Rehabilitation in Complex Political Emergencies: Is Rebuilding Civil Society the Answer?

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The paper examines the challenge of rehabilitation from complex political emergencies (CPEs) and identifies a strategy that is characterised as a civil society rebuilding approach. It focuses on Somalia and a case study of a CARE project that aims to build the capacity of local NGOs. The paper argues that civil society in CPEs is simultaneously being undermined and contested by warring parties and emerging after state collapse. The scope of the paper is limited to one case study and that case study examines only a single aspect of civil society: national and international NGOs. The paper therefore presents tentative and preliminary results based on limited research. However, in reviewing the literature and presenting a way of approaching the subject, it aims to suggest a starting-point for developing a theoretical framework for such research. The paper finds that international agencies have tended to focus on civil society institutions simply as conduits for aid money and that this has tended to create organisations which lack downward accountability, are dependent on donors and are not addressing the wider roles for civil society envisaged in the approach. Rebuilding civil society does hold out the promise of giving non-military interests a stronger voice and starting a process of changing the aid delivery culture. Achieving these objectives, however, will be a slow and largely indigenous process and there is a need for lowered expectations about what outside assistance can achieve.

Key words: complex political emergencies, civil society, Somalia, CARE, NGOs, case study.

Introduction

This paper will examine the challenge of rehabilitation from complex political emergencies (CPEs). The long-lasting nature of many of today's CPEs has led to a desire on the part of the international community to move beyond relief and engage in rehabilitation even during ongoing conflicts (USG, 1997). Assistance is seen as needing to seize critical thresholds during the conflict process and to tackle the root causes of conflict (Anderson, 1996). As aid agencies attempt to tackle these concerns, similar strategies are being articulated in a number of diverse situations. Drawing on experience from a wide range of CPEs such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Liberia, Angola and south Sudan, a variety of different agencies and academics are arguing that the key to rehabilitation is a strategy of working with and attempting to rebuild civil society.
Prendergast sets this forth clearly: 'the primary objective of interventions [in CPEs] in the future should be to utilise and to build on the capacity of emergent civil and political structures and institutions, in order to reverse the erosion of civil society' (1997: 150).

The claims being made for the potential of these civil society institutions and organisations are substantial. It is argued that, by working with local partners, international agencies can engage in more developmental forms of relief and move assistance towards rehabilitation and development. A strong civil society is also seen as a potential counterweight to the power of predatory militia and government structures. Support for civil society is advocated as a strategy that can promote peace building in conflict-ravaged societies (UNDP, 1997). It is an approach that draws on currently popular development discourses around civil society, capacity building, linking relief and development and conflict resolution.

This paper will be structured as follows. The section immediately following this introduction will outline the main features behind what can be characterised as a civil society rebuilding approach to rehabilitation. The following section will examine the theory of civil society and the next how civil society is affected during CPEs. After these, a case study will be presented which examines civil society and rehabilitation in Somalia. The first case study section will look at how civil society has been affected by the ongoing complex political emergency in Somalia and the next section focuses on a CARE project that has attempted to build the capacity of local NGOs. The paper will argue that, in CPEs, the space occupied by civil society is simultaneously being undermined and contested by warring parties and emerging after state collapse. This presents opportunities for rehabilitation but also suggests a need for caution and for lowered expectations about what outside assistance can achieve in rebuilding civil society.

The scope of the paper is limited to one case study and it, in turn, only examines one aspect of civil society: namely, national and international NGOs. The case study in the last section is based on a three-week consultancy for CARE in Somalia carried out in July 1997. The focus of the consultancy was specifically on CARE programme issues, rather than any broader examination of civil society (Harvey, 1997). The paper, therefore, presents tentative and preliminary results based on limited research. In reviewing the literature and presenting a way of approaching the subject, however, it aims to suggest a starting-point for developing a theoretical framework for such research.¹

**A civil society approach to rehabilitation**

This section will outline the main features behind what we have characterised as a civil society rebuilding approach to rehabilitation. It will attempt to show what has prompted the emergence of this approach, and where and how it is being applied.

Recent definitions of rehabilitation have argued that strengthening local institutional capacity is a crucial component of the transition from relief to development. For example, the European Union has stated:

Rehabilitation must be conceived and implemented as a strategy encompassing institutional reform and strengthening ... People — both victims and participants — must be reintegrated into civil society (European Union, 1996: 6).
Local institutions are a key part of providing more sustainable assistance and moving away from relief (Korner and Seibel, 1995). This forms a part of recent discourse linking relief and development. Traditional relief was portrayed as top-down, standardised and frequently resulting in the loss of local capacity. The answer was for relief interventions to pay more attention to enhancing local capacity; of government where that was possible, but also of NGOs and local communities. Following on from this, rehabilitation was seen as a crucial but neglected link that could ease the transition from relief to development. It should incorporate developmental principles; ‘working with and through local institutions and consulting with local people about their perceptions and needs’ (Buchanan-Smith and Maxwell, 1994: 8).

The problem in many of today’s CPEs is that rehabilitation is being contemplated without the emergence of effective government structures. In countries such as Somalia and Liberia there is no national government and at local and regional levels, the degree of government is rudimentary; what Zartman (1995) has characterised as state collapse. Authorities that do remain are more often part of the problem, rather than the solution. Predatory militias, warlords or decaying governments are the very authorities that are, in part, responsible for the emergency in the first place. Often they are still fighting, are using military tactics that deliberately create famine and are responsible for the diversion and manipulation of relief (de Waal, 1996). In these situations the question of who to work with is especially problematic. For example, in south Sudan, capacity-building assistance to the humanitarian wings of the rebel movements has been criticised for compromising the neutrality of relief assistance and so endangering the provision of humanitarian relief in the context of a negotiated access programme (Macrae et al., 1997).

Despite these problems there is a desire on the part of donors to move beyond relief and begin rehabilitation, even in situations of ongoing conflict. There are a number of reasons for this desire to start the rehabilitation process as soon as possible.

- The situation in parts of the country or for periods of time is perceived as peaceful enough to begin rehabilitation.
- In the context of donor pressure to improve the efficiency of aid delivery and donor fatigue at prolonged provision of relief, rehabilitation programming is seen as more efficient and cost effective than relief.
- It is hoped that rehabilitation may provide an impetus towards peace building and conflict resolution and be able to address the root causes of conflict.
- There are concerns that continued provision of relief may serve to prolong the conflict and attract further violence.

Rehabilitation is a problematic concept. The term as it is used here is not meant to imply that the emergency is over, or that there is likely to be a straightforward transition to development. The term is, however, being increasingly used by donors and aid agencies keen to engage in more than traditional forms of emergency relief. This paper, therefore, uses the term but argues that the boundaries between relief, rehabilitation and development are blurred and overlapping. Rehabilitation is not a separate sphere of activities but one of a range of programming options for providing assistance in CPEs that meets basic needs and contributes to peace-building objectives (Harvey et al., 1997).

It is in response to these pressures that a narrative around rebuilding civil society is emerging. Narratives are defined by Roe as simply stories that mobilise action. He
argues that uncertainty helps to create: 'broad explanatory narratives that can be operationalised into standard approaches with widespread application' (Roe, 1991: 288).

The arguments that make up this emerging narrative can be characterised as follows. A strong civil society is crucial to development (Diamond, 1994). In CPEs civil society and social capital are badly eroded (Macrac and Zwi, 1994). Given that there is no government to work with, governance capacity needs to be rebuilt from the bottom up, together with civil society and social capital. It is hoped that this will marginalise existing predatory authorities. Strengthening non-military interests will create a platform for peace by allowing space and a voice for civil society to express its desire for peace. The above arguments are a simplified characterisation of the argument put forward by advocates of a civil society approach to rehabilitation. Richards (1996: 163) for example, argues that 'coping with war depends on cultural and institutional resourcefulness within civil society' and argues that international agencies should attempt to support this resourcefulness.

The approach is reflected in agency policy on the ground during CPEs, as strengthening civil society and peace-building activities have become increasingly acceptable and indeed attractive to donors. Hence we have Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) becoming involved in capacity building through supporting local NGOs and rebel humanitarian wings (Karim et al., 1996). In Afghanistan UNDP has built its rehabilitation programme around shuras (councils of village men that resolve disputes and govern daily life at village level) and argues that 'to invest in rebuilding is still the best chance to invest in peace' (Meier, 1997: 15). In Somalia the CARE Umbrella Grant works with local Somali NGOs and ActionAid has provided support for peace conferences held by local elders (CARE, 1996; Bradbury, 1993). In Liberia Lowenkopf (1995) argues that the emergence of neighbourhood committees to handle the distribution of food aid is evidence of an emerging strength in civil society which could provide a countervailing force to the militias. Table 1 summarises how this approach is being applied in a number of countries.

This narrative presents a beguiling prospect. It fits with the current enthusiasm for bottom-up, participatory and empowering development and incorporates three currently fashionable development concepts: civil society, social capital and capacity building. It allows international agencies to claim that by working with civil society institutions, they are engaging with the current enthusiasm for conflict resolution or peace building. Through its adoption of currently popular development discourses, there is a danger that this narrative will be accepted uncritically. There is a need, therefore, to look critically at the theory behind the approach and the way in which the approach has adapted these theories to the context of CPEs.

**Civil society and social capital**

In the narrative outlined above, civil society is seen as a potentially positive force. In this section we will trace the origins of this optimistic view of civil society, point to some of the problems with this optimism and argue that a more sceptical view of civil society is appropriate in CPEs.

Civil society re-emerged in political discourse in the mid-1980s. In both the neoliberal and neo-populist development paradigms, civil society, and recently social
capital, play key roles in promoting democratic values and participation and serve as a counterbalance to the power of the state (Robinson, 1995). Promoting and strengthening civil society is advocated as a key role of development assistance. For neo-liberals, civil society provides a check on the state and is indispensable in fostering a vibrant market economy. In the good government agenda, civil society provides channels of communication and promotes accountability between the state and its citizens (Diamond, 1994). Neo-populists have embraced civil society as a way of reaching the grass roots, encouraging bottom-up development and generating participation from the poor and disempowered (Chambers, 1997). Civil society in development theory, therefore, as in the emerging narrative, is assumed to be independent from the state and a fundamentally positive force.

The term social capital has also recently been adopted by development practitioners and academics, as shown by the establishment of a social capital satellite group within the World Bank (1996). Its recent popularity has stemmed from Putnam (1993: 167)
Is Rebuilding Civil Society the Answer?  

who defines social capital as, 'features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions'. Putnam's argument is that civic engagement, measured in terms of membership in horizontal networks, enhances social trust. These horizontal networks produce a social environment that breeds and facilitates responsive government. Civic communities demand better government, as they are more likely to stand up for the common good. What the emerging literature on social capital adds to the debate on civil society is its emphasis on the importance of trust in social networks and relationships. This is particularly important for our purposes as trust tends to be broken down in CPEs and needs to be rebuilt in any process of rehabilitation.

Competing interpretations of civil society have their roots in various currents of Western political philosophy (Hyden, 1996). In the liberal tradition, civil society is portrayed as a plurality of civil associations which serve to counterbalance the power of the state, advocate popular demands and promote democratic values. The Marxist tradition criticises this perspective. Hegel and Marx saw civil society as the product of a long historical process governed by the emergence of a sphere of market relations under capitalism. Civil society was equated with the bourgeoisie. More recently, Gramsci, writing in the Marxist tradition, portrayed civil society as an arena of conflict. Civic institutions reproduce and disseminate the hegemonic values of the dominant classes but this hegemony can be contested by social movements representing alternative norms. In this tradition civil society is seen in terms of conflict, with the state attempting to penetrate and control civil society. However, in the recent enthusiasm for civil society the Gramscian perspective seems to have been lost.

All of these competing interpretations use civil society as much as a normative concept as an analytical tool. It is seen as a tool for the promotion of democracy, the market economy or capitalism. This tends to result in restrictive definitions of civil society with some sectors of society being selected as truly 'civil' and others dismissed as authoritarian, traditional or pre-capitalist, depending on the divergent political and intellectual traditions of the writer. For the purpose of this paper the need is for a definition of civil society that, as White argues, aims to come to terms with the breadth of the concept rather than restricting it to a more narrow set of phenomena. Civil society will, therefore, be defined herein as: 'an intermediate associational realm between state and family, populated by organisations enjoying some autonomy in relation to the state and formed voluntarily by members of society to protect their interests or values' (White, 1994: 6).

This sociological approach to civil society means that it embraces a wide range of social forces. These might be modern or traditional; foster or hinder democracy; and be involved in, or outside, politics. It could include distinctly 'uncivil' entities such as the Mafia or the interhamwe (death squads in the Rwanda genocide). This definition, therefore, does not assume that civil society is always a positive force for development. As Fatten (1992) argues, the emergence of civil society is contradictory; it can be repressive as well as liberating, megalitarian as well as equalising and obscurantist as well as forward looking. The definition of 'some autonomy' is not meant to imply complete separation or independence.

This is particularly important for analysing civil society in CPEs, where a more Gramscian perspective, which acknowledges questions of power and sees civil society as a contested arena, is appropriate. The fact that a positive view of civil society
dominant in the development literature has been transferred to the conceptualisation of civil society in CPEs raises a number of problems. For example, civil society is commonly linked with good governance, but there is a need to ask what role is played by different sections of civil society where governance has broken down and where warring parties and local authorities exploit its absence. This is the subject of the next section.

The impact of CPEs on civil society

This section will examine the impact of CPEs on civil society. The literature on CPEs tends to state simply that CPEs are destructive of civil society and that it therefore needs to be rebuilt in the rehabilitation period. For example, Macrae and Zwi note 'many contemporary conflicts are synonymous with the breakdown of civil institutions' (1994: 225). There is little, if any, analysis of how CPEs break down civil society and what implications this has for rebuilding. A better understanding of the processes at work in CPEs is necessary, and this section will argue that civil society is often simultaneously an important source of support at the same time that it is being undermined and contested. It is clear that, as we suggested in the previous section, a purely optimistic view of civil society is inappropriate and it should be seen instead as a contested arena.

CPEs also result in the collapse, or at least weakening of state power (Zartman, 1995). State collapse affects civil society in a number of ways. Azarya has traced three main processes of what he calls disengagement that clearly apply to CPEs:

- There is a retreat into a parallel economy (subsistence and/or black market).
- Traditional structures and authority regain force as familiar bases in which people seek protection from the instability and arbitrariness of state channels.
- Narrower bases of communal solidarity (village, family, ethnic, religious) are reinforced (Azarya, 1988: 8; Chazan et al., 1992).

The collapse of a centralised state does not mean that these processes of disengagement are complete and that civil society can be seen as completely independent. Even in the most extreme cases of state collapse, such as Somalia and Liberia, local authorities still perform some of the functions of the state, albeit in a more limited and often predatory form. While in Chad, Nolutshungu (1996) found that power devolved to armed groups which to a degree, performed some of the functions of states in the localities where they had military predominance. These local authorities simultaneously attack civil society, as part of their military strategies, and contest the processes of disengagement in attempts to use civil society to mobilise support and resources. The broad definition of civil society proposed in the previous section could clearly include militia groups. However, because warring parties continue to provide some state functions, this paper will exclude them from civil society.

The first point to note about civil society in CPEs is the obvious one that war undermines civil society. War affects civil society in three main ways. First, displacement splits up families and communities and takes individuals away from a context in which they can draw on reciprocal networks. Second, the looting of assets results in an overall lack of resources within communities, which undermines
exchange networks. If even the wealthier members of a community have been subject to looting, they are less likely to be able to assist weaker and poorer members. Third, military strategies of exemplary terror, such as dehumanising acts of torture and mutilation targeted at families and communities, results in the destruction of the social fabric that is the basis for civil society (Swift, 1996).

Indeed, the purpose of military tactics of exemplary terror seems to be to attack and undermine social capital and civil society. Otherwise they make little sense and appear as acts of random brutality and meaningless violence. As de Waal (1996: 14) argues, destabilisation through acts of violence can, 'create a climate of mistrust and turn a community against itself'. He argues that the purpose of Renamo's graphic mutilation of captives in Mozambique was to undermine the citizen's sense of security. The aim is to destabilise areas and communities that are seen as opposed to the faction carrying out the violence. Byrne (1995) notes that rape and sexual violence appear to be a universal characteristic of warfare and often seem to be part of a policy to demoralise communities. Civil society is further undermined by the manipulation of ethnic identities by warring parties. Adams and Bradbury argue that this process hardens differences between ethnic groups and destroys long-standing reciprocal relations (1995).

Attempts to disengage from the state by retreating into a parallel economy are clearly contested by warring parties. Militia leaders need the profits generated from engagement in the parallel economy to sustain their military efforts. For example, Taylor's control of greater Liberia was based on an extensive commercial network with its own currency and banking system. Exports of diamonds and timber continued during the worst of the fighting and enabled Taylor to finance his political and military networks (Reno, 1995). Clearly, if the informal economy as a whole is seen as part of civil society this makes the concept too broad. However, the way in which civil society institutions interact with the informal economy is an important part of the response of civil society to war and state collapse.

Although civil society is undermined and contested during CPEs, this is only part of the story. Despite attacks on it, and attempts to control and subvert it by warring parties, civil society institutions and organisations continue to exist and indeed to thrive at a local level. As Zartman (1995: 268) argues, 'authority structures around elders, traditional conflict management procedures, active trading networks and inventive community operations grow up to fill local vacuums.' This is reflected in the continuing strength of traditional institutions that, despite being weakened, continue to provide a degree of social stability. For example, in Afghanistan, UNDP has found that shuras, traditional male political institutions, have provided some stability. As Sultan Aziz, the project manager, argues, 'there are few things left that the Afghans trust anymore. But they trust the shuras' (Meier, 1997: 12). Religion is another institution that we see societies turning towards, as witnessed by the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and fundamentalist Islamic organisations in Somalia. The rise of these religious organisations reinforces the point that emergent civil society groups can be civil or uncivil, depending on your perspective, and are often a complex mixture of the modern and the traditional.

The resilience of civil society is also reflected in the continued strength of the parallel economy. For example, Richards (1996) found women from Bo in central Sierra Leone trading palm oil from the rebel-ringed plantation areas, having discovered ways to handle the complex check-point culture of the conflict zone. He
argues that this resilience of commerce, ‘may be one of the most important processes through which the civil agrarian zones in war-torn Sierra Leone get back on their feet and extend peace from within’ (Richards, 1996: 156).

The picture that emerges, therefore, defies simple characterisation. Civil society is simultaneously emerging, being undermined and contested, in ongoing CPEs. This section has traced five inter-linked processes affecting civil society during CPEs.

- An extreme process of the disengagement of civil society from the state.
- A fallback on primary groupings within civil society. Kinship, tribal, religious and traditional political structures serve as coping strategies of people in response to state collapse.
- Military strategies, extreme scarcity and displacement serve to undermine civil society.
- Predatory local authorities continue to contest the space of civil society, moving into the parallel economy and attempting to create support by drawing on nepotism-ties based on ethnicity.
- The continued strength of civil society at a local level, both in the parallel economy and in traditional institutions.

These processes have a number of important implications for an approach to rehabilitation that focuses on civil society. Civil society in CPEs emerges as a contested arena that is not as independent from the state as suggested in the development literature or the emerging narrative. Therefore, the hope that building civil society will marginalise warlords, is likely to be problematic and one must examine the accommodations civil society organisations have to make with local authorities. The weakness of civil society during and after CPEs is likely to affect the capability and absorptive capacity of remaining civil society institutions. This suggests the need to move slowly in capacity-building initiatives to avoid any danger of overwhelming institutions by providing too many resources too quickly.

**Rehabilitation and civil society in Somalia**

This section will take the issues explored in the earlier sections and examine them in the context of Somalia. It is based on a review of the literature on Somalia, which is growing but still limited. It should, therefore, be seen as a preliminary attempt to sketch some of the dimensions of civil society. More detailed work would need to be done to reflect the true richness of how different institutions and organisations within civil society were affected by the war.

Even before the war, civil society in Somalia had been weakened by years of authoritarian rule. Between 1969 and 1991 Somalia was governed by Siad Barre, a tyrannical ruler who relied on military force to sustain his control. During this period government was extremely centralised and the growth of independent, modern civil society organisations heavily restricted. More traditional clan-based identities were also brutally manipulated by Barre’s regime. Adam (1995: 73) describes his tactics as ‘brutal divide and rule’, first using the army to conduct punitive raids against clans seen as opposed to the regime and then arming so-called loyal clans and encouraging them to wage wars against ‘rebel’ clans.
Civil society was further weakened by the predatory behaviour of militias during the emergency. From December 1991 to March 1992, the south suffered almost continual warfare. Mass executions, destruction of agricultural land, looting of grain stores and livestock, destruction of water supplies and homes led to massive displacement and widespread starvation (de Waal, 1994). Minority groups, notably the Rahanweyne, the Digil and Bantu tribes were particularly vulnerable and suffered the brunt of the famine in 1991 and 1992 (African Rights, 1993). Gender-specific human rights abuses took the form of rape and forced marriages, and most at risk were women who lacked the protection of powerful clan structures or who belonged to ethnic minorities (Power-Stevens, 1995).

Since 1992, conflict and violence have continued to undermine civil society and it remains a vulnerable and contested space. For example, Human Rights Watch reported in 1995 that political murder of community leaders had become more common, sometimes apparently motivated by a desire to prevent efforts at reconciliation led by traditional clan leaders. In February 1995, a sultan and nine other Dегodia people were reportedly seized and slaughtered by Habr Gedir militia, apparently for having sought to promote reconciliation with other subclans. Their bodies were reportedly put on display by General Aideed’s forces in Mogadishu (Human Rights Watch Africa, 1995). This graphically illustrates the limits to bottom-up peace building in ongoing CPEs. Warring parties are unlikely passively to accept being marginalised.

Another factor shaping the development of civil society has been the history of international assistance in Somalia. Since the 1960s, international assistance has been marked by lack of accountability and a top-down focus. The lack of independent civil society organisations meant that most international aid was channelled through the government. For Somalis at the community level this meant that aid was associated with the discredited public sector and that participation in development projects was extremely limited.

The lack of modern associational networks independent of the state is illustrated by the history of NGOs in Somalia. Before the civil war, very few organisations were officially registered with the government as NGOs. They first appeared in the early 1980s, in the wake of international aid agencies that rushed in to help with the huge influx of Ethiopian refugees as a result of the 1977–8 Ogaden war. NGOs were therefore, only beginning to emerge when the civil war broke out, and the impetus for their formation was a major relief initiative (Abdullahi, 1995). This is not meant to imply that civil society in Somalia can be reduced to NGOs. Clearly, traditional clan-based identities retained their strength, despite manipulation by the regime. Indeed the formation of militias and ethnically defined non-state groups can be seen as a reaction of civil society to political violence and pressure.

The negative attitudes towards aid at the community level, produced by the nature of development assistance before 1991, were compounded by the massive relief assistance provided during the UNOSOM period. Much of the assistance was top-down, short-term and delivered with little concern for community participation and often manipulated and diverted. UNOSOM attempted to address these problems by working with local institutions. In 1992 and 1993, UNOSOM and other UN agencies announced that they would fund LNGOs to implement basic relief and rehabilitation programmes.

Although the concept of an NGO was largely new in Somalia, the availability of funds meant that the idea was quickly adopted. The result was a sudden mushrooming of NGOs
and, in Mogadishu, they numbered in the thousands. Many of these consisted of little more than a few individuals with little capacity or experience and a primary concern with making money from the funds available. Corruption and diversion of funds were common (Prendergast, 1997). Funding was short term with a focus on projects such as food for work and rebuilding basic infrastructure such as schools or health posts. Accountability was limited and capacity building for the NGOs was rarely part of the process. The result of this process was widespread suspicion of local NGO motives, both between the international community and NGOs and between NGOs and communities. Since the withdrawal of UNOSOM and a decline in available funding most of these NGOs have disappeared, but a legacy of suspicion remains.

However, as we argued in the previous section, despite attacks on it, civil society also serves as an important fall-back mechanism. A common response to the fighting since 1991 has been for Somalis to return to their home areas where kinship ties can provide some support and security. As the War-Torn Societies Project argues, these ties:

have served for many Somalis as a guarantee of security and protection from violence and upheaval. The segmentary social system of the Somalis has arguably done more than any other factor to mitigate the ravages of civil war and state collapse (1997: 5).

Traditional civil society institutions have not played an exclusively positive role. The armed militia factions have drawn on clan-based identities to mobilise support. This generates a paradoxical situation in which clan loyalties have served to generate hostility and violence, but these same ties have also provided mutual support and helped to regulate social behaviour in the absence of a government (War-Torn Societies Project, 1997).

Civil society’s strength can also be seen in the resilience, and in some places resurgence, of the informal economy. Again, however, this is a contested arena and the militias have made determined efforts to control and profit from the informal economy. The banana wars between rival exporters supported by local militia groups are a good example. Militias also control the lucrative khat trade. Green (1995) estimated that Aideed controlled at least US$20 million a year in 1995 through control of khat imports and fruit exports.

In the relatively peaceful areas of the north-east and Somaliland, male elders have played a key role in negotiating peace accords and developing some civil governance capacity. This process has been hailed by some writers as an example of an indigenous grass-roots approach to conflict resolution that the international community could support (Farah and Lewis, 1993). Bradbury (1993: 88) describes it as a ‘bottom-up approach where people rebuild their relations of trust and cooperation from the grassroots’ and contrasts it to a top-down approach that recognises the legitimacy of warring parties. The Boroma conference held in Somaliland in 1993 is an example of how traditional civil society institutions have contributed to a process of conflict resolution. It was held to resolve fighting that had broken out after the declaration of Somaliland independence in 1991 and produced a National Charter which set out a transitional structure for the government of Somaliland for the next two years.

In southern Somalia, grass-roots political developments have been more fragmented, and less successful in creating peace or governance capacity. As
Menkhaus and Prendergast argue, the most significant feature of the Somali political landscape has been the ‘radical localisation of [Somalia’s] politics’ (1995: 47). Indigenous local administrative structures are, however, beginning to appear in southern Somalia. Local communities have adapted to the collapse of the state by developing a variety of informal systems that provide minimal functions of day-to-day governance. These local-level authority structures are largely traditional forms that bring together the elders, merchants and religious leaders of a clan. Human Rights Watch Africa (1995) argues that they have restored a degree of protection for local communities from gross abuses by rival militias. A variety of local institutions and organisations have emerged from this process. In some areas Islamic courts have imposed a degree of law and order by imposing sharia law on offenders. Some communities have developed their own self-defence militias which provide some protection from the armies of warlords, rival militia groups and bandit gangs.

The continuing conflict in southern Somalia suggests that civil society cannot be seen as separate or independent. Agencies attempting to work with civil society will need to consider how their support interacts with local political and military realities. However, the processes traced above also suggest that there are opportunities to work with emerging civil society institutions in constructive ways. This section has suggested that different roles are played by the wide range of institutions and organisations within civil society in Somalia. As Prendergast (1997: 98) argues, ‘clan elders are almost always central players in clan reconciliation and conflict mediation, but they may not be the most effective or appropriate actors for managing and overseeing a demobilisation programme’.

We turn now to a case study of a CARE project that has attempted to seize these opportunities by aiming to build the capacity of local NGOs. As we come to look at the case study the following key questions will be addressed:

- As civil society is a contested space, how do NGOs fit into local political structures?
- As civil society has been weakened by war, do NGOs have the absorptive capacity to implement projects and is there potential to move towards sustainability?
- Given the history of aid in Somalia, are NGOs able to mobilise community support and contribute to civil society at a local level?

**CARE and civil society in Somalia**

This section will examine in detail a CARE project which aimed to approach rehabilitation by working with civil society organisations. CARE has been operating a USAID-funded project in Somalia since 1993, now called the Somalia Partnership Project (SPP). This project funds local and international NGOs to implement projects in the areas of health, income generation and agriculture (CARE Somalia, 1996). Institutional capacity building is seen by CARE as a vital element of the project and is addressed through training and technical support. CARE argues that, ‘local NGOs have proven themselves to be a viable alternative towards positive change’ (CARE Somalia, 1996: 1). The information here is based on interviews with CARE staff and CARE’s NGO partners and beneficiaries. As no independent evaluation of the
project has yet been undertaken, judgements about the project are necessarily subjective. As the field-work was part of a consultancy for CARE, the focus was on specific programming issues and NGOs and broader questions about the interaction between aid and other aspects of civil society could not be addressed.

During the past three and a half years, the Umbrella Grant has funded a total of 37 projects and 28 NGOs. As of March 1997 CARE had committed $7.045 million. Careful systems for financial reporting, monitoring and evaluation have created enough safeguards that CARE is confident of an improved level of upward accountability. A lengthy selection procedure has enabled the programme to develop a reputation as a funding source that only committed NGOs should apply for. The training offered to NGOs has provided them with enough capacity to develop, plan and implement simple projects. However, CARE’s NGO partners still have limited organisational capacity, the projects being implemented are technically weak and problems with embezzlement still occur.

Training for NGOs has largely focused on their internal effectiveness and organisational development. The main stress of the project has therefore been on NGO’s upward accountability to CARE and their own internal organisational effectiveness. This raises a number of questions about the role of NGOs in civil society, problems with the way the project is currently structured and challenges for the future development of the SPP. These are:

- participation and downward accountability;
- sustainability;
- NGOs and politics.

NGOs in Somalia, as in other CPEs, have been formed in response to donor pressure; they lack the strong links to communities that would enable them to contribute to civil society at a local level. The participation of many communities in SPP projects remains limited. A central challenge in developing more genuine participation will be for NGOs to focus more on the creation and strengthening of local institutions and on capacity building at the local level.

At the moment, the creation and training of local institutions, such as farmer associations or water committees is often a part of NGO projects but has tended to take a back seat to more concrete and easily achievable activities. For example, in Bossaso, DanDor and SORSO (NGOs) both included the establishment of village-managed revolving funds as part of their projects. In practice, the rush to complete the physical outputs of the project (irrigation system improvements and soil conservation) meant that the capacity-building component was neglected. Plans to hand over projects to community ownership are often a part of NGO plans, but few NGOs have provided community-based organisations (CBOs) with enough training to make this a realistic goal. Without greater downward accountability NGOs may develop the ability to spend aid money, but will not empower communities to demand better governance.

The NGOs in the SPP are basically fulfilling the role of direct service providers and there is a danger that the SPP will simply move assistance from unsustainable direct implementation by INGOs to unsustainable direct service delivery by NGOs. Part of the problem is related to the history of NGOs discussed earlier. Initially modelled on international relief agencies in the 1980s, NGOs since 1991 have moulded themselves, and been moulded, in the image of the international relief
agencies that flooded Somalia during the UNOSOM period. The model is, therefore, based on the relief mentality discussed earlier: direct implementation; free assistance; large-scale projects; and limited community consultation.

Sustainability is a key issue. At the moment LNGOs are largely dependent on continued CARE funding and the sustainability of both their projects and the LNGOs is questionable. One focus of CARE’s plans is to achieve project sustainability through the inclusion of cost recovery or profit components in projects. A good example of this is Bani Adam, an NGO which provides loans to farmers for land preparation and is repaid in kind. By storing the crops it is repaid and selling when food prices are higher, the project has been able to make a profit ($7,000 in the last season) and so expand its project area. An NGO running a vocational school in Bossaso also aims to achieve sustainability by running a production unit as part of the school. This suggests that for LNGOs engaging with the emerging business community is a key task and could improve sustainability.

CARE is also planning to hold training workshops on fund-raising strategies. If, however, these are to generate more than good intentions, there may be a need to consider more concrete strategies. An example might be an insistence on having NGOs raise a certain proportion of funds from local sources in future projects. In the north-west and north-east strategies to encourage local administrations to take over some responsibility for services could also be part of a sustainability strategy.

The relationship between LNGOs and local authorities and militias is clearly of crucial importance, given our argument that civil society in CPEs is a contested space. CARE’s policy and that of the LNGOs interviewed was one of neutrality and attempting to keep LNGO projects completely independent from militia interference. This is, however, a tricky area to research. While LNGOs told me that they avoided engaging with political processes and militias, it was impossible to verify this. They were unlikely to admit to having to pay off militia leaders out of CARE funds, for example.

What the LNGOs told me, was that they try to keep their work completely separate from local militias and political leaders. If they do get pressure from militias, they appeal to local administrative structures, traditional elders or the wider community to solve the problem. LNGOs need to get the approval of local administrations and traditional elders and inform them of what they are doing. Because the militia leaders rely, to some extent, on the support of clan elders, the latter can help the LNGOs to deal with pressure from militias. How accurately this represents the real situation is probably unanswerable. Two points, however, can be made. The first is that generating community support for a project may be a way of insulating the NGO from political pressure. Militia leaders and political authorities will be wary of disrupting a project if the community is mobilised and the project is delivering real benefits. If the NGO is seen to be lining its own pockets, militia leaders are more likely to demand their slice of the cake. Second, the resources in question are relatively small scale. CARE only funds the salaries of a few NGO staff and project materials are limited: for example, concrete for wells or irrigation networks, or a limited number of seeds for extension purposes. This makes it less likely that NGO projects will attract the attention of militias or exacerbate conflict.

Distancing themselves from politics and militia groups has been a necessary strategy for NGO survival in southern Somalia. In the north-east and north-west, however, the question that arises is how NGOs should attempt to interact with emerging governance structures that are not predatory.
In the north-west (Somaliland), the emergence of a reasonably representative government with some, albeit limited, capacity, means that it will be important to consider whether new projects will contribute to or undermine the emerging governance capacity. For example, if LNGOs are providing services that should eventually be provided by government (health or agricultural extension, for example), how should local administrations be involved? In the longer term, CARE might need to consider strategies such as insisting on local government contributions to projects.

The SPP programme is an example of an approach to rehabilitation that focuses on building the capacity of civil society organisations. In this section we have moved from broad issues to more specific and small-scale programmatic issues of how to work with LNGOs. This in itself suggests a need for lowered expectations about what international agencies can achieve in supporting the emergence of civil society. Over four years and with $7 million invested, the project has begun to build a network of local organisations able to manage and implement development projects and foster trust between LNGOs and communities, but this is still at an early stage. CARE's experience suggests that it is possible to develop worthwhile partnerships, even during a CPE, where the capacity of local institutions is extremely weak, but that establishing partnerships requires a major investment in time and resources and a comprehensive capacity-building strategy.

Conclusion

This paper has identified a strategy towards rehabilitation in CPEs that has been characterised as a civil society rebuilding approach. The review of the theory that informs this emerging narrative suggested an overall need for caution about what outside assistance can achieve in rebuilding civil society. A need for tempered optimism was borne out by the case study of rehabilitation in Somalia. Civil society in Somalia has been a highly contested space and initiatives that threaten the authority of Somalia's warlords risk a violent response. A central problem for aid agencies in finding space for more developmental interventions, is continuing violence and the lack of political authorities able to levy taxes and accumulate and disburse funds for the public good. Attempts to move away from relief are also made difficult because of a legacy of diversion, manipulation and suspicion towards aid, created by the flood of poorly delivered relief during the UNOSOM period.

Despite these obstacles, however, some positive developments can be identified. In Somaliland and the north-east, traditional elders are playing an important role in a process of conflict resolution. Local administrative structures are beginning to emerge that provide minimal functions of day-to-day governance, and in parts of the country, a thriving business community is growing. These are largely indigenous developments and what international agencies can contribute to these processes is likely to be limited. They can support positive developments but cannot make them happen.

This is what CARE has attempted to do in a project that supports local NGOs, but CARE's experience demonstrates the need for low expectations. The low initial capacity of CARE's partners has meant that even developing a minimum of project planning and management capability and accountability has required major investments in time and resources. CARE's project is narrowly focused on local NGOs and does not embrace the full diversity and complexity of civil society. It is also
essentially socio-economic in nature, aiming at rebuilding local livelihoods and developing local institutional capacity to continue this process. While it is unfair to criticise CARE for not doing something which it did not set out to do, it is illustrative of a more general weakness with the civil society rebuilding approach.

International agencies have tended to focus on civil society institutions simply as conduits for aid money in an attempt to make humanitarian assistance more sustainable and developmental. This, however, tends to create organisations which lack downward accountability, are heavily dependent on donors and are not yet addressing the wider roles for civil society envisaged in the emerging narrative. There is little evidence for the claim that strengthening civil society may create a platform for peace and marginalise warlords. The rehabilitation of civil society is a socio-political process proceeding alongside the broader macro-political processes that occur after conflict. It is unlikely to serve as a substitute for these macro-level political processes and warring parties will probably still have to be accommodated in national-level political settlements, as events in Liberia demonstrate. Rebuilding civil society is not a convenient substitute for the complicated task of rebuilding the state and tackling problems of governance.

These conclusions do not invalidate the emerging narrative but they do suggest that it is overly simplistic and optimistic and exaggerates what international agencies can achieve. Civil society rebuilding holds out the promise of giving non-military interests a stronger voice. It can start a process of changing the aid delivery culture from relief to development, making the provision of assistance more sustainable and less dependent on outside agencies. Perhaps, by amplifying the voice of civil society, it can begin a process of making political leaders more accountable and contribute to a demand for better governance. It is important to recognise, however, that achieving these objectives will be a slow and largely indigenous process.

Civil society rebuilding is not a magic wand for the problems faced in today's CPEs, but it does suggest a strategy that could enable international agencies to address some of the failings of past humanitarian assistance. This paper only scratches at the surface of what happens to civil society during and after CPEs and the question of whether and how it can be supported. Further comparative studies of capacity-building initiatives in south Sudan and Afghanistan would be especially valuable, and more detailed work needs to be done at the community level to understand more fully how local institutions respond to and cope with conflict.

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Notes

1. A lengthier version of this paper with a more complete list of references has been published as IDS Working Paper 60, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton.
References


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