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## **Conflict and the Emerging Roles of NGOs in Peace-building in Uganda**

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This paper is part of his ongoing research in the area of conflicts and peace-building and was originally presented at a seminar at the Centre of African Studies in December 2006.

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## **1. Introduction**

With the multiplication and escalation of intra-state and regional violent conflicts, the need for new workable conflict resolution practices has come into sharper focus. There has been a realization among governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) the work for peace requires improved cooperation among several agencies at different levels of conflict affected societies.

Traditionally, governments inadequately addressed national conflicts by negotiating agreements with rebel or insurgency groups. True peace, however, addresses the underlying causes driving the conflicts, using complex measures which often are related to core themes like participation, good governance and democracy. Conflicts are almost always delicate and politically complex and may be exacerbated by weak government agencies, insufficient resource allocation, or the lack of political will to resolve the conflict.

With the recognition that peacemaking must address a wide range of underlying complexities, the conflict and conflict resolution discourse developed dramatically. In the early 1980s, “track-two diplomacy” accompanied official government diplomacy; more recently, conflicts were addressed by multi-track international relations that incorporated a synthesis of international, national, and local actors as well as official and non-governmental organizations. This more nuanced approach seeks not only the cessation of hostilities but sustainable conflict resolution and societal reconstruction.

It is the objective of this paper to analyze the roles of NGOs in peace processes. First, it will discuss the evolution of a new conflict resolution environment and the establishment of partnerships between Governments and non-state actors. Second, the paper will encapsulate the emerging roles of non-

state actors within this new framework. Finally, the paper will evaluate the roles and functions of NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) in northern Uganda.

## **2. Towards a New Conflict Resolution Environment**

The world wide expectations that the end to the cold war would also result in improved conditions for global peace and stability rapidly faded in the face of new levels of conflicts and wars during the closing decade of the twentieth century. The stagnant conflicts and wars resulting from the particulars of the East-West power balance, strategic patronage and national loyalty to tactical 'block' concerns changed dramatically with the abolition of the Soviet Union and the opening up of new geographic, political, social and economic borders, which were previously sealed.

In the Cold War power-balanced scenario, wars generally were fought between states or between factions supported by the patrons. The post Cold War order quickly witnessed an emerging pattern of civil, intra-state and regionalized conflicts involving citizens as both perpetrators and victims of conflict. Violent human rights abuses flaring in the republics of the Caucasus, the Balkans, the Middle East, eastern and western Africa are all testimony to the realization that the biggest threat to human security may derive from hostile next door neighbors rather than a nuclear meltdown. One of the hallmarks of post-Cold War conflicts is the effect on civilian populations: citizens trapped in conflict, high levels of non-combatant casualties, and mass displacement to camps in neighboring areas or across international borders. The Balkan and Caucasus wars in the early 1990s saw such displacement and victimization of citizens as did more recent conflicts in the African Great Lakes region, including northern Uganda, Darfur and Sudan.



The fundamental geo-political changes created new responses to conflicts as it emerged that the state was no longer the singular entity in charge of preventing or bringing resolution to violent conflicts. Responses to conflict developed in parallel to the evolution of new structures of conflict. Through Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace*, the UN system launched a new paradigm for addressing conflicts. Recognizing increased levels of intra-state tensions such as ethnic, religious, social and cultural anxieties, the new Agenda offered assistance to "peace-building in its differing contexts, rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife..." (Boutros-Ghali 1992).

With the UN system's introduction of new understandings of conflict and the subsequent new operational mechanisms for responding to conflicts, a more consolidated approach to assistance developed with the main objective to support civilians in war zones. To mitigate impact on these populations, humanitarian assistance subsequently was distributed in the midst of ongoing conflict, while international efforts to prevent conflict saw new modalities and networks of operators for intervention. The international community developed the notion that human rights abuses, crisis and the possible expansion of insecurity are international concerns. This new level of moral and practical responsibility shifted foreign policy towards conflict prevention, resolution and societal reconstruction, from monitoring abusive national conduct to far-reaching international interventions.

The fact that stability was regarded as a prerequisite for development was nothing new. Changes, however, focused on networks and programmatic responses to produce and sustain stability, increasingly focusing on preventing rather than addressing conflicts. The shift to preventative action started by addressing conventional diplomatic process of conflict resolution, which was

regarded as an inappropriate tool for addressing protracted or intra-state conflicts. By expanding the definition of conflict to include social problems resulting from insufficient governance and underdevelopment, new networks of international organizations, NGOs and civil society organizations legitimized strategic alliances in the pursuit of support to social transformation in order to achieve stability as a precursor for development.

‘Track Two Diplomacy,’ or later ‘Multi Track Approaches’ (Lewer 1999) invited the emerging networks of UN agencies, governments, NGOs, international organizations, civil society organizations, the police, and the military in new ways of working together, involving relations of state-non state actors to be increasingly active in addressing peace-building mechanisms. Sustainable conflict resolution subsequently had to be developed in cooperative settings addressing issues like ethnic identity, unbiased economic distribution, democratization, political space and social peace. This formula was designed over the commitment to guarantee long term conflict resolution and the reconstruction of societies in such a way as to avoid recurrence of conflict. These new approaches to conflict resolution also developed a new vocabulary, revealing the ambitions of how to work with conflict: root-causes, negative imaging, stereotyping, conflict management, civil society inclusion, good governance, weak or fragile state, peace-building and positive peace. This vocabulary is indicative of the complexity of the new process.

In development assistance terms, the new programs aimed at conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction are to be regarded as far-reaching offshoots of conventional development programming. As the orientation moves from war affected societies to creating stable entities, the assistance policy necessarily has to focus on close cooperation with the plethora of entities contributing to the society. The network of conflict resolution actors then pursues program assistance as a first step in the long-term development

process. Following this platform of networks, an immeasurable variety of organizations were established to translate multi-track diplomacy into on-the-ground activities, combining and coordinating the avenues of communication and actions taken by Governments, institutions, communities and individuals at international, regional, nation, and local levels (Rupesinghe and Anderlini 1998).

Traditionally, NGOs regarded their active functions as a humanitarian trademark to save and protect lives (Anderson 2003). NGO presence in conflict environments and increased levels of cooperation with donor governments have influenced the character of international responses to conflict, in that new players within the field of peace-building required new processes of agreement, programming, communication, cooperation and policy. Conditions allowing for and managing the performance of NGOs are required as the program implementation is having societal implications reaching far beyond the humanitarian variables. Conflict prevention and resolution action does not take place in a vacuum and is by all means also political. The intricate question of impartiality comes across even more complex, as actors necessarily will have to be sensitive to their potential to do harm (Anderson 1999).

### **3. Roles of Non-State Actors**

The evolution of conflict prevention policies are met by a diversity of NGOs established with different sets of objectives. Three major clusters or types of NGOs stand out (Aall 2003): humanitarian, human rights, and conflict resolution. Within this grouping, a distinction is drawn between International NGOs (INGO) operating across national borders, national NGOs and Civil Society Organizations operating in one country or even more targeted to a specific, limited geography. A unifying factor though, is the objectives, for which they

perform, as they operate in partnerships within the same environment, for the same needs and sharing equal operational requirements established by authorities.

A NGO is defined as a private, self-governing not-for-profit entity characterized as a bridging facility between the official and the grassroots levels, acting as advocates for the grassroots and implementers of Governments and INGO programmes (Aall 2003). Civil Society Organizations are any associations operating outside the formal state structures, including social and political organizations, faith based organizations, trade unions, women and youth groups, academic institutions, traditional leaders and others.

Good governance is the system of mutual support and cooperation between a wide variety of public and private, state and non-state, national and international institutions and practices. NGOs and civil society organizations are part of this governance system although they cannot replace the state; similarly, the state cannot seek to be the sole occupant of civil society.

This system can be damaged by an underdeveloped civil society or a state that is overreaching – ‘authoritarian’ – or too weak. In many cases, an underdeveloped civil society is a cause of an authoritarian state. Symptomatic of such states are a lack of accountability, transparency and legitimacy within both the civil society and the state. Decisions are made solely at executive levels and then filtered down through the organizations without proper consultation, leading to deficient organizational ownership to the project, the project activities and partnership with beneficiaries. In a damaged system, misappropriation of public resources for private gain is common, along with a lack of accountability. Even with functional accountability systems and system management, though, corruption is possible: a lack of sufficient capacity within both state and civil society entities with regard to skills in management,

communication and administration often leads to corruption and failure to deliver services. Rules and regulations to operationally guide civil society are important as the absence of codes of conduct and ethics negatively impact the cooperation between civil society and the state.

Of course, the operational capacity to engage in conflict transformation activities varies substantially among the civil society entities. Because of this, there is a significant need for appropriate capacity-building and training programmes. A concerted effort must be made to identify and provide appropriate training and capacity-building support for civil society actors involved in conflict transformation.

This support and the task of rebuilding damaged governance structures often fall to NGOs, whose goals are to heal within the aforementioned clusters. Increasingly, human rights violations have provided a rationale for NGOs and aid agencies to intervene in conflicts. The roles of NGOs within this field are:

- the immediate provision of humanitarian relief to people in emergencies;
- the short-term advocacy and monitoring of basic human rights;
- the promotion of long-term social and economic development programs in poverty affected countries; and
- the overall pursuit of peace (Anderson 2003 and Richmond 2001).

These action levels involve different policy decision-making, financing and program planning, different levels of coordination with authorities and require different staff qualifications. However, immediate relief work and long-term development are often inseparable, as the first development initiatives are designed and partnerships established during early relief phases of assistance. Development cooperation strives for an environment of structural stability as a starting point for sustainable development (OECD 2001).

NGOs constitute an essential part of civil society and hold the potential to play key roles in resolving conflicts and restoring civil peace. NGOs can establish or support local network of citizens, so-called peace constituencies (Lederach 1997) with the objective to facilitate public participation in a peace-building formula, based on long-term commitment through the distribution of the widest possible responsibility and ownership to the process. NGO support to civil society takes on the following three dimensions (Pouligny 2004):

- utilize local knowledge and resources as key inputs to establishing program strategies;
- harmonize external programming with local processes; and
- manage the difficulties associated with working with asymmetric associations.

A number of critical areas for cooperation between NGOs/civil society and the state are part and parcel of the standards eventually leading to successful performance. Such areas include planning, communication and coordination between state and civil society and within civil society. In order for the state and NGOs/civil society to fulfill their roles effectively and to strengthen each other there is a basic need to communicate effectively. For communication to be vibrant and relevant, it takes a certain infrastructure and understanding of the functioning of communication between the state and civil society. Communication is not control, antagonistic or erratic. Communication is a means of achieving objectives.

NGOs do not individually establish needs and thus need close dialogue with both beneficiaries and host authorities or Governments in order to determine their actions' extent, nature and methods. Close dialogue ensures that efforts will be cooperatively encouraged by the Government rather than ignored or

even opposed. Furthermore, the nexus of interaction between states and non-states translates into professional levels of partnership, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation. Whatever the formal relationship, NGOs are guests in the host nation and so must work within that nation's political framework. Cooperation with a Government institution is a reflection of governance and not just a signal to operate independently outside the limitations of agreements. Certain aspects, such as the evaluations, are attempts to ensure neutrality and professionalism; paradoxically, many NGOs are criticized for that very relationship with host Governments. In general, effective work in conflict situations requires NGOs to safeguard their institutional identity and be alert to challenges to perceived impartiality. At least four conditions for NGOs to directly engaging in conflict resolution activities prevail (Aall 2003):

- be very familiar with the area of operation, knowledgeable about key issues and participants in the conflict;
- establish cooperation agreements with indigenous partners;
- be well grounded in technical conflict resolution skills; and
- understand and accept the personal risk they run in attempting to intervene directly in the conflict.

The role of the NGOs in conflict resolution is based on their presence on the ground as actors with insight and local knowledge generated over years of community work. To be successful, an NGO must employ experts, communicate with local civil society organizations and Government, and plan activities so as to harmonize all work, from short-term relief to long-term development.

The following section will explore the conflict in northern Uganda and the contributions to peace-building by local, state, and international actors.

#### **4. The Roles of the State and Non-state Actors in Uganda**

Sectarian violence has been a dominant aspect of Uganda's post-independence history, with the northern region of the country at the center of this legacy. Issues of ethnic identity and representation constitute an inseparable element of the nation's security domain and governance mechanism, especially regarding northern ethnic groups, such as the Acholi, the Langi, the Iteso, the Karamojong and the West Nilers.

Those in power often used northern tribes to ethnicize military power throughout Ugandan history. The Acholi made up a prime recruiting ground for the colonial King's African Rifles and the first Obote Government inherited an Acholi dominated army. This Government, the first following Independence, set in motion the militarization of public and political space, creating inter-ethnic tensions. After the 1971 coup, Idi Amin replaced ethnic Acholi officers with loyalists from his home region of West Nile and subsequently murdered huge numbers of opposition groups. Upon returning to power in 1980, the second Obote Government replenished the ranks of the army with Acholi.

The National Resistance Army (NRA) mobilized against the Obote II regime, framing the political fight along ethnic lines. The Luwero massacre, perpetrated by Obote's United National Liberation Army (UNLA), further cemented the tie between politics and ethnicity. Obote was overthrown by yet another northerner, Okello, resulting in the Acholi dominance of both political and military space. This short-lived Government was ousted by the NRA, causing the Acholi elements of the UNLA to relocate to southern Sudan. Numerous succeeding conflicts have developed along ethnic lines, including rebel groups such as the Ugandan People's Democratic Army, the Holy Spirit Movement, and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (See: Hansen 2006a for detailed presentation). The conflict involving the LRA continued throughout the life of



the current Government and is, similar to previous Ugandan conflicts, is highly ethnicized.

What about this conflict makes it seem to be intractable? There are two aspects contributing to its longevity and brutality. First, the cause of the war is unclear. LRA motivations are dubious; though they occasionally claim some political message, their acts seem to be focused on terrorizing the civilian population they claim to represent. With this, there is a conspicuous absence of popular support in the north, despite the LRA leadership statements.

In addition, military support and decisions have prolonged the war. The LRA received support from the Government of Sudan for many years in retaliation for Uganda's patronage of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army fighting in the south of Sudan. Similarly, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni persistently called for military victory<sup>1</sup>, although that scenario seems increasingly unlikely.

The two decades of conflict have produced an ongoing and simultaneous process of disintegration and re-integration of northern society, with the population bearing the physical and emotional blunt of the problems in what Jan Egeland, the UN Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, describes as the worst humanitarian catastrophe that receives the least international attention (BBC News. November 10, 2003). A large proportion of the population – over 90% in some districts – is living in crowded displacement camps with little access to land or sources of livelihood.

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<sup>1</sup> One example cited from the New Vision, November 15, 2006:

“President Yoweri Museveni has described LRA rebel leader Joseph Kony as a traitor. “Kony is a traitor and a criminal. Over the last 19 years, he has tried to kill as many Ugandans as possible. If it was not for the NRM/UPDF, he would have killed hundreds of thousands of Ugandans...When H.E. Salva Kiir... proposed a new attempt at peace talks, I agreed because of Congo and the UN giving a safe haven to Kony. I also thought that Otti and Kony, having tasted the serious pressure we had put them under, had understood the dangers to themselves and would use this chance to come out of their criminality...The days of playing with UPDF are over. There is no trick you will play that you will get away with. If you continue disturbing peace, you will perish because the UPDF's capacity is now almost complete,” he said.”

Beyond the humanitarian characteristics of the conflict, a potential political undercurrent seems to be part of local considerations. The legacies of mistrust and ethnic confrontation that have distinguished the post-colonial political landscape seem to lock the conflict into renewed cycles of violence, depriving large segments of the population from life opportunities, turning experiences of conflict into a root cause for future life possibilities. The Government's inability to end the conflict, coupled with its questionable record on providing basic services, resulted in the escalation of ethno-political tensions. Thus, "...even if Kony's movement does not propose a concrete political programme, the effect of the LRA has been profoundly political" (Jackson 2002).

Human rights abuses and violence divide people, catapulting tension and feelings of mistrust, hatred, and fear, "Whereas common experiences link people, different experiences can divide them. Perceptions of the world and of right and wrong, of justice and injustice often reflect direct and immediate experience" (Anderson 1999). It is against this background that victims display a high level of frustration and annoyance being sandwiched between violence and inadequate security responses.

As a result, the Acholi have tended to look to other authorities with high hopes as their main partners in mitigating the effects of conflict and ultimately ending the war. Importantly, a gap in the exercise of basic authority exists in the conflict area. For example, many local disputes go unaddressed, as the local population often is left with no authority to turn to. By contrast, in other areas of Uganda, such grievances and local disputes are normally addressed by the Local Council (LC) system or similar public structures. Likewise, basic services such as education, sanitation, water, and others are often not provided for by the Government.

Therefore, non-state actors help fill the void left by the state. These non-state actors work in the state's domain, justified and reinforced by the conflict. In turn, this scenario created a unique structure of shared authority in the region with distinct relationships between the state, civilians, civil society groups, humanitarian and development practitioners. Such structures include NGOs, a plethora of civil society organizations, traditional leaders and religious leaders, which have all been allowed both political and humanitarian space at the local level.

### *The Role of Traditional Authorities*

Understanding the local traditions in northern Uganda is a necessary prerequisite to effectively engage and work in the region, since traditional and cultural leaders play a very important role in peoples' everyday life. Traditional leadership consists of the Paramount Chief and his deputies, sub-county Chiefs and elders. Their roles include mediation in and resolution of local disputes, reconciliation and justice mechanisms, as well as rearing the youth. Traditionally, the Chiefs foster reconciliation, settle disputes through the conduct of ceremonies such as the 'mato oput' and 'tumu kir', enforcing traditional norms and values by emphasizing forgiveness and reconciliation, as well as filling the gap to pre-empt escalation of violent actions. The Acholi culture is referred to as one based on forgiveness and reconciliation and the Chiefs' leadership and guidance in cleansing ceremonies are vital to defusing tense situations. Many persons interviewed in northern Uganda emphasize that they turn to traditional Chiefs to address local dispute resolution or community justice issues, such as disagreement of land rights, clan fights or animosity between families, as well as local thievery. Such justice practices would not be seen as stand-alone measures in other areas of Uganda, where offences or dispute resolution also are dealt with through the official LC structure.

Thus, traditional leaders perform highly relevant functions in the local justice

system of northern Uganda. Traditional leaders are trusted by the population and even by Government to be independent, impartial and moral, although these perceptions may be exacerbated by negative opinion about the Government's effectiveness in the face of conflict. Nonetheless, where official structures are seen to cause economic and social shortcomings, traditional authorities are viewed as effective in addressing these issues, especially when settling family disputes, reconciling parties in conflict and encouraging peaceful co-habitation. For many Acholi, traditional leaders command moral authority and are effective in dealing with its social responsibilities.

Issues of local justice are vital to peaceful co-habitation in overcrowded IDP camps that differ greatly from the spacious traditional ways of life, where people were neighbours and could visit when they desired. Thus, traditional leaders' level of power, respect and performance assist in upholding peaceful relations at all levels, from domestic and community conflicts to the larger conflict with the LRA.

### *The Role of Religious Leaders*

Alongside traditional leaders, religious leaders command an additional layer of organized, united and respected local leadership in the northern region. While traditional leaders provide local peace and reconciliation tools, religious leaders provide the channels within which communication can flow to the otherwise unattainable parties. In 1998, all of the main religious faiths in northern Uganda gathered together to form the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), which is headed by a senior core team comprised of the Catholic Archbishop, the Anglican Bishop, the Muslim Sheikh and a Christian Orthodox representative. Together, these leaders direct and lead the voices of concerned persons in the camps to both the Government and the international community.

For example, a major achievement of the ARLPI is advocating the Amnesty Act to the Government. Following considerable lobbying and advocacy by the religious leaders in the late 1990s, the Government adopted the Amnesty Act in 2000, providing for comprehensive amnesty for all insurgents and rebels in Uganda. Due largely to the intense advocacy campaigns undertaken by the religious leaders over many years, the Amnesty Act is well understood and supported by the Acholi population. Their communication efforts are also aimed at outreach to the LRA through radio, telephone and other communication channels. By all means, the religious leaders remain a vital resource for continuing communication in the region and advocacy for peace and reconciliation.

### *The Role of NGOs*

In an environment with deficient public service delivery, NGOs, civil society organizations, development partners and the UN family have a significant responsibility in providing services which are usually ascribed to the state. Frustrated by perceived governmental neglect, many communities turned to NGOs for humanitarian services. As institutions independent from the Government, NGOs can provide for humanitarian needs while simultaneously avoiding cross sensitive boundaries that could obstruct their work. Many NGOs seek to meet basic needs such as providing food, medical care, clothes and other commodities outside the resource reach of central and local Government and traditional leaders. As a result, northern Uganda's populations often trust NGOs to be effective providers and caretakers. In turn, this relationship of trust allows NGOs to be more effective in their tasks while positively reinforcing peoples' loyalty to authority structures.

However, there are two central issues related to the functioning of non-state actors as long-term caregivers. In the short-term period, the scope and coordination of NGO-supplied services is often inefficient. The majority of NGOs or

civil society organizations only have the ability to cover a relatively small territory or thematic area. For example, an organization may provide water and sanitation to 10 IDP camps, leaving the omitted 52 camps to seek these services elsewhere. In other situations, some NGOs overlap activities, such as undertaking identical psychosocial support in the same camp (these camps are often in easy access from arterial roads). NGOs in northern Uganda do not adequately inform local district Government offices about their activities, and when they do, these offices do not sufficiently manage the information. As the lack of a comprehensive coordinating framework leads to omissions and duplications, NGO service delivery can be highly inefficient.

The second central issue concerns attitudes formed over the long-term period toward NGOs and the Government, and implications for the development of a prosperous peace and security environment. As the conflict persists, large population groups in northern Uganda no longer see the conduct of NGOs as a provisional mechanism for support. On the contrary, the populations increasingly understand the performance of NGOs as a permanent feature of service delivery. Though it helps build trust, it also builds dependency: most of the population believes that disaster would occur should NGOs leave the region. This reveals mistrust in the Government's ability to provide these services, potentially damaging to the Government's ability to continue to procure funding from beneficiaries.

Of course, NGOs are not universally trusted. Some persons in the IDP camps believe that through development practices, NGOs are strengthening the central Government. Occasionally, schools, health centers and other necessary institutions have been constructed without sufficient levels of dialogue and recommendation provided by the local population. This can lead to inadequate and inefficient services as well as critical ownership issues.

## *Impacts of the Shared Authority Structure*

The relationship between conflict and shared authority is significantly reinforced by articulated enemy imaging, power politics, displacement and other humanitarian challenges replicating conflict rather than focusing on human security. Along with the relationship and key issues of identity, representation, and human security (Richmond 2001), a critical pattern of psychological issues emerges. Along with the aforementioned hazards of dependency and further mistrust of the Government, weak state structures and uncoordinated civil society performance pose a problem for the continued cultural 'binding' of the nation into a coherent shared identity. The problem is not one of destruction of identity, but rather construction of identities forged by conflict. The proliferation of locally based identities causes problems for the state's authority over its population's sense of cultural attachment.

The social-psychology of attachment to locality is powerful and complex, demonstrated through different possible modes of articulation and different consequent implications for people's sense of belonging. At its most intense, "(s)trong ethnic identities are today frequently seen as a source of social disintegration, violence, and terror" (Boulding 2000); at minimum, it may be regarded as a reaction to the failure of the state to meet the needs of its miscellaneous population. Communal identity is rarely addressed by NGOs or Government, yet it seems ultimately to be a governance concern in situations of conflict.

Of course, attempts to address identity by the state or other organizations would be seen – rightly so – as authoritarian. Yet the immature development of civil society and political institutions may lead to a confrontation of social interests. The absence of credible interaction and productive dialogue between local representatives and the Government constitute a setback in the political

process, arresting possible developments in key areas such as: the persistence of regional, ethnic or religious conflicts; poorly educated and corrupt military leaders; the unwillingness of political elites to accept defeat and; the organizational weakness of civil society (Koonings & Kruijt 2002). As exemplified by the lack of northern support for President Museveni in the latest presidential elections, the severe level of human rights abuses, violence, and feeling of marginalization or exclusion have significant negative impact on politics.

Realizing that it cannot answer single-handedly the conflict in the north, the Government has launched a number of different peace, recovery and development plans. These plans seek to address security and other challenges simultaneously: displaced persons, malnourishment, psycho-social problems, educational needs, and medical care, among others. Thus the Government encouraged the development of shared authority structures to address the conflict comprehensively. Shared authority structures, from sub-regional to national levels, were called upon to propel the search for avenues to foster national reconciliation.

The pattern of events in Uganda demonstrates a fundamental structural problem in the system of conflict resolution. Just like any other major political manifestation, the peace-process must be backed by the entire nation and the question arises to what extent the current political system is able to include northern concerns into the peace-building agenda. Political division, especially when connected with ethnic animosity, complicates such initiatives.

Historically, politicians in Uganda have been reluctant of relinquishing their powers. Prime Minister Obote's exiling of the King of Buganda saw the beginning of a patrimonial governance structure; because of this, the "constitution lost its significance as a normative guide for political behaviour." (Hyden 1998).



Following the NRM coming to power, a system of 'resistance councils' was established through a hierarchical model encompassing presentation from the village to the national level, creating a framework for national legitimacy. This system was supposed to create a national governance system to enhance security and strengthen the state. However, in doing so, the NRM stumbled into a basic contradiction by imposing a system of choice.

In order to warrant as diverse participation as possible, invitations were extended to other groups active in the bush war, but political space was limited to the loyalty parameters shaping the policies of the NRM. Political opposition was suspended and the no-party political system was formed, ostensibly to prevent ethnic divisions from transferring to political ones. As long as the country is divided along ethnic and religious lines, it requires economic development until a multiple-party system can be trusted. It is only following the elections in 2006 the suspension of organized opposition has been lifted.

The early NRM ran a 'winner takes all' formula and patronage remains a governing practice. The all-encompassing nature of the NRM translates into its being "...part of both state and civil society at the same time. This generates contradictions which are not easily resolved, and where the tendency often is for its association with the state to take precedence in finding a solution. This leaves behind an image of the movement as more exclusivist than inclusivist" (Hyden 1998).

The legitimacy of the NRM system as open to everyone and serving the whole nation may fail if northern and other regional concerns are left aside. Challenges articulated by civil society to the governance system in addressing the conflict should not be perceived by the Government as a threat or failure, but rather as a window of opportunity to engage more capacity in working for lasting peace solutions. Legitimate challenges should be translated into vehicles

for wider participation, resulting in a civil society that has been afforded space for action. A strengthened civil society will eventually also strengthen the state, as a healthy democratic governance structure is truly constructed on the mobilization of citizens.

The weak state performance in resolving the conflict relates to the failure of the state to unite the different ethnic identities. Conflict resolution based on reconciliation as a vehicle for national unity, complemented by comprehensive recovery and development programs may be the yet untested answer to a new peace-building principle. Such endeavors will require NGOs to supplement their traditional relief and rehabilitation activities with new long-term programming, qualified staff members, and cooperation with the state. A comprehensive approach is the best chance to resolving the conflict.

## **5. Conclusion**

Conflict is multi-dimensional. As a consequence, action launched to manage conflict requires a multi-dimensional response. The hybrid of NGOs and civil society organizations constitute a unique platform for addressing the key conflict resolution issues of identity, representation and humanitarian action. This conflict resolution program understands peace-building as the state's ability and will to stabilize society through the pursuit of meeting human needs. Conflict resolution practices subsequently have to be tied to bottom-up approaches in which individuals and communities are afforded certain positions and influence in the conflict environment. The perspectives for lasting resolution to structural causes of conflict are dependent on how local environments have access to take part in the wider peace-building process. Such a formula can hardly be advanced by conventional diplomatic approaches to conflict settlement and will require new structures able to bring into the equation the

important outlooks for human rights, participatory processes and human security.

Referring to NGOs and civil society with little attention to the vast organizational diversity also masks the requirements for operational qualifications and thorough understanding of managerial requirements as part of close cooperation with international partners and Governments. When operating in environments characterized as weak in governance terms, it is critical not to perceive NGOs and civil society organizations as alternatives to the dysfunctional state responsibility. When dealing with identity, representation and humanitarian action, there is ample space and responsibility for the trained organizations holding the potential to contribute positively to conflict resolution, as they solely are able to fill the gap between the state and human security. Bottom-up peace-building is about defusing local tension by bringing their legitimate concerns into an official constructive conflict resolution environment, eventually leading to the stabilization of civil society.

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