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NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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JCSP 40

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Introduction

Tsunami hits Japan, earthquake in Nepal, hurricanes and tornados in the United States, ISIS terrorists take over another city. These are all examples of conflicts which we face almost daily. Whether they are conflicts with nature or fellow man, thousands need help. Who are they going to call? More and more the call for help goes out to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). What is an NGO? Why are they being called upon? How do they assist in resolving the conflicts that we face? This paper will answer these questions plus discuss the challenges faced by NGOs.

An NGO is any non-profit, non-violent, organized group of individuals who are not seeking government office.¹ NGOs can do many of the things as governments, but they have the advantage of less red tape; as mentioned by O.P. Richmond, “NGOs have come to symbolize everything that governments are not, they are unburdened with large bureaucracies and they are seen to be flexible and able to respond to grassroots needs.”² Francis Gladstone talks about NGO beginnings: ‘NGOs started to appear around the end of the eighteenth century, when people became concerned about social conditions and believed that part of the answer to improving conditions lay in the formation of groups committed to action.’ They include abolitionist and religious organizations.³ One of the first NGOs, established in 1859 by Henri Dunant to help care for the wounded from the

¹ Peter Willetts, 'The Conscience of the World' the Influence of Non-governmental Organisations in the UN System. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1996), 5.

² Jonathan Goodhand, Aiding Peace?: The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict.(Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 2.

³ Peter Willetts, 'The Conscience of the World' the Influence of Non-governmental Organisations in the UN System. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1996), 17.

battle of Solferino, developed into the International Committee of the Red Cross. After World War II, the number of NGOs continued to grow, but since 1989, when they began to work in conflict zones, NGOs asserted themselves as actors with whom to be reckoned in conflicts and emergency settings.⁴ Today, there are more than 20,000 NGOs around the world; their work includes the human rights activism of Amnesty International in 150 countries, the development work of BRAC which is influencing the lives of 126 million, and the participation of approximately one billion people in the member organizations of the International Co-operative Alliance.⁵

Their flexibility and success increased their credibility. As quoted by M. Duffield, “aid and politics have been reinvented, seen to be natural domain of NGOs, who have been encouraged to reconceptualise their development activities as peacebuilding programmes, reflecting earlier ideas of NGO comparative advantages; they are closer to the grassroots better informed, can more easily build trust, are flexible, and so on.”⁶ Periods of conflict are never easy, they are usually unexpected and therefore chaotic, “In times of need, interactions between aid and conflict are rarely simple and unidirectional; they are usually complex, mixed and context-specific.”⁷ NGOs have become an essential part of the conflict resolution process. In accordance with Becky Nesbit’s paper, there are four main kinds of NGO actions in conflict resolution; advocacy, policy work, provision of relief and humanitarian aid, and empowerment.

⁴ Abby Stoddard, “Humanitarian NGOs: challenges and trends”. Chapter 3, HPG Report 14. Center on International Cooperation, New York University, (2003), 25.

⁵ Thomas Davies, “NGOs a Long and Turbulent History.” *The Global Journal*, January 23, (2013), 1.

⁶ Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 86.

⁷ *Ibid*, 123.

Advocacy

The type of conflict that involves the least contribution from an NGO is advocacy. Advocacy enables NGOs to voice the concerns of the people in need at the earliest stages of a conflict: “NGOs’ efforts in advocacy are directed at governments and the general public, to educate and build constituencies behind certain values and ideas.”⁸ It is a hands-off method to be employed in a more ad hoc fashion, such as early warnings from NGOs when conflict is likely to erupt, pressuring the international community to become involved in conflicts, attracting media attention to violent conflicts, and encouraging warring parties to engage in peace talks.⁹ An example of NGOs advocating against conflict would be the “save Darfur campaign”, where more than 100 NGOs promoted awareness of the growing human rights abuses and conflict in the Sudan: “There can be no doubt that the advocacy campaign regarding the conflict in Darfur has made an important contribution to raising public awareness and engaging ordinary Americans in the plight of a people half a world away.”¹⁰ Oxfam and Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) are two particular examples of NGOs with strong advocacy programs. Oxfam is a large humanitarian NGO, “though the acknowledged leader in the technical provision of water and sanitation, still sees its core mission as advocating on behalf of the world’s poor and disenfranchised.”¹¹ MSF is well

⁸ Abby Stoddard, “Humanitarian NGOs: challenges and trends”. Chapter 3, HPG Report 14. Center on International Cooperation, New York University, (2003), 30.

⁹ Becky Nesbit, “The Role of NGOs in Conflict Resolution in Africa: An Institutional Analysis”. (Presented at the Institutional Analysis and Development Mini-Conference, 3 – 5 May 2003. Indiana University, Bloomington Indiana), 11.

¹⁰ Medina Haeri, “Saving Darfur: Does Advocacy Help or Hinder Conflict Resolution”, *The Fletcher Journal of Human Security*, Volume XXIII. (2008), 39.

¹¹ Abby Stoddard, “Humanitarian NGOs: challenges and trends”. Chapter 3, HPG Report 14. Center on International Cooperation, New York University, (2003), 30.

known for its advocacy through ‘witnessing’ events or conflict.¹² Over time, NGOs have determined the most effective ways to promote their causes: “NGOs have learned walk the fine line between providing information and attacking states directly, and they were able to play an important role in publicizing flagrant human rights abuses.”¹³

Though NGOs have more opportunities they can use when trying to advocate against conflict, they have to be careful as warned by A. Yannis: “in the absence of a centralized international system that can authoritatively articulate, interpret and enforce common interests and values of the international community, peace enforcement approaches risk being perverted and becoming an arm of foreign policy of dominant states.”¹⁴ NGOs have to ensure the cause for which they are advocating is in the best interest of everyone, rather than bolstering one side of the conflict or having one side use the NGO to get what they want at the other’s expense.¹⁵

Policy work

Policy work is another hands-off method NGOs use when dealing with conflict. It is more systemic and preventive in nature and includes researching the root causes of conflict and determining how to re-order social institutions to mitigate and prevent conflict.¹⁶ NGOs have the advantage over governments regarding policy work, because members of the NGO have been on the ground, living in the conflict situation. They are

¹² *Ibid*, 30.

¹³ David Clark MacKenzie, *A World beyond Borders: An Introduction to the History of International Organizations*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 114.

¹⁴ Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 84.

¹⁵ David Clark MacKenzie, *A World beyond Borders: An Introduction to the History of International Organizations*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 121.

¹⁶ Becky Nesbit, “The Role of NGOs in Conflict Resolution in Africa: An Institutional Analysis”. (Presented at the Institutional Analysis and Development Mini-Conference, 3 – 5 May 2003. Indiana University, Bloomington Indiana), 11.

talking and working with the people suffering through the crisis, which gives the NGOs important awareness and credibility regarding effective policies that a government official wouldn't be able to achieve. NGOs provide crucial information and expert advice, as "in crisis or conflict situations in the developing world, most of the ground-level information on which policymakers proceed originates not from the local government, the press, the UN, or government intelligence or foreign services professionals, but from NGOs."¹⁷ It is important to keep the basics of life and human security in mind when creating policies and re-ordering institutions to mitigate and prevent conflict. World Vision is an NGO that has stepped up its policy activities, in order to protect children's rights.¹⁸ Amnesty International is a global NGO whose mandate includes, "promotion of human rights, campaigning against torture, the death penalty, and political executions."¹⁹ NGOs like these two are in a better position to affect policies and reduce or prevent conflict compared with governments, since "NGOs are able to concentrate on universal and timeless values, while governments predominantly respond to events and keep an eye trained on the next election."²⁰ NGOs are able to put the focus in the necessary areas.

NGOs are in a great position to influence programs, starting at the bottom and working their way up the chain; "by virtue of being the singular originating source of information on humanitarian conditions in many areas, however spotty or soft the information on humanitarian conditions in many areas, NGOs in fact play a significant

¹⁷ Abby Stoddard, *Humanitarian Alert: NGO Information and Its Impact on US Foreign Policy*. (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006), 45.

¹⁸ Abby Stoddard, "Humanitarian NGOs: challenges and trends". Chapter 3, HPG Report 14. Center on International Cooperation, New York University, (2003), 32.

¹⁹ David Clark MacKenzie, *A World beyond Borders: An Introduction to the History of International Organizations*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 115.

²⁰ John Sankey, 'The Conscience of the World' the Influence of Non-governmental Organisations in the UN System. Ed. By Peter Willetts, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1996), 270.

role in shaping the ultimate policy decisions of donor governments and intergovernmental bodies dealing with a crisis.”²¹ The successes of NGO actions regarding policy work have increased their influence and capabilities, and NGOs “benefits from new arrangements, increased access and influence of regional NGOs, and improved implementation of UN programs and initiatives.”²² They have become central to international response to war, in part because of the limitations of traditional diplomacy in contemporary conflicts and in part due to a belief in their comparative advantages to the UN and governments.²³ The risks for policy work are similar to those of advocacy: “NGOs must ensure that it is a win/win situation for all.”²⁴ In conflict prevention, NGOs are in danger of both losing their neutrality and increasing the risk of conflict, as “the success of the project depends on the strict neutrality of the NGO.”²⁵

Relief and humanitarian aid

The provision of relief and humanitarian aid is a more involved method that NGOs utilize to prevent conflict. It includes giving food and medical services, and caring for displaced persons.²⁶ Many people believe this is an important, if not obvious technique for minimizing conflict, because it is intended to prevent a conflict from starting by providing people with the basic necessities of life. This is in contrast with strictly humanitarian aid (such as that provided in an earthquake scenario). In conflict

²¹ Abby Stoddard, *Humanitarian Alert: NGO Information and Its Impact on US Foreign Policy*. (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006), 31.

²² David Clark MacKenzie, *A World beyond Borders: An Introduction to the History of International Organizations*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 121.

²³ Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 2.

²⁴ David Clark MacKenzie, *A World beyond Borders: An Introduction to the History of International Organizations*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 121.

²⁵ United States Institute for Peace web-site, Accessed: 20 May 2015.

²⁶ Becky Nesbit, “The Role of NGOs in Conflict Resolution in Africa: An Institutional Analysis”. (Presented at the Institutional Analysis and Development Mini-Conference, 3 – 5 May 2003. Indiana University, Bloomington Indiana), 11.

scenarios, “far more significant than humanitarian aid was the role of development assistance in contributing to the origins of conflict.”²⁷ NGOs have realized the importance of human security and how it’s provided, since, “at first, NGOs offered direct relief assistance but over time a more collaborative, self-help approach evolved as humanitarian organizations worked with emerging nations for social and economic development.”²⁸ A self-help approach is important as this would enable nations to eventually look after themselves rather than always be dependent on aid from other countries. As the story from the Bible goes, NGOs should “teach a person to fish” rather than providing fish for a meal. In comparison with government organizations, “NGOs are able to provide direct intervention, delivery of assistance, implementation of projects without working through intermediary organizations.”²⁹ As well, “in contested borderland areas, often beyond the control of the state, NGOs become important, if not primary, providers of public services due to the withdrawal of government services and of UN and bilateral donor agencies.”³⁰ Because of their relationships with the locals, their knowledge and experience, the NGOs have a better tolerance for risk and are better able to conflict-proof themselves and their activities; they deploy a range of humanitarian tactics to reduce their exposure to conflict-related risks.³¹ An example of the use of humanitarian aid to prevent further conflict would be the International Committee of the Red Cross, (ICRC) in Somalia in 1991, in which case, “what they found in Somalia was a largely engineered famine, with the incoming international aid resources being flagrantly

²⁷Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 173.

²⁸David Clark MacKenzie, *A World beyond Borders: An Introduction to the History of International Organizations*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 113.

²⁹Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 173.

³⁰*Ibid*, 105.

³¹*Ibid*, 105.

hijacked by the rival warlords to exert power over populations and enrich their supporters. People were starving and food aid was not being allowed to reach them.³²

Another example is Cooperative Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) providing care to the refugees in Syria. The NGOs stepped in to provide help and care to reduce the conflict, when the United Nations and governments could not.

As always, there are risks involved so that “humanitarian aid needs to be given in a thoughtful way, including an analysis of the causes of the conflict and how existing institutions and norms either feed into the conflict or serve to mitigate it.”³³ NGOs do not want to create a nation dependent on other nations and organizations for survival. There are risks associated with making the conflict worse, and “although giving aid appears to be a benign and benevolent activity, this aid can inadvertently perpetuate patterns of conflict.”³⁴ NGOs have to be very careful about maintaining their neutrality between different groups involved in conflict:

Trying to combine relief and advocacy can lead to jeopardizing the neutrality that is so vital in relief work. If one group receives aid and another group with whom they have tensions doesn't receive aid, it can serve to reinforce those divisions.³⁵

Providing relief and aid, when done properly, sets a nation up for future self-sustainment, by giving them the tools and knowledge to succeed.

³² Abby Stoddard, *Humanitarian Alert: NGO Information and Its Impact on US Foreign Policy*. (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006), 78.

³³ Becky Nesbit, “The Role of NGOs in Conflict Resolution in Africa: An Institutional Analysis”. (Presented at the Institutional Analysis and Development Mini-Conference, 3 – 5 May 2003. Indiana University, Bloomington Indiana), 22.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 22.

Empowerment

Empowerment/transformation is the last way NGOs deal with conflict. It focuses on providing services to help change the attitudes and institutions of people involved in conflict, as a means of preventing further occurrences of conflict; it includes reforming local institutions to span conflict, rebuilding local economy, seeking justice and retribution and building local capacity.³⁶ The long term goal of NGOs is to promote sustainable community development by “enabling the individuals to gain control socially, politically, economically and psychologically.”³⁷ NGOs know the importance of empowerment and they are more willing to take the time to work from the ground up, to give people these abilities. For example, the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (BRAC) knew that before they could challenge society, “they would have to build confidence and self-esteem among its own employees.”³⁸ Being open-minded, willing to change, and reassessing the situation enabled them to realize they had to change their model if they wanted to succeed. They learned from their mistakes and came to the understanding that “for the truly poor, life was very different, and sustainable empowerment would require more than sloganeering and exhortation.”³⁹ They were in a unique position, living with the poorest of the poor. It provided them with valuable information about the nature of rural poverty in Bangladesh. The NGO used first-hand knowledge to improve long-term living conditions, with the understanding that:

³⁶ *Ibid*, 11.

³⁷ Hedayer Allah Nikkah and Ma’rof Bin Redzuan. “The Role of NGOs in Promoting Empowerment for Sustainable Community Development”. *J Hum Ecol*, 30(2):85-92 (2010), 86.

³⁸ Ian Smillie, *Freedom from Want: The Remarkable Success Story of BRAC, the Global Grassroots Organization That's Winning the Fight against Poverty*. (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2009), 56.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 65.

external resources, if properly applied, could accelerate development among the poorest, but only if the poorest were directly engaged and treated as adults rather than children... it understood that women occupied a special place in the hierarchy of rural servitude and this had to be given priority attention.⁴⁰

This realization by the NGO was important; it was even more important that following this realization, the NGO effectively changed their processes to help rebuild the local economy and capacity. In essence:

BRAC refined its approach to staff recruitment, hiring women under 30 from the immediate project area. Nobody would be parachuted in. They looked for people with at least an eighth-grade education and they trained them.⁴¹

These women were then used to help train and educate other women in their village.

BRAC gave the community the tools it needed, “providing capacity building, working with and developing the capacity of individuals or intermediary organizations to sustain the effects of projects/programmes.”⁴² An effective form of economic empowerment is microcredit, which provides credit for poor women who are usually excluded from formal credit institutions.⁴³ In order to prevent conflicts in the future, “peacebuilding must go beyond aggregate or national level and address local dimensions of conflict.”⁴⁴

As demonstrated, NGOs may have more room to manoeuvre than states, when it comes to preventing or minimizing conflict, but they are not without challenges.

Non-governmental organizations have more options in working with people and organizations to resolve conflicts than governments, as "the strength of NGOs lies in their

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 65.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 56.

⁴² Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 15.

⁴³ Hedayer Allah Nikkah and Ma'rof Bin Redzuan. “The Role of NGOs in Promoting Empowerment for Sustainable Community Development”. *J Hum Ecol*, 30(2):85-92 (2010), 87.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 124.

ability to act as bridges, facilitators, brokers and translators."⁴⁵ This ability has allowed

NGOs to stretch their skills:

this enables them to lobby governments international organizations, other groups, and so on; they launch direct action campaigns; they research and study, collect information, and write pamphlets, reports, and books; they advise governments, IGOs, the media, and the public; and they help set agendas, and monitor and implement policies initiated by governments and international organizations.⁴⁶

NGOs have more room to manoeuvre than state actors, but they still have plans and procedures to follow. Because NGOs are embedded in different environments and have different participants and resources, their involvement in conflict resolution should mirror those differences for the best results.⁴⁷

Challenges in dealing with conflict

NGOs face many challenges when dealing with conflict. Not only must they decide which method to use and when to use it. They must be able to read the local government's viewpoint and react accordingly, as "the most important challenges facing NGOs primarily political rather than technical".⁴⁸ Though NGOs have more flexibility than governments, they have had to take many factors into account in order to better their chances of success, as it is "less about fine tuning projects than making choices about where and how NGOs should position themselves in relation to political economy of war and response system in which they're firmly embedded".⁴⁹ NGOs have to manage competing loyalties, such as "the needs and interests of the beneficiary, the desires of the

⁴⁵ Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 166.

⁴⁶ David Clark MacKenzie, *A World beyond Borders: An Introduction to the History of International Organizations*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 110..

⁴⁷ Becky Nesbit, "The Role of NGOs in Conflict Resolution in Africa: An Institutional Analysis". (Presented at the Institutional Analysis and Development Mini-Conference, 3 – 5 May 2003. Indiana University, Bloomington Indiana), 17.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 171.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 171.

donor and the interest of the organisation to survive and grow.”⁵⁰ High turnover of personnel within the NGOs presents another challenge; especially “given the importance of leadership, more or less constant rotation of senior NGO staff, particularly within NGOs was serious constraint.”⁵¹

Another big challenge NGOs have overcome is the realization that they have to be able and willing to use various approaches to conflict, where “the more difficult the conflict-environment, the greater the need for more coercive and multidimensional approaches.”⁵² This has been referred to as developing the right combination of heart and mind, which means “having the organizational intelligence to analyse and learn from situations, to know one’s own capacity to good effect.”⁵³ NGOs have to weigh all the risks and draw their own ‘bottom-line’⁵⁴ conclusions, determine whether their aid is doing more good than harm. Everyone knows that there is never an easy explanation for conflict, and it “can rarely be understood in terms of one simple cause, which makes it critical to recognize connections and overlaps between sources of tension in different areas and at different levels.”⁵⁵ It is even more difficult in many of today’s conflicts, due to the number of actors attempting to resolve the conflict, where “NGOs find themselves integrated into multidimensional peace operations, a hybrid response involving diplomatic military, developmental and humanitarian actors.”⁵⁶ The accomplishments of

⁵⁰ Abby Stoddard, “Humanitarian NGOs: challenges and trends”. Chapter 3, HPG Report 14. Center on International Cooperation, New York University, (2003), 34.

⁵¹ Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 160.

⁵² *Ibid*, 135.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 155.

⁵⁴ Abby Stoddard, “Humanitarian NGOs: challenges and trends”. Chapter 3, HPG Report 14. Center on International Cooperation, New York University, (2003), 33.

⁵⁵ Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 1.

the NGOs around the world make these challenges and risks worth it. At local level, for example, NGOs are “reducing mortality and morbidity, relieving a subsistence crisis, reducing resource competition, creating alternative livelihoods and providing employment opportunities.”⁵⁷ NGOs have earned the respect of people the world over because of their abilities in overcoming the aforementioned challenges and putting forth their best effort in conflict prevention.

Conclusion

Non-governmental organizations have worked hard to become an important part of world conflict resolution:

They have become “fully-fledged actors in international governance”, as advisers, administrators, advocates, and monitors for people and causes, working on behalf of governments, International Government organizations (IGOs) and themselves. They provide much of the world’s humanitarian assistance and they often find themselves on the frontlines of the world’s trouble spots.⁵⁸

NGOs like ICRC, World Vision, Amnesty International, CARE and BRAC provide humanitarian assistance around the world, to improve human security and reduce conflict. They have done such a good job of demonstrating their abilities and credibility, that they’re now viewed as “a crucial part of ‘connective tissue’ of vigorous civil society.”⁵⁹ Through experience and training, NGOs have developed the knowledge and understanding to realize that making the best decision for each situation is necessarily unique, and they have organized themselves accordingly. The adaptive ability of NGOs

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 121.

⁵⁸ David Clark MacKenzie, *A World beyond Borders: An Introduction to the History of International Organizations*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 122.

⁵⁹ Jonathan Goodhand, *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 166.

“can then be made to mitigate the negative and amplify the positive.”⁶⁰ This is why NGOs are the ones governments are going to call when they need help with conflict.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 123.

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