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Exploring Civil Society in Conflict and Post-conflict Countries

A continuum to peace

Tracy Anderson

Introduction

Civil society has had a long-standing history of involvement in conflict and post-conflict countries. It has played such roles as: peacemakers, peacekeepers, transitional justice and reconciliation motivators, basic needs providers, and even instigators, warriors and war-mongers. Moreover, the special social, political, economic and cultural environments that exist in conflict and post-conflict countries can strongly affect how civil society operates. As such, the effectiveness of these roles of civil society in conflict and post-conflict circumstances has been contested for just as long. Indeed, previous studies have found that CSOs and their programmes can both make a positive impact and hinder peace efforts (Fischer 2006; Frerks 2005; Marchetti & Tocci 2009, to name a few).

Using the CSI 2008–2011 data, this chapter continues the examination of civil society in conflict and post-conflict countries, and the impact of conflict and post-conflict situations on civil society. Yet it takes a unique approach by comparing the differences and similarities of civil society in countries that are in different stages along a conflict-to-sustainable-peace continuum (countries currently in conflict, countries that have been in post-conflict for ten years or less, countries in post-conflict for eleven years or more and countries that have not been in conflict since 1945), rather than taking a longitudinal look at a country's – and its civil society's – journey through each stage.

It will examine how, and how well, civil society operates along this path, how it changes and develops, what its strengths and challenges are according to the five dimensions of the CSI (Civic Engagement, Level of Organization, Practice of Values, Perception of Impact and External Environment) and along a number of specific indicators that make up these dimensions. Understanding the differences and similarities between civil society in these various stages of conflict and post-conflict can provide an understanding of

the space civil society must maintain during and after times of conflict. This study can also flag what CSOs and stakeholders can expect through the transitions through the various stages, thereby enabling pre-planning in order to capitalize on the strengths and counteract any weaknesses as each stage approaches in a country. With that understanding comes the opportunity to strengthen the initiatives that support peace and can prevent a future lapse into violence.

Yet hypothesizing about these differences is just as difficult as defining the notions of 'civil society' and 'conflict/post-conflict'. It is logical to deduce that countries in conflict will have a weaker civil society because of the environment that conflict creates – harsh laws, and inability to enjoy aspects of life including work, play and engagement in civil society because of real hazards – such as land mines, walking into lines of fire, or bombings. Conversely, countries that have never been in conflict should have a stronger civil society than those that have, as they have not been torn apart by the physical and psychological destruction of combat. Yet, it is equally logical to say civil society could be stronger in conflict countries because there is greater need: when governments cannot or will not meet the needs of their citizens, civil society steps in to provide those basic needs through, for example, displacement camp care, food provision, security, rights advocacy and so on. Moreover, the darker side of civil society can emerge when groups are organized to bring about change through violent means.¹ Therefore, this exploration will uncover which of these hypotheses matches the experience of the countries analysed.

Further, this chapter attempts to understand the progression of civil society in post-conflict stages by asking if there are differences in civil society between those countries in which people have only recently stopped fighting, and those that have been rebuilding society for many years. Again, it is logical to assume that the longer a country and its civil society have been out of conflict, the stronger it will be: civil society has had time to rebuild society and itself, repressive laws may have been overturned and the economic, social and political contexts are likely to be stronger. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that there are indeed differences between these stages of conflict-to-sustainable-peace, and that the above assumption holds true: civil society in countries that have been out of conflict for longer periods will be stronger.

This study will examine the above assumptions and hypotheses by taking the following structure: first, a literature review will help define the major terms used in this study and set the stage with what previous studies have already found on the topic. Following this, the methodology and research design for examining civil society along the different stages of the conflict-to-peace continuum will be laid out. This will be followed by analysis of the data and a discussion of the results.

Defining conflict

Since the end of the Second World War, when the global community responded to the Holocaust with a profound ‘never again’, 317 episodes of armed conflict (1946–2010) have been counted (Center for Systemic Peace, 2010). These episodes include the genocides in the Balkans, Cambodia and Rwanda, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and numerous other intrastate, interstate, civil, ethnic, international and communal conflicts and warfare.

Yet, conflict is a difficult concept to define. It means different things to different people. Simply put, a conflict is an incompatibility between two or more subjects. Examples include political violence, civil war and genocide. Conflicts such as these, between or within states, occur over such diverse issues as land and other resources, ideologies, ethnic differences and power. Yet when are these incompatibilities considered to be conflict in the traditional sense of the word? Is it as soon as the opponents turn to violence? Or before? Does it matter if lives are lost, or is it considered a conflict if people are just injured or property is damaged? How many lives need to be lost to draw the line?

For the purposes of research, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (2010) defines an armed conflict (‘a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, is present’) and non-state conflict (when neither party is the government of a state) as having a threshold of twenty-five or more battle-related deaths in one calendar year.² Yet a quantitative number of lives lost does not take into account the other casualties of conflict.

In contrast, the Center for Systemic Peace (2010) considers other variables in their categorization of conflict and war. These include: direct and indirect deaths and injuries, sexual crimes and intimidation, population dislocations, damage and distortions to social networks, damage and destruction to the environment and infrastructure, diversion of resources and psychological trauma to individuals and adverse changes. They use these factors to create a ‘magnitude of war’ scale from 1 (Sporadic or Expressive Political Violence with deaths under two thousand and little population dislocation) to 10 (Extermination and Annihilation, where the goal of total destruction of a social identity (genocide) is more important than the death or dislocation counts).

Both UCDP and Systemic Peace further categorize conflicts according to the major opponents involved in the conflict. Intrastate conflict occurs within one state: either between rival political groups (civil-intrastate); between the state agent and a distinct ethnic group (ethnic-intrastate) (Center for Systemic Peace 2010); between a government and a non-governmental party; or where at least one side receives troops from other governments to fight in the conflict (intrastate with foreign involvement) (Uppsala Conflict Data Program 2010).

International event-interstate armed conflict occurs between two or more states or a distinct polity fighting against colonialism (Center for Systemic Peace 2010). UCDP (2010) defines one-sided violence as the use of armed force against civilians by their government or a formally organized group (but not including extrajudicial killings in custody).

A third perspective focuses on an extreme form of conflict: genocide. Genocide is a conflict where there is intention to ‘destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group’ by means including killing or inflicting serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, preventing the birth of children or purposefully transferring children of the group to another group, or causing ‘conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part’ (UN General Assembly 1948).

Civil society, conflict and post-conflict society

The relationship between conflict and civil society is complex: the very definition of civil society – a space for individuals or organizations (outside of the state, family and market) working towards a common interest – means it is naturally at the heart of every stage of conflict, peace and post-conflict rebuilding/reconciliation. The common goals of wanting equality, resources or power, or wanting to keep what already exists, lead to civil society engaging before and during conflict as advocates for change and sometimes even as instigators of conflict. A shared interest of wanting to end violence, establish peace and rebuild and heal society continues civil society’s presence in post-conflict situations.

Indeed, civil society has a strong and undeniable impact on conflict. It plays these many roles in both destroying and rebuilding, in struggling for *status quo*, and in standing up for change. However, conflict impacts upon civil society just as strongly. Firstly, conflict is a catalyst for the arrival of new CSOs and donor funds (Meyer 2002; McKeon 2005; Dudouet 2007). Moreover, while this increase in numbers may suggest growth, Harpviken and Kjellman (2004: 6) state succinctly: ‘In conflict, civil society is simultaneously torn apart while constituting a source of social support.’ This is in part because conflict changes the relationship between state, market and civil society: it can diminish the space civil society needs to exist by limiting associational and organizational rights. The level of functioning and characteristics of the state affect how civil society operates, the level of cooperation or adversity with the state, and the principles adhered to. Conflict also physically destroys the very buildings and infrastructures CSOs use to function well.

Furthermore, in times of conflict, especially in failed or weakened states, civil society often ‘comes to occupy part of the space normally filled by the functioning state. Yet without the laws and rules governing society, civil society

organizes alternative systems of self-help and tribal justice; informal forms of governance that civil and uncivil society actors alike establish and are shaped by' (Marchetti & Tocci 2009: 203). This situation also frequently results in a market atmosphere where civil society must adapt to working in an illegal economy and sometimes engage in corrupt practices in order to function in a corrupt society.

Likewise, civil society both shapes and is shaped by situations of peace and peacebuilding. Dudouet (2007) suggests that CSOs, in particular those that were founded during the time of conflict as a response to the conflict, shift their focus, mandate and modes of operation throughout the stages of conflict to post-war reconstruction and development. Her two case studies showcased CSOs in Guatemala and South Africa that transformed from informal, underground social movements to structured and professional NGOs. However, she also found a trend of individuals who began in these social movements being 'absorbed by the political sphere' or joining the private sector.

Throughout this tangled web of relationships, civil society plays many roles – roles that both enable conflict and enable peace, sometimes at the same time. Civil society, for instance, can play a role in conflict escalation (Marchetti & Tocci 2009: 208). Perhaps the most obvious example of how this occurs is found within the darker side of civil society: combatant groups, racist and ethnicist organizations promote violence, ethnic cleansing and apartheid systems as means to reach their goals. However, even well-intentioned CSOs can escalate conflict through their actions:

They can discursively contribute to the securitization of conflict by raising awareness of conditions of latent conflict. They can do so through mass demonstrations, media diffusion, public assemblies and monitoring and denouncing activities (Marchetti & Tocci 2009: 209).

In other words, though raising awareness of and denouncing inequality, abuses and injustices is meaningful and important work, it can escalate conflict by either igniting those perpetrating the injustices to increase their actions to quash the opposition, or, if the goals of the demonstrations and non-violent attempts to change the *status quo* are not sufficiently met, the oppressed may escalate to more violent methods to achieve change. In this way, civil society creates or increases conflict, just as conflict tears civil society apart.

Yet civil society also heals conflict and its destructive impact. Previous literature suggests three main areas of work and activities in which civil society engages in conflict and post-conflict countries. As conduits of change, many CSOs campaign and lobby for better human rights standards, equality, an end to torture, poverty reduction legislation and other such endeavours that help heal the divides that lead to conflict and the impacts thereof (Dudouet 2007: 26). As substitutes for government, CSOs can provide basic needs and other services that the government refuses to or cannot provide. These can include offering

shelter for displaced citizens, providing food and water, setting up education programmes and making available health services (Fischer 2006: 5; Dudouet 2007: 26). And as conflict preventers, peacemakers and peacebuilders, CSOs engage in early warning activities, preventive diplomacy through third-party intervention, facilitation of dialogue workshops and mediation, negotiations (peacemaking), networking and initiatives for cross-cultural understanding and relationship building (Fischer 2006: 5; Dudouet 2007: 28). Indeed, ‘strengthening civil society’ is established as a key element of many external interventions and missions in post-conflict situations (Fischer 2006: 13–14). (See Box 3.1 for more examples of civil society work in conflict and post-conflict countries.)

Box 3.1: Examples of civil society involvement in conflict and post-conflict work

- Raising public awareness of emerging crises
- Cross-border, inter-religious and ethnic divides reconciliation and appreciation through informal exchanges, dialogue and joint projects
- Creation and promotion of alternative media, war and peace reporting
- Watchdog roles during elections and of state institutions
- Youth and women empowerment (community-based social policy, income generation, education and rights)
- Education reforms and peace education
- Establishing peace cultures: overcoming cultures of war through arts and cultural actions
- Demobilization, disarmament and demilitarization programmes
- Protection, re-integration, support and security for endangered individuals, refugees and returnees
- Human rights monitoring
- Documentation of war crimes, fact-finding and support to identify missing people
- Trauma and psycho-social support for conflict-affected individuals
- Transitional justice and reconciliation initiatives (story-telling, memorials, reparation)

Over the past two decades, civil society has increased its engagement in these areas and developed a reputation for doing so to the point where it is largely accepted and encouraged that civil society will be involved. This is in part because, for NGOs in particular, they tend to have reputations as a whole for 'political independence, the flexibility of their mandates, their impartiality and high standards of credibility... Generally, NGOs can do things that governments cannot' (Fischer 2006: 9). However, civil society also faces several criticisms in their roles in conflict and post-conflict countries. It has been argued that CSOs are not really independent but are often state or donor driven; that Western NGOs dominate the field and impose Western ideals and principles that are inappropriate in other countries; and that international organizations meddle in the internal affairs of sovereign states at the behest of external state and non-state actors (Fischer 2006). Moreover, Frerks (2005: 18–24) points out that civil society faces challenges with staying impartial during or after conflict and are often criticized in relation to who they are actually representing (the funders, the state, themselves or the actual intended beneficiaries).

In summary, previous literature shows that civil society serves a plethora of praiseworthy goals in conflict and post-conflict societies. Yet there are flaws in the system, obstacles to effective impact and sustainable change. While these studies have demonstrated how civil society affects conflict and peace and touched on how conflict and the transition to peace impact on civil society, there is little literature on what civil society in conflict and post-conflict countries looks like, how it differs and how it is the same. Therefore, this chapter does not delve further into whether civil society has an impact, or what roles it takes on in various stages of conflict to peace. Instead, it takes an exploratory approach to examine the features, strengths and weaknesses of civil society at different stages from conflict to long-term post-conflict with respect to the five CSI dimensions and their indicators and to uncover what trends are encountered along the five CSI dimensions and indicators between civil society in these different stages from conflict to peace.

Classifying countries along the conflict continuum

Though conflict and peace are not as linearly simplistic as conflict -> post-conflict -> peace, but instead experience flare-ups of violence and conflict and stalemates during peace negotiations and rebuilding (Dudouet 2007: 28), the over-arching goal is as simple as this: to move from conflict to no conflict by building sustainable societies where those threats of flare-ups are gone (sustainable peace). The path then is linear in theory: conflict -> post-conflict -> peace.³ It can be seen as a continuum, a continuous series of events that develops gradually over time forming a road from conflict to sustainable peace.

Yet, this path sidesteps into stalemates, backtracks into flare-ups, and takes twists and turns along the way, but idealistically there is an end: the cycle stops when sustainable peace is entrenched.

The CSI 2008–2011 data provide an excellent opportunity to delve into how civil society operates throughout this continuum. First, three time intervals were chosen to mark stages along the continuum: In Conflict -> Post-conflict for Ten Years or Less (PC<10) -> Post-conflict for Eleven Years or Longer (PC>11). Two time periods of post-conflict were used in order to determine if there are changes in civil society as time passes from the end of the conflict towards sustainable peace. The intervals – ten years or less and eleven years or more – were chosen to represent 1) a time frame of post-conflict that is still fairly nascent because history has shown that a large portion (50 per cent) of countries that experience war relapse back into violent conflict within five years (Fischer 2006: 442); and 2) a period of post-conflict that has lasted long enough since the end of conflict to provide more time for rebuilding society physically, emotionally and mentally. Therefore, in theory, the further away from the conflict a country and its civil society get, the closer to sustainable peace it is. A fourth category was also developed to recognize that not all countries have been in armed conflict and to determine if there are differences between this group – No Conflict – and the others on the continuum.

Next, in order to operationalize whether a country is in conflict, in post-conflict or not in conflict, three prominent lists of conflicts and genocide by country and year were used: Center for Systemic Peace,⁴ Uppsala Conflict Data Program,⁵ and Genocide Watch⁶, the first two of which were used in the definition of conflict above. The twenty-five countries that completed the CSI 2008–2011 data-gathering at the time this volume was prepared were then categorized into the four groups by searching the lists for the last year each country was considered to have been in a conflict (according to Systemic Peace or UCDP), or in stage 7 or 8 of genocide⁷ (according to Genocide Watch). If they were not listed on any of the three lists, the country was classified as No Conflict. The results are displayed in Table 3.1 (the most recent end-date of conflict is listed next to the source that offered the date).

The total range of years of last conflict, 1945–2010, and their assignment to the categories is a result of two main factors: first, the three sources do not have data for conflicts before 1945, which provides the beginning of the range. Second, the CSI data for this phase was gathered during 2008 to 2010, which provides the end of the range of dates. Therefore, the In Conflict group consists of countries that were said by at least one of the three sources to be in conflict during 2008–2010. This does mean that it is possible, for instance, for a country to have been in conflict in 2008, but in post-conflict in 2009 and 2010. However, because the CSI data was gathered during the year(s) they were in conflict, they would still be categorized as In Conflict. The range of dates for the two middle

Table 3.1 Categorization of CSI phase 2008–2011 countries by conflict status

In Conflict (2008–2010)	Post-conflict for 10 Years or Less (1998–2007)	Post-conflict for 11 Years or Longer (1945–1997)	No Conflict (1945–2010)
Georgia G 2010 S 2008 U 2008	Croatia/ as Yugoslavia G 2001 S 1999 U 1995	Albania G— S 1997 U—	Belarus G— S— U—
Mexico G 2001 S 2010 U 2005	Jordan G— S 1970 U 2005	Argentina G 1980 S 1982 U 1982	Bulgaria G— S— U—
Philippines G 2010 S 2010 U 2008	Kosovo/ as Yugoslavia G 2001 S 1999 U—	Armenia G— S 1994 U—	Japan G— S— U—
Russia G 2010 S 2010 U 2008	Liberia G 2003 S 2003 U 2003	Chile G 1976 S 1987 U—	Kazakhstan G— S— U—
Togo G 2010 S— U 1986		Italy G— S 1982 U—	Uruguay G— S— U—
Turkey G 2010 S 2010 U 2008		Nicaragua G 1989 S 1990 U 1990	
Venezuela G 2010+ S— U 1992		Slovenia G— S— U 1991	
		South Korea G— S 1980 U—	
		Zambia G— S 1964 U—	
(7 countries)	(4 countries)	(9 countries)	(5 countries)

Source: G = Genocide Watch (2010), S = Center for Systemic Peace (2010), U= Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2010)

groups is due to the time-frame inherent from the category: Post-conflict for Ten Years or Less has the time-frame of 1998–2007; and Post-conflict for Eleven Years or More has the timeframe from 1945–1997.

Though using these three lists provides a pre-established and accepted measurement of what is conflict, they do bring noticeable flaws. To begin with, as discussed earlier, the definitions of conflict or genocide clearly limit what is then considered a conflict. It is for this reason that three lists were used for this methodology instead of just one: each can help fill the gaps that another may have due to how the source classifies a country as being in conflict. Yet even with three lists, there are apparent limitations. For instance, a country is considered as post-conflict in this chapter solely by the last date they were in conflict. It is inferred that if a country was considered to be in conflict or stage 7 or 8 genocide in one year and then is no longer listed as being party to a conflict in subsequent years, the conflict has deflated enough to be considered post-conflict for either ten years or less or eleven years or more. Further, if a country was never listed as being in conflict or genocide (stage 7 or 8) on either of the three lists then they are categorized as neither conflict nor post-conflict but as having not been in conflict since 1945. Classifying conflict in such strict definitional manners resulted in countries being categorized in unexpected groups.

For example, Belarus, Bulgaria and Uruguay have all been classified in the no conflict category for this study because none of the three sources listed these countries as having conflict or stage 7 or 8 genocide; however, these countries are all either transitioning or have transitioned from a history of human rights abuses (see Olsen *et al.* in Chapter 4). Further, Armenia was classified as post-conflict for eleven years or more because the last year any of the three sources listed it as being in conflict was 1994 for the Nagorno-Karabakh War (Systemic Peace), yet flare-ups of this war have continued into the 2000s (International Crisis Group, 2007).

These instances exemplify how difficult classifying conflict can be, yet the strength of using these lists, and the operationalizations they come with, is the very ability to classify and then search for differences. Using these lists enables comparability with other studies that use these sources and adds reliability to this methodology that re-categorizing based on new, unsubstantiated definitions and markers of conflict could not give.

A further limitation of the analysis is the size of the sample and the resultant groups – because there are only twenty-five countries in the sample used for this volume, there are only four to nine countries in each group. This of course increases the possibility that findings are due to chance. Therefore, when analysing for differences between the dimension and indicator mean scores for these four groups, statistical tests that work well with small sample sizes were used (Kruskal-Wallis and Two-tailed Mann-Whitney tests). Simple averages of scores were also used for analysis.

Comparing civil society in conflict and post-conflict countries: the CSI dimensions

As described in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this volume, the CSI combines data collected through a variety of research instruments and from a diverse range of sources on various aspects related to civil society and the context in which it operates. The result is a profile of civil society in each participating country that comprises the following five dimensions: Civic Engagement, Level of Organization, Practice of Values, Perception of Impact, and External Environment. This section explores the differences that may exist among the groups of countries along the conflict-to-peace continuum in each of the dimensions.

Civic Engagement

Civic Engagement measures the percentage of the population that is actively involved in civil society in a country through membership in or volunteering with a CSO, individual activism and community engagement. The analysis of the scores for this dimension found no statistical differences⁸ between the four continuum groups.⁹ However, an interesting – but seemingly logical – pattern emerges where formal participation in civil society increases along the continuum from when a country is experiencing violence, to just after the end of the conflict, to the highest participation coming eleven years or more after the conflict ends (see Figure 3.1).¹⁰

Specifically, In Conflict countries have the lowest civic engagement of the four groups. An average of only 38.2 per cent of the population sample in these countries is involved with civil society activities and groups. This is followed by the No Conflict countries (43.9 per cent), and then the Post-conflict Ten Years or Less group (44.1 per cent). The countries with the highest

Figure 3.1 Civic Engagement dimension average scores by stage in conflict continuum

level of civic participation are those in the Post-conflict Eleven Years or More group (47.3 per cent).

It is understandable that participation would be lowest in countries in conflict. According to Garcia-Duran (2005: 150 in Dudouet 2007: 24), the violence experienced in conflict creates fear and intimidation in the population and destroys the social fabric of a country. Furthermore, the public sphere becomes physically and politically unsafe for citizens to exercise their rights of expression and association. Such an environment 'results in a paralysis of collective social initiatives' (Pearce 2004: 11 in Dudouet 2007: 24). In addition, restrictive legislations are often imposed during times of conflict that curtail civic participation through loss of freedoms of association, assembly and/or speech (see Chapter 6 for further discussion on this area).

It is then expected that as society rebuilds, as restrictive laws are reduced then abolished, and as time passes from the end of the conflict, civic participation will increase. The pattern that emerged above supports this theory. However, interestingly, the CSI data did not show any statistically significant correlations between Civic Engagement and three of the indicators from the External Environment dimension measuring the legal situation: 1) rule of law and personal freedoms, 2) associational and organizational rights and 3) experience of the legal framework.¹¹ It should be pointed out again that the small sample size might influence this finding as it is well established (including in many of the previous studies discussed above and within this very volume) that a conflict environment interferes with the lives of citizens and civil society.

A closer look at the indicators that make up the Civic Engagement dimension shows this trend in detail. As illustrated in Figures 3.2 and 3.3,¹² the Kruskal-Wallis tests show that citizen membership and volunteering in both social and political civil society organizations, the extent of individual activism in demonstrations, boycotts and signing petitions and the diversity of membership in both social and political organizations all increase from In Conflict, to Post-conflict Ten Years or Less, to the strongest participation occurring in the Post-conflict Eleven Years or More group.¹³

Interestingly, the countries that did not experience a conflict as defined by the three lists (Systemic Peace, UCDP and Genocide Watch) had an overall lower Civic Engagement dimension score than both post-conflict groups. When analysing the indicators, the No Conflict group also had lower membership in socially-based and politically-based CSOs than the Post-conflict >11 group, lower diversity in social membership and in volunteerism rates in socially-based CSOs than all other groups, lower volunteerism in politically-motivated CSOs and rates of individual activism than both of the post-conflict groups, yet they have the highest rate of diversity in the population that are active members of political organizations.

Figure 3.2 Mean ranks of social engagement indicators by stage in conflict continuum

Figure 3.3 Mean ranks of political engagement indicators by stage in conflict continuum

Though much of the trend of low participation can be attributed to the political and social situations in the countries that make up this No Conflict group (Belarus, Bulgaria, Japan, Kazakhstan and Uruguay), the finding is nonetheless surprising and further research is needed to determine why countries that have not experienced wars or genocide in the contemporary period (again, based on the defining criteria used by the three sources) have lower civic participation in certain engagement areas than those countries that have had, or are in, conflict and are rebuilding a damaged society.

Further, as illustrated in both of the figures above, the trend in these engagement indicators shows an incline in citizen participation with civil society through the continuum stages: the lowest levels of engagement are experienced in conflict countries, then climb through Post-conflict <10 and up again for Post-conflict >11 countries, the levels of engagement then declining in the set of countries that have no listed conflicts. The only indicator here that breaks this trend is that for diversity of membership in political organizations. This indicator follows the same pattern for the first three stages but increases again in the no conflict category. In other words, countries that have not experienced conflict tend to have a more inclusive citizenry engaging in political CSOs, including more typically marginalized groups such as women, minorities and rural and remote area dwellers.

Level of Organization

The CSI data examine organizational strength (through indicators such as human, technological and financial resources) and partnerships amongst civil society (international presence, network associations and peer-to-peer communication). According to Frerks (2005: 20), institutional strengthening and partnerships are key elements in resolving 'the weaker aspects of CSO performance' in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Furthermore, as discussed in the review of previous studies above, conflict destroys much of the physical and psychological infrastructure necessary for civil society to operate more effectively.

Therefore, it is surprising that the overall look at the Level of Organization dimension scores shows almost no differences between the four conflict groups (see Figure 3.4).¹⁴ In fact there are only two scores when rounded to one decimal place – In Conflict and No Conflict both score 55.6, whereas both post-conflict groups score 59.1.

Though it has been said that conflict tears civil society apart, in terms of both infrastructure and relationships (Harpviken & Kjellman 2004: 6) this lack of a strong difference in the Level of Organization scores across the four groups may indicate that either conflict does not do as much damage to CSOs, or that the indicators are low to begin with, or perhaps that conflict tears some aspects apart yet strengthens others. Further research would be needed to determine

Figure 3.4 Level of Organization dimension average scores by stage in conflict continuum

which, if any, is the case. Understanding what is occurring here could help civil society, its stakeholders and the governments and society it works with to develop actions to further strengthen civil society (and therefore society itself) in conflict and post-conflict situations. For example, if the indicators are low to begin with, this would suggest that more funding is needed across the board to develop the infrastructure, partnerships and stability of civil society, which will then enable civil society to better meet the needs of its beneficiaries. If conflict tears some aspects of civil society apart, but not others, finding out which is which will help pinpoint the strengths (those areas not badly damaged) to utilise and the weaknesses (those areas badly damaged) that need to be built back up.

When examining the underlying Level of Organization indicators, several noteworthy patterns were found. First, regarding partnerships and cooperation between CSOs in these countries, Figure 3.5 shows that the indicators for this dimension do not follow an overall trend as clearly as in the previous dimension. Only the indicator for peer-to-peer communication through exchange of information resembles the previous pattern where there is a steady rise from In Conflict to Post-conflict >11 and then lower values for the No Conflict cases.¹⁵ The other indicators in this grouping present two other formations: the average number of support networks of which CSOs in a country are members rises considerably from In Conflict countries to Post-conflict <10 and then experiences a decline in numbers from Post-conflict <10 to Post-conflict >11 to No Conflict. Compared to the other two indicators, peer-to-peer communication through meetings and international linkages (the ratio of international NGOs present in a country to the number of international NGOs worldwide) drop for Post-conflict <10 countries, then rise a great deal in Post-conflict >11 countries and then drop again to the same level as the No Conflict countries.

Figure 3.5 Mean ranks for civil society partnership indicators by stage in conflict continuum

Of the four groups, Post-conflict >11 countries have the highest levels of working partnerships, as evidenced by the highest average number of CSOs in a country that met with other organizations to work on similar issues and exchanged information, and the highest ratio average of international NGOs present in the countries to number of international NGOs worldwide. Surprisingly, the No Conflict group had the lowest percentage of CSOs in their countries belonging to support organizations and the second lowest percentage of peer-to-peer communication through meetings.

As for the resources that are available to CSOs for each conflict status, none of the indicators shows increases in resources continuously through the continuum.¹⁶ As shown in Figure 3.6 Both post-conflict groups show more financial stability than In Conflict and No Conflict countries, but Post-conflict >11 is lower than Post-conflict <10 and in fact is almost at the same level as the In Conflict and No Conflict stages. Perhaps most surprising is that sustainable human resources are assessed highest for In Conflict countries and then dip substantially for Post-conflict <10 countries. However, as mentioned in the Civic Engagement dimension, In Conflict countries have the lowest percentage of volunteers than the other groups. As the CSI measures a sustainable human resource base as being where volunteers comprise no more than 25 per cent of a CSO's average total staff (paid and unpaid), it is possible that the lower level of volunteers available to In Conflict countries influences their human resources indicator score. Also surprising is that technological resources in both post-conflict stages are lower than for In Conflict countries.

Figure 3.6 Mean ranks for financial stability and infrastructure resources indicators by stage in conflict continuum

In summary, the analysis indicates that each category from conflict through post-conflict has its strengths and weaknesses. In Conflict countries tend to have more access to sustainable resources but have the weakest partnership activities and networking. Post-conflict >11 countries, on the other hand, have the strongest partnerships and networking, which might be evidence of the time needed to (re)develop these relationships, but have lower levels of access to or sustainability of resources. The situation is very mixed for the Post-conflict <10 countries, with the indicators showing a wide dispersion.

Practice of Values

The third dimension, Practice of Values, looks at the values of democracy, non-violence, tolerance and accountability within CSOs to determine whether civil society implements the principles it extols. The data show another remarkable finding (see Figure 3.7): the countries categorized as No Conflict are least likely to have a civil society that practises the values it often preaches (44.0). Further, the pattern of growth from In Conflict to Post-conflict <10, through to Post-conflict >11, was not experienced in this dimension as it was in the first. Instead, countries that have been in post-conflict for ten years or less tend to practise these values more than the other groups (53.0).¹⁷ This is another fertile area for further research to explore these findings in more depth. For instance, future research could delve into whether the hope for rebirth that comes with the end of conflict may be a factor in this pattern. Civil society intent on rebuilding, reconciling and developing a stable peace is presumably likely to practise the very values they are promoting, and that a lack thereof

Figure 3.7 Practice of Values dimension average scores by state in conflict continuum

may have been a factor in the conflict in the first place. For example, if a conflict was aimed at bringing democracy to a country, the first ten years of post-conflict might see the strongest and most prolific work from civil society towards building that democracy and ensuring its survival and proper practice (through election monitoring, voter education and the like). While engaging in the promotion of national democracy, civil society may be more apt at practising it within its own walls.

Further exploration of the indicators in the Practice of Values dimension found a statistically significant difference in levels of perceived intolerance between the four groups.¹⁸ This indicator measures the perceptions held by CSO representatives as to how much weight racist, discriminatory or intolerant civil society groups have within civil society in their country. Countries in conflict are more likely to view the intolerant and racist groups in their countries as having substantially more weight in civil society than in all other stages, especially than in the Post-conflict <10 years and No Conflict stages (these two findings were statistically significant).¹⁹ As might be expected, the data (Figure 3.8) show that as the continuum progresses through time – from conflict through each post-conflict stage – the perceived weight of these groups decreases, with countries that have not experienced conflict having the lowest predominance of these groups.²⁰

As mentioned in the previous literature, these ‘darker sides’ of civil society often play a role in conflict. Such groups incite or practise racism and discrimination, which can lead to violence. Some of these groups advocate for the hindrance or even the destruction of another race, culture or other types of distinguishable groups of people (e.g. groups distinguished by sexuality, religion or gender). Others, such as paramilitary groups, take an active role in the combat, using instigating and retaliatory physical violence to pursue their interests. As the conflict ends and rebuilding and reconciliation progress these groups often either disband as a part of the peace agreement (disarmament,

Figure 3.8 Mean rank of perceived weight of intolerant groups by stage in conflict continuum

Figure 3.9 Mean rank of perceived promotion of non-violence and peace by stage in conflict continuum

demobilization and reintegration (DDR) practices) or find less violent means to reach their goals. For instance, some become established political parties (e.g. Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland), or are integrated into the national military (e.g. Umkhonto we Sizwe, the former military wing of the ANC, in South Africa) and therefore an overall decrease in their prominence is experienced (the idea of violence in civil society is further examined in Chapter 7).

Another noteworthy finding within this dimension, shown in Figure 3.9, is that CSOs in countries in conflict are the least likely of the four groups to believe that civil society has a role in promoting non-violence and peace.²¹ Countries in the Post-conflict <10 Years category had the highest level of perception of civil society having this role. Though the differences are not statistically significant, this is an important finding when observing civil society in different stages of conflict and post-conflict situations.

The reasons for this finding are beyond the scope of this chapter. Further research should be undertaken to uncover why those countries that are perhaps more in need of civil society to assist in peacemaking and non-violence are those which are least likely to see a role and why those which have just come out of conflict are the most likely to perceive it. Potential hypotheses to examine include: 1) civil societies in current conflict situations are working

at the height of the conflict, within the difficulties that conflict creates (the tearing apart of infrastructure and society as explained above), and as such they may have reached the point where it feels like civil society's promotion of peace and non-violence is not working (see also Chapter 5 for more on this notion); 2) the darker side of civil society is so prevalent that there are more CSOs with the view that during conflict the only, best or fastest way to achieve change is through violence than those that believe in the promotion of peace and non-violence; or 3) CSOs are working on the ground during the conflict and therefore see at first hand the struggles, violence and psychology of the conflict (including negative beliefs about the ethnic, economic, social and other differences at the heart of the conflict), and they also see that civil society can only do so much, that the direct actors of the conflict are the ones that must promote non-violence and peace in order for the conflict to truly end. It must also be asked if there is a disconnect between the CSOs' perceptions of this role and the perceptions of citizens, combatants, victims, governments and other stakeholders in the conflict: do they see civil society as having this role and, if so, is there a gap between how others see civil society having a role and how civil society sees its role?

Perception of Impact

This dimension looks at the perception of civil society's impact on social and policy arenas in general and on specific concerns.²² This dimension also shows a trend of growth from the In Conflict stage to Post-conflict <10 to Post-conflict >11, and indeed the No Conflict countries have the highest Perception of Impact mean score of all the groups (48.4).²³ However, there is very little difference between the four groups (see Figure 3.10). Countries In Conflict have the lowest mean score for the dimension (43.7), followed by the Post-conflict <10 countries (45.1)

Figure 3.10 Perception of Impact dimension average scores by stage in conflict continuum

and Post-conflict >11 (47.2), indicating that there is progression as rebuilding of society continues through a longer-term timeframe.

However, all of these averages are relatively low, illustrating that, overall, both external stakeholders and civil society personnel are not seeing a strong impact made by civil society's work. Of course, impact is a rather elusive concept to measure. There are immediate, more tangible outputs that can be observed, such as: number of refugees housed, amount of food and other supplies passed out, number of people who participated in peace education classes. However, other effects are less noticeable and/or may take time to demonstrate an impact: did those peace education classes make a difference? Have perspectives of the need for violence changed due to civil society efforts? Nonetheless, ideally, we would hope to see high scores for this dimension across the board, with little difference along the continuum. Seeing such a pattern would indicate that civil society is succeeding in all stages, which in turn would suggest that civil society is responding well and adapting accordingly to the changing circumstances and needs that develop as a country progresses through the years from conflict towards sustainable peace. According to the data, the reality is that key players do not perceive a high impact across the board of the continuum. However, this might be due to the difficulties in measuring impact.

Further investigation into the indicators that make up this dimension found striking patterns between the continuum groups, between the perceptions held by external stakeholders and internal personnel, and by the type of impact (social or policy impact) (see Figure 3.11). To begin with, countries in conflict have the lowest perception of civil society having a strong impact, regardless of topic of impact and whether the views are those of external or internal view-holders. Perception of positive impact then increases in countries that have been out of conflict for ten years or less. This may be attributable to many factors, including the type of work that civil society may focus on in each stage. For instance, rebuilding infrastructure, buildings and communities tends to be more observable activities than behind the scenes peace negotiations. It is also possible that the increase in financial stability in Post-conflict <10 countries that was seen earlier in this chapter may contribute to a more visible and effective civil society. Further research would be needed to establish the correlations and causal mechanisms.

At the stage of Post-conflict for 11 years or more, the levels of perception for social or policy impact vary between external and internal stakeholders: the amount of respondents that viewed an overall strong impact decreased from Post-conflict <10 for external stakeholders, but increased for internal personnel. For the No Conflict countries, the pattern is the most variable – most notable is the leap in perceptions of external stakeholders regarding impact in the policy arena. For the other indicators, this stage tapers down or stays relatively even in comparison to the Post-conflict >11 group. Overall, Figure 3.11 shows that the perception of impact by civil society is stronger

Figure 3.11 Mean ranks of perception of impact indicators by stage in conflict continuum

for countries that have not faced conflict and those in post-conflict situations. Though this is understandable considering the negative elements faced by society in general and civil society in particular in conflict situations (such as concerns for safety and physical and psychological breakdowns in society), this finding suggests the need for civil society in conflict countries to find ways to increase their actual impact and the visibility of those impacts.

External Environment

The final dimension, the External Environment, examines the socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural environment in which civil society operates. The CSI makes an assumption that the more functional and supportive the environment, the better civil society can flourish. However, as Marchetti and Tocci (2009) explain, civil society is shaped by the context in which it operates as much as it attempts to shape that context. They argue that civil society is influenced by the strength of the state (civil society may be operating in a failed state, weak state or unrecognized state), the nature of the state (the degree of democracy and rights and freedoms enjoyed in the state), by socio-economic underdevelopment and by the character and role of the international community in the state, all of which are aspects connected with conflict, either

Figure 3.12 External Environment dimension average scores by stage in conflict continuum

as a reason for conflict, or a casualty of conflict. For example, when a state is failed or failing, or in conflict, civil society frequently steps in to provide services normally provided by the state.

Analysis of the CSI data illustrates this connection (see Figure 3.12): countries in conflict have, on average, the weakest external environment (mean score of 55.5), whereas countries in the Post-conflict for Eleven Years or More category have the most favourable environment (63.8).²⁴ This supports the theory that an external environment is strongly hindered by conflict, but can be rebuilt as time passes.

The indicators that make up this dimension show a more thorough picture of this proposition. As Figure 3.13 reveals, there are various patterns of progression for the indicators along the continuum.²⁵ For instance, the satisfaction of basic capabilities increases along the continuum from countries in conflict through each post-conflict stage to the highest score for the countries which have not experienced conflict since 1945. The line graph shows that perception of corruption (which has an inverse relationship – the higher the score, the lower the perception of corruption in the country), associational and organizational rights, and state effectiveness all increase as the continuum progresses from In Conflict through to Post-conflict for More Than Eleven Years, yet drop for No Conflict countries. However, the rule of law and personal freedoms are experienced at similar levels for In Conflict and Post-conflict <10 (which is slightly lower) then increase dramatically in the Post-conflict >11 stage.

Interestingly, countries in Post-conflict for Eleven Years or More have the highest scores for all of these indicators except basic capabilities. This would suggest that even though rights and freedoms may be curtailed during conflict, and states may lose their effectiveness, these environmental contexts can be and are strengthened and rebuilt with the passing of time.

Figure 3.13 Mean ranks for external environment indicators by stage in conflict continuum

Conclusion

As can be seen by the above analysis, civil society appears to experience changes in the CSI dimensions as the continuum progresses from conflict to the goal of sustainable peace. Though the CSI data are not longitudinal and therefore differences in a civil society cannot be tracked in a particular country through the stages of the continuum, the data do show a tendency that civil society grows and strengthens after conflict as countries rebuild and recover. In particular, Civic Engagement, Perception of Impact and the External Environment all increase for the better along the continuum from conflict, to post-conflict for ten years or less, to post-conflict for eleven years or longer. The Level of Organization and Practice of Values also increase from countries in conflict to the post-conflict stages. However, the Level of Organization plateaus between the two post-conflict stages, and post-conflict <10 is the strongest stage for the Practice of Values dimension. Though these patterns of increase from In Conflict to the post-conflict stages are expected due to the destructive nature of conflict for all areas of society, including the physical infrastructure, the social fabric that binds a community, large or small, together, and the mental

and psychological well-being of all walks of life, a number of noteworthy trends were also uncovered.

Perhaps most surprising is that the countries that were classified as having not been in a conflict since 1945 did not follow the expected pattern of the continuum. As they have not been in conflict, it would have been easy to predict these countries as having the strongest civil society. If they have not been at war, then are they not enjoying a sustainable peace? Yet these countries were frequently amongst the lowest scoring groups. They had the second lowest overall average for Civic Engagement, the lowest numbers of volunteers and diversity in civil membership in socially-based CSOs, tied with the In Conflict group for the lowest Level of Organization dimension average score, had the lowest percentage of CSOs belonging to networks, and the lowest peer-to-peer communication through meetings. They are also the least likely to have civil society practise the values that it espouses.

However, as noted, some of the countries that make up this group (Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan and Uruguay) have struggled in many ways akin to conflict, and thus this grouping is not truly representative of the stable, peaceful countries one might assume to belong in this category. This finding therefore illustrates both the difficulties in defining conflict mentioned earlier and the notion that the absence of conflict does not equal peace. Just because these countries have not experienced war as defined by this research does not mean that they are naturally healthy societies or that civil society will be healthier within them. It also reflects the limitations of the small sample of countries in the CSI 2008–2011 data. Further research would need to take a closer look at whether countries that are more typically considered peaceful do indeed have a stronger civil society.

Also of great interest is the finding that countries in conflict are the least likely to view civil society as having a role in the promotion of non-violence and peace. Considering the vast amounts and types of work that civil society engages in related specifically to promoting peace and non-violence in conflict countries, it would be worthwhile to determine why these countries that are perhaps in most need of this work are less likely to believe there is a role for it.

Countries that have been in a post-conflict status for eleven years or longer appear to have the strongest civil society in many aspects: they enjoy the highest engagement of citizens as members and volunteers of both socially-based and politically-based CSOs, diversity in membership of socially-based CSOs and participation through individual activism. These countries have stronger levels of organization as a whole, and higher peer-to-peer communication through meetings and exchange of information, and more international linkages. They also perceive more positive outcomes for an organization's policy activity. Countries in post-conflict for eleven years or more also have the most favourable external environment as a whole. They function with the highest state effectiveness, enjoy the most associational and organizational rights, and have stronger rule of law and more personal freedoms.

However, as mentioned earlier, the ideal situation (after having no conflict at all) is for civil society to be equally strong through every stage of the continuum from conflict to peace, and in countries where there has not been conflict; for civil society to grow and adapt according to the situation it finds itself in (including impacting on that situation). Therefore, the findings of this exploratory study spark the need for further research as identified in the above discussions in order to discover why these differences in civil society occur. This future research should extend the sample of countries, and should include countries more typically considered not to have a history of conflict or political strife. A useful approach would be the combination of the methodology of this study with that of Dudouet (2007) for a historical-longitudinal examination of civil society in the many countries that have now experienced post-conflict life for a number of years to determine if a country's civil society experiences the same patterns along the continuum of conflict-to-peace that were presented here.

Civil society has a long-standing role throughout conflict and the continuum to sustainable peace. This study has flagged several features experienced by civil society in different stages along that path, of which all involved can take advantage. This in turn will increase civil society development and impact. Civil society can help prevent, end and heal violent conflict. A strong functioning civil society that understands and therefore uses, adapts to, or outright changes the playing field, and is supported by its beneficiaries, governments, donors and other stakeholders can do it faster and better.

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