Preventing deadly conflict in divided societies in Asia: the role of local NGOs
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II. Deadly conflict and Non Governmental Organisations: the analytical framework

2.1 Conflict, identity and inequality

Conflict is intrinsic to human society and a consequence of human co-existence. While this study deals with prevention of deadly conflict, non-violent conflict is understood to be a positive force for change, acting as an agent of reform, adaptation and development. The conflict definition that reflects this research most accurately comes from the work of Rubin, Pruitt and Kim (1994, p.5): “Conflict means perceived divergence of interests or a belief that current aspirations of different individuals or groups cannot be achieved simultaneously.”

Fry and Bjorkvist’s (1997) work on culture, conflict and violence provides three important insights into the nature of and culturally defined coping with conflict. First, they argue that conflict is not synonymous with aggression, which is defined as verbally, or physically inflicting harm or causing pain (physical, psychological and/or social) to another person. Coping with conflict can be done in a variety of ways: deny its very existence, negotiate a mutually desirable solution, compromise, threaten verbally, attack physically or appeal to a third party. Second, when dealing with conflict in the multi-ethnic societies in Asia, its cultural dimensions must be understood. Culturally specific ways of perceiving and responding to conflict may remain invisible as unquestioned social assumptions of the members of a culture. It is also useful to view conflict in terms of general strategies, each consisting of a set of more narrow tactics, which vary in terms of possible outcomes and perceived feasibility for the parties involved. These strategies include: contending—high concern for one’s own outcomes and low concern for other’s outcomes; problem solving—high concern for both one’s own and other’s outcomes; yielding—low concern for one’s own and high concern for other’s outcomes and avoiding—low concern for one’s own and other’s outcomes. Fry and Bjorkvist’s research concluded that most cultures tend to favour particular strategies, but the problem solving strategy is likely the most effective in conflict resolution because, unlike contending, yielding and avoiding strategies, it aims at solutions that reconcile needs or interests of both sides.7

Most societies have developed mechanisms to deal with conflict and prevent it from turning violent. Levi-Strauss (1990) explains that conflicts of different natures are latent in every society and that the reason why norms are formed is to prevent latent and potential conflicts. Norms are defined as ritualised ways of handling conflict. Every society has rules and etiquette, the neglect of which leads to sanctions. Illiterate societies too have systems of social control, although they may not have written laws. When individuals or groups are systematically deprived of their right to have their concerns heard or see their hope of favourable conflict resolution diminished, they may break the society’s rules and resort to violence despite the risk of sanctions. Response to conflict in this study is understood as the result of an analysis of the situation and a conscious, culturally determined strategic choice that is expected to provide the best result in a given context with a specific set of power relations.

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7 Rubin et al. (1994, p.168-173) identify three problem-solving approaches: 1) compromise; 2) arbitration—a mutually agreed procedure to decide who wins; 3) integrative solution. They conclude that usually the most desirable approach is an integrative solution, as these tend to last longer and benefit the interests of both parties and the welfare of the broader community.
Conflict, identity and exclusion

Exclusion, discrimination and repression tend to strengthen most people’s identification with their kindred and motivate them to seek collective remedies to redress injustice. Ethnicity, nationalism and religion fuel the identity of groups and are often assumed to be causes of conflict. There exists a complex relation between ethnicity, nationalism, religion and conflict. The theoretical framework of the Harvard Divinity School’s course on Religion, Nationalism and Peace provides four helpful definitions:

- Ethnicity is a subjective belief or consciousness of common descent (Weber)
- Religion is a divine reality, linked to governance, which enforces one view of life over others (Weber, idem)
- Nationalism is an impulse of people to assert control over what they believe to be their own territory (Little, 1996)
- A nation is an “imagined community with territorial limitation, political sovereignty and legitimacy and with deep horizontal comradeship with equality notions” (Anderson, 1991).

There is much debate over the definition of ethnicity. Little argues that the essence of ethnicity is passed on by birth in a lineage with genetic characteristics and blood bonds. But equally important is the subjective belief of people that they are a part of this gentle—the chosen people—and of its imagined community. As an imagined community, nationalism is therefore best understood as a combination of nation, blood ties and religion. Anderson (1991) presents three models of nationalism in his book on ‘Imagined Communities’: civic, popular or ethnic, and official nationalism. On a continuum, ethnic and civic nationalism are on opposite ends. Civic nationalism dominates in nations that share common national interests as their highest goal. The “Old Democracies” of the West fall toward the civic end of the continuum. Ethnic nationalism at the other end of the continuum prevails in autocratically ruled and poorly governed states where elites primarily serve the interest of the ethnic group in control of political power, usually but not necessarily the majority ethnic population. Because the “imagined community” is limited to an ethnic lineage, as opposed to wider national interests, political leaders are inclined to stress the uniqueness of blood ties, culture and religion as mobilising factors in their public speeches to keep their supporters vigilant and ‘divide and rule’ the nation.

Scholars have held opposing views on the intrinsic nature of ethnic and religious identity too. There are three schools of thought. The “primordialists” view ethnic identities as more essential and transcendent than others and therefore believe that groups defined by ethnicity or religion are more enduring than other collectives, nation-states included. A renowned proponent of this line of thought is Samuel Huntington (1996) and his “Clash of Civilisation” theory. The “constructivist” view on the other hand sees ethnic identity as ‘enduring social constructions that matter to people who share them’, but is not necessarily the driving force for group action. Lastly, the “instrumentalists” view ethnicity as one of several identity sources. It gains social and political

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9 Huntington’s book “Clash of Civilisation” was first published in 1994 and strongly influenced US foreign policy over a decade. Huntington argues that historically the world’s major civilisations have been deeply and structurally divided. As distinct religious traditions provide the unique core value system to each of these old world civilisations, Huntington sees religion and not ethnicity as the prime, dividing factor. Post 9/11 this theory (popularly also known as the “West against the Rest”) became subject of fierce debate at Harvard’s Center of Foreign Affairs and Divinity School. The counter arguments entailed three main criticisms. First, the concepts of civilisation and ethnicity cannot be equated and are hence confuse the debate. Second, the impact of (ethnic) nationalism on group identity is underrated. Third, the inventiveness of governments to use and misuse religion as a rallying factor, is overlooked.
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significance only at times when ethnic symbols are manipulated by political entrepreneurs in response to threats or opportunities.’

The Minorities at Risk (MAR) project elaborates on the notions of ethnic groups and ethno-political conflict and studies core variables determining the emergence of ethno-political conflict among 275 ethnic groups worldwide. Gurr (2000, p.4-12) distinguishes three forms of discrimination (economic, political and cultural), which result in material inequalities, lack of (political) empowerment, endangered minority cultures and social victimisation. Skillful leaders can build on ethnic sentiments to mobilize support for protest campaigns or rebellion. In line with the constructivist view, Gurr poses that ethnic identities are not primordial but are nonetheless based on common values, beliefs and experiences. Ethnic identities can be invoked to sustain movements serving ulterior material or political interests.  

The MAR project provides comprehensive insight into the motivation of ethnic groups and the decisive factors in taking up arms to achieve justice. Globally, only 25% of the 275 minority groups opted for rebellion in 1995, while another 25% were not active at all. The empirical evidence shows that the chance that ethnic groups will initiate political or armed action depends on four variables: the salience of the group identity, the collective incentives, the capacity for joint action and the external opportunities. Though the MAR project concluded that most civil conflicts do have an ethnic dimension, it is important to stress that ethnicity alone never provides a sufficient explanation for conflicts turning deadly. Tharoor (1999), the UN Assistant Secretary General, concludes “Civil conflict is usually the result of failing political leadership. There are always more prosaic motives of ethnic leaders to be considered… Indeed it would be safer to proceed from the assumption that politics is at the root of most contemporary conflicts”. He states furthermore that opportunistic political leaders find in ethnic conflict. “The ideal vehicle to preserve or enhance power or to distract their citizens from other domestic failures, often when ethnic division is nowhere as profound as it is being claimed.”

The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict published a series of studies on different dimensions of conflict in 1997/1999, several of which were studied for this research. The study on Sustainable Peace (Peck, 1999, p.10-13) opens by setting the global context of conflict perception that shows a marked difference in Northern and Southern perspectives on the origins of conflict. For most poor nations in the South, development is the main peace and security issue. There is a sense that decolonisation left the North in control of the resources and trade relations, depriving the South of equal market access and thereby of a fair chance to attain sustainable development. For most nations in the North, the national security paradigm remains the core focus when they relate to conflict, and “carrot and stick” policies are preferred to entice weak Southern leadership. It is, however, more likely that integrative solutions are needed to structurally redress the situation. With “systematic frustration of human needs” as a major cause of conflict, communal groups mobilise along cleavages, such as ethnic, religious or clan lines to express grievances and seek redress. Causes of protracted social conflict are mostly found in historic or contemporary grievances that can lead to demands for political autonomy, greater political access and participation, and exercising economic and socio-cultural rights. Peck conclusions support the MAR project findings as she identifies five factors that determine whether groups will mobilise and express grievances: the ethnic geography; the leadership and political organisation of the group; changing circumstance in the political environment;  

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10 Gurr’s definition of an ethnic group is “people who share a distinctive and enduring collective identity based on common descent, shared experiences and cultural traits (which could include customary behaviour and dress, religion, language, physical appearance, region of residence, traditional occupation and a history of conquest and repression by different peoples). Gurr, T.M. People versus the State, 2000, p.4.
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demonstrating effect of efforts of groups in similar circumstances or neighbouring countries; and
lastly, the specific group identification and grievances.

In this study ethnic identity, based on common values, beliefs and experiences, is not only
perceived as a liability, but could be explored as an asset as well. Ethno-nationalist leaders can
manipulate it to ignite violent conflict, but in civic nationalism shared values have been mobilised
to resolve identity conflict for the common good. Ethnic conflicts are seldom caused by ethnicity
or religion, but are usually the result of prolonged, deliberate policies of favouring some and
excluding other identity groups in a country. Poverty does not cause deadly conflict, but wilful
and systematic exclusion and inequality—both on national and global level. To prevent deadly
conflict successfully, it is therefore crucial to overcome social cleavages as well as historic and
contemporary grievances in a divided society.

Conflict, inequality and social cohesion

Two recent constructs, social capital and social cohesion framework and the human security
paradigm make a direct connection between poverty, governance, equality and inter-group
relations. These key factors largely determine deadly conflict and provide the context for the
conflict prevention and civil society and NGO framework applied in this research.

The rebuilding of social cohesion is a central theme of the work of Nat Colletta, the former
founder and manager of the World Bank’s Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit. His models
for conflict prevention elaborate on the importance of vertical linkage between the State and its
citizens (good governance) and horizontal social capital building and bridging relations among
communities in multicultural societies. The chances of violent conflict eruption are higher, if the
quality of both is poor. If the governance structure is characterized by inequality and an unequal
distribution of power and opportunity, the State’s capacity to manage civil conflicts is sharply
reduced. The lack of organizational integrity and synergy of the State, or poor vertical social
capital, are often key causes of conflict. On the other hand the lack of horizontal relations
between different ethnic groups in a multicultural society can erupt into hostilities if one group is
seen as monopolizing resources and power to the disadvantage of the others. “And if these
cultural groups, high levels of homogenous social capital bonding occur, differences in access to
resources and power may further aggravate tensions between those in control and those
excluded.” (Colletta, 2000, p.16)

Colletta postulates that violent conflict is trigged by the presence of strong exclusionary bonds
and disempowerment combined with a lack of horizontal bridging and vertical linking social
capital. “The weaker the social cohesion, the weaker the reinforcing channels of socialization
(value formation) and social control (compliance mechanisms). Weak societal cohesion increases
the risk of social disorganization, fragmentation and exclusion, potentially manifesting itself in
violent conflict.” Hence, peacebuilding initiatives should work simultaneously on good
governance, decentralization and participation, and responsible market penetration (vertical axis),
as well as on empowering and bridging horizontal relations among and between different
communities (horizontal axis). This will strengthen civil society, mutual trust and social cohesion
and thereby the conflict prevention ability of the society as a whole. As a consequence, Colletta

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11 Social cohesion refers to two broader intertwined features of society: the absence of latent conflict whether in the
form of income/wealth inequality; racial/ethnic tensions; disparities in political participation; or other forms of
polarization; and the presence of strong social bonds-measured by levels of trust and norms of reciprocity: the
abundance of associations that bridge social divisions (civil society) and the presence of institutions of conflict
management, e.g. responsive democracy, an independent judiciary, and an independent media. ” (Colletta 2000, p.4)
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(2000, p.29) concludes "The emergence and growth of the civil society, as key mediating agents between communal groups, governments and markets is central to a nation’s capacity to manage social and economic transformation peacefully and mediate conflict."12

Conflict, globalisation and human security

Another approach to State-civil society responsibilities in conflict prevention is the concept of human security and the effort to formulate a new global security paradigm. The issue of security was traditionally defined as State-oriented and military in nature. National security was, therefore, the justification for the strengthening of military capacity to defend against ‘external’ threats. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 proved that modern weapons to protect a nation’s borders can no longer avert danger. Despite the focus on external threats, for most people the greatest threat to security comes from internal adversaries, resulting in disease, hunger, environmental contamination and even domestic violence. Hence, security can no longer focus only on nation states and military deterrence, but needs to include the fulfilment of economic, social and political rights of individuals around the globe.

Human security sees individual security as the prime objective and its focus includes other definitions of security, such as economic, food, health, personal, environmental, community, cultural and political security. The UN work on human security attempts to redefine and conceptually integrate the three international conflict prevention tasks of preventive diplomacy, military co-operation and development assistance and to set new parameters for the development of genuine global governance that should be based on a “human dignity regime.”

Colletta (2003) examined the emerging global human security paradigm through an analysis of key development variables that impact human security, poverty and conflict. He identifies three human security dimensions, using Amartya Sen’s concepts of freedom from want and fear, and adding the notion of despair:

- The development dimension of human security includes risk, vulnerability and insecurity resulting from poverty; especially poor access to productive assets (land, capital and knowledge) and basic services (health, education and clean water), gender disparities and other forms of inequality (freedom from want).
- The governance dimension underscores that poverty (relative deprivation), income and asset inequalities accompanied by weakened institutions, failed governance or a lack of respect for political and individual rights, greatly increase the probability (risk and vulnerability) of human insecurity and violent conflict (freedom from fear).
- The societal cohesion dimension captures the social-psychological aspects of security, including a sense of dignity, identity, efficacy and hope, re-enforced by an institutional and social network of support based on interpersonal trust and societal cohesion (freedom from despair).

Adopting the human security approach along these lines would have three implications. First, addressing human security in the sense of ‘freedom from fear’ implies that the State runs the transparency, efficiency, and accountability of public institutions and effectively manages

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12 In a 2001 publication on social cleavages and cohesion in Asia, Colletta likewise concludes that the 1997 economic crisis in Asia did not so much cause the conflicts, but rather revealed the weaknesses of the social cohesion and poor governance. Hence he argues that: “A cohesive society is characterised by far more than absence of conflict, whether latent or overt. A functioning, efficient and transparent State; respect for human rights and justice; a socio-economic system based on distributional equity and high levels of social capital are fundamental characteristics of a cohesive society.” (Colletta, 2001, p.4)
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finances, goods and services, including an efficient and non-corrupt bureaucracy. Furthermore, it requires the exercise of the rule of law, protection of human rights and the distribution of justice. When States view development as a means to achieve equity and human well being next to material advancement and not as an end in itself, it will be conducive to a sustainable conflict prevention agenda. Second, the traditional means of conflict prevention, like early warning, preventive diplomacy and deterrence (the carrot and stick approach) are challenged by the new approach of “foundational prevention.” Foundational prevention initiatives in and between divided communities need to focus on “root causes, social and economic disparities and on new partnerships between governments, local authorities and international organisations and civil society should be developed.”

(Van Ginkel, 2000, p.74-76)

Lastly, globalisation has made political space as well as economic and social relations transcend the framework of national boundaries. Multilateral governance must adjust to the changing global realities, as security is now shifting from a traditional emphasis on armaments and territorial threats of force to a transnational set of development-related threats ranging from human rights to health and livelihood and environmental impacts. Colletta (2003, p.10) argues “International Financial Institutions (=IFIs) need to respond to these challenges in order to remain relevant to the world’s poor.” Human security, in the global sense, is increasingly interconnected with sustainable development and multilateralism. It is necessary to realign economic and social policies, as well as technical and financing instruments, to the new global realities. It may also be necessary to cut to the core of the new multilateralism, as demanded by the rising anti-globalisation movement, and to revisit the legal charter and governance of the IFIs.

Conflict, gender equality and prevention

It is widely acknowledged that there is a causal connection between gender and war. Distinctly different gender roles are bestowed to men and women in deadly conflict situations. Goldstein (2001) found two explanations for gendered war roles highlighted in the conflict literature. First the small but innate biological differences in average height, strength and roughness of play. Second, the strong cultural moulding of boys into tough, brave men, who feminise their enemies to encode domination. The conclusions based on this simple dichotomy are usually quite lenient towards the role of women in deadly conflict and perceive women rather as victims than as co-perpetrators. In-depth studies by both Goldstein and Burke (2000) into warfare and gender roles however, reveal more complex gender roles and responsibilities.

Gender biased violence during deadly conflict affects women and girls most, as they stay in their communities to care for their families and preserve village life. In 2001, USAID published the final report of a comprehensive, multi year study into Women and Women’s Organisations in Post Conflict Societies, including Rwanda, Cambodia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study concluded that the impact of conflict on women and gender


14Indeed, the implications of the human security paradigm may be unsettling to many, especially insofar as they suggest policies of equity and distribution that may run contrary to mainstream political economics, at both the national and international levels. Similarly there is little agreement on what politics will realise this conceptual paradigm. Where there is agreement, there is rarely the political will to bring the necessary leadership or resources to bear upon the challenge.” (Idem)

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relations are three fold and conflict prevention and reconciliation work needs to address these three areas simultaneously:

1. The socio and psychological impact, including violence against non-combatant civilians, of which close to 95% are women and girl children; internal displacement, of which 90% are women and children; and communal violence leading to lasting bitterness, anger and hatred.

2. The economic impact, including targeted destruction of civilian property leading to increased poverty and starvation; and prolonged internal displacement; and

3. The political impact, including redefinition of female identities in society, both as victims and as perpetrators and increased access for women to political power. (USAID, 2001)

The most traumatising factor for women in conflict is the lack of physical security, both during the conflict and the post-conflict stage in which militias are demobilised. Rape is systematically used as a tool of warfare and repression worldwide. This lack of physical security keeps women trapped in their homes, unable to move around freely. Moreover, in post-conflict situations, many women are forced by circumstances to engage in prostitution, the only available means of income. With family structures damaged by death and trauma, the sharp increase in female headed households and the incidence of domestic violence post conflict, aggravate the trauma and lead to problems including depression, chronic fatigue, and stress. In addition, women are confronted with economic restrictions in conflict situations, which lead to further decline in their status. Lack of property rights makes surviving female-headed households lose their land and prevents them from getting access to bank loans. In most post-conflict societies the number of women entering the labour market increases temporarily, but many lose their jobs in the formal sector once ex-combatants return to civilian life. The resulting feminisation of poverty leaves more women malnourished and deprived of basic education and health services. At the same time, the political impact of war on women can be positive too, as war can provide an opportunity to expand their public roles and run local political institutions. While some disenfranchisement occurs in the reconstruction phase, often political headway is made overall and more women participate in politics than before.

While women are clearly most victimised by deadly conflict, they have also been instrumental in perpetuating deadly conflict. Most of the peace building literature lacks a thorough war analysis and many debates are overshadowed by a couple of cherished myths. In particular, the beliefs that men are more inclined to aggressive behaviour because of genetic codes, testosterone levels and male bonding, while women’s slighter build, female hormones and nurturing roles in society predispose them to oppose war, which explains their virtual absence in the army and on the battlefield. Goldstein (2001, p.412) poses in his book entitled “Gender and War” that a radical shift in gender role perception is necessary to prevent deadly conflict in future. He sadly concludes that real peace and real gender equity both remain generations away:

“War is a pervasive potential on the human experience that casts a shadow on everyday life—especially on gender roles—in profound ways. To think into the future beyond the war systems requires breaking out of psychological denial regarding the traumatic effects of war on human society. War is not the product of capitalism, imperialism, gender, innate aggression or any other single cause. Rather, war has in part fuelled and sustained these and other injustices.”

Three dilemmas complicate advocacy for more gender balanced and effective participation of women in conflict mediation and peace negotiations. First, women face a major dilemma when trying to change the warfare system. Women who join the military usually find themselves rather perpetuating the system because they have limited opportunity inside the armed forces to impose change. Women who join the peace movement on the other hand, often form the core of peace organisations, risking to “feminising civil society peace building efforts in turn re-enforcing
militarized masculinity. Second, women tend to reproduce gendered war roles—in an effort to be good mothers according to society’s norms—. Women who raise boys especially face the dilemma to raise boys, risking that someday they might be overrun by other societies that continue to raise warriors. Third, peace scholars and activists promote the “if you want peace, work for gender justice” approach, which proved successful in bringing together strategic allies in the peace movement (women, labour and minorities). However, it rests on the assumption that injustices cause war and fails to acknowledge that the causality runs reverse as well. Deadly conflict perpetuates gender injustice and hence changes in attitudes towards war and the military may be the most important strategy to reverse gender inequity in the society as a whole.
2.2 Conflict prevention and local NGOs

Conflict prevention, peacebuilding and the costs of war

In the post Cold War era, the UN and the international community became increasingly active in peace keeping and peace making operations in war torn societies. Their involvement included the use of military force for deterrence, or in peace keeping (enforcing peace agreements) and peace making (to separate the conflict parties so that they do not inflict harm). These peace strategies were focussed on conflict management, but experience suggests that such strategies do not necessarily lead to lasting peace. Hizkias Assefa (1999) concluded, in his study of various reconciliation processes, that conflict management approaches generally tend to focus more on mitigating or controlling the destructive consequences that emanate from a given conflict than on finding solutions to its underlying causes. As a result, unless the need for change is internalised by all parties in the conflict, the change is likely to be only temporary.

What kind of settlement will be most acceptable to contending parties depends on their specific situation and objectives. Gurr (2000, p.151) makes a distinction between settlements aimed at access or autonomy. Disadvantaged people usually aim at increased access measures that give them a greater opportunity to protect and promote their shared cultural, political and material interests within their society. Ethnic minorities, on the other hand, are more likely to seek greater autonomy, which implies a collective governance of their own affairs in the context of an autonomous region or decentralised State. The Carnegie Commission on Deadly Conflict distinguishes five areas of interests when identifying sustainable peace settlements: 1) negotiate territorial agreements to provide autonomy (regional autonomy/ federalism/confederacies), 2) improve political access to (political) decision making, 3) address economic discrimination, 4) address cultural grievances and 5) develop institutional mechanisms that support reform. (Peck, 1999, chapter 4)

In the mid 1990s, in response to these failures, peace building work slowly came into vogue and focused on the need for locally owned, culturally appropriate and long-term oriented sustainable peace processes. The Canadian International Aid Agency (CIDA) was one of the leading early actors at the time and defined peacebuilding as the effort to strengthen the prospects for internal peace and decrease the likelihood of violent conflicts. The overarching goal of peacebuilding is to enhance the indigenous capacity of a society to manage conflict without violence and build human security. Peacebuilding programmes thus focus on the political and socio-economic context of conflict rather than on the military or humanitarian aspects.

While there is a growing recognition of the moral obligation of the international community to promote and support global human security, public doubt remains as to whether deadly conflict prevention is possible at all, given the many failures of conflict mediation. In their book on NGOs and conflict prevention, Rothenberg and Nicolaidis (1996, p.27-31) summarize the “anti-prevention rhetoric” in three sets of arguments. Some perceive conflict prevention as a delusion because the future chains of events cannot be foreseen, making it purely wishful thinking. Others claim conflict prevention is a perversion: external intervention exacerbates the crisis and will only delay necessary adjustments, which are often achieved through military victory. Lastly there are those who see conflict prevention as a diversion because it diverts money and energy from structural development work and the costs are too high. To counter these criticisms, the Carnegie Commission on Deadly Conflict (1999) devoted one of its studies to the costs of conflict and found ample empirical evidence to prove that prevention is far more efficient than peace keeping or peace enforcement.
"Our main conclusion can be stated straightforwardly. In every case we examined, conflict prevention actually cost or would have cost the international community much less than the conflicts themselves. (...) Our view is that the case for conflict prevention is a compelling one. This is in part because internal costs of conflicts frequently and generally become international costs. Deadly conflicts are rarely hermetically sealed. Moreover the costs of prevention efforts are much lower than the actual costs imposed on outside powers. (...) The question is not whether international powers will become involved in trying to stop deadly conflicts, but when and how. The burden of proof should henceforth be on decision makers who oppose conflict prevention activities." (Brown, 1999, p.221-230)

Conflict prevention, civil society and local NGOs

Local development NGOs—the subject of this study—are private, non-profit, self-governing organisations (Korten, 1990) and are a distinct subset of civil society organisations. Their main goal is to improve the quality of life of disadvantaged people and work for structural change that eradicates poverty and promotes social justice and equity. Their strategies include community mobilisation, delivery of basic social services, research, training and advocacy, often in a combination of activities. These NGOs aim to provide their beneficiaries or member groups with the capacity to act or advocate autonomously from the State for the common good, at national or local levels or on specialised themes. Hence, they provide sources of pluralism in the society, which could prevent the State from resorting to autocratic or authoritarian governance practices. It is their advocacy work often puts NGOs at odds with governments and international financial institutions. NGOs are at the core of the civil society in many Asian countries and where they are not permitted to exist by law, like in China and Myanmar, their functional equivalents are beginning to emerge.16

Local NGOs play an increasingly important role in conflict prevention and peace building initiatives, as underlined by the now popular “Multi Track” and “Track Two” diplomacy. Diamond (2000, p.78) defines multi track diplomacy as “a systems approach to peace building that embraces a large network of organisations, disciplines, methodologies and venues for working toward the prevention and resolution of violent conflict around the world.” Complementary to Track One Diplomacy (the official process), it comprises peace efforts by actors such as the media, churches, schools and artists, and is based on twelve principles: relationship building, long term commitment, cultural synergy, partnership, multiple technologies, facilitation, empowerment, action research, invitation, trust, engagement and transformation. (Van Tongeren, 2000, p.128)

The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Violence (1997) identified three categories of NGOs that offer especially important potential contributions to the prevention of deadly conflict: human rights and advocacy groups, humanitarian and development organisations and a small but growing number of conflict mediation or Track Two NGOs.

"Human rights, Track Two, and grassroots development organizations all provide early warning of rising local tension and help open or protect the necessary political space between groups and

16In Asian societies with a Confucian tradition, in which the State is ideally presented as a benevolent elder intervening for the good of his people, the space the State allows to NGO work can be quite limited. Here basic concepts of privacy and individuality have culturally different meanings, and the universality of the UN human rights covenants is not acknowledged. NGOs are often viewed as a threat to autocratic governments, as their programmes may undermine or question State policies. To preclude the growth and influence of independent NGOs, State sponsored semi-official mass organisations were set-up both to provide a mass support base for state policies and to pre-empt formation of NGOs that might oppose such policies. These so-called QUANGOs (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations) are not part of the indigenous civil society and are, therefore, excluded from this study.
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The main Track Two actors are local NGOs, because they are rooted in or work in close collaboration with local communities under fire, which gives them a better position to engage with multiple actors. McDonald (1999, p.166) poses that the strength of this ‘unofficial’ diplomacy lies in its ability to address the root causes of conflict and to involve all parties in the process of rethinking peace:

"By allowing face-to-face communication, track two diplomacy helps participants arrest the dehumanisation process, overcome psychological barriers, focus on relationship building and reframe the conflict as a shared problem that can be resolved collaboratively. (...) Track two is transformational, posting a worldview in which power politics is superseded by mutual empowerment; identity groups at least join if not replace the nation-states as the loci of power; basic human needs and not the strategic interests set the agenda; collaboration and inclusiveness replace competition and exclusivity: international relations are seen as ongoing relationships between all people, not crisis or situational relationships between governments."

A recent award winning comparative study into the work of local peace and conflict resolution NGOs in Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine and South Africa reached similar conclusions.17

The very characteristics that make Track Two diplomacy so worthwhile (unofficial, informal, mutual understanding, involving all contesting parties) do, however, create serious challenges for Track Two actors as well. Landrum Bolling, advisor to the Harvard linked Conflict Management Group, highlights five challenges. First, local NGOs might be “amateurs who can cause damage” because they sometimes have limited knowledge and professional background in conflict management. Second, NGO peacemakers have a higher vulnerability to be manipulated by armed parties compared to Track One actors. Third, because they maintain close relations with the constituencies, local NGOs are thought to have more difficulty in maintaining balance and even-handedness in peace talks and risk acting as advocates for one of the parties in conflict. Fourth, NGOs are often not equipped to deal with the intense emotions of people directly engaged in conflict: deep psychological issues such as victim hood, mourning and forgiveness. And lastly, NGOs should be aware of dealing with ethical issues, as intervening in conflict carries innate moral concerns over power, ethnocentricity and the personal agendas of mediators. (Havermans, 2003, p.167)

Despite these concerns, the contributions of Track Two diplomacy remain crucial, even though its potential has not yet been fully realised; in particular, the NGOs’ capacity to build both horizontal and vertical social capital between communities and actors. John Paul Lederach (1999) reviewed two decades of peace building efforts and concluded there is hope for future accomplishment, if three gaps can be overcome. The first gap is the lack of vertical integration of peace initiatives. Most peace building work has been aimed at improving relationships by getting counterparts of relatively equal status to meet with each other. The emphasis on this type of dialogues has fostered mainly horizontal relationships and lacks responsive and coordinated relationships up and down the levels of leadership, which is much needed in societies affected by violent conflict. The second gap deals with the lack of structural transformation after peace agreements are signed.

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Lederach observed that though peace processes have delivered a reduction of direct violence, they have rarely achieved the aspirations of desired structural change and the concomitant needed social and economic justice required for sustainable peace to last for most affected minority populations. The last gap refers to the tendency to conceptualise peace as an end product, instead of a dynamic, ongoing process of transformation. The word resolution lends itself to suggest the goal is to end something not desired and overlooks the importance of parties committing to the permanent relation building needed to facilitate the structural transformation process. Hence, Lederach concludes, in line with Colletta, Van Ginkel, the Carnegie Commission and other quoted experts that:

“Third parties need to reorient their investment (including funding, research and practice) and no longer be negotiation centric only, but focus on developing practices to create collaborative non-violent processes of structural change.” (Lederach, 1999, p.34)
2.3 Research Methodology

This study combines three research approaches: historic and political conflict analysis, qualitative field surveys and participatory action research. First, the intrastate conflict context was researched by means of a qualitative historical and political analysis, using multi disciplinary data (social, cultural, political, economic and religious) to study historic developments since the end of WWII, social cleavages in the four societies and their historic and contemporary grievances (chapters III-V). My first year at Harvard University was spent to study deadly conflict with diplomatic, military and religious experts at the Weatherhead Center for international Affairs, the Kennedy School for Governance and the Divinity School. In subsequent years, I fostered relationship with experts at the University of Amsterdam and the Columbia, George Washington- and the Georgetown University in New York and Washington DC, to further my literature study and the deadly conflict analysis.

The selection of case study countries was made on pragmatic grounds. Using my professional experience as a baseline for this study, there were twelve Asian countries to consider. China, Vietnam and Laos disqualified because of the absence of a genuine local NGO sector. Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia were dropped because of their lower risk of intrastate conflict (not withstand the fact that there are a few minority groups at risk there too). Of the remaining six countries, the Philippines was excluded because of the intimate connections between local NGOs and political parties, which is unusual in the Asian context, while Nepal was excluded when the political situation became highly troubled in 2001 after the assassination of the entire royal family.

Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Indonesia are appropriate case study countries because all have well established NGO sectors and went through different deadly conflict experiences that might help to determine the successes and failures of NGO work. Myanmar was added as a fourth case country to analyse why a different governance structure emerged, in the face of nation building challenges similar to Indonesia following independence, and how this affected the local NGOs. Civil society activities in Myanmar are severely curtailed since 1962 and hence no professional local NGO sector exists.18 There are a number of shared characteristics that make a comparative analysis of NGO responses in Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Myanmar particularly interesting:

- All four countries have a similar timeline as far as colonisation, independence and postcolonial (or decolonisation) struggle are concerned. This shaped the social cleavages in the societies, as well as the birth and development of their civil societies to a high degree (see annex on timelines). Three of the four countries have a multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition, which has been a source of conflict since independence.
- All four have experienced geopolitical significance, be it for totally different reasons (see Chapter III) that have maintained above average interest by the international community in their local political affairs. This had lasting implications (both positive and negative) for their development processes during and after the Cold War.
- All four have influential military traditions, in which political and business interests and security interests were tightly interwoven.

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18 At three crucial stages in the research a reduction of case countries was debated with the University of Amsterdam research supervisor. The sheer volume of data and research information was too much to process for a doctoral candidate. Moreover, the width of the research data (four countries, 32 local NGOs and 12 national campaigns) obviously limits the depth of the analysis. However, it was decided that the multi country data and insights provide richness to the study of this relatively new field that would have been lost if two case countries were left out.
And lastly, all four have known severe deadly civil conflicts since independence in which millions have lost their lives. All four are at high risk of escalating tensions at any time.

The qualitative field survey among 32 local NGOs and six international development agencies in three Asian countries represents the second methodology (Chapters VI-VIII). An interview checklist was designed to address four sets of core questions relating to each NGO’s history, its links with other actors, its conflict analysis and its conflict prevention work. The interviews were conducted at three levels. First, the executive management of the participating NGOs was interviewed. Next follow-up meetings with specific staff members and limited field visits took place, in which recent reports, specific approaches, staff manuals, extension materials, etc. were discussed. Lastly, similar conflict and peace building materials were collected and discussed with staff from donor agencies like Oxfam, UNESCO, CIDA, UNDP and the National Human Rights Commission in Indonesia. Four of the 32 interviewed NGOs went through an institutional transformation process in the course of this field research, which hampered the interview process but resulted in important insights of NGO responses to conflict. In the case of three other NGOs, external circumstances (e.g. security situation in Ambon in 2002) interfered with the interview process and three alternative NGOs were interviewed. In February and December 2003 six Burmese NGOs based in Rangoon and on the Thai border were interviewed as well. But their working conditions deviate too much to justify inclusion in the comparative analysis. Some recommendations on desired future NGO research in Myanmar are included in the final chapters. For details on NGO selection see table 1 and annex I.

A simple regression analysis was applied to the five core characteristics of the interviewed NGOs to search for correlations between maturity, size, type, core business, outreach and gender programming, but none were found. This supported the notion that NGO characteristics tend to be fairly unique, as they evolve from their inception history and seem highly influenced by the political developments in the respective countries. Because it was hard to distil common Asian success factors based on the individual NGO interviews alone, a next tire of NGO programme analysis was added to the research. In consultation with the interviewed NGOs, twelve national-level joint NGO campaigns were selected, in which one or more of the interviewed NGOs participated. These campaigns can be grouped in four categories, each reflecting a distinct peace building strategy: good governance and democratisation, independent conflict settlement mechanisms, people’s mobilisation for peace, and international policy advocacy. These national campaigns did show many similarities in nature and approach and thus facilitated some cross-country comparative analysis.

The field interviews took place from late 2001 to mid 2002, a year in which—with the exception of Cambodia—conflict prevention prospects looked brighter in South East Asia. There was a ceasefire negotiated and peace talks got underway in Sri Lanka: the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest in Myanmar with promise of a speedy resumption of political dialogue; East Timor regained its independence and communal violence in Indonesia was slowing down. The conditions appeared promising for greater ‘track two’ involvement of local NGOs to strengthen the peace building work in their societies. While the interview series commenced, the situation began to change dramatically. The war on terror fuelled jihad sentiments in Asia and bomb attacks on civilians in Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand left hundreds dead. Both the State and the international donor community increasingly sidelined the NGO sector in Sri Lanka and Indonesia in efforts to speed up peace building programmes. Selected follow-up interviews with NGO leaders in 2003 were required to reflect changing long-term vision on the role of NGOs in preventing deadly conflict.
Lastly, additional in-depth information was collected during several weeks of participatory action research in Sri Lanka (October 2000, Nov-December 2001, May 2002, March-April 2004) and Cambodia (February 2002, February and November 2003) as local election observer, as presenter at gender, conflict and development conferences; and as member of project identification teams. A total of seven weeks were spent in the field with six of the 32 interviewed NGOs (COMFREL, ADHOC, PAFFREL, SETIK, LST and MDDR). The field research in Indonesia was twice hampered, due to the local conflict situation and personal circumstances. As a result, no participatory action research could be realised in the Moluccas, but the value and quality of the interview results was deemed important enough to keep Indonesia in the NGO review part of this study.

Table 1 NGOs interviewed for this study in Cambodia (C), Sri Lanka (S) and Indonesia (I)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community development NGOs</th>
<th>Organisation name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Started</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Expertise and country (C/S/I)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PADEK</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Rural Development (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Women Development (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sor Sor Trung</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Comm. Development training (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SETIK</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Comm. Dev and Human Rights (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarvodaya/Seeds</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Rural Development and micro credit (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VYMA</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Muslim Youth vocational training (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Dev. Centre</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Tamil Women Development (Jaffna) (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalyana Mitra</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Women development, gender justice (I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baku Baai</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Conflict resolution in Moluccas (I)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WALHI</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>National Environment NGO network (I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civil Society building NGOs</th>
<th>Organisation name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Started</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Expertise and country (C/S/I)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADHOC</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Political, civil &amp; economic rights (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Aid Cambodia</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Legal aid &amp; law/constitutional reform (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Conflict mediation (C)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WMC</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Women equality (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMFREL</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Voter education &amp; election monitoring(C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDDR</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Social, economic, cultural rights (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Society Trust</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Constitutional, political and civil rights (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FHD</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Tamil women equality and rights (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahimsa</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Conflict mediation training (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAFFREL/MFFE</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Election monitoring, peaceful co-existence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBH</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Political civil, labour and env rights (I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APIK</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Provinicial</td>
<td>Women equity and rights (I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KONTRAS</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Political rights and disappearances (I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advocacy NGOs</th>
<th>Organisation name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Started</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Expertise and country (C/S/I)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WGWR</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Disarmament and demobilisation (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO Forum</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>International policy advocacy (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRM</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Constit. reform &amp; pol/civil rights (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTHR-J</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>Tamil political and civil rights (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPC</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Peace building &amp; communal harmony (S)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koalisi Perempuan</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Women in politics development (I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komnas Perempuan</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Violence Against Women (I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFID</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>International Policy Advocacy (I)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19 In June 2002, the conflict situation on Ambon and military security measures to prevent further violence made doing participatory research on the Moluccas impossible. A year later, upon arrival in Jakarta in December 2003 to update the research and follow-up on interviews, I broke my leg in a street accident and had to be repatriated to the Netherlands.

20 Area illustrate the NGOs prime geographic area of work. Provincial and National indicate NGO work is concentrated in a few provinces or based on a nation wide grass roots network. Training and advocacy indicate the NGOs do not have a permanent geographical basis, but their training or advocacy initiatives primarily determine their geographic partnering, which can vary over the years.