors do not have access.
Lastly, it is necessary to recognize that there is no post-conflict rehabilitation model that is universally valid; but that each situation requires its own process from the financial and institutional resources available to which actors in the international society should assume responsibility in the post-conflict rehabilitation process. This is one of the keys to the complexity of these processes.

**Some Recommendations for Donors**

Development cooperation must be oriented towards the promotion of democracy, defining mechanisms of participation, as a part of the strategy to integrate individuals and groups within the societies, avoiding their exclusion and the possibility of the recurrence of violence. "In order for the peace to be sustainable and lasting, it must be built by the societies affected by conflict themselves and the international aid must contribute to support this process". According to the DAC report, the areas of support by the donors can be classified in three categories:

- Support of certain traditional institutions;
- The promotion of dialogue and cooperation in divided societies; and
- Support of the freedom of information and access to it by all members of society.

The donors must take into consideration the impact of the aid with regard to encouraging reconciliation or division processes:

- Promoting the necessary conditions so that the parties in conflict focus on finding solutions to their problems (instead of using the aid programs to mutually ensure a situation of dominance over the other group(s);
- Encouraging neutral spaces among the parties;
- Boosting the civil society’s participation;
- Guaranteeing that the local and international legal institutions will be able to fulfill their obligations to try those responsible for violations of human rights;
- Carrying out activities for the promotion and respect of human rights;
- Treating the psychological effects of war, especially in the most vulnerable groups, like children and victims of rape; and
- Truth commissions can, frequently, contribute to reconciliation and conflict resolutions because they promote the neutralization or deactivation of past conflicts.

Some proposals to strengthen and empower the civil society through local actors (NGOs) in the post-conflict phase are:

- Information: providing information on those issues that directly affect them;
- Public Consultation: the population should be consulted on issues that the external actors have perceived as problematic;
- Participation: encourage the people to commit themselves to achieve the objectives of the project with the aim of reducing costs and involving them, along with the external actors, in the design, implementation and evaluation of the projects; and

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- Mobilization: the local communities take the initiative, in an independent manner, and the external actors back up the process.