

## **ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN POST CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*The aftermath of any violent conflict is devastation, depression, degradation and ruins. This paper examines the role civil society organisations plays in lifting these burdens from survivors or victims of the conflicts. The objective is to understand the positive impact of these roles in rebuilding, reconstructing and rehabilitating people affected by conflict and then identify gaps and ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness in carrying out these responsibilities. Aided with the use of secondary data/content analysis it argues that political insecurity, violent extremism and state collapse are products of long term degenerative politics marked by a loss of control over economic and political space. Conclusively government alone cannot handle post conflict reconstruction, capacity building, economic development, peace-building etc. it does not also have the capacity to access interventionist funds/aids from international donors and agencies. The civil society organisations can access these funds; this will enable them play these paramount roles so they should be highly supported.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, Development, Organisations, Peace-building, Reconstruction.

### **Introduction**

Conflict is a phenomenon that is considered as part of human existence. It is conceived as the incompatibility of goals, interests and objectives. The conflicts that take place within a society may be the result of several factors. Explanations for social conflict, as put up by Faleti (2006), whether it is on a small or large scale, resulting from interactions between social groups or caused by external factors, have been an issue of common concern. It is often difficult to point to a single explanation for the emergence, escalation or protraction of conflict whether violent or otherwise and it is also common that those involved will even find it difficult to remember what led to the initial disagreement.

The world has witnessed several wars and conflicts that led to unnecessary destruction of lives and property. These include the 2 world wars (1914 – 1918 and 1939 – 1945), the Korean War (1950 – 1953), Vietnam war (1959 -75), Iran – Iraq war (1980 – 88), the Gulf war (1991), the Kosovo conflict (1998 – 1999) and the Middle East conflicts<sup>3</sup>. And with the current waves of violent revolutions sweeping the Middle East and its attendant institutional and social destructiveness; and humanitarian concerns, the hope of a world safe for human habitation seems elusive.

In the realm of peace and security in Africa, the 1990s witnessed dramatic and profound changes throughout the continent. With the conclusion of the Cold War, some of the major tensions between the East and West over the African battleground were markedly eased. South Africa and Namibia installed democratically elected governments. Relative peace and stability was established in Mozambique after three decades of confrontation between the warring parties. Widespread societal conflicts in Africa are often played out against the backdrop of deep poverty, illiteracy, and weak systems of governance.

### **Causes and Consequences of Conflicts**

It is not always possible to distinguish the cause of a conflict from its consequences. In fact, as a conflict emerges, cause and consequences tend to merge. Hostility might be a consequence of one phase of a conflict and a cause of the next. Perceived goal and interest incompatibility is perhaps the most basic cause of social conflict. Identity defence is also common, particularly in the contemporary world where group awareness and rights have assumed high visibility. Cultural differences, and particularly language, are yet other sources of separateness and difference. They create a sense of self and self-defence, which is probably another primary motive for conflict.

From time immemorial to the contemporary era, competition and conflict are regarded as inherent phenomena in both nature and society. Arguments to support this proposition that conflict and competition are inevitable and ubiquitous in all societies at all times abound. Similarly, in the best of circumstances, conflict and competition are bounded and circumscribed. Contending groups of people and rival nations get involved in violent conflicts either because their vital interests or their values or interests are challenged, or because their needs are not being met. The deprivation (actual or potential) of any important value induces fear, a sense of treat, and unhappiness.

Whether contending groups in a particular society are defined by ethnicity, religion, ideology, gender, or class identities, they have, by definition, different needs, interest, values and access to power and resources. Understandably, such differences necessarily generate social conflict and competition. What is at issue, therefore, is how to represent, manage and resolve inherent social conflicts before they degenerate into violence and massive destruction. Goodhand and Hulme (1999), observed that the aim of conflict prevention is not to prevent conflict as such, but to reduce the likelihood of specific conflicts becoming, or continuing to be, physically violent.

Political insecurity and violent conflicts became increasingly persistent realities of the development scene in most developing countries, especially Africa. Internal strife with deep historical roots surfaced in many countries on the continent. Ironically, while the international community paid less and less attention to security affairs in these countries, their institutional and organizational capacity to manage their pervasive conflicts was not developing at the same pace as the escalation of conflict. Against such a backdrop, peace and peacemaking in Africa emerge as critical issues in global politics.

Widespread societal conflicts in these states are often played out against the backdrop of deep poverty, illiteracy, and weak systems of governance. Undermined by unfavorable

terms of trade, like in the case of Africa, indebtedness and administrative failures, most states have not responded adequately to the critical social needs of their citizens. In the most extreme cases, insecurity has been reflected in traumatic episodes of collapsed and fragile states, as noted by Rugumamu (2001). Almost invariably, state collapses are products of long-term degenerative politics marked by a loss of control over the economic and political space. As would be expected, collapsed states in Africa and other developing nations have had harmful spillover effects on neighboring countries; the overflow of refugees and heightened ethnic tension (Zartman, 1995). In the process, what were once thought to be merely domestic conflicts, not in the purview of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and regional organizations such as the African Union (AU), have now been internationalized. External actors have been drawn into what was technically a civil war in order to restore peace and security. It has become increasingly apparent that Africa should develop capacity to deal with its own growing domestic security problems.

During a civil war a society diverts some of its resources from productive activities to destruction. This, according to Collier et al. (2003), causes a double loss: the loss of what the resources were previously contributing and the loss from the damage that they now inflict. The diversion of resources to the war effort often causes a decrease in other public expenditures such as those on infrastructure, health and education. During the war, the rebel forces tend to target physical infrastructure as part of their strategy. The main targets are the enemy's communications and support lines, such as telecommunications, airport, seaports, roads and bridges. They also loot and destroy housing, schools and health facilities.

Severe conflict, especially its most virulent ethnic forms, destroys much more than buildings and power plants. It short-circuits the rules that keep human interaction constructive and predictable, targets primarily the organizations and individuals who administer those rules, and wipes out most positive forms of social capital. Civil war can have the effect of switching behaviour from an equilibrium in which there is expectation for honesty to one in which there is expectation of corruption. Once the reputation for honesty has been lost, the incentive for honest behaviour in the future is greatly weakened. In this sense, therefore, post-conflict reconstruction is first and foremost an institutional challenge. Failure to meet that challenge dooms the effectiveness of any external facilitation and intervention. The more direct effects of civil war are the fatalities and population displacements. Violent conflict can decimate the human resources of a country when people are killed, maimed, or displaced in large numbers.

### **Post Conflict Reconstruction and Capacity Building**

Capacity building goes well beyond the provision of basic needs. It is a matter of development at all levels of society and includes institutional development, community development, and economic development. Some of the critical assets that individuals, organizations, communities, and governments need in order to achieve their full potential include knowledge, technical skills, institutional / organizational capacity, and the ability to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts. Building capacity involves skills transfer,

training, human resource management, organizational development, and the strengthening of communities and social networks.

It should be noted that once conflicts escalate into violence, the major concern of neighboring states, civil society, and the international community is to intervene in order to facilitate the mediation process and to help transform structures that produce insecurity and structural violence into positive peace (Galtung, 1995; 1998). Pertinent also is, the need to point out that conflicts in which the state is an effective arbiter do not present particular difficulties, since they are manageable within the national framework. The problem arises when the state itself is a party to the conflict, for under those conditions, external involvement becomes necessary.

In the wake of a country's experience of widespread violence, or where the preoccupation of the state is armed warfare, where the state has failed, or a significant part of the population is engaged in armed struggle with the state, requires construction. In such situations, external agencies need to understand the varying histories and the nature of the "failure" process. This will enable the agencies calibrate informed intervention measures to facilitate the transition from war to sustainable peace, support the resumption of economic and social development, and determine at what point in the post-conflict process is a particular country judged to have achieved a relative state of normalcy.

While post-conflict reconstruction, like post-natural disaster reconstruction, typically involves the repair and reconstruction of physical and economic infrastructure, it also entails a number of interventions aimed at rebuilding weakened institutions. The state institutions are usually so weakened that they are incapable of carrying out their traditional functions. Those interventions include jump-starting the economy, reconstructing the framework for democratic governance, rebuilding and maintaining key social infrastructure, and planning for financial normalization. In contrast, unlike post-disaster construction, post-conflict reconstruction assistance often operates amid tensions and suspicions between key actors within the country, which can and does influence relations among the engaged international parties as well. Moreover, a civil war alters both the level and the structure of economic activity in ways, which persist beyond the war. (World Bank, 1998; Colletta and Cullen, 2000).

The devastation of human, social and physical capital often found at the beginning of the post-conflict period, and the particular provisions of the peace agreement, require a paradigm shift for diagnosing and prescribing policy interventions, which should be conflict mitigating. The volatile and fast-changing circumstances of post-conflict societies demand a high degree of flexibility and speed in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects and programs. In addition, post-conflict interventions tend to have explicit objectives like supporting the transition from war to peace, resumption of economic and social development, reconciliation and reconstruction, human and institutional capacity building, a special investment fund to maintain social cohesion during the period of economic adjustment and poverty reduction and decentralization. Moreover, a post-conflict reconstruction process typically requires at least two decades of sustained effort, with the risk of war or recurrent risk of war (Collier, 2001).

It is against this background that most bilateral and multilateral organizations have established post-conflict research units to consolidate institutional learning on reconstruction issues, to support staff in developing and implementing reconstruction strategies, and to act as the focal point for partnership with other members of the international community. Capacity building needs to be addressed at three levels: individual, institutional and societal. All these layers of capacity are mutually interdependent. If one or the other is pursued on its own, development can become skewed and inefficient (Browne, 2002).

The immediate post-conflict capacity building interventions in societies affected by violent conflicts and devastating wars include the provision of technical assistance, training, best practices, tools and equipment and transport facilitation. The provision of technical assistance is deliberately targeted to a few carefully selected line ministries and government agencies. It largely consists of long-term advisors/experts and short-term consultants in the areas of economic management, policy formulation and strategic planning, organizational reforms and institutional strengthening, including post-graduate training of professional cadres. Capacity building also involves the provision of tools and equipment and transfer of technology. Donors and friendly nations are involved in the supply of technological support to rebuild the victim country. Also, capacity building interventions include the provision of transport facilitation.

The contention is that a solid foundation for effective organization and enabling institutions is a necessary precondition for sustainable and enduring peace-building especially in a post conflict society. Countries as well as societies emerging from the violent conflicts need institutions that strengthen organizations and promote good governance, whether through laws and regulations, or by coordinating the actions of many players, as in international treaties to enable a thorough peace building through capacity building, with assistance from the international community. Countries that are emerging from conflict face many challenges, but lack of capacity is at the forefront. Unless it is addressed, fragility is likely to persist. Paradoxically, intense pressure for “quick wins” and results-on-the-ground, especially in post-conflict situations, often pushes the capacity development agenda to the margin.

Capacity building in post-conflict and fragile states presents three unique challenges, at least in the short run: everything is a priority, existing capacity is weak, and visible results must be achieved quickly. Building capacity in these states is like living through history in a hurry: long-term capacities and institutions are needed, but there is only a short time in which to deliver results. So in such settings, capacity building is not about traditional training or education alone which will take years to deliver results, but it is about on-the-job engagement, in which we draw out and inspire and energize latent capacity to achieve rapid results in targeted areas.

To meet these challenges, capacity building efforts must define goals and results that matter and that people will strive to reach. Since capacity is limited all around, emphasis should be placed on forging coalitions to leverage scarce capacity in state and non-state sectors, as people working together can expand capacity. The leaders must also inspire

pride and confidence, spreading a “can do” attitude, while also setting goals that are achievable in view of the constraints.

### **Role of the Civil Society Organisations in Peace Building**

The civil society organisations extend technical and direct financial assistance in conflict environments in Nigeria and countries of the third world or developing and underdeveloped countries of the southern hemisphere. They are involved in the sending of professionals in diverse fields like medicine, technology, humanitarian and the academics for the advancement of these countries. They render out enormous assistance in many ways and knowledge transfer from Nigerian experts to participating personnel within such environment. They have also played cardinal roles in cementing existing relations between Nigeria and beneficiary countries, and, on a wider scale, in creating an atmosphere of partnership where it otherwise would not exist.

A very important role and significance of the CSO programme could be likened to the reconstruction and rebuilding of war-torn societies during the post-conflict era. Noteworthy is the fact that the countries of the southern hemisphere, especially those of the African continent have a common characteristics- conflict prone. Majority of the nations within this zone have witnessed and continue to witness the outbreak of violence which have rendered already weak structures and infrastructures dilapidated and requires external aid in the reconstruction era. Thus, the need for capacity building cannot be overstated as a major role of the CSOs.

A successful capacity building and reconstruction in war-torn societies is said to involve a “triple transition”: a security transition from war to peace; a political transition from authoritarianism to a more participatory form of government; and a socioeconomic reconstruction, these make sum up the contribution of the civil society organisation to peace building in post-conflict societies through its wide range of professional expertise, especially in developing countries. These developments are nourished in contexts with citizen security, the rule of law, equitable distribution of resources, functioning markets, responsive governance, an active civil society, and basic trust among national sectors.

These are the basic objectives of war-to-peace transitions and reintegration. As Collier at al. (2003) have noted, to rebuild a society torn by civil war requires a decade or more under the best conditions. The best conditions mean, at the minimum, that governments and societies share a political will for peace and change, an attribute which is often in short supply in many post-conflict societies. Moreover, international support can contribute to bringing about most of these conditions, but donors and international agencies still have much to learn about what to do following civil conflict. There is still insufficient understanding and weak institutional capacity among international agencies in defining their comparative advantages and identifying dynamic collaboration synergies when addressing intricate issues of post-conflict reconstruction in poor societies over the long term.

As Khadiagala (1995) points out, conceptually, state reconstruction usually deals with rejuvenating institutional mechanisms that formerly gave consistency to state action, legitimizing power, establishing social trust, and returning the state to the centre of

political life. Creating and strengthening the legitimacy of national and local authorities (through inclusiveness and transparency), rebuilding the technical capacity of key institutions, and making them capable of managing tensions in a non-violent manner is as important as repairing the shattered physical infrastructure. To be sure, effective institutions and organizations demand high levels of skill and dedication among managers, and cooperation and understanding among beneficiaries.

Foltz (1995) has proposed that the reconstruction of a state involves putting back into place at least six basic elements, and these require the assistance of external nations who may assist in the reconstruction process: Re-establishing the state's control over the means of coercion: (military, police and security) throughout the territory to secure security; Re-establishing the state's fiscal capacity; Restoring macroeconomic management capacity; Developing a functioning judiciary; Decentralizing decision-making and expenditure authority; Improving governance and transparency.

The civil society organisations, as non-governmental agencies assist countries, especially Third World countries which are trying to recover from the effects of violent conflicts and wars. To be effective and sustainable over a long haul, external assistance should aim specifically at enabling war-torn societies to emerge from disabilities and poverty, rather than trapping them in relations of food aid, dependence on technical assistance, and indebtedness.

Capacity building interventions by international donors and agencies in post conflict environments should involve largely informed and serious needs assessment evaluation studies, policy framework, institutional coherence, effective participation by the beneficiaries. Capacity building assistance offered to societies damaged by conflicts should tend to be donor-driven, coordinated, and have in-built capability to contribute effectively to longer-term processes of institutional change. A country that has recently experienced widespread violence, or where the preoccupation of the state is armed warfare, where the state has failed, or a significant part of the population is engaged in armed struggle with the state requires reconstruction. In each situation, external agencies need to understand the varying histories and the nature of the "failure" process in order to calibrate informed intervention measures to facilitate the transition from war to sustainable peace, support the resumption of economic and social development, and determine at what point in the post-conflict process is a particular country judged to have achieved a relative state of normalcy.

Capacity gaps can undermine early progress in reconstruction, as local administrators lack the knowledge, skills and experience to sustain or replicate successful outcomes. And although some fragile and post-conflict countries receive huge and unforeseen aid inflows, these can dry up quickly if the government is unable to absorb them and demonstrate progress. In some cases, a vicious cycle can take hold: governments cannot secure aid because they haven't the capacity to use it, and the resources to develop it.

Local authorities in most fragile states face urgent demands for food, water, housing, health care and schools. Their legitimacy, and even survival, depends on meeting at least some of them. In practice, this means that reconstruction; service delivery and capacity

building must be undertaken all at once, albeit with strategic focus to deliver targeted results in key areas.

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