

Through economic programmes that attempt to create work for men who might otherwise be recruited into the military or militia groups (Natsios 1997a, 352).

Much of the conflict resolution work that is conducted by NGOs does not follow any particular analytically developed approach; instead, their work is usually based upon the practical need of those working in the midst of conflict to deal with its effects. In the case of NGOs who were engaged in conflict-resolution programming in Burundi – including Refugees International and Search for Common Ground – methods used included radio broadcasts on interethnic harmony, reconciliation retreats for civic leaders and the production and distribution of educational materials to schools that promoted peace (Natsios 1997a, 352-353)

Related to the approaches that NGOs can use in mediation, conflict resolution and early-warning is the notion of ‘flash-points’ and how they affect the outcome of humanitarian efforts. A flash-point, as defined by Joseph Bock and Mary Anderson is "...an occurrence that causes the tip-over from the usual state of non-violence to a state of open violence." (1999, 332-333). It involves injury that is seen to represent the group – a deliberate action of one identity and group against another identity group. Flash-points are unlikely to occur in a vacuum; rather, they occur where tension is mounting and where there is a climate of intergroup suspicion (ibid). Therefore, the traditional conflict prevention approaches that emphasise ‘good will’ based on the promotion of trust are unlikely to be effective in these situations. Instead, it is becoming recognised that helping to foster the ability in local populations to avert flash-points will be the most effective way to avoid the initial outbreak or re-emergence of violence. How can NGOs do this?

While NGOs can engage in peace-building by educating people to respect the rights of minorities, as the ICRC did in Burundi, they can also engage in another kind of approach: building leadership (Bock and Anderson 1999, 334). The idea behind building leadership is that the pre-emptive investment in people who are trained in how to respond quickly to situations of eminent conflict is critical to avoiding a downward spiral into violence. The skills that are involved in leadership should be focused on 1) ways to promote a sense of belonging and inclusiveness and 2) ways to manage both information and misinformation (ibid). The reason for stressing a ‘belongingness paradigm’ is so that local communities can learn to redress old wrongs and work towards enlarging their group identities and linkages with other groups instead of getting caught up in past wrongdoings.⁵

⁵ From the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, several lessons have emerged with regard to leadership and overall strategy: 1) use participatory programming in post-conflict relief work in order to strengthen the community; 2) empower community leaders to create their own solutions by working through partnerships within a community; 3) help the whole community to improve conditions rather than only focussing on refugees or minorities; 4) where possible, direct humanitarian resources through private sector channels to promote multiethnic, cross-entity relationships; 5) create a donors strategy and set of co-ordinating principles to accomplish the strategy; and 6) strengthen the public sector at the canton level to establish partnerships with the emerging civil society (Demichelis 1998, 14-15).