

6

CHAPTER 6

Volunteerism, cohesion and conflict management

Volunteerism is a source of community strength, resilience, solidarity and social cohesion. It can bring positive social change by fostering respect for diversity, equality and the participation of all. It is among society's most vital assets.

Ban Ki-moon (2009, December)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about the links between volunteerism and social cohesion in situations of violent conflict. The World Development Report for 2011, *Conflict, Security, and Development*, states that 1.5 billion people today live in countries affected by political violence, organized crime, exceptionally high murder rates or low-intensity conflicts. Violent conflict is now seen as a key challenge to development as it deters investment, limits access to employment and educational opportunities, drains state resources and threatens governance. It erodes social cohesion and is becoming the primary cause of poverty.¹ For many people, living in the midst of direct physical violence is a “normal” part of life.²

Conflict is more or less normal in any ethnically or religiously plural society and open expressions of conflict are more likely to occur in democratic societies. The important question is how a conflict is managed, whether through institutions and social norms or through violence. There are various forms of violence including organized and individual crime and violence against women. Our concern here is with violent, armed conflict. The twenty-first century marks a break with the past as inter-state wars have declined sharply. In their place, there is strife within nations in the form of conflict at community and national levels. Here, people can contribute at every stage. Through volunteer action, they can ease tensions that may give rise to violent conflict; engage in conflict resolution; and create a common sense of purpose once the immediate conflict is over in order to prevent new violence. At the root of all such interventions are the civic values and desire for democratic engagement expressed throughout this report. As noted by UNDP: “Peace can be agreed by high-level leaders gathered around negotiating tables but such accords must be matched by initiatives which

promote the ability of society to deal with and overcome conflict in the short, intermediate and long-term. Peace building requires that communities learn to address the past, adjust to the present and plan for the future.”³

We will look at conflict through the lens of social cohesion. This can be created and reinforced by people supporting one another, largely at local level, through volunteer action. We consider volunteer-based interventions that can help to prevent tensions, mitigate the impact when tensions spill over into violence or assist recovery when the tensions subside. We also focus on women and young people as the two segments of the population most affected by violent conflict in addition to their role as real and potential peace builders. The remainder of this chapter will consider examples of volunteer action at three stages: pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict. However, we recognize that violent conflict does not occur in such a linear way.

SOCIAL COHESION AND VIOLENT CONFLICT

Social cohesion has long been considered a factor in promoting sustainable development, as was discussed in Chapter 4. Social cohesion as an attribute of groups also has a key role to play in the context of violent conflict. One way to describe social cohesion is a situation in which a society is characterized by two complementary features. The first feature is an absence of severe inequalities in terms of income or wealth; racial, religious or ethnic tensions; or other forms of polarization. The second is the presence of strong social bonds demonstrable in terms of trust and norms of reciprocity. Such societies have an abundance of voluntary associations in which different groups in society are free to participate. There are also structures and institutions, such as an independent judiciary and an independent media, that support conflict management.⁴ It is generally under-

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stood that volunteerism entails a sense of belonging and active participation, of cooperation and solidarity.⁵ An individual with a sense of belonging, motivated by a strong commitment, will do something because it is the right thing to do rather than because it maximizes utility.⁶ As noted by the World Bank: "Social cohesion manifests in individuals who are willing and able to work together to address common needs, overcome constraints and consider diverse interests. They are able to resolve differences in a civil, non-confrontational way."⁷

Social cohesion is a key variable in the way in which people react to the risk of violent conflict, in their response when it actually breaks out, and in their actions in its aftermath. The stronger the social cohesion, the more likely it is that there will be webs of social connections and social interactions. Such webs define volunteer action. They lessen the risks of social disorganization, fragmentation and exclusion which, in turn, feed back into violence. As we have already seen, the value system underpinning volunteerism promotes norms of reciprocity and fosters trustworthiness. These favour efforts to reduce violent conflict and mitigate its effects. Of course, where networks are exclusionary on ethnic or other grounds, they can be manipulated for individual and group advantage and lead to extremism.⁸ During the Rwandan genocide in 1994, for example, Hutu power groups relied on hate propaganda "that bonded Hutu, primarily male unemployed and uneducated youth, to form such groups as the Interahamwe ("those who attack together" in Kinyarwanda) who were at the forefront of the genocide."⁹

Networks based on volunteerism that operate among people with common interests, whether they know one another or not, have a valuable role to play in situations of potential or actual violent conflict. In 2005, the Commission for Africa recognized their effectiveness in African society and qualified

them as non-state forms of governance. The Commission also highlighted their lack of visibility: "These are social networks that all too often can seem invisible to many from the developed world who have a different and more formal perspective on governance but which form much of the social capital without which many African communities could not function...For many people, their primary loyalty remains with the family, clan, tribe or other social networks, including, increasingly, religious groups."¹⁰ The contribution of volunteer action for peace often takes place in the context of such networks or through informal associations or mutual aid groups. As conflicts involve different factions or parties, peace building requires reciprocal contacts between all the stakeholders. In the case of violent outbreak, this includes all those taking an active role in the fighting. Such contacts may give rise to the creation of national or regional peace networks.

VOLUNTEERISM IN THE PREVENTION OF CONFLICT

People living their lives in a context of tolerance and mutual respect, with volunteer action as one characteristic of social harmony, are more likely to avoid being drawn into conflict situations. One important facet of cohesion is reciprocal participation and mutual help in community life, for example in important rites, ceremonies or events related to economic production.

In India, where confrontations between religious groups are not uncommon, it has been observed that inter-religious participation in festivals helps to prevent conflict. Hindus and Muslims participate in each other's celebrations and share each other's food. Joint peace vigils and marches are further examples of cross-ethnic collaboration. In the event of tensions, youth exchanges between India and Pakistan reduce the potential for conflict by strengthening mutual understanding. This is a Gandhian peace approach with young

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people living together with one another's families and engaging in actions for peace. These programmes are entirely volunteer-based.¹¹ Labour-sharing groups are a common feature in the southern coastal regions of India although traditional agricultural labour sharing practices have been in decline. Hindu, Muslim and Christian families coming together to share their labour has reduced conflict and led to feelings of broader common identities. It has also created an understanding of differences and an appreciation of how, if those differences are not managed, they may lead to conflict or, conversely, how they can be used to help in conflict resolution.¹²

In situations of potential conflict, relationships within communities can act as a buffer by reducing the negative impact that situations of insecurity have on people's sense of well-being. People may

use local associations and collective action as a way of creating safeguards which generate feelings of protection for individuals. For example, the ability to spread information in networks about events that affect people's fears and insecurities can act as an important protective factor.¹³ The kind of resilience that counteracts potential violence can also be created through actions that strengthen volunteer-based community networks against violent events and through building trust in volunteer associations through education and training.

One study compared the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India with violent strife in the former Yugoslavia and in Northern Ireland. It confirmed the relationship between high levels of ethnic violence and low inter-ethnic or inter-religious civic engagement.¹⁴ This suggests that vigorous and well-integrated communities can serve as agents of peace. Strong associational forms of civic engagement, such as integrated business organizations, trade unions, political parties and professional organizations, are often able to control outbreaks of ethnic, religious and other forms of violence. This was also found to be the case in Bosnia, Cyprus, and Israel and Palestine.¹⁵

BOX 6.1 : Creating bridges across ethnic borders

Kikuyus for Change is a youth initiative for peace. It was formed in Kenya in 2008 by young Kikuyus during the post-election violence. The young people saw ethnicity as a primary source of their country's problems. This group of volunteers challenged tribal "bonding" by reaching out to young people in different parts of the country. They organized inter-ethnic dialogue platforms where young opinion leaders came together to discuss ethnicity. They also developed activities and strategies to promote neighbourliness and reconciliation. Press conferences were held in response to statements by political leaders that they perceived as negative to ethnic harmony. In addition, they spoke on radio and television and prepared articles for the print media on tribalism and the need for national cohesion. Kikuyus for Change also promotes interaction with Kikuyu elders and arranges for civic education on subjects including how members can participate in grassroots development programmes.

*"We must work from the basis that Kenya is a garment of many colours which is beautiful because each colour is present. We cannot be one colour because we would be dull. Some colours cannot run over others because we would be ugly. We must all stay in place and be bright."*¹⁸

Source: Mayor of Garissa [in Kikuyus For Change Secretariat]. (2010).

VOLUNTEERISM DURING CONFLICT

In Kenya, during the 2008 post-election violence, volunteer groups sprang up sporadically in the affected communities to help one another and to make connections with different ethnic groups. Cultural exchange visits were organized by elders from different parts of the country to promote intercultural learning. This type of initiative created new tiers of social interactions. Such interactions are separate from those mediated by politicians who had some responsibility for fuelling animosities between the communities.¹⁶ At the height of the violence, the Media Council of Kenya transcended the parochial interests that had gripped the country. The Council was able to persuade the national media to synchronise messages by relaying them for free for several days until people

started to reach out to one another. Online media blogging sites such as Ushahidi and Pambazuka kept people informed of atrocities and called on Kenyans to assist one another.¹⁷ Some NGOs provided logistical support to volunteers to reach out to communities, assisting them in peace building wherever possible.

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External interventions based on volunteer initiatives, whether at the state or the community level, can be highly effective in turning people away from violent conflict and back to peace.¹⁹ For example, when inter-religious conflicts in India threaten, they are often resolved through the mediation of “peace volunteers” who engage with the parties to facilitate mutual reconciliation. In countries such as Bangladesh, India and Thailand volunteers are also at the core of “community policing” initiatives supported by local governments and security agencies.²⁰

VOLUNTEERISM IN THE AFTERMATH OF CONFLICT

In Sri Lanka today, the healing process between the two ethnic groups involved in the country’s long-standing conflict is being assisted by volunteers from the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement. This is the country’s most influential national NGO which has a development strategy and programme of its own.²¹ Sarvodaya has mobilized thousands of volunteers trained in peace building, crisis intervention and non-violent dispute resolution, contributing to the longer-term rehabilitation process.

In Rwanda, where genocide resulted in the decimation of the male population, the task of rebuilding the country fell to women.²²

Women with access to land formed groups structured like the pre-war mutual aid associations. The purpose was to help each other with agricultural production and to build houses and establish savings and credit schemes to finance income-generating activities. These reciprocal initiatives enabled women to gain social status outside their traditional roles and to secure entitlements such as greater power and economic independence.²³

Volunteerism can be especially effective in building cohesion and peace when people

BOX 6.2 : Muslim Volunteering Organization in the Philippines

“Believing in change but keeping the faith” is the motto of the Muslim Volunteering Organization for Peace and Development in the Philippines. Established in 2004, Kapamagogopa Inc. (KI) is actively involved in peace-building initiatives in the Mindanao region where antagonism between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has fuelled conflict between Christians and Muslims. Some 69 volunteers have been deployed since 2005 to 23 Muslim and Christian community NGOs working in peace building, community dialogue and intercultural exchange. They have contributed about 150,000 volunteering hours, impacting on the lives of as many as 500,000 people.

The volunteers have contributed to establishing community water reservoirs. They introduced Sloping Area Land Technology, a simple low-cost method of upland farming suited to small farmers with limited tools, capital and exposure to modern agriculture. They taught organic farming methods to farmers, provided capacity-building training in disaster reduction and participated in the All Women Contingent in the Civilian Protection Component of the International Monitoring Team which is assisting the peace process in Mindanao.

KI has played key roles in mobilizing Muslim volunteers to help Christian NGOs to reach out to non-Christian communities. During the August 2008 conflict, KI volunteers delivered humanitarian relief to remote communities. They also contributed to peace-building initiatives, for example addressing *rido* (clan or family conflict) in the Mindanao community.

Source: Kapamagogopa Inc. (2011); Maraim Barandia, Personal Communication. (2011, July 17-22).

from previously opposing groups connect in new and innovative ways.²⁴ In Northern Ireland, for example, people reached out to others beyond their own religious or party group through collaboration on projects that helped to rebuild bonds of trust among divided communities. When inter-ethnic violence escalated in the Solomon Islands, in the South Pacific, in 2002 between Malaitan settlers and indigenous people of Guadalcanal, women from the capital Honiara, from all backgrounds, joined forces to issue a Women's Communiqué for Peace. Subsequently, the volunteer multi-ethnic Women for Peace group negotiated with the warring parties, raising awareness of the impacts of the conflict and helping the victims.²⁵

VOLUNTEERISM AND THE PROMOTION OF PEACE

Women

Women are most vulnerable to violent conflict but have the potential to be powerful agents for peace and transformation. As the 2011 World Development Report states: women's organizations "often play important roles in restoring confidence and sustaining

the momentum for recovery and transformation."²⁶ Civic participation through volunteerism can be a powerful mechanism for marginalised women, giving them a voice in decision-making. This is especially true of societies in which both custom and law clearly favour men in terms of control of key resources, landed property, income and financial resources and access to labour market and official positions. This is the case, for instance, in Ethiopia²⁷ and in Sudan (2009). Although women are active members of civil society, they face many obstacles in being fully involved in development and peace reconstruction.²⁸

Women are increasingly involved as combatants in violent conflict. However, for most women, such conflict aggravates their situation, leading some of them to organize resistance. In fact, there is a long history of women's participation in grassroots efforts to minimise hostility and begin reconstruction efforts.²⁹ In countries exposed to long wars such as Angola, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, women have taken a lead role in a range of volunteer initiatives

BOX 6.3 : Community volunteering for peace

In the South Pacific, women are becoming more involved in community volunteer initiatives to build trust, understanding and peace. The Kup Women for Peace (KWP) initiative began in 1999 in the highlands of Papua New Guinea after decades of tribal fighting. The often brutal violence against women and children had included the burning of whole villages. After one particularly devastating battle, women from four antagonistic tribes formed the KWP with the aim of stopping tribal violence. KWP members, male and female, collected stories from villages that highlighted the desire for peace and shared them with men from warring tribes. They mediated peace agreements, conducted workshops on women's health and food production, and gathered local resources to help victims of violence.

In 2003, fighting broke out between two clans in the Western Highlands Province. In an effort to restore peace, seven women and five men from KWP spent two weeks camping on the battlefield. During the day, they used their loud hailer to call for a truce and advocate reconciliation. Every night, they stayed in a village of one of the warring clans and talked about peace. The warring men had never heard strangers, especially women, talk about peace in this way before. In the words of one of the men: *"The police and the government have forgotten us. But these women cared for us enough to be with us for two weeks."* Eventually, both parties stopped fighting and allowed the women to facilitate compensation payments.

Source: Dinh. (2011); Garap. (2004).

including leading protests, building peace initiatives, mobilizing resources, and recreating a sense of community. This was first recognized in the literature of the 1990s³⁰ and has since been gaining increased attention.³¹

The Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing in 1995, defined the following as a strategic objective: "Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at all levels...and integrate a gender perspective in the resolution of armed or other conflicts...and ensure that bodies are able to address gender issues properly."³² United Nations Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) calls for greater participation of women in peace processes and conflict resolution.³³ However, as stated in 2003, "if Resolution 1325 has strengthened African women's claims to a seat at the peace table, it has not removed the formidable political, cultural and economic obstacles to their full participation as peacemakers or as citizens."³⁴ At that time, experiences of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and in the Mano River Union (MRU) countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, illustrated the barriers that women face in making their voices heard and in bringing about sustained change at political level.

In Latin America, the impact on women of the conflict in Colombia over five decades has remained hidden for years. The silence was broken when, in 1996, thousands of women from 300 grassroots and indigenous organizations across the country joined in sending a message against more fighting through the network Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres (Women's Peaceful Path). The volunteer-based network opened doors for women to play an active role in the peace-building process in Colombia.³⁵

Conventional views of women as passive onlookers in times of crisis need to be corrected.³⁶ However, as the experience of the Mano River Women has shown, women

BOX 6.4: Women struggle to be heard

The Mano River Basin is a cross border area covering Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone. With its porous frontiers facilitating the flow of weapons and combatants, it has been the focus of intense violent conflicts and refugee movements. The Mano River Union (MRU) Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was launched in 2000 with the involvement of women leaders, rural women, women communicators, religious women and businesswomen from the four countries. While MARWOPNET has played a significant role in mediating conflict, it has been excluded from some parts of the formal peace process. According to one member, the problem is: *"the male mentality that says women are not supposed to be involved in these things. They will meet with you and say they appreciate our efforts and promise all the cooperation. But we don't see them doing that. They want to give us only observer status and that is what we cannot accept."*

Source: Fleshman. (2003).

who voluntarily engage in addressing conflict have to be prepared for a long struggle.

Young people

The youth population of the world is growing fast, especially in poor countries affected by violent conflict. There is increasing concern about the conditions that may encourage adolescents, especially males, to perpetuate violence and prevent the consolidation of peace processes. Young people are often seen as a security threat that needs to be disarmed and kept occupied.³⁷ Another narrative is that young people in conflict situations are passive victims characterized by vulnerability, rather than resilience, and without a role in influencing peace processes.³⁸ However, a vital resource for overcoming violent conflict is overlooked when young people are denigrated or feared or when their potential role in the solution is ignored.

In many conflicts, young people themselves have been fully involved in the fighting. However, when hostilities cease, they have little opportunity to become involved in peace-building processes at national level.³⁹ Moreover, the absence of mechanisms for participation, combined with high levels of

underemployment and unemployment, can result in further disaffection among young people in many low-income, post-conflict countries. This reinforces the very factors that gave rise to the violence in the first place. It should be remembered that, in countries where violent conflict is prevalent, many young people have been born in time of war. This is the only "social dynamic" that they know and they have developed coping mechanisms to come to terms with this reality of fear and violence. At times, this includes becoming violent themselves. The young people have few opportunities to express themselves in other ways. Engaging in peace activities may, therefore, bring a whole new perspective to them, encouraging non-violent forms of interactions with different groups.

The idea "that youth must be engaged as primary building blocks for peaceful futures"⁴⁰ is now beginning to be accepted. Volunteerism is one channel by which young people can engage, especially through youth organizations. Where young people work together through volunteer action, they can contribute to building bridges across cultures and gender and play their full part in peace

processes.⁴¹ A leading civil society organization in West Africa, the West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP), runs an Active Non-Violence and Conflict Transformation Programme for Youth providing opportunities for over 650 students and 450 community young people to become directly engaged in conflict prevention and management through peace clubs in Monrovia, Liberia.⁴²

After 20 years of war, northern Uganda is fortunate to have a dynamic, growing network of national and grassroots volunteers, many of whom are war-affected youth. One example is a group of female returnees from the Lord's Resistance Army. They have used skills acquired in the bush, such as midwifery and leadership, to carry out peace-building work through the NGO Empowering Hands. Established in 2004, the NGO set up peer support groups for released abductees transitioning to freedom. It provided them with counselling and helped them to re-enrol in school.⁴³ Empowering Hands is a well-known success story. Throughout northern Uganda, there are many volunteer youth groups that have also demonstrated similar potential with the capacity to form the next

BOX 6.5 : Youth promote post-conflict recovery in Liberia

The Liberia National Youth Volunteers Service (NYVS) enables college graduates to contribute to reconstruction and development in Liberia in the aftermath of the 15-year civil conflict. The programme offers training to graduates in education, health and agriculture for one year. It then deploys the graduates as national volunteers around the country.

The national volunteers teach in schools and administer health awareness campaigns. They work to improve the situation of women, to advocate for girls' education, end gender-based violence and discriminatory practices, and develop peace-building campaigns to reduce divisions and polarization. Where they have served, people have been more willing to volunteer and parents have wanted their children to participate.⁴⁵

Liberia also faces high unemployment, especially among young people. The NYVS has enabled graduates to cultivate skills and gain professional experience. Over 80 per cent of the first 67 national volunteers from 2008 are currently employed in the public and private sector. Of the 121 from the second batch in 2010, over 50 per cent are employed and 3 per cent are pursuing further studies. A third batch of 128 national volunteers completed their assignment in June 2011.⁴⁶

Source: Isaac Bropleh, [Project Manager of the Liberia National Volunteer Youth Service Programme], Personal Communication. (2011, July 13).

generation of civil society. However, being loose associations, they lack official legal status and are unable to absorb grants.⁴⁴ Much could be achieved if governments and donors recognized the presence of youth initiatives in conflict situations and worked towards building the capacity of the groups involved and their leaders.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, we examined the relationship between volunteerism and violent conflict from the perspective of social cohesion with particular focus on the situation of women and young people. The dynamics that generate violent conflict, and determine the course that it takes, are complex. They do not respond to a standard set of remedies. However, the values of solidarity and mutual support, that help to create cohesion in soci-

eties and also underpin volunteer action, contribute in addition to preventing, mitigating and removing the causes of conflict.

Volunteer action should, therefore, be an integral part of policies and programmes aimed at preventing and responding to conflict. While food and shelter, rebuilding of infrastructure and economic stabilization are necessary, so is civic engagement based on mutuality and solidarity. There is growing awareness of the need to strengthen networks that have survived violent conflict or to support re-activation of such networks where they have been destroyed. Networks are not sufficient on their own: rule of law, justice and human rights must accompany any peace process. However, recognizing and supporting volunteerism will help to ensure the sustainability of achievements and to avoid the risk that elements underlying conflict remain combustible.

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