

AFRICA

While long a crucial element in the struggle for increased respect for democratic rule and human rights within African countries, civil society actors are slowly recognizing their role in addressing conflicts that pose threats to regional and subregional peace and stability. In many ways, this recent trend coincides with the increased attention paid by regional bodies to security issues. The Fund for Peace, a Washington, DC-based research, educational and advocacy organization, convened a series of subregional workshops in October and November 2003 that brought together civil society representatives in West, East, Central, and Southern Africa. At the three meetings in Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, participants took part in plenary discussions on the role that civil society should play in strengthening African capacities to manage conflicts. The results of these meetings will play a critical role in evaluating and addressing the needs of a region steeped in historic change resulting from the dynamics of colonialism, the Cold War, and the emerging struggle against global terrorism. Often relegated to the official backwater of many nations' foreign policy considerations, Africa has repeatedly found itself thrust onto the international stage as a source of instability. The Fund for Peace workshops revealed that the victims of humanitarian conflict in Africa are fully aware of, and engaged in, finding a solution to the problems facing their continent.

Following the humanitarian disasters in Somalia and Rwanda from 1991 through 1994, the United Nations began a critical assessment of the acute humanitarian crises confronting African states in the post-colonial, post-Soviet environment of the early 1990's. As evidenced by the failed international intervention in Somalia in 1992 and

the international failure to act in the horrific Rwandan genocide of 1994, it became increasingly apparent that intrastate conflicts in Africa required a new toolbox of options to prevent and reduce civilian casualties in these conflicts. In many cases, traditional tools, such as economic sanctions, international condemnation or political isolation, did little to avoid or alleviate the sufferings experienced by civilians on the ground. The traditional view of warfare that informed the United Nations Charter gave exclusive authority for internationally sanctioned military intervention to the Security Council and enshrined the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states. However, the history of the post Cold War era showed that the concept of sovereignty had to be redefined. No longer were most wars limited to conflict between sovereign states or coalitions of sovereign states acting against others and fought primarily by professional soldiers. Instead, violent conflicts erupted within states and civilians were the primary targets, and perpetrators, of the conflict. With non-state actors playing such a prominent role, sovereign states were no longer able to protect their own people or, worse, created humanitarian disasters within their own borders. While leaders in previous historical eras also perpetrated large-scale atrocities against their own citizens, the world was becoming less tolerant of such crimes, albeit uncertain about how to stop them.

In Africa, the proxy wars fought by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, as well as the interests of former colonial powers in maintaining a presence on the continent, began to wane as new conflicts in the Middle East and the Balkans consumed much of the world's attention in the 1990s. In the power vacuum that

followed, the United Nations was ill-equipped to respond to humanitarian emergencies in Africa and it became the object of international scorn, especially in Africa itself, for its inability to prevent conflicts and its failure to alleviate the suffering of African people when conflicts erupted. In the past two decades, massive displacement, rape, murder, and grave human rights abuses have come to characterize the conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. In the face of such overwhelming challenges in Africa and elsewhere, the United Nations commissioned independent studies to evaluate the role of outside actors, including military alliances like the North American Treaty Organization (NATO), “coalitions of willing states,” and regional and sub-regional bodies to respond to humanitarian crises.

In an attempt to analyze the new challenges confronting the international community and the United Nations, the Canadian government established The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in September 2000. The findings were published in December 2001 in the report, *The Responsibility to Protect*. Ultimately, the ICISS Report agreed that the United Nations Security Council should sanction all military interventions but, in instances when it failed to act, the responsibility to protect civilians should fall to either the UN General Assembly under the “Uniting for Peace” clause or to regional or subregional organizations under Chapter VIII of the Charter. The ICISS report cautions against “coalitions of willing states” or unilateral state intervention as these actions would clearly undermine the legitimacy of the UN. The report further argues that military interventions for the sake of halting or averting grave human rights abuses should always be a last resort, proportional in scale, and have reasonable prospects for ending the humanitarian crises.

While the global debate revolved around the United Nations, the people and organizations most directly affected by conflict at the regional level were not engaged in the discussions. To close this gap, The Fund for Peace sought to have these voices heard on defining the acceptable parameters of, and capabilities for, humanitarian intervention in internal

conflicts that exist at the regional level. Four series of workshops were held in-region in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe from 2003 to 2005. Three African workshops were convened in October and November 2003 in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa on the capabilities for action. These built on the findings of international conferences held in Washington, DC from 2001 to 2003 that focused on defining the norms for an intervention. Conference participants were asked to address four main questions:

- Who should be able to authorize military interventions?
- When should a military intervention for human protection purposes be considered?
- Who should conduct it?
- How should it be carried out?

The participants represented a wide range of professions, including members of the military, government, UN, the press, academia and non-governmental organizations. Both the findings of the ICISS report and The Fund for Peace conferences concurred that internal conflicts in Africa constituted grave threats to human rights and, further, could cause regional destabilization. Empowering regional bodies to act while encouraging indigenous efforts by civil society groups were thus seen as interrelated and essential in humanitarian interventions as well as in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. Reports on the conferences dealing with regional norms of intervention are available at The Fund for Peace website: <http://fundforpeace.org/programs/rriw/rriw.php>

In an effort to address the substantive issues central to civil society in Africa and to explore the findings of the ICISS report and The Fund for Peace Conference Report, three African workshops brought together more than one hundred representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches, the media, women and children’s advocacy groups, scholars and conflict resolution practitioners on the continent. Each workshop was co-hosted with a local civil society partner. In two full days of plenary sessions and working groups, participants were asked to address

specific questions that were grouped thematically and to come to a consensus on concrete recommendations based on the discussions and working group meetings. In sum, African civil society representatives from 31 countries spent six days in discussion.

Workshop participants were asked to:

- Identify the greatest threats to the region and discuss whether the findings in the ICISS and the earlier FfP Africa Conference reports adequately address the criteria for military interventions in Africa for humanitarian purposes.
- Evaluate the role of civil society in the subregions and its current relationship with national governments and sub-regional and regional bodies and then assess the impact of these relationships on overall regional security.
- Report on the impact of regional conflict on vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the disabled and address national and subregional efforts to protect vulnerable populations.

Defining Regional Threats to Security in Africa

Definitions of internal war varied among West, Central, Eastern and Southern Africa, with historical, political, and cultural precedents each playing a role in how participants viewed the findings of the ICISS and Fund for Peace findings. In all regions, participants concurred that the United Nations was the most legitimate and preferred organization to authorize a military intervention to prevent or halt a humanitarian crisis. However, participants also recognized that the United Nations had been too slow to act, if it did act at all, in conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, and alternatives must therefore be explored. While most participants agreed with the criteria for military intervention defined by The Fund for Peace Africa Conference¹, the findings of the ICISS report were regarded cautiously. Although some of the criteria set out by the ICISS report were agreed with in

principle, many attendees felt that it was far too general and did not address the particular dynamics that fueled crises in Africa.

In West Africa, conflict is cyclical and wars spill across borders resulting in continual refugee and internal displacement crises, traumatized populations, and the constant threat of regional destabilization. Ethnic and tribal linkages in West Africa are dominant across state lines and, as one conference participant remarked, “I am closer tribally and linguistically to those in Western Benin than here in southern Nigeria.” Porous borders and the failure to demilitarize and reintegrate combatants have led to the illicit cross-border trafficking of small arms and light weapons. It has also contributed to the destabilizing factor of mercenaries and former soldiers who, unemployed and marginalized by their communities, simply cross national borders and are recruited to fight in other wars or insurgency movements. The easy procurement of weapons and drugs, combined with a breakdown of traditional family and communal structures, was also cited as a prime cause of conflict in West Africa. The pervasiveness of rulers and regimes that finance wars both within their own borders and in neighboring states was another factor noted in the destabilization of West Africa, predominantly in the Mano River area.

Furthermore, acute poverty and the unequal distribution of resources, particularly in volatile countries like Nigeria, have fanned the flames of ethnic discord and have led to fractures at the state level. These fractures, despite attempts by national governments to crack down on militancy and ethnic and religious alliances, are evidenced in the recent outbreaks of ethno-religious fueled conflict. In this environment, it is imperative that outside peacekeepers or international monitoring bodies recognize the root causes of internal conflict if they are to address the crisis successfully. In West Africa, perhaps more acutely than the other regions, the concept of state sovereignty continues to dissolve while tribal and religious alliances align across borders and fuel the continuum of conflict in the region. The continuing destabilization of Côte d’Ivoire was given as a prime example of the state’s use of ethnic and religious propaganda to divide

the population and drive targeted groups across borders into other unstable countries. As one participant noted, “Côte d’Ivoire is now two states - the North and the South - separated by ECOWAS troops and French peacekeepers. Something must be done to address the conflict immediately because this is not a solution.”

In the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, the history of conflict and outside interference in internal wars has left the region with a particularly fearful and negative view of military interventions for humanitarian purposes. In Eastern Africa, conflict was defined as “trans-generational” with internal wars that have continued for decades. Somalia and Rwanda stood out as examples of failed or grossly inadequate international military responses to humanitarian disasters while participants from Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo stated that outside interventions, whether by international actors or coalitions of frontline states, has contributed to the worsening of the conflict rather than its improvement. In direct response to the ICISS and FfP findings, participants asked, “When situations are so violent that they require military intervention, who is actually trying to stop these problems and why?” Moreover, participants from Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo-Brazzaville and Burundi stated that interventions into the conflicts that plagued their countries lacked transparency and were actually “a cover” for outside states and international actors to exploit natural resources for economic gains. This has led to contracting economies, debt, declining terms of trade and predatory investment in the region. A participant from Burundi stated: “In Eastern Africa, military interventions are about protecting interests, not people.”

Although conflicts in the Horn and the Great Lakes Region were not cited as being as overtly interconnected as those in West Africa, participants did agree that the cross-border trafficking of weapons, drugs and livestock posed a major threat in the border regions. The war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the continuing tensions in those states despite the presence of UN peacekeepers (UNMEE) was noted as an example of a failure of the international body to resolve a “traditional”

interstate conflict in the region. The presence of refugees from the ongoing conflicts in Sudan and Somalia also were mentioned as being highly destabilizing internally to states that already lacked sufficient resources for their own populations. Despite these factors, the participants to the Kenya workshop were the most reluctant, based on prior history, to condone military intervention for any reason. One workshop participant even voiced the opinion that, “Instead of dying because of the military intervention, it may be better to continue to have serious problems and see what we can do locally. People are very afraid of another Somalia.”

Finally, if a military intervention was condoned as a last resort, participants all concurred that it would have to be comprised of actors with “absolutely no other interest than to stop the conflict for humanitarian purposes.” Such an intervention, therefore, must come in the form of a NATO or EU-led coalition and be almost exclusively international in force composition. A guest from Congo-Brazzaville said, “If it is a military intervention, then it must be a neutral military, which means it must not be from Africa.” This statement contrasted with earlier FfP findings where conference participants felt that it was better to have African peacekeepers in African conflicts and condoned the use of regional or subregional bodies. It also conflicted with the precepts and practices of the African Union, which emphasizes the use of African peacekeeping troops in African conflicts. Participants also stated that regardless of which international body led the intervention, there had to be a solid commitment to finance the intervention and contribute to peacebuilding and development after the cessation of violence. As a workshop participant from Burundi stated, “If the international community is not going to address financially the root causes of conflict in the region, then they must at least be willing to make sure that the peace is held through development after the war ends.”

In Southern Africa, several participants at the workshop articulated the core theme of humanitarian intervention in the form of a question: When and how do humanitarian and human rights issues become understood as security threats? There was substantial concern that such military

interventions are driven by national political motivations that would ultimately serve to destabilize further the affected country and the region. It was noted that, particularly in Southern Africa, acts of violence are not always obvious in their physical manifestations and can take the form of the politically motivated denial of food or basic needs as well as forcible dislocation. “Thousands are threatened with starvation in Zimbabwe; this is a humanitarian crisis although not one that a military intervention would fix.”

Participants also felt that the ICISS report did not adequately address the fundamental aspects of conflicts, such as insurgency movements, the role of outside actors in fueling or covering up conflicts in the region, and refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Historically, conflicts in Southern Africa have largely been characterized by strong independence movements against former colonial rulers or minority regimes and many states were subject to heavy outside interference during the Cold War. This legacy led individual states to take on leading roles in both the independence and insurgency movements in neighboring states and has enhanced the sentiment, at least on the political level, of a regional identity characterized by such struggles.

There remain, however, underlying tensions throughout the region based on what many view as the unfair hegemonic influence of South Africa. As the region’s most advanced economic and military power, participants from several states felt that South Africa unfairly monopolizes both regional and international trade agreements and encourages dependence rather than promoting region-wide sustainability. Several other participants were critical of South Africa’s political and military strategies, on the one hand citing the military intervention in Lesotho as “overboard” and, on the other hand, the failure to take a more aggressive stand against corrupt and repressive neighboring regimes such as Zimbabwe as “irresponsible.” Finally, the extremely high rate of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, the prevalence of child soldiers, landmines and small arms were also cited as root causes of conflict and destabilization in the region.

The Role of Civil Society, Subregional and Regional Bodies in Africa

The role of civil society in each region has been directly shaped by historical, political and cultural precedents that have defined the nature of regional conflict in sub-Saharan Africa. In each region, civil society has expressed a need for greater networking across national boundaries although some regions, West Africa in particular, have more experience working together to address crises. In all three regions, civil society organizations defined an over-reliance on outside donor funding as being a primary stumbling block in effectively addressing conflicts in a holistic and indigenous capacity. Moreover, in each region, workshop participants noted that many civil society organizations have historically had hostile relationships with national governments, resulting in marginalization at both the national and subregional level. Despite broad areas of consensus among the three regions, each workshop highlighted that civil society was unique in each sub region and confronted different challenges and sought different goals.

In West Africa, participants to the Ghana conference noted that civil society has often become part of the conflict by taking sides or becoming politicized by the government. Each country has a different relationship between civil society and the national government. Many of these relationships are viewed as antagonistic and characterized by high levels of distrust between the two parties. A participant from Nigeria stated, “They don’t trust us because for many years we protested against the government on its policies and actions instead of realizing we reflected the voice of the people.” It was noted, however, that civil society has had a history of engagement, both positive and negative, across borders in West Africa as conflicts in the region have necessitated interaction. Particularly with the recent wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire, civil society organizations have often found themselves confronting the same issues — refugee and internal displacement crises, small arms and light weapons trafficking, the rape and mutilation of civilians, and the prevalence of child soldiers. Nevertheless, civil society cooperation in West Africa continues to

suffer from fragmentation and a lack of definition. In order to fully realize their collective agendas, there needs to be an overarching structure for communication and coordination among them. As one participant noted, “In West Africa we have non-governmental organizations, non-governmental individuals and many who are just interested in getting funding for their own agendas.”

In exploring civil society cooperation with the dominant sub regional body, The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), it was noted that experience in conflict intervention has also set precedents for action on the civil society level. ECOWAS has intervened in more subregional conflicts than any other regional body in the world, notably in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire with military interventions; and in Guinea Bissau and Sao Tome and Principe in diplomatic interventions. However, participants felt that ECOWAS had largely failed to include civil society organizations in these processes and has ignored civil society organizations when sounding the signals of early warning. As civil society is the most familiar with issues affecting populations at the grassroots level, conference participants felt that ECOWAS should utilize civil society’s functions as “conflict watchdogs.”

While the appointment of a civil society liaison within ECOWAS and the summit of civil society organizations and ECOWAS, held in December 2003, were heralded as positive steps in formalizing relations between civil society and the subregional body, it was agreed that more cooperation was still needed. Specifically, participants felt that ECOWAS should work to strengthen civil society capacity through the creation of a West Africa civil society directory of expertise that could be readily called upon in conflict prevention and intervention. As civil society has direct experience working with civilians, particularly women and children, a failure to utilize their expertise in past interventions was cited as a fundamental flaw that had led to further human rights abuses. Moreover, by not including civil society input in interventions, participants noted that the institutional learning process was lost. “For ECOWAS, every intervention is like reinventing the wheel,” one participant remarked.

ECOWAS was not seen as effective in preventing humanitarian crises and human rights abuses in West Africa and is not generally respected for saving lives. Many civil society organizations see ECOWAS as “an organization in the sky” with little connection to the daily challenges and conflicts experienced on the ground. ECOWAS, by and large, is viewed as a “leaders club” and not an organization representative of the views and concerns of the people of West Africa. The failure of ECOWAS to deal with corrupt rulers and rogue regimes and punish member states for noncompliance with its treaties and the West African Moratorium on Small Arms and Light Weapons was also cited as a fundamental flaw in the organization. One participant characterized ECOWAS as a “toothless bulldog” run by several powerful heads of state but lacking the political will and resources to create an effective system to respond to conflicts before they become humanitarian disasters. Finally, a general lack of communication and information about ECOWAS treaties and actions is prevalent among civil society in all West African states. This has translated into an inability of civil society to convey information to local populations, particularly in respect to ECOWAS military interventions. A participant from Nigeria noted, “We found out that ECOWAS was intervening in Sierra Leone through the national news, the same way the rest of the world did. We had no idea that battalions of Nigerian soldiers were on their way there until after they had been deployed.”

The role of civil society in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region was characterized as distinctly different in many ways from civil society in West Africa. Although countries like Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda have vibrant and evolved civil society organizations, there is little networking across state borders. The ongoing crises in Sudan, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, along with the complete collapse of Somalia and the terrorist attacks in Kenya and Tanzania, have led civil society organizations to focus inward toward more state-centered problems. As many conflicts in the region were defined as “trans-generational,” civil societies in countries like Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo have been

overwhelmed by the humanitarian crises occurring within their own borders for decades. As a participant from Sudan stated: “We have entire generations that have spent their lives moving from one refugee camp to another, depending on where the attacks occur and the government does not help.”

In the Horn of Africa, the effects of the war in Ethiopia and Eritrea and the failed state of Somalia have led to well-developed internal initiatives aimed at protecting local civilian populations but have not translated into a broad effort to act as a regional coalition of civil society actors. Furthermore, governments which have come to power through violence and the possession of weapons lack transparency and are not viewed as legitimate partners in civil society initiatives focused on promoting democracy and human security in the region. One conference participant noted, “How can you expect anyone to respect the government when the only legitimacy some presidents have is that they have more guns? Civil society must find ways to work together to minimize the capacity of armed groups to grab power.”

The relationship between the overlapping subregional organizations of IGAD, EAC, COMESA and civil society is not clearly defined.² Many civil society organizations, like those in West Africa, are largely unfamiliar with the treaties and protocols of sub-regional bodies and only have limited knowledge of their functions. A failure on the part of civil societies in the region to engage each other has translated into a failure to engage regional organizations and bridge the information gap. The perception of corrupt and undemocratically elected national governments that hindered cooperation at the national level has translated to similar perceptions at the subregional level. As one conference participant stated, “They are the same people except now they are in a group, what is the difference?”

Subregional bodies in the Eastern and Central Africa region have traditionally been focused on issues of food security and land reform and have no precedent for undertaking military interventions. In the past two years, however, IGAD has

demonstrated an interest in diplomatic interventions in regional conflicts and has hosted both the Somalia and Sudan peace talks. Particularly in the case of Somalia, there appears to be some progress on integrating civil society into the peace negotiations through the creation of technical committees tasked specifically with addressing the role of civil society organizations in the failed state. Additionally, the new government elected in Kenya in January 2003 has also demonstrated a desire to move away from state-centered politics and integrate regional initiatives aimed at reducing the incidence of conflict by creating spaces for civil society participation.

In the Somalia peace talks, for example, both Kenya and Uganda have taken a lead role in including civil society groups, women’s organizations among them, in the talks as well as attempting to employ traditional forms of mediation and reconciliation through the inclusion of village elders and “panels of the wise.” IGAD has also created a conflict early warning initiative, CEWARN, with fledgling attempts to stem pastoral conflicts through the direct participation of civilians in gathering information on potential conflicts. While the general findings of the workshop demonstrated that civil society interaction across state borders and engagement with regional bodies remains largely fragmented, there are attempts at certain levels to broaden and institutionalize conflict prevention and intervention mechanisms.

Overall, civil society participants to the Kenya workshop largely agreed that greater interaction and integration with other organizations, national governments, and regional and subregional bodies was a shared responsibility. A failure to learn about the mandates and functions of subregional and regional bodies and lobby at both a national and regional level hampered their abilities to influence policy and institute change on the ground. Participants further noted the need for subregional organizations to create local offices, as the region is so large that the ability of civil society actors to span the gap between local populations and national governments is limited. Finally, conference participants agreed that the best method of ensuring transparency and accountability of national and subregional bodies was through strong civil society

engagement in the policies and practices of governments and organizations. The creation of databases and directories of civil society experts, as well as national civil society platforms, was recommended as part of the process. A conference participant from Ethiopia noted, "We must counter the image held by governments that we are just a group of briefcase NGOs and unite as a collective force that gives a voice to the needs of civilians."

In Southern Africa, some countries have active civic organizations capable of engaging in policy processes while others, especially South Africa, have a long experience with grass root movements that have confronted governments on political and economic issues. Participants to the South Africa workshop emphasized that a full understanding of civil society in Southern Africa must acknowledge the role played, not only by the anti-apartheid movement, but also by trade unions, religious groups, media organizations, and institutions of higher learning. A tendency for civil society and social movements to be urban-based was noted as being a key feature in Southern Africa. While this contributes to a degree of networking across national boundaries, it also limits contact with rural-based communities and grassroots organizations in other countries.

Civil society in Southern Africa, based on its participation in the independence struggles of individual countries and the fight to overcome the scourge of apartheid, has a history of cooperation, as one workshop participant noted, "It occurs naturally; we have a history of working together." While participants agreed that civil societies throughout the region could benefit from greater networking, especially from joint skills training exercises, most Southern African countries have proactive civil society organizations that work across state lines. In South Africa, for example, civil society organizations with regional links have contributed to the peace processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. In Mozambique and Zambia, according to participants, civil society has partnered with governments based on a mutual appreciation of the necessary roles played by each.

Southern African civil society's views on its sub-regional organization, the South African Development Community (SADC), generally fell into two categories. Many participants viewed the organization as representative of an institutional desire to tackle conflicts and threats to human security from a regional perspective, while others saw the organization in terms of its overall inability to be more than a club for the region's "big men." Following the turbulent events in South Africa in 1994, the organization stated its commitment to ensuring the human security of the populations of member states. To date, however, SADC has not involved civil society organizations in regional processes of preventive diplomacy, early warning and peacebuilding.

As in the other regions, and some might argue to an even greater extent, there exists a pervasive lack of knowledge about SADC, its components and its protocols at the civil society level. Critics at the conference argued that the failure of governments and SADC to integrate civil society into diplomatic and conflict management initiatives reflects the organization's tendency to place a higher value on protecting the sovereignty of its member states and their leaders than on addressing violence and potential humanitarian crises in the region.

SADC, like ECOWAS, has designated formal civil society representation within the organization through national committees and an NGO desk. The main problem in Southern Africa, however, is that few civil society members know that such points of entry exist or what they do. Furthermore, the ability of civil society actors to gain access to specific SADC protocols also remains problematic. As one conference attendee from Botswana recounted, "I spent hours trying to gain access to the Protocol on Peace and Security only to be told that I was not authorized to view a document that is supposed to be public knowledge." Other participants noted that SADC representatives in their own countries had little information to offer and were unable to provide documentation about the structures and protocols of the organization. The failure of SADC to translate its protocols into the three main regional languages (English,

Portuguese and French) has also hindered the ability of civil society to explain the protocols to local populations or translate it into local languages.

A discussion of SADC's right to intervene militarily to halt conflicts in the region brought up questions of legitimacy, civil society participation, and the composition of intervening forces. As in the other regions, military interventions were seen as a last resort but were not unprecedented, as SADC had intervened in the conflict in Lesotho in 1998. Similarly, participants urged that, without prior consultation and training by civil society on issues of human rights, conflict resolution and the protection of vulnerable groups, such as women and children, military interventions could potentially do more harm than good. In post-conflict peacebuilding, civil society actors needed to be responsible for monitoring and providing feedback to SADC in order to create a unit devoted to "best practices" in intervention. Civil society representatives of some SADC countries also expressed concern that the military and political dominance of South Africa and its ability to undertake interventions alone might translate into other states being "pulled along" under the broader banner of SADC. Ultimately, while South Africa's economic, military and political clout were seen as a necessary component in leading the organization forward, broader civil society participation would also ensure that humanitarian interventions were well informed and representative of regional political will.

The African Union

When asked about the role of the African Union in conflict prevention and mediation, civil society representatives across Africa agreed that it was clearly too soon to assess the impact of the newly created organization, which succeeded the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and the newly established organs of the AU: the Peace and Security Council, the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force and the Council of the Wise.³ Some voiced concern that the sheer number of members (fifty-three) makes it unable to react swiftly or decisively when crisis threatens or is occurring. Others worried that, like its

predecessor the OAU, the AU would ultimately guard state sovereignty over the security of its people. The location of the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, and its recent intervention in Burundi made it a topic of concern in the conferences on the Horn of Africa, Great Lakes Region and Southern Africa. In West Africa, however, conference participants preferred to remain focused on the role of ECOWAS and its current and past military operations, as it was widely felt that it was likely to remain the primary future vehicle for intervention in the sub-region.

A further concern voiced by participants at the workshops was the tendency of the regional body to be dominated by the "big men" of Africa. Leaders from Nigeria, Libya, and South Africa, and to a certain extent Kenya and Algeria, have all been accused of dominating the politics of the organization and exerting pressure on less powerful states. Past incidents of powerful member-states paying the dues for other states has also reinforced the conviction that, despite the name change, the AU would never truly be a representative organization. A conference participant from Ethiopia remarked: "When one speaks about the strength of the AU, it is necessary to talk about the strength of individual states. The AU tries to convey that all members are equal but this only makes the organization look weak and it is not true." Moreover, other participants noted that most countries in Africa can barely afford to train and supply their own militaries and simply do not have the human or financial resources to contribute to an AU stand-by army or brigade. It was noted, however, that the acknowledgement by the AU that Africans had to assume responsibility for the security of their own continent was a very positive step. "It shows that we have learned that we cannot wait for the international community to rescue us from our own problems," a participant from Tanzania remarked.

Nevertheless, the reliance of the regional body on its member states for troops and supply contributions led many participants to dub it "the African United Nations." The recent African Union mission in Burundi (AMIB) was heavily reliant upon South Africa for support and also was only

mandated to act in self-defense and not to separate combatants or forcibly intervene to protect civilians. A lack of institutional planning also resulted in the reliance on draft Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) rather than a comprehensive mandate with defined Rules of Engagement (ROE). The African Union Mission in Burundi handed off responsibility to the UN quickly as the main donor states of South Africa, Ethiopia and Mozambique were overwhelmed by the heavy burden placed on their budgets and resources. The long-term sustainability of African Union missions must also be considered, according to participants, as the United Nations may not be as eager to take over the AU's responsibilities. Overall, the first deployment of troops under the aegis of the African Union was heralded as positive although most participants to the conferences recognized the need for a much greater focus on institutional processes so future missions do not appear poorly planned or ad hoc in nature.

The African Union undertook its most extensive conflict management endeavor with the African Mission in Sudan (AMIS). What began as a purely observer role when the monitors began in June 2004 has evolved into military mission with nearly 2,300 troops from African countries deployed throughout the Darfur region. Moreover, despite its inception as a ceasefire monitoring mission and ongoing concessions to the government of Sudan over who has the "formal" responsibility for the protection of civilians in Sudan, AMIS has undertaken activities that should be acknowledged as having a civilians protection effect. Moreover, the presence of the African Union on the ground in Darfur serves as a stark contrast to the inability of the United Nations Security Council to become actively engaged in civilian protection in Darfur.

AMIS has faced many challenges, however. Its difficulties in getting member countries to contribute troops to reach its deployment goals and its wholesale reliance on donor support for mission logistics, equipment, planning and strategic lift represent real weaknesses in the AU's ability to conduct such operations. At the same time, the AU has made progress in building cooperative relationships with other regional organizations, most

notably NATO and the European Union, in order to fill many of these gaps.

As with the subregional organizations, little is known about the African Union's treaties and protocols, and civil society feels largely alienated from its activities. One participant from the Democratic Republic of Congo noted, "We first need to promote ourselves and integrate with bodies in the subregion before we can think about the African Union." There is a perceived overall deficit of communication between the AU and its member states, which contributes to its relative obscurity for civil society organizations. As with subregional bodies, civil society organizations acknowledged that they bore partial responsibility in not reaching out to the African Union through advocacy or the creation of partnerships. Particularly in the case of the African Union, civil society participants felt that it was first necessary to unite as a collective force before approaching the organization because civil society organizations had been viewed as "spoilers" by the OAU. "We need to start with a campaign designed to promote mutual awareness and support because images need to be repaired," remarked a participant from Kenya.

In general, the ending of the OAU and the creation of the African Union, with the associated new initiatives proposed by the organization, were received well in theory but with a high degree of skepticism about their actual effectiveness. While civil society organizations in Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa seemed more aware of the role of the AU and its functions than participants in West Africa, there still remained large gaps in the flow of information from the AU to the civil society level. Increased networking and lobbying at the subregional level was, therefore, viewed as the necessary first step prior to efforts to engage the African Union.

The Impact of Conflict on Vulnerable Groups

It was recognized in all of the African workshops that, during wars, vulnerable groups were most likely to suffer both during the conflict and in its aftermath. Women, children, the elderly and the disabled were identified as being at particular risk

and were most likely to become refugees or IDPs and lacked access to social and civil services. In particular, attendees noted that in much of rural Africa, women suffer from a lack of basic knowledge about their rights and are completely dependent on traditional family structures that are eroded or destroyed during wars. In the aftermath, women often bear the full responsibility for caring for children, the elderly and disabled family members with no financial support or opportunities for employment. Additionally, as rape and mutilation have become systematically used as tools of war, women are at particular risk of becoming the victims of brutal sexual violence, which often leads to unwanted pregnancies, stigmatization and shunning from their local communities.

Similarly, children are often tortured or forcibly recruited to fight in wars and become disenfranchised from the family structure and have few opportunities for reintegration into civilian life once the hostilities have ended. The prevalence of child soldiers was noted repeatedly at each conference and one Liberian participant remarked, “A whole generation of children has been lost in Liberia.” Similar sentiments were echoed by participants from Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Women and children were also cited as being more vulnerable to attacks from rebels and at high risk for deaths and injuries from landmines. International efforts targeted at reintegrating women and child combatants are often under-funded or fall far short of addressing the specific needs of vulnerable populations. Further, there must be a close examination of cultural variables and an effort to work with indigenous civil society organizations on the ground in overcoming such obstacles. As one participant in West Africa remarked, “Even the most well-intentioned international efforts are often not effective because they fail to consider the culture of the people on the ground.”

In all three subregions, participants cautioned against viewing women and children simply as “victims” and pointed out that both groups are also stakeholders in conflicts. Women in all subregions had willingly joined insurgency movements and rebel groups and, in many cases, were highly revered as

fighters. In the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, women were “on the front lines on both sides and were known for their courage and dedication,” noted an Ethiopian participant. Many women viewed the chance to fight as a form of emancipation from traditional structures and played main roles in recruiting other women. Women have also been used by governments and rebel groups to spy on their husbands and others suspected of subversion because they are not considered to be a threat. In Southern Africa, participants noted that both the government and rebel groups utilized a wide variety of recruitment tactics and incentives including education, emancipation from traditional structures, and promises of wealth and fame. This was particularly true in the struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe; when the war was over, women who went back to their villages became “misfits” and were left out of the gains brought by emancipation.

It was also mentioned that children are known to be some of the most brutal fighters in wars but for different reasons. “Children who are taken [to become child soldiers] when they are very young do not have a developed moral sense of what they are doing and many of them are drugged so they just kill without thinking about it twice,” stated a participant to the West Africa workshop. When the war ends, these children, often infected with HIV or addicted to drugs, become street children or are recruited to fight in other wars. A participant from Uganda noted, “Now we have an entire generation of young people who are lost from wars, disease, and drugs.” The use of child soldiers, although officially denied, is still practiced by many governments as well as rebel groups in Africa. Until there are concerted efforts to prosecute violators, conference participants agreed that the practice would continue to flourish.

Women and children who are not combatants or direct victims of rape or abuse by the enemy during wartime still suffer in the aftermath. A participant from Lesotho noted that women are expected to encourage men to be violent as a display of their masculinity. This, in turn, creates a culture of conflict that results in further violence. Additionally, participants from Sierra Leone, Liberia, the

Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and South Africa all spoke of the high levels of domestic violence that occurred both during and in the aftermath of conflicts. In South Africa, the emasculation of black men often resulted in increased levels of the battering of women and children at home. In Liberia, the wars had robbed men of their livelihoods and many became alcoholics and abused their wives and children. Participants noted that, in these cases, national efforts at establishing reconciliation processes often failed to address issues of domestic violence or the psychological effects of war on men.

Indigenous reconciliation efforts spearheaded by women, however, were often quite successful at reaching a broader section of society. In Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, reconciliation efforts undertaken by women were seen as particularly effective in contributing to national healing. Women's participation in national governments and subregional bodies, while still numerically low, was also believed to be a recognition on the part of many societies that women play a fundamental role in all aspects of peace and security. Civil society participants noted that they could play a role in pressuring regional bodies like the AU, which has mandated 30% of its seats to women, and subregional bodies to ensure that women are represented in the numbers guaranteed.

Conclusion

The three civil society workshops in Africa demonstrated that, while each subregion is shaped by its own unique history and current conflicts, civil society organizations have a valuable role to play in both preventing and intervening in humanitarian crises on the continent. While civil society organizations in West and Southern Africa have a history of working across national boundaries, all participants to the regional conferences agreed that greater networking was needed. In addition, participants called for the establishment of an overarching platform for civil society coordination. Reliance on donor funding and outside international assistance has often had negative effects on civil society organizations, creating competition and

necessitating organizations to change their mandates. Further, there was a recognition that civil society organizations must also look to their own governments, sub-regional and regional bodies for support in order to address the needs of affected populations in an indigenous and holistic manner. Creating national platforms and utilizing existing entry points, as well as identifying and linking with civil society organizations that were already involved with these bodies, was a recommendation that came from all three subregions.

The need to become more engaged in lobbying sub-regional and regional bodies to ensure civil society participation in decisions that affect populations on the ground was seen as fundamental. Also, across the subregions there was an acknowledgement that civil society actors need to assume responsibility for taking a more active role in finding out about the protocols and activities of subregional bodies in order to disseminate information to local populations. Similarly, participants agreed that the creation of national and regional databases on civil society expertise was needed in order to allow organizations to be able to access such information quickly both during and after an intervention. Improving cooperation and coordination through training, joint summits, and capacity-building exercises were all mentioned as activities aimed at integrating the work of civil society organizations and national and subregional bodies. Information campaigns in local languages and through the use of a wide variety of media were also cited in all regions as innovative measures aimed at raising civilian awareness of the organizations.

Finally, the role of women, children and other vulnerable groups in conflict was carefully explored and defined at each workshop with perspectives from many countries. Civil society experts agreed that, without a close examination of culture and history of vulnerable groups, military interventions could potentially exacerbate suffering rather than alleviate it. Furthermore, the necessity of including local civil society experts in all stages of planning, deployment and post-conflict operations was also highlighted, particularly in regards to women and children. The issue of child soldiers was identified as a problem that faced the entire continent and

needed to be addressed at the international, regional and national levels. A concerted effort by the current UN missions in Africa with assistance from the main subregional bodies and local civil society actors could help address this problem with targeted and culturally relevant disarmament and reintegration programs and donor assistance. The significant role that women have played, at the civil society and grassroots levels, in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations and promoting reconciliation and peacebuilding should be acknowledged by governments and multinational bodies.

Civil society organizations in sub-Saharan Africa have many burdens and limitations, but they are committed to eradicating the root causes of conflict in their respective regions and working to empower regional and subregional bodies to better address the needs of civilian populations. There is a growing awareness of the need to network with each other and become actively engaged in advocacy, monitoring and training across national boundaries.

In all three workshops, concrete recommendations and plans to move forward underscored two successful days of dialogue and workshops. As one participant in Kenya summed up, “We have a role and a responsibility to connect the grassroots with the leadership to help prevent the conflicts that kill so many innocents in Africa.”

ENDNOTES

¹ See attached summary document from the October 2001 Fund for Peace conference.

² IGAD: The Intergovernmental Authority on Development; EAC: The East African Community; COMESA: Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa

³ The Sirte Extraordinary Session (1999) decided to establish an African Union. The Lome Summit (2000) adopted the Constitutive Act of the Union. The Lusaka Summit (2001) drew the road map for the implementation of the AU and established the Peace and Security Council, Continental Early Warning System, African Standby Force and Council of the Wise. The Durban Summit (2002) launched the AU and convened the 1st Assembly of the Heads of States of the African Union.