

Subcontracting Peace: The Challenges of NGO Peacebuilding

**Edited by Oliver P. Richmond and Henry Carey
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This edited volume of twenty-two essays deals with the involvement of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in efforts generally aiming at mitigating conflicts and establishing sustainable peace in various regions of the world. The contributors are mostly academics but also include practitioners and activists. The book is divided into four parts. The first part (conceptualising NGO roles in peacebuilding) contains four context-setting chapters. The rest (NGOs in peacemaking, NGOs in peacebuilding, NGOs and norm development and monitoring) are devoted to specific case studies of NGO work in a number of different settings ranging from Central America to the Balkans, the Southern African region, Rwanda, Iraq and Pakistan.

The international community's official recognition of the importance of NGOs goes back to the early 1990s. Because of their supposed closer links and better understanding of the local realities in developing countries as well as practical qualities – e.g., speed, flexibility, lack of bureaucracy, high implementation capacity and, especially, relative cheapness – they came to be regarded as the indispensable agents of development aid delivery, preferred much more over states and intergovernmental organisations. Similarly, they began to be significant operators in situations of conflict, helped by widely-endorsed opinions about their unique potential to contribute to peacemaking and peacebuilding. Such great demand naturally brought about a huge proliferation of NGOs that continued to flood the international scene, with growing acceptance of their role in public policy-making at both the UN and the nation-state levels.

The greater their function and involvement, the more the problems and challenges they came to confront, with the failures they experienced. In addition to self-doubts about the worth of their own contributions in the field, there have been many outpourings of disillusionment and complaints directed against them.

In this environment, *Subcontracting Peace* comes across as an ambitious effort to make sense of the past two decades' rapid rise of the NGOs as global peacebuilding actors, as well as the more recent doubts, self-doubts and criticisms

related to the issues of their effectiveness, performance, management, and socioeconomic and political impact on local populations. In doing this, it adopts a rather loose sense for the term 'NGO', covering almost any non-state organisation, non-for-profit or otherwise (see, for example, the article on 'Private Military Companies'). Also the term 'peacebuilding' is used to cover not only the long-term process that involves interventions leading to stabilisation and transformation of post conflict societies so as to achieve durable peace, but also more broadly, to include peacemaking and peacekeeping, military intervention, humanitarian assistance, advocacy work, election monitoring, environment work, establishment of peace zones, etc.

An overview of the general background relevant to NGO peacebuilding, presented in the chapters of part one, introduce the focal concepts of the book. Notably among these are global governance, the liberal peace, subcontracting of peace, transnational political mobilisation, non-state political entrepreneurs.

Chadwick F. Alger examines the nature and scope of the increasing involvement of NGOs in world affairs and their growing participation and influence in intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), particularly the UN. Thus, NGOs appear to be an important constituent of 'emerging global governance', which Alger presents as a useful context within which to understand and evaluate the vast range of NGO peacebuilding activities and the related problems discussed in the book.

Oliver Richmond's chapter, with its somewhat loaded title 'The Dilemmas of Subcontracting the Liberal Peace', is a critical assessment of the ideological ground on which the current goals of the 'peacebuilding consensus' amongst 'donors, major states, IGOs, and IFIs' are based. He argues that NGOs and their networks have now become crucial in realising these goals which encompass 'building the institutions of the "liberal peace" ... including free market economies and development strategies, social reform political democratisation, to human rights and humanitarian assistance'. (p. 20) Moreover, as a result of their supposed independence and unique links with local populations and civil society, NGOs in effect serve to provide the consent needed to legitimise the more crusading aspects of this 'liberal peace'.

NGOs' growing presence and influence in the international arena, boosted by the enthusiastic support, resources and political access given to them by powerful states, international organisations and private foundations, have led to their coming under increasing scrutiny. The various criticisms directed against the NGOs from those concerned about the betterment of NGO practices as well as from sceptics across the political spectrum are the subject of Kim Reimann's chapter. She

discusses these under the five categories of (1) NGO performance and effectiveness; (2) accountability, representation and transparency issues; (3) NGO autonomy and dependence on external funding; (4) commercialisation and the creation of a 'global market of worthy and just causes'; and (5) ideological and politically motivated critiques of the Western NGOs's influence. Her conclusion is that 'Although NGOs are not the "magic bullet" that will solve all problems ... they have also provided relief and "voice" to millions of people in practically all corners of the globe'. (p. 50)

Fiona Adamson puts forward the idea that, whether violent or not, today's transnational political or social movements should be more usefully seen as products of the same phenomenon, namely, transnational political mobilisation brought about by non-state 'political entrepreneurs'. This, she explains, has been due to the incentives provided by globalisation. Concentrating more on the activities of non-state actors who employ violence (both pre- and post-9/11), she discusses the security implications of transnational political mobilisation both at state and global levels. She argues that 'the blurring of distinctions between internal and external security threats, and the increasing convergence of internal and external security strategies combine to lead to what might be referred to as the "domesticisation" of the global security environment.' (p. 62)

The remaining chapters are accounts of specific NGO peacemaking/peacebuilding efforts in different localities. They are generally more descriptive than analytic, though they manage to give useful insights into many of the actual technical, structural, political and normative problems associated with the related approaches and practices and their short and long-term impacts.

The peacemaking part has five articles. Ann Kelleher and James Larry Taulbee write about the Norwegian initiatives (in Guatemala, Sri Lanka and Sudan) which characteristically rely on cooperation between the Norwegian government and the Norwegian NGOs and involve a combination or linking of official (Track 1) and unofficial (Track 2) diplomatic processes in the country experiencing conflict. Susan Burgerman's article is about the role of the civil society actors in the Guatemalan peace process of the 1990s, while Catalina Rojas tells us the story of the remarkable phenomenon of the Colombian 'zones of peace' and the NGOs contribution to their establishment. Mahmood Monshipouri reports about the international humanitarian NGOs' dilemmas in Iraq where they often run the risk of being seen as non-neutral adjuncts of the US or other military occupation forces, and hence 'justified' targets of attack. It is interesting to compare this situation with the cases of Sierra Leone and East Timor where, as Michael Gordon Jackson explains, the external military forces that backed the NGOs were internationally sanctioned UN peacekeeping troops.

Of the eight chapters included in the part on peacebuilding, the one by Julius Mertus and Tazreena Sajjad on the western controlled state-building experiment in the Balkans is the most notable. Here one finds numerous illuminating points related to the negative aspects of the externally funded and directed civil society development programme promoted as an important component of the post-conflict reconstruction process. Other essays in this section are: by Marek Pavka virtually promoting the somewhat unorthodox idea of utilisation of private military companies in peacekeeping as alternative to traditional UN troops; by Wole Olaleye and David Backer reporting from a 2001 survey on NGOs working in trauma management and crime prevention programmes in the Southern African region; by Clark Efaw and Avtar Kaul on how NGOs can push for a 'Rights-based Approach' to natural resources management that entails economic development and sustainable environment with a focus on the political and economic empowerment of the poor local populations; by Susan Saphiro, the project director of the Soros Foundations' 'Health Education Program', assessing the different dimensions of this programme's implementation (1989-1999) and its impact on the transformation process in twenty-three post-communist countries; by Thania Paffenholz examining the peacebuilding work carried out in Somalia by the Swedish 'Life and Peace Institute'; by Joanna Fisher looking at the involvement of NGOs in 'institution-building' in Rwanda though the examples of the introduction of two traditional local institutions in modern form; and by Steven Barmazel on the achievements of the Orangi Pilot Project, a self-financed NGO that implemented a development programme to improve living conditions in the ethnically diverse and impoverished urban centre of Orangi in Pakistan.

In the final part of this volume are articles by Chena B. Seelarbokus who gives an appraisal of NGO advocacy efforts against the use of depleted uranium weapons; by Henry Carey about the problems confronting foreign election observers in post-conflict countries; and by JoAnn Fagot Aviel describing NGO strategies used for the promotion of human rights and the rule of law in Guatemala and El Salvador.

Subcontracting Peace is certainly a useful contribution to the current debate on the role of NGOs in peacebuilding. At any rate for those who can bear to read it. I say this because most of the articles are written without a lot of concern for clarity let alone style and are often badly organised. Some of them even give one the impression that they may be hastily produced first drafts which the authors or the editors somehow forgot to go over a second time. There are too many typographical and grammatical errors. In two consecutive pages of one article I counted four such mistakes. For instance, a sentence like this is allowed to pass: 'The complexity of the political processes in which NGOs that are the focus of this volume are involved is not only a result of the 'sheer diversity' of those NGOs working for social and

political change, but also NGOs providing humanitarian relief, as well as from the array of other state and intergovernmental NGOs with which they must interact.' (p. 4) And this: 'We need to study the supporting organisations and activities enhance NGO peacebuilding.' (p. 225) etc. It is a pity that the combined effort of such an impressive group of academics and professionals, together with a respectable publisher, could not do a bit better than this.

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