

## Civil Society and Conflict Prevention, Stabilization, and Reconstruction

Security planning should be both wide and deep. It should take a *wide* “whole of government” approach coordinating with regional and international actors in development, diplomacy, and defense. And it should take a *deep* approach to link with civil society leaders.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are non-governmental groups such as charities, community-based organizations (CBOs), women's groups, media, business associations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trade unions, coalitions and advocacy groups.

### 10 Functions of Civil Society Organizations in Conflict Prevention, Stabilization, and Reconstruction

1. **Long-Term Building Blocks:** Lay foundation for development, human rights promotion, prevention of environmental degradation, strengthening governance, addressing tensions between groups by facilitating dialogue and promoting tolerance.
2. **Advocacy for Good Governance:** Seek the creation and strengthening of a citizen-focused, functioning state that can protect and provide for its population through policy advocacy and dialogue.
3. **Early Warning:** Monitor, analyze and communicate changes at local level that indicate impending violence and then help to mobilize the public and political will for conflict prevention,.
4. **Violence Mitigation:** Create “peace zones” to protect civilians and humanitarian aid corridors, delivery of humanitarian relief to war-affected communities.
5. **Track II Diplomacy:** Facilitate unofficial communication and dialogue between armed groups or opponents and their supporters in civil society both during and after armed conflict.
6. **Capacity Building:** Train local and national leaders in principled negotiation and problem-solving techniques, rule of law, and human rights.
7. **Facilitation and Mediation:** Work with groups in conflict to develop shared analysis, negotiation agendas, identify common ground, develop confidence building measures (CBMs), and build political agreements.
8. **Public Education:** Raise public awareness and support for peace agreements and community security.
9. **Transitional Justice:** Facilitate post-conflict reconciliation, trauma healing, and restorative justice processes in war-affected communities.
10. **Security Sector Reform:** Participate in the design of improved security infrastructure to protect both human and national security.

### **Civil Society's Contributions to Conflict Prevention, Stabilization, and Reconstruction**

**Commitment:** Long term commitment and responsibility in local context.

**Experience:** Involvement in local efforts to address conflicts.

**Analysis:** Cultural intelligence of local context including knowledge of local cultural traditions that support peace is essential for accurate conflict analysis

**Access:** Can work in areas and talk to people where government cannot reach

**Trust:** Hold greater legitimacy and trust with local populations

**Flexible:** Able to adapt to changes in local context

### **Civil Society's Challenges to Conflict Prevention, Stabilization, and Reconstruction**

**Diversity:** Missions, capacities and strength of ties to local constituencies varies greatly

**Capacity:** Staff, funding, and skills are sometimes lacking

**Tensions with Government:** Mistrust between government and CSOs

**Security:** Sometimes unable to work in times of great civil violence

**Substitution:** May weaken state by delivering public services

**Evaluation:** Effectiveness of CSO programming sometimes difficult to measure

## **Recommendations:**

Conflict prevention, stabilization and reconstruction programs in relation to civil society should include the following:

**Involve civil society in every step of the process.** Establish permanent social and political dialogue between government and civil society actors on four levels:

**Analytical:** Include diverse CSO representatives in assessing the local context, conflict analysis and research on early warning indicators in crisis regions.

**Planning:** Include local and international CSOs in policy planning for interventions in crisis regions. *Sequencing is critical.* Strategies must be broken down into manageable phases, with a credible set of actions; division of CSO and government roles, and a flexible 'living' strategy so that adjustments can be made as contexts shift.

**Training:** Develop joint training forums for civil society, government and military leaders to build capacity in stabilization and conflict prevention while building relationships with each other.

**Operational:** Create dialogue forums with local and international CSOs operating in the same crisis regions that allow CSOs to participate in shaping the agenda for discussion. Encourage national governments and international actors in the field to adopt broader consultation strategies with civil society leaders throughout the region.

**Ensure accountability as a core principle.** Accountability includes development of mechanisms for transparency, participation, evaluation, information sharing and complaints and redress based on the need for those most affected by policies.