Preventing deadly conflict in divided societies in Asia: the role of local NGOs
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Introduction and Executive Summary

1. Introduction and Executive Summary

1.1 The origin of the study

My international development career began at the Directorate for International Cooperation of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and I spent among others four years as Deputy Country Representative in Kathmandu, Nepal. In 1989, I switched to the international non-governmental sector to work on the intersection of sustainable development and human rights with local civil society and international advocacy groups and headed the East and South East Asia Bureau of Novib (Oxfam Netherlands) for the next ten years. After nearly two decades of professional engagement in structural poverty eradication and human rights work, I decided to devote a year to reflection, academic study and debate as a fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs (WCFIA) at Harvard University in 2000/1. My initial research -on the role of the military and religion in preventing deadly conflict- was soon extended to include local NGOs in Asia. It developed into a full PhD research, when I got involved in an Asian United Nations University training initiative and the University of Amsterdam endorsed my PhD candidature in April 2002.

The past two decades (1983 – 2002) have been a time of marked global change and economic transformation: from Asian Miracle to Asian Crisis. When I first began to work in South East Asia, the mood was euphoric and the development community optimistic: the “Asian Miracle” was unfolding with impressive economic growth rates, the Cold War was drawing to a close and the process of economic globalisation had been initiated. But in the mid 1990s the tables turned as the Asian economic bubble burst. The severe economic crisis resulted in declining gross domestic product (GDP), mass protests and the toppling of well-established regimes. In the wake of the crisis, fragile democratic transition processes were initiated, violent civil conflicts broke out and large numbers of Asians were pushed back to or deeper below the poverty line as development indicators plummeted.

Of the twelve Asian countries where I have spent most of my professional career, five have been severely affected by deadly conflict in recent years. Some experienced civil war as a result of problematic decolonisation processes or geopolitical developments fuelled by the Cold War. In others the democratisation and development processes were destabilized by the increased concentration and collusion of power between the political, military and business sectors. In recent years, the “war on terror”, the U.S. led response to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon of 11 September 2001, has further complicated the troubled Asian development outlook and fuelled conflict. The new challenges highlight the vulnerability to deadly conflict of Asian societies, which are historically divided by ethnicity and religion and speak to the need of a re-examination of local development and poverty eradication strategies.

Working on eradication of poverty with the poor in Asia made me realise new approaches need to be developed to prevent violent deadly conflict at community and provincial levels, as part of overall poverty eradication strategies, because:

• Most serious threats to the life and security of poor people come from within their society at the hand of their fellow countrymen, rarely from unpredictable foreign “enemies”;
• Ethnicity and religion are hardly ever the cause of deadly conflict but they are often manipulated to provide a means for ethno-nationalist leaders to mobilise support;
• Armed communal violence is on the rise and jeopardises the fruits of many years of development work in marginalized communities;
• Victimisation of non-combatant civilians, women and children, as a deliberate strategy of armed groups, has changed the nature of conflict and thereby reduced the chance to negotiate peaceful settlements;
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- The mechanisms of State, judiciary, security forces, and of communal and religious institutions, meant to protect civilians in times of crisis, usually fail to do so at decisive moments;
- Violent conflicts do deep and lasting damage to local communities, by destroying both the physical infrastructure and the social tissue, and it often takes generations to overcome the resulting anger, hatred and distrust.

In the late 1990s the need for conflict prevention began to dominate the Asian sustainable development debates, as result of a series of simultaneous events: the intensification of the civil war in Sri Lanka; the violent clashes between the Maoist rebel movement and the State in Nepal; the increased impunity in the wake of the 1997 ‘coup’ in Cambodia; the fall of Manaplaw and the retreat of the Karen National Army in Myanmar; and the political transformation and deadly communal conflicts in Indonesia and East Timor. At the same time the world at large became aware that the protective quality of distance is quickly fading and the ever-prevalent risk of deadly civil conflict in poor, developing countries now impacts on all corners of the globe. These events forced governments, civil society, NGOs and international aid agencies to reflect on how societies could be better equipped to anticipate and pre-empt deadly conflict. This PhD dissertation aims to contribute to this debate by studying the role of local NGOs in preventing deadly conflict in four divided societies in Asia (Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Myanmar) and distilling success factors that would increase the effectiveness NGO conflict prevention work.

Deadly conflict in divided society and the threat to global security

In the 21st century deadly conflict prevention has become more than a moral obligation of the international community, because as economic and technological globalisation advance, extreme inequality, deprivation and violent conflict anywhere have serious implications everywhere. In the 1990s, with the Cold War over and technological and financial means at hand to initiate an historic economic and social globalisation process, the international community expected to concentrate on eradicating absolute poverty and improving global human security. A decade later, the failure to match rapid economic and information globalisation trends with better and more equitable governance, has instead increased the income and justice gap between rich and poor nations. A growing number of intrastate conflicts in poor societies are on the brink of violent escalation and the war on terror is diverting resources from international development efforts and has had no effect on reducing the security risks. Increased peace keeping and preventive diplomacy have had some encouraging results over the past decade, but have not made serious contributions to eliminating the causes of deadly conflicts.

The nature of deadly civil conflict is changing radically. Grievance-seeking minority groups are adjusting to the new reality of failing states. Their awareness of inequality and expectations for a better future are rising with advancing global networking technologies. Rebel leaders are increasingly involved in illegal international trafficking of drugs, arms, gems and humans to maintain their military operation and secure their lifestyles. Negotiating lasting peace settlements with under-performing governments is becoming a less favourable strategy, because it is unlikely that these agreements can be enforced in failing state contexts. The growing business partnerships between international mercenaries, commercial arms traders and armed rebel groups in marginalised countries pose an unprecedented additional security risk and prolong deadly conflicts.

Third party intervention to prevent or end deadly conflict has also become increasingly complex too. Negotiations require working with weak governments, which lack legitimacy and resources.
and unwilling rebel groups who have more to gain from illegal trade interests and humanitarian aid—both of which would end with a peace settlement. Private interest in deadly conflicts makes them progressively harder to settle peacefully. In the twentieth century, the average duration of an interstate war was twenty months, as opposed to 120 months for civil wars. In the period of 1990-2000, 104 intrastate conflicts occurred. Only 14 conflicts (or 16 percent) ended in a negotiated peace settlement, while half of the conflicts were settled through military victory, and one-third was ongoing or in stalemate at the end of the decade. Sadly, seven of the 14 negotiated peace settlements did not hold and deadly conflict had resumed within five years.¹

Another troubling development in deadly intrastate conflict is the deliberate targeting of non-combatants, women and children, both as strategy in armed combat and to support the livelihood of warring fractions. Armed groups and the military forcibly recruit civilians to secure labour and support needed to cater to the needs of the fighters, work in natural resource exploitation often the main source of income, and provide porter and sexual services to the troops. The privatisation of deadly conflict further aggravates the suffering and trauma of trapped civilians, particularly children, who have nowhere to turn for protection. Local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are increasingly called upon as last resort to respond to humanitarian needs and gross human rights violations. They try to feed and counsel traumatised victims, document atrocities committed by both sides and advocate for non-violent conflict resolution and disarmament. This dual role often gets them into double trouble with the authorities and armed rebel groups alike, putting a heavy strain on their workers and resulting in a high burnout rate.

Aftermath of 9/11 and the war on terror

The attacks of 11 September 2001 posed an additional challenge to the world. Some scholars, like theologian Karin Armstrong, perceive the attacks as the ultimate privatisation of war: a group of individuals using non-military means to wage a massive terror attack against a group of innocent civilians in a perceived enemy state. They show how causes of deadly conflicts in remote countries can pose direct threats to the security of any nation on the globe, regardless of its wealth and technical sophistication. Moreover, they illustrate how religion, ethnicity and nationalistic sentiments can be re-interpreted and exploited to foster a global fear for the “clash of civilisations”, in which deeper economic and political causes of envy and warfare are underrated.

In his article entitled “Making our way back to humanity” the seasoned American Mennonite peace builder John Paul Lederach (2002, p. 9-16) identified five shattered security myths in the 9/11 aftermath. First, the global community is now fully connected to the North and problems of the world have become everyone’s problem. Second, security is no longer a matter of protecting national borders against visible invading enemies. Third, more and larger weapon systems will no longer provide protection and what exactly increases security is unknown. Fourth, suffering, poverty and political marginalisation of people and their cry for respect and inclusion is likely connected to security in the North. Fifth, the historic belief that the West can “do it alone” no longer holds. Lederach therefore argues that seeking solutions and addressing global human security will require global cooperation, mutual understanding and respect.

Two years later the renowned businessman and philanthropist George Soros took the debate on the need for global dialogue and cooperation in response to recent terrorist attacks a step further in his commencement address at Columbia University on 17 May 2004. He argued that with the

¹ According to the same study, only 15% of the 43 conflicts that ended in military victory resumed. From Monica Toft - Civil War course. Harvard, KSG School, spring semester, 2000.
decision to declare a literal war on terror. Americans became victims turned perpetrators. Since 9/11 the war on terror has claimed more innocent victims than the terrorist attacks. The invasion of Iraq was justified by connecting Saddam Hussein and the suicide bombers of September 11th and claiming that Iraq was in possession of weapons of mass-destruction. When both claims turned out to be false, President Bush argued that Iraq was invaded in order to liberate the Iraqi people. Soros postulates that a world full of tyrants that take unilateral and arbitrary action against some countries only, has actually made it more difficult to solve the terrorist problem. The terrorists have hit upon a weak point in the American collective psyche: they have made the US fearful. The Bush administration has fostered that fear. “By declaring war on terror, the President could unite the country behind him, but fear is a bad counsellor. As a fearful giant that is lashing out, the US is creating innocent victims and innocent victims generate the resentment and rage on which terrorism feeds. (...) By succumbing to fear, the US is doing the terrorists’ bidding: unleashing a vicious circle of violence”. Terrorism will never disappear and globalisation has rendered the world increasingly interdependent. Maintaining peace, law and order, protecting the environment, reducing poverty and fighting terrorism are among them. Thus Soros concludes: “Instead of engaging in pre-emptive actions of a military nature, we ought to pursue preventive actions of a constructive nature, creating a better balance between carrots and sticks in the prevailing world order.”

The relation between terrorism and religious fundamentalism has long been a research focus of theologian Karen Armstrong. In her book the “Battle for God” (2000) she perceives religious fundamentalism as a religious reaction against the trend of secular modernism in the home societies. The recently emerged fundamentalists’ groups are modern movements in Armstrong’s view, whose roots cannot be traced back to ancient religious traditions. Others refer to these groups as “revitalization movements” as religious and cultural reactions opposing the rise of secular modernism. Because they live withdrawn from modern society, they are more flexible and their networks can regroup to suit their goals. If these movements decide to engage in a Jihad or holy war, the violence is often first directed against their fellow countrymen. The history of fundamentalism shows that it is dangerous and thus unwise to ignore these movements. However, rigid suppression is likely counterproductive because it confirms the fear of nearing extinction that the fundamentalist leaders promote. Exploitation of fundamentalist movements for other political purposes, as a tactic to divert attention, has proven to be very difficult too. Armstrong recommends to study fundamentalist movements closely and to engage their leaders in dialogue when ever possible to pacify their potentially violent approaches.

The “Preventing the Next Crisis” study (2003) assessed the impact of economic disparities on terrorism and concluded too that there is no direct connection between terrorism and absolute poverty. International terrorist interventions are very complex undertakings that require middle class, well educated cadres, which are usually found in economically and democratically stagnating countries. The study warns for two additional threats in the wake of the 9/11 attacks: the number of failed states has gone up and the global democratisation trend seems to slow down. In this respect it is important to consider geopolitical influences, which can have a major impact on deadly conflict in the South, as the next section will reveal.
Geopolitical influences on deadly conflict in Asia

The geopolitical importance of Asia during the Cold War cannot be understated because it is the part of the world where the Soviet Union, China and the Koreas are located. The struggle over political spheres of influence began with the surrender of the Japanese imperial army that ended WWII. A wave of decolonisation swept over the continent in the late forties. While the French and Dutch—who were economically weakened after five years of German occupation—fruitlessly attempted to regain control over their former colonies through force. Great Britain and America tried to align the liberated nations through active support of their aspirations for independence. In the early 1950s the West became involved in the Korean War while the USSR and China expanded their political alliances with Myanmar, Indonesia, India and Vietnam. Political parties, farmers unions and labour movements with Marxist affiliations emerged and won elections. In the early sixties when concern over the spread of communism grew (the falling domino theory), western military operations were initiated in South East Asia and marked the next chapter in the Cold War.

Direct military intervention is the most visible attempt that third parties can make to influence a country’s political development and change its ruler. The military intervention can range from military threat and covert operations to direct military invasions. While Biekart (1999) argued that in Latin America the lasting effects of military interventions by third parties on the democratic process were only marginal, in Asia the results were different. France and the USA lost their successive Vietnam Wars (1953 and 1972) and the ‘dominos did fall’: a process that was likely aided by these failed covert operations and war atrocities in which an estimated 3.4 million Vietnamese and 700,000 Cambodians, mostly civilians lost their lives. In 1975 the North Vietnamese army defeated and annexed South Vietnam with support from the USSR, while the Khmer Rouge came to power in Cambodia with Chinese support and installed a terror regime that

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*Source: [http://www.sitesatlas.com/Maps/Maps-Asia.htm](http://www.sitesatlas.com/Maps/Maps-Asia.htm)*
left 2 million people dead. As the Mekong delta came under Marxist rule, it was isolated by the international community through a diplomatic and economic boycott that lasted till the late 1980s.

Meanwhile, Indonesia and the Philippines returned to the Western cradle in the mid 1960s after a series of violent military operations against presumed Marxist organisations, that left hundreds of thousands sympathisers dead. Over the next three decades the Presidents Suharto and Marcos received unprecedented international economic and political support for their autocratic rule, which rapidly eroded the young democratic systems. These events had a dramatic impact on the emerging civil society, actually wiping it out, and affecting State-NGO relations still today. In post Cold War Asia, economic and military support to less democratic regimes remained a popular strategy to secure regional stability for economic liberalisation and growth.

The war on terror has a direct impact on this part of Asia as well. Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the South East Asian terrorist organisation based in Indonesia, was one of the groups held responsible for the Bali nightclub bombing in 2002 and the Jakarta Marriott Hotel bombing in 2003. According to the International Crisis Group (2003), the Indonesian police has succeeded in seriously damaging the network by the arrest of several top leaders, but JI remains active and dangerous. More than 200 other suspects with possible links to terrorist organisations are now in custody in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. JI today has spread across the huge archipelago and its members probably number in the thousands.

New information suggests that JI is set up as a military organisation and most senior members of the central command were trained in Afghanistan in the late 1980s and early 1990s, before JI formally existed. Early JI leaders convened training camps in Mindanao from 1996 to 2000 and depended on a small circle of Muslim boarding schools to propagate its teachings. Today the JI is held together not just by ideology and training, but also by an intricate network of marriages that makes it like an extended family. Since 9/11 and particularly since the October 2002 Bali bombings, their strategy has become more destructive than constructive, e.g. attacking the US and allied nationals as pro-active enemies of the Islam. While JI did receive funding from al-Qaeda, it is an independent organisation and most if not all operational decisions are taken locally. Its fund-raising is largely local too. JI’s goal remains to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia. Geopolitical influences are still of great importance to peace, justice and development in Asia in the 21st century.

**Militarization in Asia**

Analysis of the geopolitical influence on deadly conflict in the region revealed its lasting impact on the context of local conflict prevention. Three implications need highlighting. First, there is a lack of civilian and political control over the armed forces. As there were few inter-state conflicts to deal with during and post Cold War and the biggest national security threat was perceived to come from local Marxist groups, the armed forces became actively involved in civic governance of remote areas and home security tasks, be it in official capacity (Indonesia and Myanmar) or ‘informally’ (Cambodia). The independence of the armed forces and their lack of accountability are enhanced by lucrative returns from military - business partnerships, often in the exploitation of natural resources (timber, mining, gems) with transnational corporations. In Indonesia, public

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3 In Indonesia in 1966, the year after a ‘failed’ coup, nearly one million political and civil society leaders with assumed communist sympathies were killed and General Suharto took power. He was appointed president in 1967 and the military set up an official mirror governance system in the provinces. In the Philippines in 1969, President Marcos, who supported the US position on the war in Vietnam, was re-elected amidst allegations of electoral fraud. In 1972 martial law was declared and the parliament suspended; the president obtained absolute powers in 1973.
spending on defence is officially less than 1.5% of GDP, but that budget covers less than 20% of the actual security forces expenses because the armed forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia or TNI) was bestowed with natural resource concessions to earn additional income in the 1960 and 1970s. The Junta of Myanmar is, with its forty years in power, not only the longest ruling military government in the world but is also renowned for having privatised state economic interests for personal gain of the military leadership.

Second, as a consequence of the Asian Cold War history and the lack of accountability, the average army size is still very large and the percentage of high ranking officials in the army is high. As a result, the defence spending of poor Asian countries puts a huge claim on annual national budgets and diverts funds from more urgent development priorities, like education, health and rural development. Since 1996, Cambodia has been unsuccessfully attempting to demobilise one third of its 140,000-person army, which still claims 29% of its annual national budget. In Sri Lanka, years of civil war have constrained public transparency in the name of national security interests. Multiple emergency regulations and special court orders make all military information classified and provide immunity to politicians and the military alike. As a result, there is no transparency with regard to how 25 percent of the national budget or 5.2% of GDP is spent. There are no figures available on military spending in Myanmar.

Third, human security is not the paradigm of choice of the armed forces in the four countries. Acts of political violence against civilians have been left largely unpunished. In Cambodia high-ranking army officials committed 80% of the officially recorded land grabbing cases that took place in 2000. In Indonesia, well documented cases of murder, rape and sexual harassment of Aceh citizens by the armed forces in the 1980s and 1990s remain unpunished. In Myanmar an estimated 500,000 poor people a day are forced to provide ‘voluntary labour’ to the military and this continues despite the ILO banning Myanmar from its General Assembly in the year 2000 on slave labour charges.

The transition to more participatory, just and democratic governance systems in the four countries is seriously hampered by the collusion and misuse of power by those who are mandated to provide protection and security to the people. The prime threat to livelihood and security of poor people comes from within their own society. Sustainable conflict prevention strategies should, therefore, focus on strengthening the local capacity, networks and systems to analyse conflict and protect citizens so that they can secure a life in dignity. Different actors and stakeholders at the community, provincial and national levels need to be better equipped to engage pro-actively in conflict prevention and thereby secure the hard earned social and economic development gains.

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4 The approximate size of the armed forces in Cambodia is 140,000; in Sri Lanka 240,000; in Indonesia 350,000; and over 400,000 in Myanmar.
1.2 Local NGOs preventing deadly conflict: the four research propositions

This study aims to make a contribution to the discourse on the role of local Development NGOs in preventing deadly conflict, through an analysis of deadly conflict causes. State – NGO relations and success factors for the work of local NGOs in four divided societies in Asia. The importance of civil society in building cohesive communities is widely acknowledged, as its work can reduce hatred and violence, and encourage attitudes of concern, social responsibility, and mutual aid within and between groups. In difficult economic and political transitions civil society organisations are of crucial importance in alleviating the dangers of deadly violence. (Carnegie Foundation, 1997) Civil society comprises all organisations and networks that operate outside the official government sphere, including professional associations, trade unions, charitable groups, political parties, religious organisations, press, cause-oriented movements, social clubs and nongovernmental organisations. The significance of civil society today is primarily defined through its relation to democracy. Steinberger (2001) argues that the value of civil society lies in the hypothesis that if civil society is strong and if citizens band together for the common good on a sense of community or programmatic trust and efficacity, then this trust and efficacity will translate into overall trust in the political process and democracy and leads to diffusion of the centralized power of the State. Civil society is thus an essential element of a political pluralist society – the diffusion of power that is the hallmark of modern democracies.

Non-Governmental Organisations are private, non-profit, professional organisations concerned with public welfare goals a distinct subset of civil society and a distinct subset of civil society. (Clarke 1998) They specialise in areas such as poverty eradication, sustainable livelihoods, primary health care and education, environment, human rights, gender equity and indigenous people. The critical role of NGOs in conflict mediation and reconciliation has gained global recognition since the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. NGOs are key partners for government and international aid organisations, because they are willing to play many roles that governments are unable or unwilling to perform. UN Secretary General Kofi Anan stressed in a press release (SG/SM/7201 28 October 1999) that the relationship between the UN and civil society has changed beyond all recognition:

"Information technology has empowered civil society to be the true guardians of democracy and good governance everywhere. Oppressors cannot hide inside their borders any longer. A strong civil society, bound together across all borders with the help of modern communications, will not let them. In a sense, it has been the new superpower - the people determined to promote better standards of life in larger freedom."

In the same vain UNDP Administrator Mark Brown added that UNDP partnerships with civil society organisations were going to be as important as its partnership with governments in shaping the future of international development. (Fukuro Par, 2000, p.2)

Yet five years later local NGO actors still do not have much political clout when it comes to the actual recognition of and involvement in conflict prevention and development efforts; not in their home countries nor in the international diplomatic arena. Case in point are two mega studies on conflict prevention published in 2003: ‘Breaking the Conflict Trap’ by the World Bank, and ‘Preventing the Next Wave of Conflict’ by the Woodrow Wilson Center. one of the Washington DC based official think-tanks. Neither multi expert teams included civil society in their conflict

analysis, nor did they identify local NGOs as stakeholders in peace building processes. Which begs the question: are local NGOs rightfully omitted here, because their efforts and achievements have made little to no contribution to preventing deadly conflict in their societies? Or do local NGOs remain uncharted terrain on the mental map of powerful think tanks and multilateral institutions and does their significant political role in their home countries make them less desirable partners? This study postulates it is the later and supports Gidron et al (1999, p.277) conclusion in their articles and book on violent conflict and the role of local peacebuilding NGOs: “The lack of theoretical and empirical work on peace and conflict resolution NGOs hinders our ability to understand what roles these increasingly important organisations can play in conflicts around the world.”

In spite of diverging opinions on the quality of local NGO work in developing countries, friend and foe continue to agree that a strong civil society and a professional, well functioning NGO sector are essential actors in building participatory, democratic, peaceful and just societies. The Carnegie Foundation concluded in 1997 already that “Responsible leaders, key inter-governmental and non-governmental institutions, and civil society can do far better in preventing deadly conflict than the current epidemic of violence suggest” (p.xvii). This narrows the question down from the whether NGOs can do conflict prevention to the how: how can the partnership between local NGO and the State and international stakeholders be build and/or enhanced to make efforts to prevent deadly conflict more successful?

To this end the study has formulated four core research propositions:

- **Deadly conflict in Asia is the result of deliberate exclusion, inequality and the lack of human dignity and can only be prevented through changes in local policy and practise that facilitate sustainable development, social justice and forms of inclusive governance:**

- **As privatisation of conflict is in an early stage in Asia, deadly conflicts can still be resolved through peacefully negotiated settlements provided the State commits to it “prime duty holders” role -laid down in various UN Covenants- and provides human security to all its citizens, while it grants the necessary political space and fundamental rights to NGOs to work in a supportive and democratic environment:**

- **Local NGOs are key partners to the State and the international community in building cohesive and democratic societies and the impact of their work is enhanced when three critical success factors are incorporated in their programme strategies and institutional set-up (social capital building, strategic networking and organisational integrity):**

- **(Re)building the mutual trust in State - NGO relations is a deliberate and sensitive local process of reconciliation that involves multiple stakeholders at different levels in the society and in which international aid agencies can only play a limited role.**

To do justice to the unique local characteristics of deadly conflict in divided societies and the wide variety of NGO responses, and to allow for the formulation of general conclusions on conflict prevention in Asia, a comparative analysis of four countries was undertaken. Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Indonesia were chosen as case countries because all had a troubled nation building past, went through exceptional intrastate conflicts and have well established NGO sectors, whose experiences might help to determine success factors for conflict mediation and prevention work.

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Report addresses the importance of NGOs only twice, when it criticizes the attitude of international NGOs in global advocacy and the achievements of NGOs in promoting effective democratisation processes.
Myanmar was chosen as fourth case country, because it faced a similar post WWII nation building challenge, but it ended up with an entirely different deal. The longest ruling Junta on earth has severely curtailed civil society since taking over in 1962, has denied freedom of association and has forced local NGOs to work in exile. The first two parts of this study attempt to explain this marked difference in governance history and show how the local NGO void in Myanmar benefited the Junta to stay in power and prevented local democratisation initiatives to come to fruition. However, Myanmar had to be excluded from the success factor exploration in the third part of this study, as in the absence of an in-country local NGO sector no comparative analysis could be made.6

The study consists of three parts. Part one opens with an analytical framework, defining key concepts of conflict, ethnicity, nationalism, exclusion, social cohesion, human security, peace building and NGOs (Chapter II). Next, it presents the nature and causes of deadly conflict in Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Myanmar and identifies national and minority peoples at elevated risk. Political developments since post WWII independence, national building struggles and historic and contemporary grievances and cleavages were analysed to determine whether deadly conflict in Asia has been progressively privatising, which would make peaceful conflict resolution increasingly difficult. (Chapter III) Social and economic causes and consequences of deadly conflict are considered in Chapter IV. Concluding the political space for negotiated settlement and structural political, social and economic transformation still exists, the study moves to the second level of analysis and reviewed the State – NGO relations in historic perspective to gain insight where the collaboration faltered and how the relationship got strained. (Chapters V and VI) The third and last part of this study researches the work of 32 local NGOs in Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Indonesia and explores success factors and indicators that would potentially enhance the effectiveness of NGO development and conflict prevention work. (Chapter VII) Sixteen case studies of successful joint local NGO initiatives to mediate and prevent violent conflict are presented in Chapter VIII to illustrate the success factors and come to eight lessons learned. The final Chapter IX reviews the four research propositions to provide a set conclusions and recommendations for future research and action.

6The use of Myanmar and Burmese does not imply a political bias and may be confusing. This dissertation uses the country's official name, as the Union of Burma was renamed Myanmar by the Junta in 1988. Most citizens and local NGOs continue to refer to their country as Burma and local NGOs in exile wish to be identified as Burmese NGOs.
1.3 Executive Summary

This study analyses the role of local NGOs in preventing deadly conflict in four divided societies in Asia and identifies factors that can enhance the success of NGO work. It aims to contribute to the discourse on the role of local Development NGOs in peace and development efforts and hopes to encourage fostering of diverse stakeholder partnerships by providing empirical evidence of their mutually beneficial nature. To understand why deadly conflicts are difficult to prevent, why key stakeholder interaction—especially between the State and NGOs—is problematic and what needs to be done to foster constructive partnerships, this study explores three distinct issue sets: the causes of deadly conflict in divided societies; the State-NGO relations in historic perspective and the role of local NGOs in preventing deadly conflict in Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Myanmar.

The study addresses four core propositions:

- **Deadly conflict in Asia** is the result of deliberate exclusion, inequality and the lack of human dignity and can only be prevented through changes in local policy and practise that facilitate sustainable development, social justice and forms of inclusive governance;
- **As privatisation of conflict** is in an early stage in Asia, deadly conflicts can still be resolved through peacefully negotiated settlements provided the State commits to it “prime duty holders” role—laid down in various UN Covenants—and provides human security to all its citizens, while it grants the necessary political space and fundamental rights to NGOs to work in a supportive and democratic environment;
- **Local NGOs are key partners** to the State and the international community in building cohesive and democratic societies and the impact of their work is enhanced when three critical success factors are incorporated in their programme strategies and institutional set-up (social capital building, strategic networking and organisational integrity);
- **(Re)building the mutual trust in State - NGO relations** is a deliberate and sensitive local process of reconciliation that involves multiple stakeholders at different levels in the society and in which international aid agencies can only play a limited role.

The study posits that sustainable development interventions are likely more durable and effective in preventing deadly conflict and building peace both nationally and globally, because their main goal is to eradicate poverty and injustice and their programme strategies attempt to redress structural causes of inequality, injustice and indignity. The analysis of deadly conflict and historic grievances and social and class cleavages in the four countries concludes that historic and cultural grievances are the driving force behind deadly conflicts, rather than greed motives or private interests of rebel leaders and could be redressed peacefully if the political will exists. Rebel groups are still more inclined to seek a negotiated end to the conflict than to fight indefinitely for cessation, with the LTTE in Sri Lanka as possible exception.

Geopolitical influences have played a major role in the recent history of deadly conflict in Asia. Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Myanmar have struggled since independence in the late 1940s with the self-determination aspirations of ethnic groups—mainly national peoples—within their borders. Because the complicated nation-building processes were poorly managed by the States, frustrated self-determination aspirations have become a major cause of recurring deadly conflict over the past fifty years. Cambodia provides a unique conflict context, as its deadly conflict is the result of locally clashing Cold War alliances. The impact of the Cold War dynamics is still evident in Cambodia, Indonesia and Myanmar, as all countries went through a militarization process that deeply affected the societies. The armed forces became actively involved in the civic governance of remote areas, as the main national security threat was perceived to come from local groupings.
with Marxist or capitalist orientations. Safeguarding national unity was the armed forces’ main goal and NGOs working in remote territories and/or on politically sensitive subjects (i.e. human rights) experienced repression. Forms of extreme State repression of NGOs in the 1960-70s, in which over a million civil society leaders died, made way to more political savvy approaches in the 1990s, often through denial of the freedom of assembly and expression. Only Myanmar continues to prohibit an independent local NGO sector to operate, which has dramatically reduced the societies’ ability to advocate for change towards more equitable, democratic and inclusive governance.

This conclusion prompted a deeper analysis into the capability and effectiveness of the State in interacting with its civilians. NGOs and other stakeholders as a key factor in preventing future deadly conflict. Societies with a good mix of vertical linking social capital between the State and citizens (or good governance) and horizontal social capital or bridging relations among diverse communities are known to be more resilient to deadly conflict. Though local NGOs are key partners to the State and the international community in this process of building cohesive and democratic societies, the NGO country overviews show that the collaboration is actually limited. The troubled ‘organisational integrity’ of the State in the four countries has been one of the main impediments to prevent deadly conflict from recurring. Many NGOs were founded during or as a result of deadly conflicts, in an effort to protect and support beneficiaries that were victims of impunity, violence or exclusion. The absence of the rule of law, militarization, impunity and corruption however, have hindered effective NGO development and conflict prevention work and aggravated existing grievances and cleavages. Governments have generally four concerns when partnering with local NGOs: the lack of official NGO legitimacy and accountability; the control over the ‘end message’ in NGO partnerships; the potential damage to their image when partnering with the ‘wrong’ NGOs; and doubts about the impartiality of NGOs in representing fairly the interests of those other than their own constituencies. As a result, bilateral and multilateral aid agencies tend to award their donations largely to international NGOs, instead of local NGOs, because they are presumably more impartial, less corrupt and have stronger delivery and management capacities. Moreover, the UNDP, World Bank and some bilateral agencies are increasingly engaged in operational field programmes to rebuild grass roots civil society directly. The efficiency and long term sustainability of the international civil society building programmes in the four countries is questionable however, in view of the historically troubled relationship of the State and local NGOs.

The comparative analysis of the responses of 32 local NGO to prevent escalation of deadly conflict meant to distil local specificities, regional commonalities and best practises. In the third part of the study the Burmese NGOs in exile were not included in the analysis, because the repressive State policies force local NGO to work in exile. NGO responses were remarkably similar across the three countries in terms of issue setting and institutional responses, but implementation differs distinctly because of the diverse political, geopolitical and stakeholder contexts of the conflicts. NGOs have built horizontal networks in communities to overcome group identity divides and promote peaceful co-existence through economic cooperation and local participatory governance. Vertical networks were built to strengthen good governance, exercise human rights, increase the participation of marginalised constituencies and improve collaboration between different stakeholders. The NGO efforts to generate cultural capital—by reframing sustainable peace messages to generate public acceptance, proposing alternative conflict solutions, reiterating respected values and norms, etc— proved to be another vital contribution to defuse tensions and build new peace constituencies. Low human security remains the prime threat to effective social and economic grassroots work of NGOs. The process of balancing asymmetric political power relations in democratising societies can be influenced by the international aid community. if the State is concerned about its international credibility. Seven
approaches of local NGOs to increase their leverage with the society, State, stakeholders and the international community are identified. These approaches can serve as success indicators: because they enhance the chances of success of development and social justice work of local NGO, even if the political space is hostile. The seven indicators are grouped in three success factors:

1. Social and cultural capital: NGO’s ability to build sustainable horizontal bridging and vertical linking social capital and to frame alternative peace and justice messages;
2. Strategic actor networking: engagement in joint national NGO campaigns and exercising soft power through international advocacy;
3. Organisational integrity: NGO leadership and its organisational integrity.

Lastly, the study assesses the organisational integrity of the interviewed NGOs, based on the degree to which horizontal bridging and vertical linking social capital were reflected in the NGO programmes, beneficiaries, actor networks, staff composition and internal governance systems. Cambodian NGOs appear more proficient in horizontal social capital building than their sister NGOs in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, as they can rely on strong national NGO networks to balance poor State-NGO relations and they face fewer identity obstacles in this country with a high ethnic and linguistic homogeneity. Indonesian and Sri Lankan NGOs have stronger vertical than bridging (horizontal) capital building capabilities, which mirrors respectively the weakness of the NGO grassroots movement and the power of the military, and the deep ethnic divide after twenty years of civil war. Applying the model to the thematic specialisation of NGOs shows the expected result: training, single issue and advocacy NGOs tend to possess stronger vertical capital, while community development and most women’s NGOs have stronger horizontal social capital building capabilities. Twelve cases studies illustrate successful joint NGO programmes and campaigns to promote good governance, build conflict resolution mechanisms, mobilise broad peace movements and solicit international support for policy change. Eight lessons can be learned from these cases. The study concludes that (re)building of mutual trust in State-NGO relations requires a deliberate and sensitive local process of (re)conciliation that involves multiple stakeholders at different levels of society, and in which international aid agencies can only play a limited role: more research and pilots are required to this end. Five sets of recommendations to key stakeholders --local NGOs, State, international aid agencies, women, military and religious leaders-- provide a number of suggestions how this process could be initiated.

This study consists of three parts. Part I identifies the ethnic minorities at risk in the four case countries and analyses causes and potential remedies of deadly conflict in each country since its post WWII independence. (Chapter III - IV) Part II reviews State-NGO relations in historic perspective, identifies State interventions to control the local NGO sector and explores the division of roles and responsibilities among stakeholders. (Chapter V - VI) Part III analyses the work of 32 local NGOs in Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Indonesia in preventing escalation of deadly conflict. It assesses their conflict analysis, strategies, projects, social capital building capacity and organisational integrity; it concludes with an inventory of success factors that may enhance the quality of NGO work in conflict prevention. The case studies of joint NGO initiatives illustrate the political opportunity structures, the diversity of NGO contributions and the three success factors, with related indicators and concludes with a series of lessons learned. (Chapter VII - VIII) The final chapter summarises the main conclusions per each of the four research proposition and formulates five sets of practical and transformational recommendations for each of the main stakeholders: local NGOs, States, international community, women, armed forces and religious leaders. (Chapter IX)