The owl and the dove: knowledge strategies to improve the peacebuilding practice of local non-governmental organisations

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Chapter 1. Pieces of peace
Civil society and peacebuilding

This chapter addresses the following questions in order to set the stage for the remainder of the book. In doing so the chapter aims to contribute to a better understanding of the role and place of NGOs in contemporary peacebuilding processes and the constraints which they face. This helps to contextualise the discussion of the knowledge processes of local peace NGOs that follows in the next chapters.

- What is the position of NGOs within civil society and vis-à-vis non-civil society actors?
- What does peacebuilding entail, and what is the role of NGOs in this field?
- What kind of conflicts do they strive to solve or change?
- What are the specific characteristics of peace NGOs and what makes them different from other NGOs?
- What kinds of activities do peace NGOs engage in, and what are their aims?
- Which discussions take place about the role and limits of civil society actors when it comes to peacebuilding?

1.1 Civil society and NGOs

The term civil society is usually used to refer to those parts of society that are organised and that exist outside of government and the private sector. The non-governmental and organised nature of civil society is important because it means that – at least ideally – civil society can act as a check or balance on governmental action. As a watchdog of citizen interests civil society is an indispensable element of democracy. At the global level civil society may be especially important since citizens do not relate to institutions of global governance through elections; thus global civil society may be seen as organisations facilitating a “process through which individuals debate, influence and negotiate an ongoing social contract or set of contracts with the centres of political and economic authority” (Kaldor 2003, 79).

The width of the concept depends on the observer. Some see civil society as including political parties, media, sports associations, group interest organisations, idealistic non-governmental organisations, religious organisations, and private corporations. Particularly with regard to the inclusion of political parties, media, and the private sector
there is discussion. The media are often considered another important, but separate, element of democracy and check on government. Political parties are usually seen as semi-governmental institutions and therefore not part of civil society. Businesses have their own relation to government and do not organise civilians around public issues or have a representative function towards government. The way in which the concept of civil society is mostly used, then, is as a sphere of organised society apart from government that includes non-governmental organisations, interest groups, and religious organisations. (Diamond 1992, O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Kaldor 2003, Barnes 2001, Pishchikova 2006)

This study zooms in on one important element of civil society: the non-governmental organisation or NGO. In its broadest sense, an NGO is an organisation that is not part of the structure of government. In that sense it is synonymous with a civil society organisation (CSO). However, in the context of the current field of analysis, the term NGO tends to be used somewhat more narrowly to refer to humanitarian or otherwise idealistic non-profit organisations. NGOs can be distinguished from organisations which represent their own members, such as sports organisations, interest groups and church organisations. In developing countries such organisations tend to be called community-based organisations (CBOs). NGOs do not in the first place represent their own members; they work on behalf of people other than themselves. (Usually these are people considered to be marginalised and in need of support.) They are usually formally registered and include voluntary associations, charities, foundations, and professional societies. NGOs do not make profits. CBOs are not part of this more narrow definition but are covered by the broader concept of CSO.

The first well-known international NGOs were the Anti-Slavery Society (1839) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (1863). Globalisation during the 20th century gave rise to the importance of international NGOs. International treaties and organisations such as the World Trade Organisation were perceived as being too centred on the interests of private enterprises. In an attempt to counterbalance this trend, NGOs emphasised humanitarian values, development cooperation and environmental issues. A concern with such ‘public’ affairs characterises NGOs, and professional associations that try to advance the interests of their members therefore do not really qualify as NGOs.

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In the 1980s and 1990s the number of NGOs grew dramatically. International NGOs registered with governments and international organisations numbered 13,206 by the end of the 1990s, although the actual number of internationally operating NGOs is estimated at around 40,000. National numbers are even higher and vary considerably depending on the country. The United States has an estimated 2 million NGOs, most of them formed in the past 30 years. Russia has 4,000 NGOs. India has 2 million NGOs. In Kenya, some 240 NGOs come into existence every year.4

Civil society in general, and NGOs in particular, are considered an important element of democracy5. By organising citizens civil society facilitates their ability to act as a check on government officials, holding them accountable for their actions also in between elections. NGOs are said to stimulate participation in public affairs, help people develop organisational and public debating skills, and foster norms of trust, moderation, and accommodation. (Pishchikova 2006: 43) This applies not only to organisations playing an active role vis-à-vis government, but for any organisation that brings people together for a common cause beyond their own immediate private sphere – including, for example, sports clubs. Such organisations are considered important elements of civil society because they contribute to social capital. (Putnam 1993)

Social capital, a concept made famous by Robert Putnam, consists of relations of trust and reciprocity that are the result of interaction by citizens outside the political sphere. In a study of Italy, Putnam found that social capital is important for democracy because it creates connectedness and common interest and because interaction in civilian organisations stimulates political skills and a sense of citizenship. (Putnam 1993) The concept of social capital has found its way into the discourse of policy makers in development, most notably the World Bank which termed it ‘the missing link’ in development (Harriss 2001). This has led to increased attention to civil society development in developing countries as part of strategies for democratisation, development and peacebuilding. The creation and consolidation of NGOs has come to be seen as an indispensable part of strategies for post-conflict democratisation and peacebuilding (Barnes 2001, Pouligny 2005: 498). “Local civil societies […] are often seen to carry the best hopes for a genuine democratic counterweight to the power-brokers, economic exploiters and warlords who tend to predominate in conflict-

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ridden weak or failed states, and may even capture the electoral process” (Pouligny 2005: 498)

Over the past two decades, donor agencies have focused increasingly on the development and support of civil society in developing countries as a way to build democracy, peace and economic progress. In the process, the concept of civil society has become ‘instrumentalised’ towards fulfilling a specific set of donor priorities (Pishchikova 2006: 44). Mostly this has taken the form of the creation or support of professional NGOs that may implement the policies of donors with organisational structures ensuring accountability for their activities towards donors.

This form of organisation is relatively new to many societies. Pre-existing, more locally grounded civil society groups such as church organisations, councils of elders, or even individual activists are not eligible for donor support unless they become organised as professional NGOs. As a result, “the gap between home-grown civic groups and NGOs that are mainly provided for by Western assistance agencies is disturbingly big” (Pishchikova 2006: 79). Pouligny (2005: 500) sketches the issue as follows:

“When working in non-Western contexts, most outsiders tend to look for structures representative of a ‘civil society’, i.e. something which corresponds, in reality, to the form it has taken in modern western societies – NGOs, trade unions, etc. […]. Either they do not find this representation of society and thus create one (as [the UN mission] UNTAC did in Cambodia during the peace process in the early 1990s) or they may find groups mirroring western society that suddenly emerge and claim this label. But such groups are far from covering the range of different modalities of a collective organization (Afghanistan offers many examples). Moreover, these groups (often limited to a few individuals) have difficulty in establishing links with other existing arrangements, especially at the community level.”

Rather than play a political role as social movements or checks on government, the new NGOs are treated as technical organisations implementing a specific policy or delivering a service. As a result, the use of the concepts of civil society and social capital by powerful actors in development is seen by some as part of an effort to ‘depoliticise’ development: social capital and civil society are seen to be “clever ideas which suit the interests of global capitalism […] because they represent problems that are rooted in differences of power and in class relations as

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6 Pishchikova adds that “[g]iven such failures to acknowledge home-grown theories and practices of civil society, most donors were initially driven by the assumption that civil society had to be built afresh and reserved for themselves the privilege of deciding what kind of civil society was to be built and how. Since NGOs were indeed non-existent, the success of civil society programs was, and still is, evaluated on the basis of quantitative growth of NGOs.” (Pishchikova 2006: 79)
purely technical matters that can be resolved outside the political arena” (Harriss 2001, 2-3). In this way, development has become an “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson 1994). In line with this, Kaldor refers to NGOs as “tamed” social movements. Where social movements (especially prevalent in the 1980s and before) aim to transform society, NGOs, more institutional and professional than movements, began to proliferate increasingly from the 1980s onwards. (Kaldor 2003: 86) In sections 1.5.1, 1.5.4, and 4.4, I return to the debate about the depoliticisation of civil society in development, discussing what it means for the organisations and issues under study.

Kaldor (2003: 90-92) identifies several ways of distinguishing among NGOs:

- **Northern versus Southern NGOs.** Many Northern NGOs (NNGOs) are set up to assist people in the South. In achieving their objectives they often work together with Southern NGOs (SNGOs). The latter are often seen as small, informal ‘grassroots’ or ‘community-based’ organisations, but some SNGOs are actually very large and many are based in large cities. To further complicate the picture, NNGOs that operate internationally often have offices in Southern countries, largely staffed by local employees.

- **Advocacy versus service provision.** Service provision includes emergency relief, health care, non-formal education, legal services, the provision of micro-credit, and in the field of peacebuilding, activities like the organisation of dialogues, trauma counselling and the training of community mediators. Advocacy includes lobbying and the organisation of public campaigns to draw attention to an issue or group that needs assistance.

- **Organisational forms.** NGOs’ forms of organisation differ widely. Some NGOs are membership organisations, while others are governed by boards. In addition, the meaning of membership varies. In Amnesty International the members are the owners of the organisation and determine its decision-making. By contrast, the members of organisations such as Greenpeace and War Child are supporters passively donating money.

In this study the focus is on SNGOs in the field of peacebuilding that have various organisational forms and engage in both advocacy and service provision.
1.2 The context: war and peace in the 21st century

1.2.1 Present day wars

War between states and their regular armies, as it was fought during the First and Second World War, has become rare. During the Cold War, wars largely took place within states, usually between government armies or government-supported militias on the one hand and rebel groups on the other. Often both sides were supported by one of the Cold War’s great powers. After the Cold War this trend of within-country warfare – but with international linkages – has continued.

Rebels and governments are no longer able to turn to one of the Cold War superpowers for support, but to some extent the ‘War on Terror’ has replaced the old dichotomy. During the Cold War warring parties would clothe their grievances in either Marxist or anti-communist language in order to gain support. Similarly, current-day groups may gain international support either by adopting an Islamist cloth, as the Chechnyan independence fighters have done, or by branding one’s opponents as terrorists, as the Russian government does. The first strategy is likely to lead to an inflow of foreign mujahedin and of money from Islamic foundations. The second strategy may result in financial support from the United States, or at least it may silence American criticism of human rights violations.

However, international linkages are by no means limited to ‘War on Terror’-related support by Islamic groups or the United States to a government or rebel force that is a party to a civil war. In many cases, civil wars have a regional dimension and conflicts in neighbouring countries are intimately tied to one another. In the African Great Lakes region, Hutu genocidaires from Rwanda play an important role in the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a war in which at least nine different countries have been involved at one point or another: Namibia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Angola, Chad, Libya, Sudan, Uganda and Rwanda. The current conflict in Darfur is spreading to Chad and the Central African Republic. And in West Africa, the erstwhile Liberian president Charles Taylor, an important figure in that country’s civil war, has recently been indicted by a Sierra Leonean special court for his active role in fuelling the civil war there, a war that can in some ways be seen as an expansion of the Liberian conflict.

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7 This section draws on publications such as Kaldor (2000, 2006), Duffield (2001), Berdal and Malone (2001), Mair (2003), and Collier (2000, 2003, and 2006).
International diaspora groups add another external element to current-day ‘internal’ conflicts. Diaspora communities often play an active role in conflicts back home, for example by financing conflict groups or lobbying Western governments to intervene. People who have left their country and have built up an existence abroad can afford to be radical as they do not have to live with opposing groups or with the consequences of conflict on a daily basis. Given the size of the remittances they send home, the ‘long-distance nationalism’ of diaspora groups can affect conflicts significantly. However, some try to counter this trend by organising dialogues among diasporas from opposing sides.

Transnational criminal networks provide another international link to today’s predominantly internal wars. The smuggling of arms and drugs are profitable businesses in war areas. In addition, conflicts create instable and untransparent environments with little rule of law. Such circumstances are suitable for all sorts of illegal activities, such as for example the trade in ‘blood’ diamonds from Sierra Leone. Such economic endeavours create groups of people with an interest in continued instability and war. For some, illegal activity stops being a means to finance rebellion and becomes a profitable end in itself, with war the means to achieve it. As a result, distinguishing between greed and grievances (Collier 2000, 2003, 2006; Berdal and Malone 2001) and between rebels, warlords and criminals (Mair 2003) becomes increasingly difficult. Many groups combine elements of ‘justified’ rebel movements with characteristics of criminal gangs.

The distinction between civilians and fighters has also decreased enormously in comparison to the ‘classic’ wars of the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the Holocaust started a trend in which the majority of war casualties nowadays are civilians. Common terror tactics, as seen today in Darfur, include rape, plunder, maiming and killing civilians, and burning down houses. The reasons behind these tactics are not always clear and lead to considerable speculation. An element of it seems to be to scare local people into submission to militias. These groups also use them to control their own members: for example, children abducted to become soldiers are forced to hurt their own communities to prevent them from trying to return. In any case, it is clear that the use of such tactics has dramatically increased the costs of conflict for ordinary people. Civilian deaths are estimated to make up 75 per cent of all war casualties nowadays. (Barnes 2006: 18)

Particularly in Africa, the phenomenon of ‘weak’ and ‘failed’ states has contributed to conflicts. Africa’s history of the slave trade pitted African traders against victims of the trade. It was followed by colonisation
which drew artificial borders, used divide-and-rule tactics and appointed particular groups to rule over others. This led to governments that enjoyed little legitimacy in the eyes of their populations. After independence these governments were somewhat artificially propped up by the support of superpowers, but when this ended after the Cold War they weakened further. The governments’ lack of resources led to them becoming increasingly indebted to international financial institutions, which demanded particular conditions in return. One of these conditions, privatisation and the related shrinking of state expenditures, further weakened Southern governments, which became increasingly unable to regulate and control their societies and prevent conflicts.

Southern, and particularly African, governments continue to be weak. In situations of weak governance and resulting low security, people fall back on small groups for their sense of security and belonging. Kinship, tribe and ethnicity become important organising factors. In addition, weak governments tend to employ patronage strategies to remain in power. In this way, culture ties in with responses to state weakness to create tit-for-tat style governance systems. Democracy in these countries mainly entails voting for one’s patron or ethnic kinsman in return for profitable positions and favours. What Western observers may consider corruption is really a functioning mode of governance. However, it means that controlling the government becomes a way to extract resources from supporters. Problematically, a rule of law tends to be absent. The close interrelation between political power and material wealth raises the stakes in the political game. It makes such power something to fight for.

1.2.2 Conflict, peace and development

Conflict, peace and development are very much connected. The developing world has faced a wave of violent conflicts during the last two decades. Civil wars have thwarted development efforts in which vast amounts of human energy and money had been invested. The main feature of countries in the wake of armed conflict is the very real danger of a resumption of the fighting. The best predictor of future conflict is past conflict: in 44 per cent of all post-conflict situations, war starts again in the first five years after the violence has stopped (World Bank 2004: 8), and about 50 percent of post-conflict countries revert back to war in the first decade of ‘peace’. (World Bank 2003: 7) With every violent conflict, a society loses part of its capacity to handle future conflicts in a peaceful way (Miall 2001: 15), endangering future development efforts as well as present ones.
Organisations involved in peacebuilding therefore argue for a shift in emphasis (and financial means) from development projects to peace building and conflict prevention, since a relatively small effort that would help to avoid violent conflict could save large investments in development and prevent enormous expenditures for peacemaking, peacekeeping, and the alleviation of dramatic humanitarian problems that result from large scale violent conflict. The realisation, made public by Mary Anderson in her book *Do No Harm* (1999), that emergency help and long-term development programmes can unintentionally contribute to conflict has stimulated the notion that development efforts should consciously take into account the conflict factor. (Boyce 1996, Ball 1996, Carbonnier 1998, Addison 2003, Moore 2000, Junne and Verkoren 2004)

At the same time, it is argued that peace needs development just as much as development needs peace, as rising living standards and employment opportunities, as a result of economic development, are considered to be effective conflict preventors. The fact that most warfare takes place in the developing world is considered proof of that idea. (World Bank 2003: ix) More and more analysts consider the degree of economic and social development that is achieved, and the fair distribution of its fruits over different groups of the population, to be crucial determinants of whether the shooting and looting starts again. The World Bank notes that “countries affected by conflict face a two-way relationship between conflict and poverty – pervasive poverty makes societies more vulnerable to violent conflict, while conflict itself creates more poverty.” (World Bank 2004: 14) Indeed, economic development gives different groups something to work on together. Orientation may change from looking at the past toward focusing on the future. An interesting job is not only an alternative to fighting, but could also give rise to new professional identity. If people see another perspective than continuous fighting, they may be more resistant to renewed manifest conflict. There will be fewer fighters to pick up their arms, and there will be stronger efforts to stop those who do.

This line of reasoning does not hold true in all cases: sometimes, some economic ‘development’ can be the precondition for the resumption of fighting. If the decline of military activity was mainly due to the exhaustion of the conflicting parties and a lack of means to continue, then ‘development’ may take these constraints away, and with a ‘culture of conflict’ unabated, violent conflict may resume. Therefore, it is not just economic growth which is important, but a specific economic development which addresses the grievances of different groups, allows
compromise between contending factions, and offers sufficiently attractive alternatives to the main opponents.

However, this is more easily said than done. The number of developing countries that have recently been the scene of civil strife is such that post-conflict development has become the norm rather than the exception. Moreover, the pursuance of traditional development strategies may have contributed to the increase of violent conflicts rather than preventing it (Anderson 1999). With a large share in state income in the poorest countries, development aid given to governments may incite opposition groups to fight for their share of the cake. Moreover, ‘structural adjustment’ programmes have been criticised for reducing the capacity of states to respond to the needs of their population, increasing general dissatisfaction with the government and intensifying the struggle for the remaining sources of income. (Rapley 2004)

1.2.3 Conflict and peace in West Africa and Southeast Asia

This study concentrates on (post)conflict areas in West Africa and Southeast Asia. More specifically, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cambodia and the Philippines are the focus areas of the study. This section briefly describes the conflicts in these countries in order to illustrate the current-day wars introduced above and sketch the context in which to place the findings presented in subsequent chapters.

Liberia

In 1989, the relatively peaceful state of the West African region (not counting numerous coups d’état) ended with the outbreak of civil war in Liberia. In that year, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor entered Liberia from Ivory Coast to fight the dictatorship of Samuel Doe whose Krahn tribe had begun attacking other tribes. After Taylor had invaded Nimba County the Liberian Army retaliated against the whole population of that region, attacking unarmed civilians and burning villages. Many left as refugees for Guinea and Ivory Coast. Soon after, Taylor’s army split when his ally Prince Johnson formed his own militia, based on the Gio tribe. Taylor's NPFL soon controlled much of the country, while Johnson took most of the

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capital, Monrovia, and killed president Doe. The war continued among all groups as both Taylor and Johnson claimed power.

A peacekeeping force of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), called the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), intervened and negotiated a treaty between the NPFL, Johnson, and Doe’s remaining supporters. A coalition government was formed in August 1993, but instability continued. In April 1996 particularly destructive fighting flared up in Monrovia. Many international NGOs left and parts of the city were destroyed. In a new accord the parties agreed to demobilise their fighters and organise elections in 1997. These were won by Charles Taylor, who went from warlord to president.

Low-intensity warfare continued, however, escalating around the turn of the century with the formation of new anti-Taylor groups, supported by the government of neighbouring Guinea. By the summer of 2003, Charles Taylor’s government controlled only a third of the country. Monrovia was besieged by the rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), whose shelling of the city resulted in the deaths of many civilians. Thousands of people fled.

The United States, historically tied to Liberia, sent a small number of troops to defend its embassy in Monrovia, which had come under attack. The United States (US) also stationed a Marine unit offshore, while Nigeria sent in peacekeepers as part of another ECOMOG force. President Taylor resigned in August 2003 as part of a peace agreement and went into exile in Nigeria. A transitional government was installed until technocrat Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected the new president in early 2006. Sirleaf’s immediate steps to fight corruption fill many Liberians with hope, although she still faces the power blocs of warlords in parliament and local government.

Sierra Leone

Just a few years after it had begun, the Liberian war expanded into neighbouring, diamond-rich Sierra Leone with the rise of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) supported by Charles Taylor. Since its independence from the United Kingdom Sierra Leonian history had been characterised by authoritarian rule and a series of military coups.

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From 1985 onwards, the dictator had been Joseph Momoh, who increasingly abused his power. In 1991, the RUF began to attack villages in Eastern Sierra Leone on the Liberian border. Soon it gained control of the diamond mines in the Kono district and began pushing the Sierra Leone army towards the capital Freetown. In 1992, a group of young military officers launched a military coup that sent Momoh into exile.

However, the new military government was not able to effectively counter the RUF. By 1995 the rebels held much of the countryside and approached Freetown. In response, the government hired several hundred mercenaries from the South African private firm Executive Outcomes, who drove RUF fighters back to Sierra Leone’s borders. Elections were held in 1996, but the winner, UN diplomat Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, was overthrown a year later by a group of militaries that formed a junta jointly with the RUF. Another year later, ECOMOG intervened to reinstate Kabbah, and the RUF resumed its military resistance.

In January 1999 there was severe fighting in Freetown, leaving thousands dead and wounded. ECOMOG forces drove back the RUF attack several weeks later. Later that year, president Kabbah and RUF leader Foday Sankoh negotiated a peace accord. The accord made Sankoh vice-President and gave other RUF members positions in the government. In addition it called for a UN peacekeeping force, which was deployed soon after. Almost immediately, however, the RUF began to violate the agreement, most notably by holding hundreds of UN personnel hostage in 2000. Soon, Sankoh and other senior members of the RUF were fired from their government positions and arrested. However, violence continued and even escalated to such an extent that British troops were deployed in May 2000. They succeeded in stabilising the situation and enforced a lasting ceasefire.

Since 2001, the process of demobilisation and disarmament of fighters has gathered momentum, although their reintegration into communities still presents difficulties. In 2002 president Kabbah and his party won the presidential and legislative elections. The RUF political wing failed to win a single seat in parliament. In the same year, the UN mission began a gradual reduction of its presence and completed the withdrawal of all troops on January 1st, 2006. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Special Court for Sierra Leone have been established to deal with the perpetrators and victims of atrocities committed during the war. RUF-leader Foday Sankoh was indicted but he died in prison from a heart attack before he could be tried. In addition, the Special
Court indicted former Liberian president Charles Taylor for his role in fuelling the Sierra Leonean war. It was agreed that he would be tried not in Freetown but in The Hague, where he is currently imprisoned.

Even though intra-state conflicts began relatively late in West Africa compared to other parts of the continent, they were extremely brutal. There was widespread use of child soldiers. Rape and cutting off limbs were common actions in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean wars. In Sierra Leone the illicit trade in diamonds turned from a means to finance rebellion to an end in itself. There the distinction between government soldiers and rebels was increasingly difficult to make. With the government unable to pay its soldiers’ salaries, many turned to looting and illicit diamond mining as a means of survival. Fighters variously joined whichever group provided the most profits. Some turned into sobels: soldiers during the day, rebels at night (Reno 2003: 58; Keen 2003: 81-86; Adebajo 2002: 79-110).

Political power play and the greed of leaders triggered the Liberian and Sierra Leonean conflict, but the root causes are also found at the level of the individuals joining the war effort. These were mainly marginalised and discontented youth, who had little opportunities in life because of exploitative and corrupt political and economic structures. There were increasing land shortages due to increased diamond mining, soil erosion, and population growth, and there was (and is) high unemployment. Disputes with local chiefs over the allocation of land and NGO funds also played a role. Richards (2005) reports that many young men in Liberia and Sierra Leone expressed grievances about chiefs’ use of local systems of land tenure and marriage payments as instruments of exploitation. Chiefs impose heavy fines on youth for minor or fabricated offences, and make them do hard labour for years in an almost slave-like fashion in order to pay these fines. In other cases, young men are forced to marry (as punishment for being seen with a girl or as a way to obtain land) but cannot afford the dowry, which forces them to work for their wives’ families.

The Philippines

Mindanao, the Southernmost part of the Philippines, has been a conflict region for decades - or even centuries. The most high-profile conflict in Mindanao revolves around the “Bangsamoro issue”. The Bangsamoro, or Moro, people are Muslims who either came from Malaysia or were

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10 This section is largely based on Schiavo-Campo and Judd 2005, Stankovitch 1999, www.wikipedia.org (accessed on 1 December 2006), and conversations with people in and outside The Philippines.
influenced by Malaysian traders in the thirteenth century. The Spanish colonisers in later centuries did not manage to penetrate Mindanao as much as they did the rest of the Philippines, and the Moro people - as well as other indigenous groups, generally termed Lumad - were able to retain their religion and culture.

In the nineteenth century however, the central Philippine government in Manila began a policy of sending settlers from other parts of the country to live in Mindanao. These predominantly Christian ‘settlers’ (they are still called this by Moro and Lumad even though most of them have lived in Mindanao for generations) acquired positions of power over the other Mindanawan groups, sowing the seeds for violent rebellion and conflict. An important issue in the conflict is that of the ‘ancestral domains’: Moro groups demand control over the territory that used to belong to their ancestors. They aim at a Bangsamoro homeland, sufficient control over economic resources in their ancestral territory, and a structure of governance that will allow Moros to govern themselves in ways that they consider to be consonant with their culture. The difficulty, however, is that these ‘ancestral domains’ now include significant non-Moro groups (Christian Filipinos) who do not want to be governed under Bangsamoro autonomy. In 1990, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao was created, but in a referendum provinces with majority or large non-Moro populations voted to stay out of this region and as a result only a few provinces are currently included.

After the Philippine government concluded a peace agreement with the Mindanao National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1996, another rebel movement, the Mindanao Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which seeks to establish an independent Islamic state in Mindanao, became active. Presently, peace negotiations with the MILF are ongoing. Abu Sayyaf is the smallest and most radical of the Islamic separatist groups in Mindanao. The group appears to enjoy little popular support in the area. Another armed conflict in Mindanao, as well as in other parts of the Philippines, is that between the government and the communist National Democratic Front (NDF). In Mindanao this conflict is concentrated in the Northern part of the island. The NDF, which has fought for social justice for many decades, is also negotiating with the government.

The Philippine government has established a Presidential Office for the Peace Process, which engages with the rebel groups and with civil society groups from Mindanao to try and find a lasting solution to the

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11 It has appeared in the Western media because of kidnappings of Western nationals.
conflicts. At the same time, however, government forces continue to clash frequently with rebels in Mindanao.

Cambodia

Cambodia is usually considered to be a post-conflict country in the sense that large-scale armed conflict ended in the mid-to late-1990s with the demise of the Khmer Rouge, who had brutally ruled the country in 1975-1979 until they were ousted from power by a Vietnamese invasion. The conflict dates back to at least 1970, when a military coup was staged and the Khmer Rouge began their uprising in the context of the wider Indochina war and heavy American bombings of the Cambodian countryside believed to harbour Viet Cong fighters. The bombings and civil war in the period between 1970 and 1975 took up to a million lives.

Despite American support for the military government, the Khmer Rouge, supported by China, won the civil war in 1975 and established a revolutionary government that aimed to establish a rural utopia. The regime cleared out the cities and sent the entire population into rural communities where they were forced to do heavy agricultural work to meet increasingly unrealistic production targets while being underfed. Hundreds of thousands died from these conditions, while others were murdered because they were considered urban intellectuals or potential traitors from the Khmer Rouge’s own ranks. The total number of casualties of the Khmer Rouge period is estimated at between one and two million people.

Towards the end of its rule the leaders of the Khmer Rouge, increasingly paranoid, began attacking neighbouring Vietnam, which finally retaliated with an invasion that ended Khmer Rouge rule and established a puppet government that essentially lasted until 1991. The Khmer Rouge, meanwhile, had retreated to the jungle area bordering Thailand where they regrouped and formed an alliance with other anti-government groups. The coalition was supported by China and the United States, which was ready to side with any group in order to counter Vietnam and its backer, the Soviet Union. Illicit trading of timber across the Thai border further helped finance the Khmer Rouge’s continued resistance.

Only after the end of the Cold War did the Great Powers support peace negotiations, which led to an agreement in 1991. The agreement

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stipulated the disarmament and demobilisation of all groups, to be carried out by a UN mission. This mission, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), was a new phenomenon in international history as its mandate was broad and included many civil tasks, including the organisation of elections. The elections, held in 1993, were considered to be a success, and the UN mission withdrew soon after. However, other aspects of the mission, most importantly the demobilisation process, had been less successful and this allowed for continued warfare after the elections. Moreover, a weak rule of law enabled the elected government to quickly descend into authoritarianism. In 1998 fighting came to an end. However, many challenges remain, including poverty, corruption, weak legal and regulatory institutions, a lack of democracy, and traumas and distrust that are remnants of the conflict. The risk of renewed revolution and conflict in Cambodia is prevalent and may even be growing stronger given increasing inequality between rich and poor and city and countryside, issues which played an important role in causing the Khmer Rouge revolution in the 1970s.

After many years of negotiations between the Cambodian government and the UN, a mixed international-Cambodian tribunal began operating in 2006 to try the remaining Khmer Rouge leaders for their role in the 1975-1979 genocide. However, questions are raised about the political independence of the tribunal, which contains a majority of Cambodian judges, many of whom have close ties to the government.

The conflicts compared

Summarising some of the main characteristics of the conflicts described, the Liberia and Sierra Leone conflicts are very much intertwined, while the Cambodia and Mindanao conflicts are not only separate but very different in nature. Ethnicity and religion play a significant role in Mindanao but not in Cambodia; in West Africa ethnic tensions are part of the conflict but do not emerge as chief causes. Poverty, exploitation and marginalisation of groups – whether a specific ethnic group such as in Mindanao, marginalised youth in general in West Africa, or the rural population in Cambodia – are important factors in all the conflicts. State weakness and corruption play a role as well, particularly in Cambodia and West Africa.

In all four countries these factors have not yet been addressed to the extent that the risk of renewed fighting has faded. In Mindanao peace negotiations are ongoing. In the other countries peace agreements have already been reached and demobilisation efforts have been undertaken with varying degrees of success. Those who have been demobilised still
face poverty and high unemployment, making it difficult for them to reintegrate into society. The conclusion of a peace agreement in Mindanao is likely to lead to a flow of money for reconstruction and peacebuilding, as it did in Cambodia and the West African countries. The difficulty, however, is that at such an early stage local and national institutions have little capacity to spend these funds in a meaningful way. As such capacity develops, as it may slowly be doing now in Liberia, the availability of funds decreases as donors move to other crisis areas.

The most positive atmosphere was encountered in Liberia, which I visited soon after the elections that brought Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to power. Although she faces difficult structural constraints, her energetic tackling of corruption has given many people hope. In Sierra Leone, by contrast, the political situation has stagnated and it is hoped that the 2007 elections may bring change to this situation. Cambodia’s political situation has not changed much over the past years; although there are regular elections, major issues such as the intimidation of opponents and the government’s hold over the judicial system remain.

Both Cambodia and Sierra Leone currently witness tribunals that try the chief human rights violators of the conflicts in those countries. One challenge for civil society is to relate to these tribunals and help disseminate information about them in order to raise awareness about the significance of the trials. Like Liberia, Sierra Leone has also established a truth and reconciliation commission to deal with lower cadres that were often victims and perpetrators at the same time and to bring out the truth about what happened. Here too, civil society has a role to play – in gathering information, making suggestions for the best approach, and raising awareness among the population.

1.3 Peacebuilding

In this book I use the term peacebuilding as short-hand for a broad field of intervention activity by NGOs, states, and international organisations. Other terms used to describe the field include ‘conflict transformation’ and ‘violence prevention’. Peacebuilding includes what is called peacemaking (negotiation to reach a settlement between warring parties or military action to enforce peace) and peacekeeping (military missions that keep warring parties apart) but goes beyond those interventions as it strives for lasting solutions that address the underlying causes of a conflict. Similarly, conflict transformation is an activity that goes beyond conflict management (regulation, mitigation, or containment of
violent conflict) and conflict resolution (mediation or negotiation to reach a mutually acceptable settlement) to include structural issues such as the inequalities between parties and the role of external players.

Conflict transformation aims not only at a settlement that ends the violence but at a ‘just’ or ‘positive’ and thereby sustainable peace. Conflict transformation does not see conflict as a negative thing. On the contrary, conflict is the source of change and progress. Even if this were desirable, it is impossible to end or prevent conflict because conflict is omni-present. Instead, the aim of conflict transformation is to reduce the negative, harmful expressions of conflict – violence – and enable people to conflict constructively and peacefully – as happens, for example, in a democracy in which all interests ideally have equal representation.

Peacebuilding is synonymous to conflict prevention, or more accurately, violence prevention, in that it aims to prevent violence either from beginning in the first place or from resurging after it has ended. The latter is a serious risk given that half of all civil wars take place in post-conflict situations and forty per cent of post-conflict countries fall back into civil war within a decade (Collier 2006). Peacebuilding includes activities at various levels of society, or ‘tracks’. ‘Track One’ interventions aim at the leaders of the warring parties. Track One activities may include state diplomacy or high-level mediation to prevent or end warfare. Track One is largely the realm of states and international organisations, but NGOs are sometimes also involved. For example, the Carter Center of former US president Jimmy Carter has been involved in mediation activities at a high level in various parts of the world. Recently, the Dutch branch of the NGO Pax Christi became closely involved in peace negotiations in Northern Uganda. As the NGO had long worked in the area and had built up relations of trust with the various sides it was invited to play a mediatory role (Te Velde 2006). After a settlement has been reached, Track One peacebuilding focuses on building institutions and structures that strengthen the government and make it accountable to its citizens. Strengthening government legitimacy and building up the judicial system, army, and police forces are all generally considered elements of a long-term peacebuilding strategy.

Too often, high-level peace agreements have failed to be implemented because they lacked societal support and failed to address deep-seated grievances and issues. Therefore, ‘Track Two’ initiatives aim at drawing important societal figures into a peace process in the hopes of giving it a broader base. Track Two peacebuilding involves high-profile, influential societal figures in a conflict region, such as leaders of political parties,
journalists, interest groups, local government leaders, or religious organisations. It may include consultations, workshops and dialogues in which representatives of different sides in a conflict are involved. In addition, Track Two strategies involve institutional development of local NGOs, media, and other potential checks and balances. NGOs often work at this level, sometimes in cooperation with international organisations like the UN. (Ramsbotham et al. 2005: 26)

‘Track Three’ peacebuilding, finally, focuses on ‘ordinary people’: the communities at the ‘grassroots’. It focuses on the causes and consequences of conflict at the level of the individual citizen. These causes and consequences (often difficult to separate from one another) may include inter-communal hatred, discrimination, unequal opportunities, poverty, and trauma. Track Three interventions are usually carried out by NGOs, sometimes in conjunction with local or national government. These interventions are varied and many, and include development work, peace education, the training of community mediators, the organisation of dialogues, strategies to reduce the availability of small arms, the reintegration of former (child) combatants and of refugees, and psycho-social work. The NGOs that are part of this study carry out activities in all tracks, but mainly tracks two and, particularly, three. We will now look in some more detail at the kinds of work they engage in.

1.4 NGOs and peacebuilding

Many people are familiar with the role played in peacebuilding by institutions like the United Nations, regional organisations, and individual governments. The role of NGOs is much less known. This section sheds some light on the range of activities undertaken by NGOs in the field of peacebuilding. As little was been written in the literature about this, the section uses findings from my field research as well as literature on the subject.

1.4.1 Positioning peace work in relation to other NGO activities

One may wonder to what extent peace and conflict NGOs are different from others working in developing countries. In many respects they are similar: they tend to be part of the same policy chain that stretches from policymakers in Northern governments and international organisations such as the World Bank and the UN via international NGOs to local partner NGOs in developing countries. Being part of this chain has
various major consequences for the activities and knowledge of SNGOs. This is the case for development NGOs as well as for peace organisations – at least for those peacebuilding organisations that are financed from development cooperation budgets, as the majority of NGOs studied are. Northern – or international – NGOs receive funds from national development cooperation budgets and spend these via their partner NGOs in the South. In this way they finance ‘regular’ development work such as infrastructure and health care development, but they also have peace and security departments that support peacebuilding work through, or together with, the local NGOs studied in this book. In this sense, peacebuilding is part of the wider field of development and the chain of relationships (and knowledge flows) is similar.

There are also differences. First of all, not all peace work is organised and financed through the development chain. Some Northern/international peace organisations, such as the recently merged Dutch organisation Interchurch Peace Council – Pax Christi Netherlands (IKV-Pax Christi), have a church background. They receive only part of their funding from official development budgets, being financed also through the churches that founded them. This gives these organisations more independence vis-à-vis official policy. Another difference, emphasised particularly by ‘pure’ peace organisations and less so by development organisations that do peacebuilding only as part of their work, lies in the nature of partnerships. The chain model with its emphasis on transferring responsibilities to Southern partners with the aim of creating their capacity to function independently from Northern aid, does not always work in peacebuilding. In that field, external partners sometimes continue to be necessary, whether as neutral interveners in conflict and negotiation processes or as channels to help bring locals’ issues to the attention of international public opinion and policymakers in the North. (Barakat et al. 2006) That said, for nearly all of the organisations visited the chain is very much a reality and it shapes their functioning and knowledge processes.

Another difference between peace work and other development activities relates to the nature of the outcomes of such work. Peace is an elusive concept that is difficult to measure. Understandably, agencies funding the work of local NGOs ask them to show concrete results of their projects. But the results of peacebuilding are hard to pin down. They are part of a long-term process and often cannot be captured after a short project cycle. Peacebuilding is a process rather than a set of deliverables. This is different for at least some other development activities; the outcome of building wells for example is easily measured.
Peace projects can often give numerical information about the number of people trained or the number of meetings organised, but have difficulty showing the impact of these activities. This has led to many discussions and organisations struggle to find ways of measuring results while leaving space for open-ended and flexible processes. We will return to this in chapter five.

1.4.2 Lasting peace as the ultimate aim

The ultimate aim of the peacebuilding activities of NGOs is twofold: first, to end violence and destructive conflicts, and second, to build just and sustainable peace. The first is a more immediate goal that ends direct violence while clearing the ground for the more long-term and difficult task of creating the structures and circumstances for a lasting peace. Such a lasting peace is usually considered to require some form of social justice and legal, political, social and economic equality between groups and individuals. In many cases, a strengthened rule of law, democratic institutions, free media and a strong civil society are seen to be part of that. These elements enable conflict to be managed peacefully rather than through violent means.

Many practitioners include these ultimate aims in their visions and mission statements. When it comes to their concrete programmes, the goals of NGOs are more specific: “to change people’s view of the other side by bringing them together in a dialogue”, “to reduce the likelihood that these people will be killed”, or “to educate children about how to resolve conflicts without violence”. However, the connection between such specific programme goals and the ultimate aims of ending violence and building peace is usually left implicit and is not systematically thought through. (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 11-12) Most practitioners agree that the ultimate aims cannot be met through any single programme or organisation and require actions by various players. But few people have integrated visions about how the pieces of the puzzle fit together and about how their own activities relate to the broader effort of peacebuilding.

This does not mean that NGOs should pretend they are able to build sustainable peace on their own. What they can do is think more explicitly about what their role is and how it relates to the roles and activities of others – other NGOs but also governments, military actors, and international organisations. Being more aware of one’s role in the bigger picture of peacebuilding not only implies more thorough reflection on the part of individual organisations, but also coordination
among actors in conflict and peacebuilding. The knowledge strategies described in Parts Two and Three strive to achieve both.

1.4.3 The added value of NGOs in peacebuilding

For peace to be sustainable, peacebuilding cannot only be a top-down process. ‘Track two’ and ‘track three’ strategies are needed as well. NGOs are well placed to engage at these levels. Compared with governmental and intergovernmental agencies, they are closer to the communities in which peace ultimately needs to take root and can enable ordinary people to articulate their needs and make their voices heard. Civilians – individual citizens, families and communities – have increasingly found themselves directly affected by the intra-state wars of recent times and the targeting of civilians by armed parties has increased the cost of conflict for ordinary people. In conflicts such as those in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, and the Southern Philippines, “violence often penetrates through the social fabric, involving a large array of armed actors”. (McKeon 2005: 567) As we saw, in current day wars high-level political dynamics combine with grassroots-level grievances and animosities to create “a complex tapestry of interconnected and self-sustaining conflict dynamics at the community level” (ibidem). As a result, ordinary people, living alongside the armed actors and greatly affected by them, have both an interest and a potential in contributing to the building of peace. Civil society organisations - at least in theory - consist of and represent these ordinary people and are therefore well placed to engage in peacebuilding. In the words of Goodhand (2006: 115):

> “they are mid-level actors with linkages upwards to political leadership and downwards to communities; they have the potential to play a bridging role between identity groups in contexts characterized by extreme horizontal inequalities; they have the ability to work across lines and gain access to communities living on the wrong side of a conflict; [and] they [...] can work in high-risk environments.”

In addition, NGOs are often considered to be more “flexible, adaptive and innovative” than governmental and intergovernmental institutions (ibidem). Indeed, the study of local peace NGOs has shown that they are relatively unbureaucratic and decision-making structures are flat in that all staff members tend to have easy access to leaders and are consulted over policy. That said, the flexibility and innovativeness of NGOs are limited by two issues: the constraints created by their place in the international policy chain, which will be discussed extensively further on in this book, and, partly related, their often limited learning capacity.
In order to adapt to either changing circumstances or to increase effectiveness requires the capacity to study the circumstances as well as the effectiveness of one’s work, to reflect on the outcomes of such study, and to adapt activities as a result. This is what the concept of learning capacity refers to. In the next chapter and beyond, it is explored further.

Moving on to other ways in which NGOs potentially add value to peace processes, another unique aspect relates to their own values:

“[t]hey do not only seek to get things done, they embody a particular set of values or way of thinking about the world. Therefore, just as material resources interact with the political economy of conflict, NGOs’ values and ways of thinking interact with ideational and discursive aspects of war and peace. Individual peace entrepreneurs […] play an important role in the diffusion of ideas and the generation of social energy that can transform social structures and social relations. […] An example of this […] is the use of the media to broadcast messages of peace and reconciliation and to counteract pro-war propaganda.” (Goodhand 2006: 121-122)

More generally, a strong civil society, of which local NGOs are a part, is an important element of “the capacity of societies to manage conflict peacefully” (Barnes 2006: 21). As discussed in section 1.1, people coming together in associations and organisations and taking part in the public sphere create what has been called “social capital” (Putnam 1993): networks of interaction, mutual assistance and trust that give a sense of common identity and foster civic engagement and democracy. This is particularly important from a peacebuilding perspective.

1.5 Activities of the NGOs visited

This section aims to give an idea of the range of activities that local peace NGOs engage in. As there is hardly any literature available on this, the section draws on my own field research and is based mainly on the activities mentioned by NGOs visited as they described their own work. Table 3.5 in the methodology section (3.10) provides an overview of the activity areas in which NGOs consulted for this study engage. Most NGOs are active in more than one of the areas described. There are variations in the nature and work of peace NGOs in different parts of the world. However, it is quite striking how similar the range of activities is when compared between countries. This once more draws attention to the consequences of being part of the same funding chain. As will be discussed in Part Two of this book, funding agencies often
present a range of activities they are willing to support, and in many cases local NGOs have few options but to choose from such lists.

However, the picture is a little more complex than that. In part it is a matter of the language used – local NGOs have become adept at using the ‘right’ terms in their project proposals, but this does not necessarily mean that their actual activities are the same. The extent to which these differ has been difficult to establish due to the nature of the research undertaken. NGO staff members interviewed tended to use the same ‘international development language’ in our conversations, and although in some cases it was possible to move beyond that discourse, in most cases I was not able to observe their actual activities in the communities.

1.5.1 Types of activities

The NGOs visited focused on one or more of the following types of activities.

*Dialogue and reconciliation* programmes are widespread among peace NGOs. Reconciliation includes a wide range of activities that include promoting reconciliation through support to Truth and Reconciliation Commissions; initiating joint reconciliation rituals and symbolic acts; the use of art, sports and theatre to deal with traumas and animosities; and targeted reconstruction or economic development efforts that involve representatives from different groups. In addition many local organisations focus on bringing representatives of divided communities together for dialogue. At a higher political level, some NGOs facilitate unofficial negotiation channels among political leaders from different sides to a conflict. They also employ advocacy to apply pressure on parties to start a peace process. The Mindanao People’s Council, the grassroots NGO network that was also active in the establishment of peace zones, contributed to forging a ceasefire agreement through a large demonstration of mainly internally displaced people who formed a human chain on a highway.\(^{13}\)

*Peace education* programmes include creating awareness of the common ground between groups and training people in conflict analysis, peace skills, or non-violent activism. Such education takes place inside schools as well as in communities. In addition, supporting the development of “peace media” stations to foster objective reporting or to counter pro-war propaganda is an increasingly common activity.

\(^{13}\) Interview with staff member of Mindanawan NGO network. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006.
Civilian mediation programmes train community members basic conflict resolution skills in order to mediate in conflicts that may arise in the community. Some of these programmes focus on influential community members, such as chiefs or elders, and train them as mediators. Others focus on women. Still other community mediation programmes focus on school children, who are trained to mediate within the schools. In some cases this is linked to peace education activities. “Our organisation has set up peace clubs in schools in response to an increase in violence in schools. The peace club members are trained to become mediators and animators. In the last training cycle of two years, 509 people were trained. They use drama, music, lectures, and workshops to promote peace in their schools.” To some extent, civilian mediators even fill the gap left by official court systems that are lacking or being developed. In some cases, mediators from different communities form committees that meet regularly to share experiences.

Peace zones and civilian peacekeeping are activities in which NGOs mobilise civilians to protect those vulnerable to violence. Peace zones, such as the ones created in Mindanao, are areas the warring parties promise not to attack. This is achieved through NGO pressure and negotiation. Peace zones create space for NGOs to start much-needed humanitarian, peacebuilding and development projects in order to start building sustainable peace. Civilian peacekeeping can entail the monitoring of a ceasefire by representatives of civil society or the accompaniment by volunteers of human rights activists or others in danger of attack.

Box 1.1: The Pikit space for peace

The Pikit space for peace came into existence in response to the wish of local groups to start rebuilding communities in Mindanao, addressing the visible (socio-economic and physical rehabilitation) and invisible (restoring relationships) effects of the war. However, such activities proved impossible due to ongoing violence. In order to proceed with the rehabilitation the NGO Mindanao People’s Caucus asked the main active rebel group, the Mindanao Islamic Liberation Frond (MILF), and the army to treat the Pikit area as a space for peace. The parties agreed and peacebuilding programmes began to be implemented. After this success, the ‘space for peace’ concept expanded to seven other villages. The chairman of the MPC, who is also pastor of Pikit parish and who played an important role in this initiative, thinks the reason why the soldiers cooperated was that they were approached as human beings who are basically good, rather than as ‘bad guys’.

14 Interview with staff members of Liberian youth organisation. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.
15 Interview with staff members of Liberian NGO. Monrovia, Liberia, 13 February 2006.
16 Interview with chairman of the Mindanao People’s Caucus. Marbel, Philippines, 16 May 2006.
Representing a particular group: Many NGOs work to increase the role of women or youth in peace processes and in society more generally. In West Africa in particular youth are of central importance because the large numbers of unemployed young men with little social opportunities present a huge conflict potential. In Cambodia as well, the population is very young and the opportunities of youth are an important agenda item. Indeed, in all four of the focus countries youth organisations are active in the peacebuilding field, as are women’s groups. Others work to empower an ethnic, religious or socially marginalised group whose emancipation is considered necessary for long-term peacebuilding. The Bangsamoro in Mindanao are an example of this; a number of NGOs in the region work for their empowerment which they see as an integral part of any strategy for sustainable peace. Partly in relation to this, it deserves mentioning here that many religious organisations such as churches and church umbrella organisations are active in the field of peacebuilding. In addition to activities such as those described elsewhere in this list, they focus on religion as a source of tolerance and inspiration and often organise inter-religious dialogues.

Organisational development, training and networking: Larger, city-based NGOs often work to support grassroots, community-based partners to strengthen and develop their organisations. This set of activities includes giving training, providing advice and helping organisations to find donors and to write funding proposals. Some NGOs engage in research to find out more about the needs and conditions of beneficiaries as well as possible methodologies for meeting these needs. A related set of activities is networking with other NGOs at home and abroad and with governments and regional and international organisations in order to extend the reach of an individual organisation, exchange knowledge, and undertake joint advocacy and other activities.

Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) of former fighters is another set of activities in which NGOs participate. Usually the DDRR process is led by a United Nations mission or government and NGOs carry out supporting activities at the grassroots level. These activities often entail helping ex-combatants find alternative means of living to prevent them from picking up arms once again. To help former fighters find alternative employment, skills training (such as computer proficiency) and vocational education (for example in car garages or tailoring shops) are prominent NGO areas of work within the range of DDRR-related projects. In some cases reintegration activities
are combined with rehabilitation and development work. An example is a farming project in Liberia’s Nimba province.

“Farmers who fled during the war work together in teams to clear the land that has become overgrown, plant, and harvest. Over fifty per cent of the farmers and their family members involved are former combatants. Some youngsters have been disarmed but because of their remote location, difficult to reach during the rainy season, they did not benefit from national rehabilitation programmes. These kids are easily recruited to fight in neighbouring Ivory Coast. Our organisation tries to prevent this by involving these kids in programmes such as the farming one.”

Early warning for early response has recently been getting increasing attention in recognition of the fact that preventing violence is better than responding to it. Civil society organisations are often socialised into the areas in which they work and have access to information about rising tensions and impending events. The problem lies often in getting those who can act on such warning signs to do so, highlighting again the importance of linking up with other actors as well as the difficulty of doing so.

Addressing broader structural issues of democracy, human rights and development is another broad area of activity of NGOs. Organisations strive to contribute to the strengthening of democracy at local and national levels. They do so, for example, by lobbying and advocating for increased transparency and accountability and by organising training sessions for parliamentarians and government employees. A related set of activities concerns human rights advocacy, which includes gathering information on abuses and making this available to various channels and institutions. Lobby and advocacy is also done in other areas, for example to draw attention to issues affecting the peace or the plight of a particular group. Many NGOs consider lobby and advocacy necessary activities that complement community work in order to address the larger political framework in which civil society’s peacebuilding work takes place. Local and national governments, governments in the North, and regional and international organisations are addressed in order to put issues on their agenda. In addition, ‘regular’ development work is sometimes carried out by peace organisations based on the recognition that sustainable peace requires socio-economic progress and an equitable division of wealth. The reverse is also true (development requires peace) and therefore development organisations increasingly have peacebuilding divisions.

17 Interview with staff members of Liberian youth organisation. Monrovia, Liberia, 9 February 2006.
1.5.2 The countries compared

Before making an attempt to further categorise the various activities and find out whether there are important gaps in the practices of NGOs as they work towards their ultimate goals of ending violence and building peace, I will first take a quick look at the character and activities of NGOs in West Africa and Southeast Asia in order to show the extent to which variations exist among countries within the relatively similar range of activities described above.

The Philippines

The Philippines, including Mindanao, are characterised by a strong and vibrant civil society. The country’s activist tradition goes back to the opposition movement during President Marcos’ dictatorship in the 1970s. NGOs there tend to be rather political - both in terms of their activist focus and of their connections to political parties and groups. Many NGOs originated from a political party or rebel group or are still closely related to it, even though this is not always clear to the outside observer.

Interestingly for this study, Philippine NGOs are also characterised by the fact that they have formed many networks; some even say too many. One interviewee in Mindanao sighed, “after each conference a network is created. This results in many names and abbreviations, but usually it is the same people who make up these networks. Often the new organisational forms only add to the workload. If the activities aimed at could as well be carried out within one or more of the organisations involved then there is no need to create a separate network or organisation.” However, most people see mostly advantages in the fact that the Philippine peacebuilding community is so well networked: people know one another and are familiar with each other’s activities, which stimulates cooperation and prevents duplication. There are also some notable networking successes. The Mindanao People’s Caucus (MPC) for example contributed to forging the ceasefire agreement between the MILF and the government through a huge demonstration of mainly internally displaced people who blocked the traffic on a highway. The MPC also initiated and carries out a civil ceasefire monitoring mission. As the MPC is a network of grassroots organisations it has been able to mobilise more people than an individual organisation could have done.

18 See also Box 1.1.
Typically, the peacebuilding activities of Philippine NGOs and networks include advocacy, lobbying, building the capacity of grassroots organisations, promoting the emancipation of the Moro people, and monitoring ceasefires and peace zones. In addition, many NGOs engage in what are perhaps more conventional peacebuilding NGO activities, such as peace education and the organisation of community dialogues.

Cambodia
Civil society in Cambodia is significantly weaker than in the Philippines. NGOs often have low capacity and civil society as a whole is less organised and networked than in the Philippines. Language is more of an issue when dealing with international actors and materials, as NGO staff are much less fluent in English than their Philippine counterparts. The relative weakness of Cambodian civil society is a consequence of its very different history. Civil society was non-existent during the Khmer Rouge years, operated under very difficult conditions in the succeeding Vietnamese period, and was only able to grow during and after the UN mission in 1991-1993, which it did exponentially. Not all NGOs that were founded during that period had good intentions beyond profiting from the fact that many funds had suddenly become available, and those that did did not necessarily have the capacity to work effectively. Although this is difficult to know for certain, it also seems that Cambodian NGOs are generally more externally driven and less rooted in local communities than Philippine ones.

Cambodian peace NGOs tend to focus less on activism than Philippine ones, and more on building relations and establishing connections. Some Cambodian interviewees suggest that this is due in part to Buddhist culture which is deemed to be less confrontational. Cambodian peacebuilding NGOs engage mainly in peace education, community dialogues, capacity building of grassroots actors, advocacy and lobby. With varying success, they have also formed networks.

Liberia and Sierra Leone
NGO activities in Liberia and Sierra Leone are relatively similar. The general character of civil society can be compared to the Philippines in one way and to Cambodia in another. Like in the Philippines, the culture or style of NGOs is relatively direct and sometimes confrontational. On the other hand, like in Cambodia, the capacity of NGOs is low and they have few resources. The extent to which they represent, and are rooted in, local constituencies, may also be doubted at least for some of these organisations. As we will see in this study, Northern donors often set their priorities of practice.
The activities of West African NGOs represent the whole range presented above, with a particular emphasis on organising community dialogues, training mediators, facilitating the reintegration of former fighters, and promoting the role of youth in peacebuilding and in society more generally. The latter activity is related to the facts that the populations of Liberia and Sierra Leone are very young, that young people have few opportunities for social advancement, and that young people as a result have played a large part in the wars of the region.

1.5.3 Categorising the activities

It is not always clear how NGOs decide which activities to engage in. Sometimes they are inspired by the work of other organisations. Often they are stimulated by international partners to look at a particular area of work, or are trained to do so. In some cases an analysis of the needs of the community in which they want to work informs such a decision. For example, prior to the founding of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), the founders toured the region talking to various members of civil society about the needs for peacebuilding. But this does not happen regularly. Often (would-be) NGOs simply decide to focus on what they are best placed to do given their skills, connections, and region of work.

Most NGOs focus on more than one set of activities and run various projects at once. When they decide to prioritise one theme or project over another this seems often to be largely determined by factors outside their direct influence – in particular, the security situation in a particular region or the availability of funding for particular projects. Organisations regularly grow and shrink in size depending on whether a particular grant has been secured and staff can be hired temporarily to carry out a project.

One way to categorise the various activities of NGOs is according to the diagram below, developed by Anderson and Olsen based on the outcomes of a three-year project called Reflecting on Peace Practice that involved over two hundred peace NGOs. The horizontal axis represents a difference in strategies ranging from activities aimed at involving as many people as possible to activities aimed at a limited number of key people. “More people” strategies want peacebuilding activities to be as broad-based as possible and to have people from all interest- and conflict groups take part in them. In cases where the risk of participating in peace activities is high, this may mean moving incrementally towards involving more and more individuals. In other cases “more people”
strategies might entail organising public campaigns or mass protests. Peace education and the training of community mediators fall into the “more people” category. “Key people” strategies by contrast aim at those people who are considered to be in positions in which they can make a difference, affecting the larger political or economic framework in which peacebuilding efforts take place. These may be people in government, powerful civic leaders, or representatives of international organisations. Lobbying is a “key people” strategy, as is negotiation to create peace zones or efforts to facilitate dialogue among leaders. (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 48-49)

The vertical axis shows two other dimensions of peacebuilding work. Activities aimed at the individual or personal level strive to start building peace by changing people’s attitudes and perceptions. Peace education is a good example of this. Socio-political level strategies aim at systemic, institutional change at the level of society as a whole. Strategies to strengthen democracy and activities to further socio-economic development both fit within this category. (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 48-49) If we start filling in the above-mentioned activities in the quadrants of the diagram, it might look as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual / personal level</th>
<th>More people</th>
<th>Key people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peace education</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training community</td>
<td></td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mediators</td>
<td></td>
<td>parliamentarians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dialogues between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grassroots organisations</td>
<td></td>
<td>(religious) leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass demonstrations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiating peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public campaigns</td>
<td></td>
<td>zones</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.1: Categorising NGOs’ activities in peacebuilding**

Fitting their activities into such a figure may help NGOs to better understand how strategically they are placed. It can stimulate reflection on the relationship between activities and final aims. For example, if an NGO works mostly at the individual, key people level, how does it

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19 adapted from Anderson and Olsen 2003: 48
expect this work to trickle down to the more people level - and who and what are needed to make that happen? Alternatively, when an organisation focuses its activities in several parts of the quadrant, do these different areas of work strengthen one another, and how? The next section shows most local peace NGOs have not explicitly done such thinking, but voice a need for more reflection on their place, role, strategy, and results.

1.6 Discussions about the role of NGOs in peacebuilding

This section touches upon the debates relating to the role and limits of NGOs in peacebuilding. Each will be further elaborated later on as it relates more explicitly to the subject matter of this study, and is therefore introduced only briefly here. I will start by discussing a number of limits and gaps in the practice of local peace NGOs. Next, I will mention discussions relating to the following issues: the reduced political role of NGOs, accountability and legitimacy, neutrality in conflict, and the possible contribution of NGOs to the weakening of states.

1.6.1 Limits and gaps in the practice of peace NGOs

It has become clear by now that although NGOs usually mean well and often are able to report local-level achievements such as numbers of community mediators trained, many organisations do not explicitly consider how their programmes and achievements contribute to progress towards the bigger picture: the ultimate aims of ending violence and building lasting peace or about how the projects of a single organisation complement those of other institutions (including, for example, state actors). As a result, some observers feel that “[a]ll of the good peace work being done should be adding up to more than it is. The potential of these multiple efforts is not fully realized. Practitioners know that, so long as people continue to suffer the consequences of unresolved conflicts, there is urgency for everyone to do better.” (Andersen and Olsen 2003: 10) One of the strategies for realising the joint potential of organisations is to have contact and relationships with others in order to think together about the division of labour. Many groups recognise this, which explains why networking is such a popular strategy among peacebuilders. However, as we will see further on in this book, networking in a context of conflict is not always easy, and people are still looking for the best ways to interact in a network.
As asked about the limits of NGO work and the gaps in their activities, staff members sometimes find it disheartening for them to realise that NGOs are only small players who can make only small differences. Civil society peacebuilders often wish they could do more, but they feel dwarfed by the actions of major political players within as well as outside the country in which they work. A Bangsamoro organisation in Mindanao might for years be working incrementally for the recognition of Moro rights when suddenly the ‘War on Terror’ takes off and they are branded as semi-terrorists. A Cambodian NGO could be advocating for the establishment of a fair trial for Khmer Rouge leaders that includes a truth and reconciliation component for lower cadres, until it finds out that the government has negotiated a compromise with the UN establishing a tribunal that does not meet these requirements.

Another limitation of the peace work of NGOs relates to the difficult concept of effectiveness. Naturally, people like to know whether their interventions are having the intended effect; in other words, whether they contribute to overall peace. NGOs are also under pressure from donor agencies to show the impact (another difficult concept) of their work. The problem is that peace is difficult to measure. And even if progress towards peace can be discerned, then it is usually impossible to determine whether this was due entirely, or at least in part, to a particular intervention or whether other factors and activities have played a role. As will be elaborated further in chapter five, all peace NGOs struggle with these issues and are trying to find innovative ways to assess the contribution of their programmes to peace in the area in which they work.

Two gaps in peacebuilding practice have been found the aforementioned Reflecting on Peace Practice project. First of all, peace NGOs have a bias toward people that are easy to reach. For example, many programmes focus on women and children because these are deemed non-political and are often willing to cooperate. These groups are often non-belligerents. Although working with them certainly has a lot of value, targeting the (potential) war makers is also important, and this is done less. (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 50) Another bias that the Reflecting on Peace Practice project identified is one “toward doing good versus stopping bad”. Most organisations see their work as “building the positive preconditions for peace”. But they tend not to address the systems or individuals that “promote or perpetuate war”, even though it would appear that doing so is a precondition for building positive peace. Because of this lack of regard for the negative characteristics of conflict-torn countries, organisations’ objectives may be unrealistic: “the benchmarks for such positive-focused peace practice
are highly idealized conditions of social harmony that do not exist even in most countries that are at peace!” (Anderson and Olsen 2003: 50-51)

This observation is related to Anderson and Olsen’s first one about non-belligerents as NGOs’ main target groups. Again, the organisations visited in the framework of this study suggest that the situation is not as one-sided as Anderson and Olsen describe it. In part, their observed bias towards “doing good” is related to the earlier described issue that the missions and visions of organisations tend to be abstract and idealised and the links with their actual activities are not everywhere so well elaborated. These idealistic visions may explain the disregard for the actual negative characteristics of conflict countries that Anderson and Olsen mention.

A limit to the debate is that the project largely leaves out the possibility that not all activities fall in the realm of NGOs. Just because a particular area of work is not done by NGOs does not mean that it is not done at all. Other actors, such as states or international organisations, may be better placed to carry them out. Of course, the need to think more explicitly about such divisions of labour and be less random in the determination of strategy remains. This relates back to the lack of thinking on the place of strategies vis-à-vis the larger aims of building peaceful societies. However, local NGOs face various constraints in doing such thinking. The limitations described in this paragraph with regard to impact assessment, reflection, and longer term action all play a role, as do the larger issues of the civil society policies of donors. The next section raises the question of how these policies contribute to a reduced political role for NGOs.

1.6.2 Reduced political role

NGOs have been facing an increasing need for resources. Competition for funds becomes stronger because of the internationalisation of the field, in which NGOs based in one place compete with others all over the world, and because of the rapid growth of the number of NGOs and other agents operating in the market, such as consulting firms. Another development has been that donor money is increasingly channelled through NGOs rather than through governments in developing countries. In 2004 24.6 per cent of Dutch development aid was channelled through NGOs. Although the Dutch spending of aid via NGOs is exceptionally high, other governments have also developed co-financing schemes in which large NNGOs become vehicles for spending donor money in
cooperation with partner NGOs in the South. This has changed the position of NGOs vis-à-vis the state.

As a result of both developments, NGOs have become increasingly dependent on state funds. According to some, this has brought them too close to the governments they used to check and criticise. Government funding has come with increased conditionality, forcing NGOs to work in particular countries and demanding an increased focus on poverty reduction – at the expense of other social change goals (Mitlin et al. 2005: 2). NGOs have grown more distant from social movements as they became closer to government agencies as a result of their increased dependence on official subsidies. Thus, from organisations working for social change NGOs increasingly become project deliverers for donors. As a result NGOs may become less pronounced and more similar to one another. Goodhand found from a comparative study of NGO activities in conflict areas that “NGOs, because of their dependence on official funding, were reluctant or unable to lobby for changes in donor policies and practices.” (Goodhand 2006: 145)

As discussed in 1.1, civil society support programmes do not promote an independent and political role for civil society in democratisation or peacebuilding, but tend to be more technocratic and in support of a particular model of social organisation – the professional NGO. In a context of conflict this can be an issue. Conflict is after all inherently political. Sustainable peacebuilding usually requires the transformation of social relations and power structures and the ‘empowerment’ of marginalised groups. Peacebuilding is therefore political in nature - at least when it comes to addressing the larger, structural issues preventing peace. However, few of the NGOs encountered actually work on such more structural issues – political oppression, unaccountable governance, and national and international inequality. This is because political work is sensitive, not only domestically but also with regard to the policies of international supporters.

Domestic obstacles are clearly seen in Central Asia where political authoritarianism is a major issue and NGOs emphasise the importance of maintaining friendly relations with governments to avoid being shut down. In most cases, this means that NGOs can only focus on the more technical, micro-level activities and not on macro-level, political ones. Such difficulties could, and sometimes are, be addressed by NGOs creating international coalitions with civil society actors elsewhere,

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which may pressure their own governments to speak out or intervene. This can be an important role of civil society networks, and some indeed do try to perform such a function\(^\text{21}\). However, this is not facilitated by the international issues described in this section that reduce the political role of NGOs. Donors often require CSOs to be neutral and unpolitical to be financed (Pishchikova 2006). There is some basis for this, particularly in conflict contexts, as some CSOs are tied to specific conflict parties or interest groups and do not always work in the best interest of peace as a whole (see 1.6.4 below). So indiscriminately supporting CSOs just because they are locally grounded is not a good option. International civil society support is grounded in values, and should be. But this does not preclude a recognition that peacebuilding may entail change in the balance of power, or that critical, autonomous civil society groups are an important part of democracy.

Although development is not an unpolitical project (and this is now increasingly recognised\(^\text{22}\)), it may be argued that peacebuilding (like the related fields of human rights and democratisation) is even more political. However, much of the work of the organisations visited is supported through the regular development funding and policy chain. There are exceptions; in particular NNGOs focusing exclusively on peacebuilding tend to emphasise more of a political role for their Southern partners. However, even these organisations are increasingly dependent on state funds.

1.6.3 Legitimacy

An important question to ask regarding NGOs is who they represent. Unlike democratic governments, the leaders of NGOs have not been elected. So how legitimate are they? Usually peace NGOs claim to work on behalf of the communities whose conditions they aim to improve. But in practice they account for their actions not to these communities, but to their donor agencies in the North. It is those agencies that demand and obtain evidence of efficient and effective action, not the intended beneficiaries of projects. Another aspect of the legitimacy of NGOs is the way they are governed internally. Not all NGOs are necessarily democratically governed. “[H]ailed as the exemplars of grassroots democracy in action, many NGOs are, in fact, decidedly undemocratic and unaccountable to the people they claim to represent”. (Simmons 1998, cited in Pishchikova 2006: 46)

\(^{21}\) For example, the careful activities of the Action Asia network with local partners in Burma.

\(^{22}\) See for example Pronk 2007.
NGOs are becoming increasingly aware of this issue as they try to involve staff more in policy-making and to develop participatory planning and evaluation methods together with the people for whom they are supposed to work. However, there are also NGOs whose reality is different from the picture they are trying to paint and who really serve mainly their own organisational survival. It is not surprising that in conflict and postconflict situations, in which often large amounts of donor money are available, some organisations are founded primarily in order to gain access to these funds. For some, it is a way of generating an income in very difficult economic conditions. Needless to say, such organisations usually do not primarily act on behalf of those they claim to represent. The trouble is that for external actors it can be difficult to find out whether this is the case.

A more fundamental aspect of this issue is the lack of local constituency of NGOs created with outside money (see 1.1). Writing about Ukraine, Pishchikova states that “the majority of foreign-supported NGOs are almost unanimously accused of lacking a grassroots constituency; they also fail to establish and maintain cooperative relations with other civic groups.” She adds that “[s]cholars increasingly talk about the “ghettoized” position of NGOs in the former Soviet Union in the sense that they are closer to their donors and other transnational partners than to their government or society”. (Pishchikova 2006: 80-81) The scope and approach of my study, which has taken place mainly using the perspective of local NGO staff, make it difficult to come up with meaningful conclusions regarding the constituencies of their organisations in the countries visited. However, it is good to keep the issue in the back of our minds and I will return to it in chapter four and beyond. In any case, it is important to realise that, particularly in conflict settings, “being representative of a certain constituency and sustainable still does not directly translate into democratic effects. It is therefore important to neither demonize the externally supported initiatives nor romanticize the local ones regardless of their substance.” (Pishchikova 2006: 81)

Questions of legitimacy are also tied to the issue of effectiveness mentioned under 1.4.3. If NGOs can prove that their activities have a positive impact on the situation of their intended beneficiaries and contribute to the overall aims of ending violence and building peace,
then they legitimise themselves in that way. The quest for better methods of assessing impact is thus relevant from the perspective not only of accountability toward donor agencies but also of legitimacy in the eyes of staff, communities, governments, and other organisations. And, as is discussed in chapter five, it is also highly relevant from the perspective of learning and improvement of work.

1.6.4 Neutrality in conflict

Local NGOs are part of the society in which they live and work. As a result, they are also a part of the conflict situation. Notwithstanding their aims of building peace, they may be affiliated more closely with one conflict group than with others. Armed groups “are usually supported by elements of civil society that champion the cause and view armed struggle as legitimate” (Barnes 2006: 21). In the worst case, a peacebuilding NGO may

“simultaneously be a vehicle for the political ambitions of its leaders and fundraisers for peace may in reality raise funds for warfare. The most notorious example is Rwanda, where despite its extremely high civil society density, genocide occurred partly because civil society actors turned out to have stronger loyalties to their government and ethnicity than to their principles […]. Rwanda stands out as the ultimate nightmare of a naïve support of civil society, but multiple realities of organisations always exist and are usually more innocent, as in the case of service NGOs whose informal objective is to generate job security for their staff.” (Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen 2005: 556)

In any case, “[n]o matter how well-meaning organisations may be, in environments where mistrust and rumours abound, they are highly liable to attract the reputation of being partisan, rendering them ineffective as a consequence.” (Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen 2005: 557) A Sudanese organisation whose headquarters I visited in Nairobi for example mentioned being regularly accused of aligning with the South Sudanese rebel movement24, while an NGO network visited in Mindanao is seen by some as aligned too closely to terrorists25.

Aside from the embeddedness of NGOs in conflict structures, their projects may have unintended impact on a conflict as well. Even ‘technical’ development projects can contribute to conflict or peace. Decisions on what local staff to hire and which areas to target risk

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24 Interview with staff member of a Sudanese NGO. Nairobi, Kenya, 28 November 2005.
25 Interview with Secretary General of a Mindanao NGO consortium. Cotabato, Philippines, 17 May 2006.
deepening cleavages by supporting one conflict group over another. Food or materials may inadvertently end up in the hands of fighting parties. Armed personnel hired to safeguard staff travelling to dangerous zones could be running warlord-related protection rackets. Even peace dialogues run the risk of branding participants as belonging to one conflict group when in reality their identities may be much more complex.

1.6.5 Weakening states

One reason why donor money is increasingly channelled through NGOs rather than through governments in developing countries is that many of these countries are plagued by weak or bad governance. Corruption is often high, so donor agencies cannot be sure whether their money will end up in someone’s Swiss bank account. However, channelling funds through the above-described chain of Northern and Southern NGOs risks weakening these states even further. After all, what these NGOs do is to set up structures of service provision in fields such as health care and education that are parallel to government ministries. This competing structure weakens rather than strengthens such ministries.

The parallel structures of NGOs are funded not by tax income but by Northern donors, which makes them highly aid dependent. In addition, the local branches of NNGOs tend to offer high salaries and draw talented personnel away from government agencies, thus further weakening these. What does this mean for local NGOs in developing countries? How can they prevent inadvertently contributing to weakening their governments? Again we are confronted with the importance of coordination with other actors, in this case governments. NGO-government coordination and cooperation would avoid the creation of parallel structures and help build the capacity of government agencies. However, the extent to which this is possible depends on the type of government an NGO is dealing with. Oppressive governments or governments that are a party to conflict may be better served by more oppositional NGO strategies.

1.6.6 Is it really that bad? On constraints and results

The above summary of gaps in, limits of, and discussions about the work of NGOs may leave some readers with little hope for anything positive to arise out of their work. The problems and limitations that NGO peacebuilders encounter are partly integral to their work, which
after all is done in the midst or aftermath of hugely destructive conflict. Weak or unresponsive governments are often a feature of such conflict and are but one of the countervailing forces that are largely beyond the control of NGOs. All this sometimes makes observers wonder why NGOs continue to work almost against all odds. The question may be raised whether the predominant focus of local peace NGOs on micro-level, relatively uncontroversial issues and not on larger, structural issues means that their activities amount to ‘mopping the floor while the tap is still open’, as a Dutch expression puts it. Is there any use in doing micro-level peace work if larger structures continue to promote conflict?

I would argue that there is. Although more attention for political issues is called for, local peace work has an integral value and may help build a ‘peace constituency’ from the bottom up. Individual stories about small, local-level changes give hope about the work of peace NGOs. Civil ceasefire monitoring in Mindanao, the training and employment of community mediators in Kenya, Liberian women’s sit-in protests for the resignation of president Taylor, and the establishment of a West Africa Network for Peacebuilding liaison office at the regional organisation ECOWAS are just some examples of positive results of local NGOs’ peace work. The European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP) has published two books filled with such positive stories (ECCP 1999; Van Tongeren et al. 2005).

The trouble with such achievements is that they are often difficult to measure. Peacebuilding is a long-term process engendering gradual changes in attitudes, perceptions and relationships. To a degree this is something that external parties – donor agencies, Northern and Southern governments, international organisations – may just have to accept. Simply trusting local organisations to do the right thing without always being able to show concrete results appears to be the way to go in some cases. However, this is not the whole story. Local organisations do need to think better about ways to show impact. After all, only if they do so will they be able to elaborate the links between their activities and the bigger picture of peace. I will return to the issue of impact assessment in more detail in chapter five.

In many of the countries visited the larger political issues are at least to some extent being addressed by state actors and UN missions. The activities of NGOs in such contexts may be seen as complementing this kind of work. However, two issues remain in such situations. First, more explicit thinking about how the activities of NGOs complement those of other actors would be desirable. Second, an independent civil society
playing a role in the political arena remains important with an eye on the longer term sustainability of peace and democracy.

1.7 Concluding remarks

Chapter one has sketched the context in which to place the discussion that will follow. It is an unstable and rapidly changing context of which observers are struggling to make sense. It is also a context that differs from one country, or even village, to another. That said, as we have seen, there are patterns to be discerned in the aims of NGOs and the ways they describe their activities when it comes to peacebuilding. A global community of peacebuilders exists to the extent that similar concepts and methodologies are used in different parts of the world.

What do the issues discussed in this chapter mean for the challenges and opportunities Southern peace NGOs are confronted with in accumulating, mobilising and disseminating the knowledge that is needed to make optimal policy decisions, carry out activities in an effective way and adjust to continuously changing circumstances, as I put it in the research question posed at the start of the book? More precisely, what can be said at this point in response to the first sub-question - what is the role and place of local NGOs in contemporary peacebuilding processes, and what does their position in the wider field of actors and processes mean for the knowledge on which they base their work and the learning they engage in?

Two main points emerge from this chapter in relation to this question. First, there is a need for local peace NGOs to make space for reflection, analysis, and learning. There are several reasons for this:

- Because of their size and organisation, NGOs have the potential to be more flexible, adaptive and innovative than other actors. Such flexibility could be of high significance in fluid conflict-affected situations.
- An increased ability to do research in communities about the needs existing there would increase the legitimacy of local NGOs and make projects more locally relevant and grounded. What we have not yet looked at is what research is done at present, and by whom, and what the knowledge and discourse is that the potential knowledge output of local NGOs has to compete with. Chapter two will examine these issues. In addition, the case study in chapter eight looks at an initiative that aims to strengthen both the research and learning capacity
of local peace NGOs and their contribution to the wider intellectual field.

- NGOs need to know more about the impact of, and linkages between, activities. This requires time and space for research of the context, analysis of the results of one’s own projects, and interaction with other actors – NGOs as well as others – about the way in which different activities contribute to the larger aim of peace. Such interaction is also important in order to prevent duplication of activities and, in the case of coordination and cooperation with government agencies, to prevent contributing to state weakness.

Second, the knowledge processes of local NGOs are complicated by the constraints they face due to the policy and funding chain in which they are embedded. These constraints take several forms:

- Even if local NGOs are able to research the needs of the communities in which they work, they cannot independently determine their operating priorities. International agencies that finance their activities come with their own priorities for action, making local organisations more implementers of international policy than independent actors. Further on in this book, particularly in chapter two and in Part Two, we will look at the knowledge side of this story. In other words, what knowledge and discourse informs the priorities that are set in this way, and how is it different from local NGOs’ own knowledge?

- As will be discussed in more detail later on, short-term project funding and an emphasis on activities with direct results leave little room for reflection, research, and exchange. This is compounded by the context in which peace NGOs work, which calls for direct, concrete action and gives staff members a high sense of urgency. We have now only touched upon these issues, which are worth exploring further. This will be done in the next chapters.