

"What are the important elements of peace-building processes in post conflict situations? Comment especially on the roles of NGOs"

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Introduction

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) nowadays play active roles in various fields of our life. Peace-building is also one of the fields to which NGOs are highly expected to contribute by making use of their unique characteristics. However, while NGOs are highly expected and their potential is high, it must be important for us to critically examine them. Otherwise, it is impossible for us to argue about the roles of NGOs in peace-building processes in post-conflict situations. This essay will argue mainly about the relations among international NGOs, local NGOs and their donors by pointing out ideal and the real of NGOs. The ultimate purpose is to suggest the collaboration and coordination of NGOs and donors as the important elements of peace-building processes, and to address the importance of the mutual supplement of capacity of international and local NGOs in order to realise their long-term commitment to peace-building processes.

Here, I will introduce a famous thesis, *Power Shift*, which is often said to have brought about impact on the world. The author, Mathews, wrote in it as follows:

‘A world that is more adaptable and in which power is more diffused could mean more peace, justice, and capacity to manage the burgeoning list of humankind's interconnected problems. At a time of accelerating change, NGOs are quicker than governments to respond to new demands and opportunities. Internationally, in both the poorest and richest countries, NGOs, when adequately funded, can outperform government in the delivery of many public services. Their growth, along with that of the other elements of civil society, can strengthen the fabric of the many still-fragile democracies. And they are better than governments at dealing with problems that grow slowly and affect society through their cumulative effect on individuals-the "soft" threats of environmental degradation, denial of human rights, population growth, poverty, and lack of development that may already be causing more deaths in conflict than are traditional acts of aggression.’¹

In this thesis, she highlights the potential of NGOs. She further mentions that NGOs will be a key actor in the world system. In spite of such a future perspective of NGOs as she claims, I have heard voices of NGOs staffs in the field.

‘*Our work is difficult to see the result.*’ These are words of a staff of a NGO in Croatia, *Suncokret*.² When I was involved in volunteer work for refugees and people with special needs in Croatia in the summer of 2002, she told me the hardship of NGO activities in reality.

¹ Mathews, Jessica T. ‘*Power Shift*’, *Foreign Affairs*, New York, Jan/Feb, 1997, 76(1); p.63

² *Suncokret*, which means *sunflower* in Serbo-Croatian language, is a Croatian NGO which has been operating in the Balkans to support refugees and internally-displaced persons (IDPs) since 1992. It also accepts foreign volunteers for volunteer activities, which I joined in 2002.

See: www.suncokret.org

'We accept every child without discrimination.' These are words of a staff of another Croatian NGO, *Prijatelj*³, in Zagreb. He told me that some NGOs in the region exclude children who receive aid of other NGOs from their aid programmes, because such NGOs avoid to be seen by their donors that they do not function well for donor-seeking competition in post-conflict environment where the withdrawal of foreign donors is significant. He told me that such an exclusive stance of NGOs is incompatible with his ideal which aims at the promotion of communal cohesion.

Furthermore, when I was trying to hold workshops for Romany children in a local NGO run by Romany people, I was told not to take any photos even if my purpose was to write a report. A staff of the NGO said, '*We have accepted foreign volunteers like you so far. They wrote their report with pictures which had been taken here. Then, they received financial assistance from their donors. But we did not profit from that at all. No money comes to our children.*'⁴ She was very suspicious about me and other NGOs in the region.

Considering the reality, it is worth critically examining NGOs in terms of peace-building.

Definition of Peace-building

We often confuse the term of *peace-building* with *peace-keeping* and *peace-making*. Thus, it is important for us to explicitly define the term, peace-building on which we must focus here. It could be worth quoting definitions of these three terms related to *peace* from a famous document of the United Nations. Boutros-Ghali, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, clearly defined these three concepts in an UN document, *An Agenda for Peace*⁵, as follows:

'*Peace-keeping* is the deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all the parties concerned, normally involving United Nations military and/or police personnel and frequently civilians as well. Peace-keeping is a technique that expands the possibilities for both the prevention of conflict and the making of peace.'

'*Peace-making* is action to bring hostile parties to agreement, essentially through such peaceful means as those foreseen in Chapter VI of the Charter of

³ *Prijatelj*, which means *friend* in the Serbo-Croatian language, has been working in Croatia aiming at promotion of community-based understanding of people of different ethnicity and culture. I did volunteer work with its collaboration in Zagreb for peace promotion activities, such as presentation and discussion on Hiroshima/Nagasaki nuclear bombs at a local school and a community centre from February to March in 2003.

⁴ This is a personal conversation with a staff of *Romany Union* in Zagreb, Croatia. This organisation has been providing basic education with Romany children in the community. I have forgotten her name and exact date of the conversation is unknown. The date is between February and March in 2003.

⁵ Boutros-Ghali, '*An Agenda for Peace - Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping*'. United Nations, 1992. Available from: <<http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/agpeace.html>> [Accessed: 13.Feb.2004]

the United Nations.’

Peace-building is ‘action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict.’

According to the definitions by *An Agenda for Peace*, peace-keeping and peace-making are high-level political mediation which includes diplomacy and even military enforcement. In a sense, it may be said that peace-keeping and peace-making are supposed to be implemented during conflict. On the other hand, peace-building by definition is action after conflict aiming at structural change of post-conflict societies in order to avoid new conflict. Therefore, it can be said that peace-building is a concept that requires approach focusing on structural change of societies. In other words, it may require us to focus not only on high level activities, such as politics, but also on community and individual level activities.

In this essay, I quote a further detailed definition of peace-building from a working paper published by Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Bradford, so that we can more concretely grasp what peace-building is. According to the definition, peace-building can be further explained as follows:

‘Peace-building activities by humanitarian agencies include non-violent processes (such as advocacy interventions, development programmes and peace projects) which attempt to prevent, mitigate and transform violent conflict, and contribute to building societies in which people have fair access to resources, which are based on social justice, and which respect fundamental human rights recognised under international law. The rebuilding of benign functional relations is a vital part of this activity. Such processes should be rooted within the communities affected by the conflict and be sustainable locally. Peace-building usually requires a long-term commitment from local people and outside helpers, and can involve both cross-cutting (integrated into development and relief programmes) and stand alone approaches, and work at community or national levels, or both.’⁶

As can be seen in this definition, peace-building needs ‘local people and outside helpers.’ This perhaps implies that the collaboration and coordination of NGOs are necessary. Based on these definitions and principle, peace-building should be considered.

Definition of NGOs

The general definition of NGOs could be that they are organisations based on ‘voluntarism, not-for-profit status, solidarity with a constituency, and operations outside

⁶ Lewer, Nick. ‘*International Non-Governmental Organisations and Peace building – Perspectives from Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution*’. Working Paper 3, Centre for Conflict resolution, University of Bradford, Oct.1999. Available from: <<http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/confres/assets/CCR3.pdf>> [Accessed: 13.Feb.2004]

the domain of the government.’⁷ This kind of definition is too vague to comprehend the roles of NGOs in peace-building. Therefore, in this essay, I will define NGOs as organisations aiming at ‘facilitating non-violent conflict resolution and peace-building intervention’⁸ at local, national and international levels. In addition, NGOs can be categorised into international NGOs which are usually Western organisations, and local NGOs which are usually established by local people in the field. In order to consider collaboration and coordination of NGOs, the relations between international and local NGOs must be clarified. The reason why this essay distinguishes international and local NGOs in two categories is that because ‘donors may support SNGOs (local NGOs) indirectly or indirectly through NNGOs (international NGOs)’⁹, and their relations are the key issues.

It can be said that local NGOs are a key player in peace-building, because peace-building is ultimately realisation of peaceful community. In this sense, the participation of local NGOs in peace-building processes is indispensable because they are potential to represent the community. Concretely speaking, local NGOs are advantageous to collecting local demands and reflecting the voices of local people for the reason that it is easy for local NGOs staffs, who share the same language, culture, and the feeling of communality, to contact local people. This means that local NGOs can work in peace-building with the understanding of community context. Therefore, local NGOs are essential player in the field of peace-building.

Local & International NGOs and Case Studies

However, in reality, local NGOs face many obstacles to their operation in spite of their potential in peace-building. The obstacles stem from several problems with the relations with international NGOs and donors.

First, it is their financial relations with international NGOs and donors. In general, local NGOs are highly dependent on the financial contribution by foreign donors directly or indirectly through international NGOs. It is pointed out that ‘because LNGOs (local NGOs) must gain capacity from INGOs (international NGOs), INGOs can control their access to donors. INGOs are easily able to label LNGOs as credible organisations worthy to support, or the opposite, leaving LNGOs dependent on them in many ways.’¹⁰ Because of the feature of local NGOs that individual organisations have their own mandate and serve particular community or issues, their achievements do not always meet the donors’ expectation. In the worst case, donors resume their contribution to local NGOs for this reason. As a result, local NGOs always need to make effort to satisfy donors in order to receive contribution. Under such circumstances,

⁷ United Nations. ‘*NGOs and the International Monetary and Financial System*’. International Monetary and Financial Issues for the 1990s, Volume IX, United Nations. 1998. Available from: <http://www.servicesforall.org/html/econ_lit/G-24_paper.PDF> [Accessed: 12.Feb.2004]

⁸ Lewer, *op. cit.*

⁹ Lewis, David and Sobhan, Babar. ‘*Routes of funding, roots of trust? Northern NGOs, Southern NGOs, donors, and the rise of direct funding*’. Development in Practice, V9. No.1&2. 1999. p.117

¹⁰ Keengwe, M. et le. ‘*NGO Roles and Relations – Partnership Dilemmas for International and Local NGOs (In Kenya)*’. International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). 1998. p.11

local NGOs are under the pressure of donors, which brings about gap between real needs at the field (community) level and donors' requirement. In addition, local NGOs are always busy seeking new donors or renewing contracts with donors, because the donations are often limited-offer.

Second, in relation to the financial problems above, it is that local NGOs often lack resources enough to serve their communities. 'Resources' here particularly mean human ones. Although material resources are absolutely important, it can be said that human resources are highly prioritised for organisational management of local NGOs. The lack of human resources is very common to local NGOs. It is quite often observed that local NGOs are managed by a small number of staff, while international NGOs by a huge number of professional personnel. For example, law advisers are important for local NGOs so that they can handle legally complicated matters. For example, *Prijatelj*, a Croatian local NGO in Zagreb, faced a discrimination against Romany children in community where Croats, Bosnian immigrants and Romany people are living. The case is that the head teacher of a local school refused the enrolment of Romany children. The staff of *Prijatelj* immediately reported this to the Ministry of Education. In this case, the Ministry took appropriate action for this problem, and as consequence the children became able to study at school. However, in such a situation, local NGOs need legal skills and professionals. Furthermore, to contract with donors and manage their projects, legal advisers are significantly necessary. In the case of *Prijatelj*, due to a big donation, they have recently employed legal adviser.¹¹ However, it could be difficult for the NGOs whose budget is too limited to do so in the situation that donors are losing interests in the region.

Third, vulnerability of local NGOs to external factors is significant. As the summary of problems already mentioned above, it can be pointed out that local NGOs are significantly vulnerable to external factors. As already pointed out, foreign donors play a key role in the determination of activities of local NGOs. In particular, media coverage is also one of the external factors which influence local NGOs both directly and indirectly. It can be pointed out that while humanitarian crises as immediate matters gather huge amount of media attention in the world, which is so-called 'CNN-effect', and donors and international NGOs provide massive aid to conflict regions at that time, they are likely to withdraw from the region as the media coverage declines. Media coverage strongly affects the allocation of foreign donors. Moreover, decision-makers of fund-aid governments are further influenced by the media coverage.¹² In the case of Croatia, because of the decline of media coverage in the world, it is now very difficult for local NGOs to search donors. There is a complaint from a local NGO that 'many of major donors are stopping programmes in Croatia.'¹³ Therefore, local NGOs are always in danger of financial crisis. Hence, it can be said that local NGOs are

¹¹ This is a source from a private email from Ervin Poljak, a staff of *Prijatelj*, on 2nd June 2003. He tells me new big donations which have enabled him to continue his projects.

¹² Olsen, Gorm.R. et al. 'Humanitarian Crises: What Determines the Level of Emergency Assistance? Media Coverage, Donor Interests and Aid Business'. *Disasters*, 2003, 27(2), pp.109-126.

¹³ This is a source from a private email from Durdica Ivkovic, a staff of *Suncokret*, Croatia, on 25th November 2003. She complains about financial crisis of her organisation, and asks for assistance, even soccer balls for children.

significantly vulnerable to external factors, which determines their activities in peace-building processes.

These are typical problems that local NGOs face. As a consequence, the capacity of local NGOs to contribute to peace-building is limited. In other words, if these problems are resolved, local NGOs can effectively work in peace-building processes by making use of their indigenous characteristics.

Unlike local NGOs, international NGOs possess huge amount of funds, material resources, human resources, knowledge and influence over politics. International NGOs, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch or Green Peace, are worldwide accepted. They sometimes play a key role even in conflict resolution and in high-level decision-making. However, in contrast to such abilities of international NGOs, they are not always versatile. International NGOs in fact have many problems as follows.

First, it is the culture question. Because most of the international NGOs are organisations in the West, their peace-building concepts are likely to be western-biased and ignore cultural factors. The western perspective of peace-building that intervention is completely neutral, unbiased and impartial is often inappropriate and unacceptable for non-western communities where such activities take place. Therefore, the absence of cultural awareness of international NGOs and of understanding of local people's perception is obstacles to peace-building.¹⁴

Second, it is loss of identity. So far as being organisations under influence of donors, like local NGOs, international NGOs cannot avoid such pressures. One of the impacts stemming from the relations with donors on international NGOs is loss of identity. Because of the excessive bureaucratic and rigid mechanism of international NGOs which aim at evaluation of effective and sufficient activities by documenting and reporting, they are likely to be narrow-minded. Mawdsley et al point out that 'an over-reliance on documentation rather than visits to the field to learn and see what is really going on tends to regards good documentation rather than good work'.¹⁵ As a result, international NGOs are 'taking larger programmes of work, substituting government services, and losing their direct connection with communities. NGOs are losing their unique identity...'¹⁶

Third, the competition between international NGOs is problematic like that between local NGOs already mentioned above. Especially, international NGOs tend to operate in the areas with which the media highly deals. Demichelis argues that due to such media coverage, international NGOs often use their logos in order to appeal to their donors. Such competition between international NGOs, which is in a sense

¹⁴ Lewer, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Mawdsley, Emma. et al. 'How Can Southern NGOs Have More of an Influence on the Development Agenda?'. Global Policy Forum. Available from: <<http://www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/role/globdem/globgov/2000/1219.htm>> [Accessed: 22. Feb. 2004]

¹⁶ Keengwe, et al., *op. cit.* p.25

generated by commercialisation of aid market, brings about no collaboration and coordination.¹⁷ It is pointed out that ‘today, the coordination of NGOs are not effective, because to a certain extent NGOs are competing with each other for money, competing with each other as to who’s Number One’.¹⁸ Hailey calls this trend ‘the product of the neo-liberal ideologies and ‘performance culture’’.¹⁹

These problems are what international NGOs are facing in reality. These facts are perhaps slightly different from perception and understanding of international NGOs by the public. Therefore, when considering the roles of NGOs in general, it is important for us to comprehend these facts.

Although problems of international and local NGOs mentioned above are still significant in reality, there are movements to overcome the problems. As an example, the Balkan Dialogue Project (BDP), which aims at peace-building based on community based projects, can be pointed out. This project recognises the problems I have pointed out so far and tries to resolve them in order for the project to come true. According to its recent report²⁰, several positive movements in the collaboration and coordination of NGOS can be observed in the BDP.

For example, the project in Osijek, Croatia, aims at reconciliation of divided society. The main concern is the segregation between Croats and Serbs at school. In order to reconcile this problem, the project emphasises dialogue between different ethnic groups with the support of professionals with experiences. In the process of the project, several points are considered to be important, which I have pointed out above as problems of both international and local NGOs.

First, the project has been implemented based on the network of both international and local NGOs. It recognises the importance of the locality of local NGOs and of the involvement of international NGOs as well. The network is regarded as ‘an integrated organisation rather than as different parts of the same project.’²¹ In this sense, the ‘network’ is a collaborated and coordinated unit composed of international and local NGOs. Therefore, it can be said that networks both between international and local NGOs and between local NGOs are key factor for peace-building processes.

Second, it points out the mutual complement of capacity building of NGOs. It explicitly defines ‘cooperation’ not only as ‘joint projects’ but also as ‘capacity

¹⁷ Demichelis, Julia. ‘NGOs and Peace-building in Bosnia’s Ethnically Divided Societies’. United States Institute of Peace. Available from:

<<http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/early/BosniaNGO.htm>> [Accessed:23.Feb.2004]

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Hailey, John. ‘Indicators of identity: NGOs and the strategic imperative of assessing core values’. *Development in Practice*. 10(3&4), August 2000. pp.404

²⁰ Hushagen, Anne. & Vik, Ingrid. ‘The Western Balkans: Community Based Peacebuilding. A Review of the Balkan Dialogue Project 2003’. NORDEM. 2003. Available from:

<<http://www.humanrights.uio.no/forskning/publ/nr/2003/nr1303.pdf>> [Accessed: 1.Mar. 2004]

²¹ *ibid.*

building'. The concept of 'networks within the network' in the report focuses on comprehensive collaboration and coordination of NGOs in peace-building processes in the Balkans. It recognises that networks with NGOs in other areas are necessary in order to reconcile antagonistic inter-ethnic relations in the region. This is because the project recognises that 'grassroots approach and basis in local context was thought to be a useful and necessary supplement to traditional diplomatic effort at government and state levels.'²² Therefore, it can be interpreted that the roles of local NGOs are not regarded as subordination to other actors such as international NGOs and higher-level actors.

Third, it focuses on the positive roles of donors as well. In the project, the main donors are Norwegian organisations, such International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA). In particular, NMFA 'wanted to support people who actively worked for positive changes in their local communities in the former Yugoslavia.'²³ From this perspective, NMFA supported the establishment of the BDP. Furthermore, the closer communication between the project partners and donors on the implementation was highly emphasised.

Although the BDP is a positive development in terms of collaboration and coordination of international and local NGOs and even relations with donors, the report admits that many issues still remain. One of them is transparency in terms of financial administration. It is reported that without more transparent financial plan for all activities concerned, mistrust of other NGOs will spread. Furthermore, the BDP still requires their donors for long-term commitment to the project. Therefore, it can be said that although these movements are worth noting, they have not yet realised the ideal collaboration and coordination of international and local NGOs and donors.

Conclusion

Peace-building cannot be achieved in short-term period. It takes long time because peace-building needs social change in post-conflict communities. Fragmented communities are often deeply rooted in hatred, lack of communication and prejudice between local people. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, hatred between different ethnic groups still remains even over ten years after conflict. Discrimination against and exclusion of the minorities in communities are still significant. Under such circumstances, deeper and longer commitment of 'peace-builders', which here particularly mean local NGOs, are necessary, because it is the local people who finally change their attitude towards such negative feelings and constitute peaceful communities for themselves. In this sense, peace-building *from below* is important. However, local NGOs alone cannot reach their goals as I have already argued. On the other hand, international NGOs alone cannot realise their own mandate as well. In addition, both international and local NGOs are under the danger of loss of identity, which makes them blind to real needs in peace-building processes.

Under the circumstance, collaboration and coordination of international and

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

local NGOs must be the key factor in peace-building processes in post conflict situations. However, the present relations between international and local NGOs have been one-sided. In a sense, it can be called 'parent-child relations' that local NGOs are regarded as passive actor by international NGOs and donors which have been seen as 'expert'. The present relations that intentional NGOs *teach, educate or take care of* local NGOs must be changed. Otherwise, both international and local NGOs will continue to face difficulties in peace-building processes which have already been pointed out.

As mentioned so far, both international and local NGOs are not always versatile. In order to complement capacity each other, the collaboration and coordination are necessary. To realise these, it is important for us to understand that transfer of technical assistance from intentional NGOs to local NGOs, which has made the pyramid (hierarchical) relations between them though, is not the only purpose of good relations between them. Collaboration and coordination aiming at comprehensive strategy in peace-building processes that local knowledge and experience of local NGOs, and material and/or human resources of international NGOs emerge must be necessary.²⁴

The roles of 'NGOs', including both international and local NGOs, in the peace-building processes should be that based on local NGOs activities which can work closely to communities in their community-based position, international NGOs facilitate such activities in the logistics such as technical, material and human resources. The key point here could be that each side (international and local NGOs) is on an 'equal footing', because neither is superior or inferior due to their characteristics. Therefore, what is important for both international and local NGOs in order to play the important roles in peace-building processes is to recognise each advantage and to value them. In reality, the actor which can promote this is donors, because if donors set terms requiring the collaboration and coordination between NGOs, both international and local NGOs will have to do it. Not to mention, donors themselves need to recognise their roles in peace-building processes. They need to make evaluation criteria of local NGOs more transparent. Unlike emergency humanitarian aid, peace-building needs long-term commitment. As I introduced words of a local NGO staff earlier, their work is difficult to see the result. Therefore, external actors, especially donors, should focus more on contextual outcomes of local NGOs from the view of long-term commitment. This may imply that local NGOs need to be seen as important indicator of communities. External actors should encourage local NGOs to continue their community-based projects without fear of financial crisis. Therefore, transparency and accountability of international NGOs and especially donors are significantly important. If these are not achieved, partnerships, in other words 'trusteeships', between international and local NGOs cannot be generated. This makes it difficult to realise collaboration and coordination as a result. If these problems are solved, the collaboration and coordination between local NGOs themselves are possible, which accelerates community cohesion and self-sustainable peace-building in communities. Moreover, more effective peace-building would be possible.

²⁴ Ebrahim, Alnoor. '*Building Analytical and Adaptive Capacity: Lessons from Northern and Southern NGOs*'. Available from: <http://www.uap.vt.edu/newIIG/papers/Ebrahim-ARNOVA2003.pdf> [Accessed: 23.Feb.2004]

Are NGOs playing a magnificent role as Mathews addressed? Considering various dimensions of 'NGOs' in peace-building processes as examined so far in this essay, they are not. They do not always exercise their potential due to various constrains. I must say that Mathews' thesis is still ideal in reality. Therefore, I conclude that the roles of NGOs must be the reflection of the real needs in the field. In order to meet the needs and requirement in peace-building processes, both international and local NGOs and even donors need to collaborate and coordinate with each other in terms of mutual complement of each capacity so that they make use of their advantages. In addition, the roles of NGOs are to encourage local people to 'build peace' for themselves, which is truly '*peace-building*' as defined earlier in this essay. As a matter of first priority, the ultimate role of NGOs can be said to be a message, 'We, international community, do not forget you', for people in post conflict regions. Otherwise, a role of NGOs as voice of people will be questioned: 'whose voice?' Therefore, the collaboration and coordination are the important for peace-building processes in post conflict situations and for the roles of NGOs.

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