

paper: the role of NGOs in mediation and reconciliation. Characteristics of the post-Cold War order have encouraged policy-makers to turn their focus to not only traditional humanitarian aid, but also conflict resolution and reconciliation functions. As mentioned previously, during the Cold War, the two superpowers tended to concentrate power in the leadership of a particular government or rebel movement. The tendency to limit the number of sides to a conflict made negotiations much simpler and increased the likelihood of a successful outcome. However, with the breakdown of authority and the rise in numerous sides with their own power base, there is a much more remote possibility of achieving bargaining success (Natsios 1997a, 338). As John Paul Lederach suggests, NGOs in these cases may be able to manage conflict more effectively due to their special qualities which include having a particular insight into different cultures, having relationships with local partners, and an ability to see the links between crisis management and long-term sustainable development (Lederach, 1997). This is one reason that policymakers have increased their reliance on NGOs, which tend to be deeply rooted in society and, therefore, can be seen as a source of indigenous authority for mediation between warring parties. Indeed, where government has collapsed entirely, religious institutions and NGOs may be the only source of authority that has any influence. This advantage may be due to the absence of traditional elites who have been either killed or have fled, leaving warlords in their place. Whereas diplomats are accustomed to dealing with other diplomats and elites, many NGOs are used to working at the grass-roots and middle-range levels<sup>4</sup> and in the absence of any other levers of influence. These qualities may be very valuable to the peace process.

It should also be recognised that not only has there been a shift to diffuse centres of power, there has also been a diffusion within the centres themselves as the political and military hierarchies in the affected society collapse (Natsios 1997a, 340). As seen in Somalia, with the rise of the young men who led militias, factional leaders may be negotiating with little authority; therefore, whatever they agree to may not be enforceable. Again, NGOs because of their diffuse linkages may be more effective in these situations than traditional diplomatic players who tend to rely on the assumption that those who are sitting at the negotiating table have the necessary authority to ensure the terms of an agreement are carried out.

The NGO approach to mediation and conflict resolution can take on several forms: employing traditional conflict-resolution models such as bargaining, negotiation, third party mediation and reconciliation.

Attempting to address the root causes of conflicts which can usually be traced to economic, social and political inequalities in host countries.

Creating neutral forums where informal lines of communication can be established between rival groups.

Through mass education campaigns to provide the population with impartial information.

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<sup>4</sup> For further elaboration on the three levels of actors involved in peace-making please see Lederach 1994, 1-7.