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POLICY BRIEF

Regional Organizations and Peacebuilding

The Role of Civil Society

The complexity of global security threats and the rise of intra-state conflicts have prompted a growing regional approach to security management. Intra-state conflicts or civil wars frequently spill over borders, affecting the stability of neighboring states and beyond. The problems of poor governance and institutional weakness that contribute to armed conflict exist not only at the state level but across regions. ‘Failed states’ can belong to ‘failed regions,’ calling for regional approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

In this increasingly interconnected landscape, civil society and regional organizations can play a vital role. Regional intergovernmental organizations (RIGOs) are uniquely placed to address regional peace and security issues. While the commitment to non-interference remains strong in certain regions, there are signs of normative change on a national and regional level.

In 2011, Brazil introduced its version of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ concept at the UN General Assembly, a significant departure from its non-interventionist stance. In 2012, ASEAN launched its Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, signaling a possible enhanced role in preventive diplomacy. In the wake of the post-2011 political upheaval in Arab states, the Arab League faces greater challenges but also opportunities to address problems of armed conflict and assist transitions to democracy in member states. With nuanced local knowledge and networks, RIGOs and sub-regional bodies are seen as ideal platforms for dialogue and mediation. They may be able to detect and respond to crises faster, and they may be more willing to prevent conflict in their neighborhoods for the sake of regional stability.

Institutionally, the architecture to advance peace and security now exists in some regions. In Latin America for example, it can be argued that there is an oversupply

of RIGOs and states can choose the most “advantageous institutional forum for resolving a crisis.” Despite serious shortcomings, the African Peace and Security Architecture has registered successes, as witnessed in the African Union (AU) partnership with the UN mission in Somalia for example. In Guinea, the effective joint mediation effort by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the AU, and the UN following the 2008 military coup illustrates the importance of multi-actor coordination. Devolved, regional systems of security management are far from being realized, however. There are parts of the world where RIGOs are ineffective or do not exist. In these areas, private actors and civil society organizations (CSOs) have often stepped into the breach.

As norms around conflict prevention have widened to include human security and other perspectives, CSOs have assumed a more prominent role in peace and security discourses. CSOs that conduct mediation may pose a “lesser interference” to governments at times, and have more latitude to reach out to black-listed groups. CSOs working on broader aspects of peacebuilding are seen as having the “people-centered, bottom-up” perspectives that can be missing from state-centric security analyses. With grassroots knowledge, they can play an important role in the analysis of potential conflict dynamics and can provide early warning of crises.

A rich literature drawing on peace processes in Africa and other continents highlights the importance of a united civil society in building and sustaining a durable peace. Empirical studies show that civil society participation in support of negotiations is critical to securing long-term peace. High levels of civil society involvement are directly correlated with the sustainability of peace agreements. Civil society involvement helps to bring a broad range of social and political interests to the negotiating table, making the process more inclusive and participatory. Citizen groups tend to have direct communication channels with community leaders of aggrieved constituencies and can conduct back-channel, bottom-up discussions to encourage disaffected groups to seek political solutions. The participation of civil society enhances the legitimacy of the reconciliation process, builds social consensus around the terms of an accord, and helps to hold political elites accountable to their promised agreements.

As both regional organizations and civil society address human security concerns, coordination between the various actors is critical. Building on the framework of GPPAC’s Madrid Conference in 2011, which explored initial steps towards strengthening CSO-RIGO collaboration, this paper aims to broadly assess how CSO-RIGO cooperation can be improved. By exploring the obstacles to and opportunities for engagement, the following section seeks to probe where synergies may lie.

Opportunities and Challenges

Regional intergovernmental organizations are increasingly playing a greater role in peace and security affairs. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has supported the delegation of some security responsibilities to RIGOs, within the limits of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. States are increasingly expected to submit disputes to RIGOs as well as to international institutions. An example of this can be seen during the 2011 Thailand–Cambodian border conflict when the UNSC referred the conflict to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for mediation. At the same time, the number of CSOs working on preventative diplomacy, peacebuilding, and effective global governance has grown exponentially in recent decades.

The UN has encouraged cooperation between RIGOs and CSOs, calling for joint strategies and a “division of labor” with CSOs that support Track II and Track III diplomacy, but the gap in implementation remains wide. CSOs complain that existing mechanisms for interaction with RIGOs are symbolic or do not allow CSOs any influence into policy making. RIGOs are very often unaware of the work that CSOs are doing and vice versa. In the absence of spaces for public participation, RIGOs also face broader credibility issues since they are not seen as useful instruments to the people they represent.

At a glance, CSO-RIGO engagement around the world is limited, revealing broader tensions with civil society. While the Arab League established a Civil Society Secretariat in the wake of the Arab uprisings, resistance to civil society in certain member states remains strong. When the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) drafted its Constitutive Treaty, the term ‘civil society’ was viewed as an implicitly Western term and avoided altogether. While the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa has a ‘NGO & Civil Society Forum’ in its organization chart, a civil society representative interviewed for this paper who visited IGAD headquarters in Djibouti found that it does not appear to presently exist.

A host of variables contribute to this picture of restricted engagement, including funding, personalities, and the priorities of RIGOs. CSOs are also implicated. Like RIGOs, CSOs are shaped by broader cultural and political forces within their respective countries. While this paper does not allow for a nuanced analysis of CSOs, common criticisms state that they can be poorly organized, personality-centric, clientelistic, and at times fractious. Peacebuilding CSOs are not always organized for clearly defined thematic purposes. Some define ‘peacebuilding’ as dialogue and mediation. Others expand it to include the root causes of conflict such as gender inequality and poverty.

An ASEAN official summarized general concerns with civil society at an ASEAN symposium in 2010 by asking, “Which CSOs should ASEAN engage with? ...

Can we establish *constructive dialogues*? Do we share *mutual interest*? Can we establish *trust*? Can we go beyond dialogues and *work in partnership* to serve the people. How can we better synergize interest while maintaining our independence?”

Despite these obstacles, there are examples where trust has been established, as detailed in the case studies. Gender CSOs in the Pacific Islands led a successful campaign around UNSCR 1325 after working with the PIF Secretariat for many years. Human rights groups in Cairo have had high-level contact with the Arab League, including discussions on the civil war in Syria. The relationship between ECOWAS and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in early warning is an example of a unique “partnership to serve the people.” IGAD’s own early warning system, CEWARN, draws on local networks to collect information on cross-border and pastoral conflicts in the Horn of Africa and is considered one of its most successful programs.

Mutual interest between CSOs and RIGOs is nonetheless difficult to determine. Security issues that are sensitive on a national level can be even more sensitive within regional platforms. RIGO bureaucrats are ultimately beholden to the often divided interests of member states. While CSOs play a role in early warning in some countries, the enduring challenge for CSOs is to influence strategies for response and security policy more broadly. In 2011, GPPAC’s Madrid Conference discussed some of these strategies and provided three recommendations for increased engagement with regional actors and civil society.

Increase Capacity and Cooperation Among RIGOs and with the UN

While RIGOs are increasingly playing a lead role in security affairs, many are still heavily reliant upon the support of the UN, donors, and other RIGOs. This is most obvious with African RIGOs and sub-regional bodies. Cooperation is challenging, and tension inevitably emerges between organizations with different mandates and expectations. The need to improve cooperation and clarify responsibilities was underscored at a recent debate at the UNSC.

An option for greater coordination would be improved contact between the leadership of RIGOs and the UNSC. The UN Secretary-General meets with the heads of RIGOs at high-level retreats every few years. The AU’s Peace and Security Council however, is currently the only RIGO to meet regularly with members of the Security Council. A proposal discussed at the 2011 Madrid conference called for a RIGO Caucus at the UN. The Group of Friends of Mediation at the UN is one body that has encouraged exchanges among RIGOs while promoting the role of RIGOs more broadly within the UN system. Founded in 2010 and co-chaired by

Turkey and Finland, its membership includes the Organization of American States, ASEAN, AU, and the Organization of Islamic States.

Increase Regional Cooperation Among CSOs and RIGOS

While there is no ‘one size fits all’ mechanism for RIGOs to engage with CSOs, RIGOs can learn from each other. The EU has supported and encouraged RIGOs to engage with civil society. In some instances, the EU has helped create participatory spaces for civil society around its formal cooperation with other RIGOs. At the EU’s human rights dialogue with the African Union for example, civil society engagement has been successfully introduced in sessions prior to official meetings. In the wake of the Arab uprisings, the opportunity and need exists for other RIGOs to support the Arab League as it undertakes institutional reforms.

The challenge for CSOs is how to create informal spaces for CSO-RIGO cooperation when official avenues are closed. This requires networking, strategic engagement, and an investment of resources. Crucially, CSOs need to show RIGOs how their work relates to RIGO policy making. Governments will not buy into cooperation with civil society groups unless this is a benefit to them. CSOs need to show governments and RIGOs how cooperation will be beneficial, which will generate buy-in and trust. Regional events can be fast-moving and RIGO bureaucrats often don’t have time for critical thinking about civil society. They may also be subject to criticism from member states if they appear too open to CSOs. Round tables that bring civil society and RIGO bureaucrats together around specific, concrete issues—and don’t appear to be entirely about civil society—may be the most useful.

Increase Inter-regional Cooperation and Exchange Among CSOs

Because of their regional nature, some RIGOs will only engage with regional CSOs. National CSOs—who would be otherwise ignored—have been able to access regional forums through regional CSO networks. Unlicensed CSOs in Arab countries, for example, have been able to submit information on human rights issues to the Arab League through accredited CSOs in their networks. Networks can provide a life-line to CSOs that face ongoing harassment and censure. They can also bolster the capacity of CSOs, exposing them to new information and resources.

Regional peacebuilding CSO networks are young in some settings and need time to take shape. Weak networks have led to the duplication of peacebuilding initiatives and rivalries between CSOs in some parts of the world. Stronger networks could help to prevent duplication in programming, while allowing for the exchange of best practices and lessons learned.

RIGO Analysis

This analysis is by no means an exhaustive review of the myriad RIGOs that exist around the world. By selecting key regional settings, this section provides a broader sketch of developments in RIGO engagement with CSOs on peace and security issues globally. Each region will be analyzed according to its engagement with both RIGOs and specific CSOs while providing deeper insight into how these relationships can be better engaged and even deepened.

Middle East and North Africa: The League of Arab States

Long criticized for being moribund and ineffective, the Arab League (LAS) has emerged as an unlikely platform of influence since the beginning of the Arab uprisings, although the relationship of the LAS to the Arab awakening remains undefined and contested. In March 2011, the LAS asked the UNSC to impose a ‘no-fly’ zone over Libya – a rare request for Western intervention on Arab soil that paved the way for NATO strikes against the Libyan regime. In the same year, it suspended Syria’s membership and took the unprecedented step of sanctioning the Syrian regime. It also backed the Gulf Cooperation Council’s efforts to engineer a transfer of power in Yemen. These LAS efforts did not stem the spread of armed conflict in the region, but they signaled a new-found willingness to engage in regional security and political affairs.

Support for intervention has by no means been uniform among member states. Internal divisions have simmered over Syria, with Sunni Arab monarchies of the Gulf and post-revolutionary governments more willing to confront the regime. While the Arab League’s actions since 2011 may have been less a result of the “Tahrir spirit” than of the “hardheaded, geopolitical calculations” of a bloc of Gulf Arab states, the institution has nonetheless charted a new course. The high stakes of the political turmoil and armed conflict in the region have led some member states to transcend the LAS principle of non-intervention in favor of more active engagement.

LAS and Civil Society

Although the LAS cooperates with CSOs in a number of areas, it is rare that these involve issues of peace and security. However, the LAS has started to look inward. In early 2012, LAS Secretary General Nabil Al Arabi appointed a committee to consider various reforms to the institution, including its cooperation with civil society. The Secretary General has reportedly acknowledged the need to “upgrade” LAS mechanisms to meet the demands of the people. Independent CSOs have struggled to meet the LAS Economic and Social Council’s (ECOSOC) criteria for observer status. They must be registered nationally to apply, precluding a vast number that do not enjoy this luxury. Those with accreditation can attend certain meetings, but they cannot speak, submit recommendations, influence the

agenda, or attend LAS Summits. In some instances, governments created their own supposed non-governmental groups, known as GoNGOs. Prior to 2011, for example, the LAS’ Arab Human Rights Committee was dominated by groups headed by the wives, children, or allies of dictators. These organizations vanished when the sponsoring regimes were deposed.

In early 2013, a Civil Society Secretariat was created under the purview of the Vice Secretary General. The goal of the secretariat appears to process CSO applications for observer status and to more broadly act as a focal point for CSO-related issues. The Secretariat is small however, and its mandate is vague—perhaps deliberately so. It remains to be seen how much influence it will wield; its decisions over accreditation must ultimately be endorsed by member states. While the 2011 Arab uprising improved the freedom of CSOs in some countries, they also increased suspicions of CSOs elsewhere. Arab CSOs are in turn weak and lacking cohesion. Some CSOs report that their involvement with the LAS enhances their credibility and builds trust with governments; however, time is needed to strengthen capacity and regional networks.

Despite hostility to civil society in many member states, there are ‘champions’ in the LAS secretariats who are supportive of institutional reform. Analysts have discussed whether the Arab League could play a democratizing role in the region more broadly by engaging in election monitoring, humanitarian response, and reforming its human rights protection system. At a recent EU-LAS conference, the potential of the Arab League’s Civil Society Secretariat to promote improved cooperation with civil society across the region was discussed. Some possible initiatives include:

- National and region-wide campaigns to raise awareness about the role of civil society;
- Disseminating model laws on association and civil society to member states;
- Holding workshops on specific policy issues for CSOs and LAS civil servants;
- Building an information hub for civil society on the LAS website that “could provide manuals and special materials” to the LAS civil society network; and
- Developing “mechanisms for CSOs in different fields to be able to present reports to the relevant ministerial councils.”

Arab Human Rights Organizations

An ad hoc coalition of independent Arab human rights organizations has been relatively successful at engaging with the Arab League. Over a period of many years, the groups have been pushing for the LAS to reform its human rights protection system and increase the voice of civil society in policy processes.

They appear to have built trust with certain LAS bodies while becoming adept at maneuvering around the strictures on CSOs. When the LAS' Arab Human Rights Committee has been assembling state reports, CSOs in this group have been able to slip in reports and information from unregistered CSOs in their networks, including CSOs operating under the radar in Algeria and Jordan.

More recently, CSOs actively lobbied the LAS to take a tougher stance on human rights abuses in Syria. A number of groups held informal meetings with LAS bodies and officials, submitting position papers to the Cabinet of the Secretary General. Secretary General El Arabi also consulted a number of these groups on the "composition and mandate" of a LAS observer mission dispatched to Syria in December 2011. However, the consultations were ad hoc, as opposed to being conducted through formal mechanisms.

In November 2011, Bahrain proposed that the LAS create an Arab Human Rights Court. In May 2014, LAS Secretary General Nabil Al-Arabi announced the draft charter of the Court following LAS conferences with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and with the Bahrain national institution for human rights. The draft Statute makes access to the Court the exclusive right of states, which may "at their discretion" enable non-governmental organizations to submit cases on behalf of individuals. The International Federation for Human Rights has criticized this restrictive mandate, pointing out that it denies the right of individuals to bring complaints directly to the Court. Nonetheless, some limited opportunities may exist for government-favored civil society groups to bring cases to the new Court on behalf of aggrieved parties.

Latin America: The Organization of American States and More

The Organization of American States (OAS) remains the Western Hemisphere's central RIGO and is often the first recourse for member states. However, the fact that it is heavily funded by the United States has put the OAS under fire, not only from some Latin American countries that see it as an instrument to serve U.S. foreign policy in the region, but also from members of the U.S. Congress who no longer believe that it represents U.S. interests. While some analysts view the OAS and burgeoning RIGOs in Latin America as competitors, an alternative view is that they are complementary when it comes to addressing regional security issues. Analysts note that recently established RIGOs lack the strong leadership needed to develop them institutionally and politically.

Along with OAS, a host of new RIGOs have been created in Latin America over the last decade as regional powers have sought to take greater control of economic and security affairs. Defined in part by their exclusion of the U.S., these 'post-hegemonic' or 'post-liberal' RIGOs include the Bolivarian Alliance

for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), and the region-wide Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). While the principle of non-interference is still strong in the region, some of these RIGOs have begun to exercise more latitude in security affairs. Their exclusion of the U.S. has played to their advantage in certain crises. In 2008, UNASUR helped resolve a secession crisis in Bolivia, establishing itself as an alternative to the OAS.

Despite potentially improved architecture for conflict prevention, space for CSO-RIGO engagement in Latin America has shrunk in recent years. As states reassumed a more central role in development policies, analysts argue that governments have advanced 'top-down' social agendas that fail to include civil society input. Latin American RIGOs tend to be state-centric, showing a preference for presidential summits. Many also lack financial and human resources. Furthermore, many are pro tempore in that they prefer national leaders to chair the organizations periodically instead of creating strong, independent secretariats. While the OAS has a small bureaucracy, for other RIGOs a bureaucracy is almost non-existent. This has made it difficult for CSOs to engage, and some have simply given up.

OAS and Civil Society

While spaces for formal civil society engagement around OAS summits were encouraged in the mid-1990s to strengthen the consolidation of democracy in the region, engagement dropped off in the 2000s. A handful of CSOs working on conflict prevention and peacebuilding were no longer brought into the fold, despite their previous involvement in preparing recommendations for the summits, general assemblies, and dialogues with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. OAS bureaucrats point to personnel changes in the Political Affairs Secretariat and the changing priorities of international donors as possible reasons for this closed space to CSOs.

In recent years the OAS has shifted toward a more open policy of cooperation with civil society, in contrast to the mistrust of the first decade of the 21st century. The OAS now has a civil society registry, which allows CSOs to become part of a network of organizations that work in the different thematic areas of interest for the Member States of the Organization. As of 2013, the 424 CSOs registered with the OAS can submit documents and participate in the public meetings of the Permanent Council, the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI), and their subsidiary bodies. There is also a civil society dialogue at the General Assembly. CSOs working on peacebuilding and conflict prevention are invited to relevant meetings on an ad-hoc, but relatively regular, basis. CSOs continue to advocate for formal mechanisms of engagement, including a civil society liaison office at the OAS and cooperation with the Committee for Hemispheric Security.

While OAS officials are open to the idea of setting up a liaison office, a donor is needed given the organization's funding shortfalls.

As regional integration takes a new shape in Latin America, opportunities exist for greater information sharing and cooperation between RIGOs. OAS officials recognize that the OAS has certain strengths that other RIGOs are lacking, and vice versa. There is potential for the strengthening of synergies and collective action if RIGOs work together.

UNASUR and Civil Society

Civil society participated widely in parallel Social Summits to the South American Community of Nations, the pre-cursor organization to UNASUR. Roundtables were held between government representatives and CSOs, including those engaged in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. However, when UNASUR's Constitutive Treaty was drafted, Venezuela and a number of other states objected to the inclusion of 'civil society organizations' in the treaty's language, viewing it as a Western concept. A diluted phrase, 'citizen participation,' was included instead. This is problematic in the sense that UNASUR may choose to engage symbolically with hand-picked individuals, as opposed to representative and legitimate organizations.

A forum for Citizen Participation was announced in 2012, yet it remains to be seen whether it will be developed. UNASUR is still very much in its infancy and has yet to develop much beyond presidential summits. An office for the secretary general has been under construction in Quito, Ecuador and will be inaugurated in November 2014. CSOs need a minimal bureaucracy with which to engage. Instead of a broad civil society liaison office, analysts have suggested a targeted process involving CSOs in the bodies that formulate policy. The South American Council for Defense is the most relevant and active on security issues, but it does not permit CSO participation at present.

While many of UNASUR's members remain hostile to the idea of civil society, Brazil is emerging as a possible 'champion' for civil society in the region. Brazil's foreign ministry recently announced plans to create a civil society forum on foreign policy. The move must be seen in light of Brazil's aspirations for membership to the UNSC but also as a result of domestic pressure. The massive street protests in Brazil in June 2013—ostensibly over the rising costs of public transport—were seen as reflecting middle class anger, not only discontent from the fringe. As the de-facto leader of UNASUR, Brazil's receptiveness to civil society on a national level may prove influential as it seeks to exert its soft power in the region and beyond as a global economic power.

Southeast Asia: Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ASEAN has been historically reluctant to delve into regional security affairs. The principle of non-interference is the bedrock of the 'ASEAN Way' and highly valued among member states—particularly those that are less democratic. ASEAN states nonetheless sought to tackle shared security issues in recent decades, such as transnational crime, terrorism, and maritime security. ASEAN also pivoted to respond to sources of regional tension, including claims to the South China Sea and political repression in Myanmar.

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus sent repeated messages to Myanmar condemning regime abuses. In 2007, ASEAN criticized Myanmar at the UN over its crackdown of the 'Saffron Revolution.' For over a decade, ASEAN has also been trying to forge a Code of Conduct with China on territorial issues surrounding the South China Sea. While progress is slow, talks with China have "provided a degree of reassurance" about the safety of navigation in the disputed waters. In 2011, ASEAN also helped diffuse a conflict between Thailand and Cambodia over a temple on the Thai-Cambodian border, sending a team of observers to the area.

ASEAN and Civil Society

In recent decades, ASEAN has taken fitful steps towards inviting civil society as part of a vision to create a participatory 'ASEAN Community' by 2015. In 2005, the Malaysian government organized the first ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC) around the ASEAN Summit, offering increased engagement between CSOs and heads of state. In 2008, ASEAN adopted the ASEAN Charter, which underscores the importance of civil society engagement. In 2009, ASEAN also established its Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR).

Critics point to shortcomings in these efforts. The ASEAN Secretariat lacks formal mechanisms for engagement or clear procedures for CSO accreditation, and suffers capacity constraints more broadly. The performance of the AICHR has been heavily criticized by some CSOs. The ACSC and corresponding ASEAN People's Forums—now amalgamated and organized by civil society—are highly informal and held according to the "mood" of the country hosting or chairing the ASEAN Summit. While countries like Indonesia and the Philippines are broadly supportive of civil society, other states are less so, viewing CSOs as "trouble makers and subversives." Cambodia's chairmanship of ASEAN in 2012 saw an unhealthy level of interference in the civil society platforms around the March 2012 ASEAN Summit. Southeast Asian CSOs also suffer limitations, including capacity constraints. While regional networks have been built, such as the prominent CSO Solidarity for Asia Peoples' Advocacies (SAPA), coordination among CSOs can be poor.

While ASEAN has lacked institutionalized mechanisms for conflict prevention, there are signs that this is shifting. As chairman in 2011, Indonesia helped found the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR). Primarily focused on research and policy work, the AIPR terms of reference propose a role for the institute in facilitating peace negotiations if requested by member states. An 'Advisory Board' will also be part of the institution's structure and may include civil society representatives. The ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation was officially established in December 2013 and organized a regional symposium in Bali, Indonesia in April 2014. Attending the Bali symposium were members of the AIPR Governing Council and Advisory Board and ASEAN Secretariat, officials from the United Nations, and representatives of regional think tanks, academic institutions, and civil society organizations. AIPR presents a potential entry point for CSOs to engage with ASEAN on security issues.

Looking beyond ASEAN to conflict prevention in Asia more broadly, a group of eminent politicians, diplomats, and academics recently formed the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council (APRC) to promote quiet diplomacy in the region. The non-state, pan-Asian body draws upon a high-level pool of dignitaries such as former East Timorese President José Ramos Horta and former Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hassan Wirajuda. It aims to promote a culture of conflict prevention, which is seen as lacking in the region. The first annual meeting of the APRC took place in Putrajaya in November 2013, cosponsored by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Malaysia).

Africa: The African Union

In recent decades, Africa enjoyed significant economic growth and improved levels of stability in some countries. While the number of intrastate conflicts has risen, notably in Sub-Saharan Africa, the incidence of wars between states has declined. These trends corresponded with the rising stature of regional and subregional organizations, namely the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The African Union has made significant progress toward building the African Peace and Security Architecture since its founding in 2002. The organization has performed mediation and deployed peacekeepers in multiple settings, including Sudan (Darfur), Comoros, and Somalia. The AU has also advanced new norms in peace and security by banning coups and permitting humanitarian interventions in extreme, emergency circumstances.

Despite these achievements, the AU suffers limitations. States with a seat on the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC)—modeled on the UNSC—have proved obstructionist at times. AU peacekeeping missions have been dependent on external donors. Furthermore, harmonization between the AU, RECs, and the UN has been problematic, leading to confusion about mandates. The AU and RECs

also lack the capacity to intervene in some cases, as seen in the response to Mali. Effective multilateral cooperation is vital to preserving the gains of the AU and RECS while mitigating emerging security threats such as electoral violence and growing extremism in some countries.

AU and Civil Society

The AU's Livingstone Formula and article 20 of the PSC Protocol proscribe a broad role for civil society in supporting the work of the AU's Peace and Security Council. CSOs accredited to the AU's Economic Social and Cultural Commission (ECOSOCC) can ostensibly submit reports to the PSC via the AU Commission, provide information to AU field missions, and address the PSC on invitation. CSOs seeking greater input in decision making procedures can seek MoUs.

Despite these existing channels, engagement tends to be restricted to a select group of CSOs. A survey of 21 peacebuilding organizations in the Horn of Africa found that "very few appeared to be engaging with the AU." CSOs are often focused on peacebuilding work on a local and national level and unaware of channels for engagement with the AU. The ECOSOCC also has stringent criteria for accreditation, including requiring CSOs to be first registered in their home country. This can preclude grassroots organizations operating in countries where CSOs are viewed with suspicion or conflict zones where a national registry simply does not exist. The requirements for meeting ECOSOCC's accreditation criteria are also prohibitive.

The CSOs that enjoy close contact with the AU tend to be well trusted entities led by charismatic figures with political stature or well-resourced INGOs (International NGOs) that have a substantial footprint. CSOs with MoUs have provided assistance to the AU's Stand-by Force and the Panel of the Wise for example, training them on specific security issues or mediation techniques. A number of CSOs and INGOs have addressed the PSC, including Oxfam, which has a Liaison Office with the AU. In an open session of the PSC in 2010 and 2011, women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence from across Africa addressed the council on the issue of women and children in armed conflict in Africa. Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) led a successful gender mainstreaming campaign that contributed to the creation of an AU gender directorate. More recently, CSOs have been consulted by the AU's Peace and Security Department on the substance of an AU conflict prevention policy document.

Faith-based networks, such as the All African Conference of Churches and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), have also pursued MoUs with the AU. Church networks have played an important role in peacebuilding in Africa and can prove influential where the state is weak. The Sudan Catholic Bishops Conference, for example, played an active role leading to

Southern Sudan's referendum in 2010 by lobbying the AU, the UN, and the U.S. Congress to back the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. SECAM bishops also lobbied national governments to ratify the AU's African Charter on Democratic Elections to prevent electoral-related violence.

In the absence of effective formal mechanisms, CSOs have had to pursue innovative approaches to engaging the AU. A good example of this is the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), which is building an African Peace Centre in Durban as a venue for dialogue and mediation for political leaders. ACCORD has a MoU and long-standing relationship with the AU. It helps to organize the AU's High Level Retreats which brings together officials from the AU, RECs, Special Envoys, and civil society representatives to discuss emerging peace and security challenges. For example, the June 2012 retreat in Burkina Faso addressed ways to harmonize coordination between the AU and RECs by strengthening relations between the African Union Panel of the Wise and the equivalent REC platforms.

Best Practice Mechanisms

From our RIGO analysis, it is clear that future policy developments should focus on creating enhanced and more cooperative linkages between RIGOs and CSOs. This section offers three cases which exemplify how RIGO engagement with CSOs can be enhanced. These 'best-practice' mechanisms for engagement include ECOWAS' partnership with civil society in early warning, the Pacific Island Forum (PIF), and the EU Civil Society Dialogue Network.

ECOWAS and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

ECOWAS has built a unique partnership with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in the area of early warning. In 2003, WANEP signed a MoU with ECOWAS to help operationalize the latter's Early Warning and Response Network. ECOWARN provides daily assessments of conflict-related trends across its fifteen member states. It draws on the knowledge and analysis of a pool of civil society actors from WANEP and government appointed observers from each member state.

ECOWAS' concern for early warning can be traced back to the devastating wars in West Africa in the 1990s. The strength of civil society is also a byproduct of this time; civil society actors emerged as prominent players amidst violence and state collapse. ECOWAS' relationship with civil society has helped inform its interventions on multiple occasions. WANEP policy briefs helped ECOWAS play an effective mediation role in Guinea in 2007. In Cote D'Ivoire, WANEP recommendations about direct dialogue led to the Ouagadougou accords. In other situations,

early warning has not translated into early response, as was seen recently in Mali. WANEP has also repeatedly called for ECOWAS member states to establish their own early warning systems "with full involvement of CSOs" to feed into ECOWARN.

Pacific Island Forum and Civil Society

Since the adoption of the Biketawa Declaration in 2000, the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) has intervened in several regional crises, including the Solomon Islands, Nauru, and Fiji. In recent years, the PIF Secretariat (PIFS) has also developed a fairly advanced mechanism for engagement with CSOs working on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Since 2009, bi-annual civil society 'dialogues' or workshops have been held around the Forum's principal body for security discussions, the Forum Regional Security Committee (FRSC). Regional and national CSO representatives attend, alongside political governance and security staff from PIFS, representatives of member states, and other development partners.

The goal of the dialogues is primarily information sharing to keep Secretariat officials abreast of developments that may need to be raised to higher levels. Although CSO representatives cannot attend FRSC meetings, they can submit reports and lobby the secretariat through the dialogues, ostensibly giving them an entry point into higher-level decision making. The dialogues have tended to include gender-based CSOs, but other groups, like the Pacific Conference of Churches which plays a significant peacebuilding role in the region, are also invited.

Due to funding constraints, attendance has been largely limited to CSOs based in Suva, Fiji, where PIF is headquartered. There are only a small number of groups working on conflict-related issues, making turnout poor at times. Because of this, PIFS has opened up the dialogues to a broader array of CSOs. CSOs have struggled to narrow down actionable security issues to present to the FRS and feel the secretariat needs to do more to better connect with the CSOs explicitly focused on security issues in the region.

While the PIF dialogues have encountered problems, the mechanism is still considered 'best practice' because it gives CSOs contact with policymakers and an ostensible channel into decision making processes. While some CSOs have struggled to engage directly with government officials on a national level, attendance at the regional platform has raised their profile and provides at least indirect access to the policy process. From the perspective of the Secretariat, the dialogues have been useful for information sharing. PIFS bureaucrats note that the dialogues are a 'work in progress,' and may take many revisions to get right.

An example of this engagement is evident in the work of FemLINKPACIFIC. The

secretariat of GPPAC's Pacific regional network, it has been among the CSOs to fully utilize the dialogues as an advocacy channel. Building on a relationship with PIFS established over time, they were successful in raising the issue of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace, and security to the FRSC. The FRSC subsequently endorsed a Regional Action Plan on Women Peace and Security at its 2012 meeting, which Pacific Islands Forum Leaders later noted at their annual meeting in 2012. The issues would not have been raised to such high levels had it not been for FemLINKPACIFIC's strong advocacy through the dialogue and FRSC, including through other channels.

The European Union and the Civil Society Dialogue Network

In recent years, the EU has pursued an innovative approach to engagement with civil society in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Since 2010, it has contracted an independent Brussels-based CSO network, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), to run a forum for dialogue between CSOs and EU policymakers called the Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN). The CSDN is being discussed as a possible model for other RIGOs.

The CSDN hosts events on policy issues of concern to the EU, with the explicit goal of informing EU policy. Roundtables are held on geographic issues or crises of importance to the EU, such as Libya or Mali, or thematic issues surrounding EU commitments, such as the implementation of UNSCR 1325. For events with a geographic focus, CSO representatives and the EU delegation in the particular country are flown to Brussels (government officials tend not to be included). Present as equals at these sessions, the CSOs are invited to share their specific expertise on a topic or crisis situation, as opposed to pitching for funding. Around forty people usually attend, and the numbers are kept low to preserve the nature of a dialogue.

The EU has viewed the CSDN as a success after conducting an independent internal review. It subsequently extended its first contract with EPLO for another three years (2014-2016). EU officials have found that CSO representatives have been able to speak more freely and offer more frank perspectives in Brussels, compared to their home countries. For civil society, the CSDN has removed the formalities from engagement with the EU. A major question facing CSOs in this forum is whether they should focus their advocacy on regional institutions or on specific member states, particularly as the latter tend to have a lot of power. In general, they adopt a combined approach in an attempt to influence both stakeholders.

From a managerial perspective, EPLO has served as an interlocutor for civil society. When trying to engage with civil society, EU bureaucrats not only struggle to

identify who to speak to, but also how to structure meetings so that they remain on topic. EPLO has been an effective facilitator. Jointly managed with the EU's External Action Service and Foreign Policy Instrument Service, EPLO staff work directly with EU bureaucrats to design and negotiate the substance and objective of roundtables. Founded in Brussels over ten years ago, EPLO has built up trust with the EU over a significant period of time.

The working relationship between the EU and the EPLO could be adopted as a model for other RIGOs, such as the OAS. If other RIGOs adopt this model or aspects of it, they will need to identify a trusted CSO organization to act as a facilitator. Ideally, the organization would need to be neutral, non-partisan, and widely respected by all CSOs, as opposed to favoring or excluding certain organizations.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the growing role of regional organizations in international peace and security through the lens of civil society engagement. It summarizes some of the current trends in RIGO programs for peace and reconciliation while identifying the challenges and opportunities faced by CSOs as they seek to cooperate with RIGOs for peacebuilding purposes. It is clear from this brief survey that significant opportunities exist for continued and enhanced cooperation between CSOs and RIGOs. The cases and examples reviewed here confirm empirical studies on the beneficial impact of civil society engagement for peacebuilding. Best practices are beginning to emerge that point the way toward more effective cooperation between CSOs and RIGOs, as well among RIGOs themselves. Further research is needed to probe more deeply into both the accomplishments and the obstacles civil society groups face as they seek to cooperate with RIGOs to build peace.

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Acronyms

ACCORD—African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
 ACSC—ASEAN Civil Society Conference
 AICHR—ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
 AIPR—ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation
 ALBA—Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America
 APRC—Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council
 ASEAN—Association of Southeast Asian nations
 AU—African Union
 CELAC—Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
 CEWARN—Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism
 CIDI—Inter-American Council for Integral Development
 CSDN—Civil Society Dialogue Network
 CSOs—Civil Society Organizations
 ECOSOC—AU Economic and Social and Cultural Commission
 ECOWARN—ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network
 ECOWAS—Economic Community of West African States
 EPLO—European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
 EU—European Union
 FAS—Femmes Africa Solidarité
 FRSC—PIF Forum Regional Security Committee
 GPPAC—Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
 GoNGOs—Government created non-governmental organizations
 IGAD—Intergovernmental Authority on Development
 INGO—International Non-governmental Organization
 LAS—League of Arab States, “Arab League”
 MoU—Memorandum of Understanding
 NATO—North Atlantic Treaty Organization
 OAS—Organization of American States
 PIF—Pacific Island Forum
 PSC—AU Peace and Security Council
 RECs—Regional Economic Communities (Africa)
 RIGOs—Regional intergovernmental organizations
 SAPA—Solidarity for Asia Peoples’ Advocacies
 SECAM—Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar
 UN—United Nations
 UNASUR—Union of South American Nations
 UNSC—United Nations Security Council
 UNSCR—United Nations Security Council Resolution
 WANEP—West Africa Network for Peacebuilding



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