Contending Challenges in Peacebuilding: The role of Peace and Reconciliation Movement (PRM) in Bo District

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Abstract

The increasing rate of Non Governmental Organisations interventions efforts in post conflict environments is on the premise of them building peace after a violent conflict, and restoring the dignity and rights of people. As was established in TRC Report (2004)\(^1\), Sierra Leoneans envisaged countless suffering during the eleven years rebel war with a complete breakdown in law and order, infrastructure and the economic lives of the people was in total disorder. Amidst this quest after the violent conflict for people to ascend from such a precarious status, build their lives and get back to their normal ways of life, Government need other development partners (especially NGOs) to complement her efforts to ensure stability. But in doing this, Non Governmental Organisations encounter several challenges. The focus of this study is to therefore find out key challenges facing Peace and Reconciliation Movement (PRM)-a local NGO in Bo District, Southern Sierra Leone, in its effort to building the peace of its operational communities. Mixed research methodology techniques were employed in the study process. These included using semi-structured questionnaire, focus group discussion and observation in which the researcher was absorbed. Outcome of the research revealed two main categories of challenges: Institutional and External factors. The lack of synergy and cooperation within and outside these organisations, coupled with inadequate considerations for people’s livelihood are among the challenging factors of NGOs. In this case Peace and Reconciliation Movement been a non state actor cannot fully achieve it aim (i.e. ensuring stability through Human Right Advocay) on its own and be able to surmount some of these challenges without the cooperation and intervention of several other actors like government, other domestic and international organisations, security sectors, the citizens themselves, local authorities, religious leaders to name a few.

Key Words: Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Peacebuilding, Human Right, and Livelihood, Sierra Leone Police (SLP), and Sierra Leone Armed Forces (SLAF).

Introduction

Several studies including Aall Pamela, (January 1, 1996)\(^2\), have indicated the significant increase of non- governmental organisations in post-conflict countries with Sierra Leone no exception with the premise of them being agents of change and serving as catalysts in the entire peacebuilding process. In Sierra Leone, the influx of NGOs (national and international) after the eleven years rebel war has been highly appreciated by most communities without even considering what these organisations ought to

\(^1\) TRC Report (2004): The Sierra Leone’s Truth and Reconciliation Report, 2004
be doing and whether what they do is commensurate to what they should be doing. Creating the enabling environment through adequate policy, customs and traditions is considered a key factor especially for NGO’s whose focus is on Human Right Campaign. This study targets a nongovernmental organisation call “Peace and Reconciliation Movement (PRM)” critically assessing its roles and contending challenges which have strong tendency to undermining its effectiveness and efficiency. Most often, this does not capture individual’s interest because their mere presence has being a premise for effective relief. But stability can be created by NGO’s depending on their thematic focus and different strategies used to bring transformative and projectable change. During and after the war, Bo city became the hub for most of these institutions and from Bo City they operated in other areas within the district after the cease fire and subsequently the end of the eleven years rebel war in 2002 (TRC Report 2004). In this study key considerations is giving to their contributions towards peacebuilding, challenges face and their partnership with other organisations and stakeholders in their area of operation (Bo District). Thus, the thrust of this study is to assess the role of Local NGO’s (in this case Peace and Reconciliation Movement) in their peacebuilding efforts bringing out contending challenges face in Bo district.

Concepts of Nongovernmental Organisations and Peacebuilding

Guttieri Karen and Kuhn Thomas, (November 2005) refers to NGOs as organizations characterized by non-profit, organised group of people who are not seeking government office. This definition is use in this research as it falls within the UN framework of what NGOs are; any non-profit, voluntary citizen’s group that is organised on a local, national and international level that is oriented and driven by people with a common interest.

NGOs traditionally engage in agenda-setting, policy-making and implementation of policy, with varying balance between the three types of activities, several researches revealed that NGOs are very significant in creating opportunities for participation and empowerment. But it is noted that majority of the NGOs are organised around specific issues, such as human rights, governance, livelihood and the environment to name a few. They are most of the times seeing helping in monitoring and implementing agreements to sustain peace peaceful coexistence.

Moreover, the interdependence nature of NGOs can be seen as a huge challenge that besides funding, unless and until they are given an enabling environment, they cannot function as expected. NGOs only thrive in a conducive atmosphere created by the government. Gerald M. Steinberg, (Feb 11, 2006) concluded that it is when the states and markets fail to fully replace state functions and formal political processes that they rely on NGOs. In especially post-conflict environments where the needs of citizens are insurmountable, governments often turn to NGOs (national or international) for their interventions in several areas including but not limited to: capacity building, food, medicine, transport as well as human assets with which to distribute those resources to the community. However, the efforts of NGOs cannot be analyzed for successes in isolation from the state; they are interdependent because NGOs compliments government’s efforts.

According to Boutros Boutros Ghali (1992) in his report to the United Nations General Assembly titled “An Agenda for Peace”, he defined peacebuilding as an action to solidify peace and avoid reversion into conflict. It involves activities undertaken to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations that initially led to the outbreak of the violent conflict. Peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapping into violent by strengthening national capabilities at all levels for conflict management. In 1997, Brutus Brutus Ghali explained that peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of violent

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3 TRC Report (2004): The Sierra Leone’s Truth and Reconciliation Report, 2004
5 Gerald M. Steinberg, (Feb 11, 2006). Ngo watch/articles: Funding NGOs Is No Solution; The Jerusalem Post
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conflict re-occurrence. It should be noted however, that considering the fact that violent conflicts might not have similar root causes, peacebuilding strategies must be reasonably tailored to specific needs of the community concerned and even the type of conflict. It should be based on national ownership, and should comprise a careful, prioritized, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities all geared towards sustaining and building the peace. This means the aspect of inclusiveness and local ownership through Human Right Campaigns should be very significant from the onset of the peacebuilding process.

Therefore, without addressing the continued exclusion or marginalisation of different groups in societies using human right tools to ensure positive attitudes and behaviour change, development gains will not be sustainable (Human Rights Watch, September 2005)\(^8\).

**Linking Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Peacebuilding**

In addition to providing humanitarian aid and mediation, Annan Koffi, (1998) in support of Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992; 1997) concluded that NGOs also are well positioned to engage in empowerment and capacity-building among the local population and ensures full participation with variety of joint activities (Annan Koffi, 1998)\(^9\).

In Bo District, NGOs like RADA, MOVE-SL, HELP-SL, World Vision –SL, PRM-SL are operating in several chiefdoms and making impact in these communities. Since the end of the war, PRM has been implementing several activities geared towards peacebuilding. PRM works with Volunteer Peace Monitors in three chiefdoms in Bo District who monitor and report human rights abuses and violations and actions are taken in addressing them by either settling the problem peacefully if they are not grave or by bringing perpetrators before the court of law for cases that are serious like rape, gender base violence, etc. PRM has been embarking on sensitizing these communities in human rights issues through dialogue sessions and settling disputes most especially boundary disputes between chiefdoms and ensuring peaceful co-existence among its inhabitants.

It is therefore against this backdrop that this study is done to assess the role of Peace and Reconciliation Movement (PRM) in the Peacebuilding process with regards the activities undertaken, and the challenges faced in carrying out their functions as a Peace building organisation.

A core element is the concept of peace constituencies that aims to identify mid-level individuals and empower them to build peace and support reconciliation (Lederach, 1997)\(^10\). The assumption here is that mid-level empowerment will impact on both the macro and grass-roots levels. Over the years, multilateral organisations and donors have established the significance of NGOs in the peacebuilding process of any war torn environment. It should be noted that the growing importance attached to these initiatives is due to the fact that peacebuilding entails numerous societal reconstruction tasks that official diplomacy and reconstruction programs cannot achieve easily.

For such a situation, there should always be collaboration between NGOs, central government, UN or it partners and other agencies. This encourages networks of peacebuilding organisations to establish joint working groups to foster learning about peacebuilding and conflict sensitive mainstreaming. Thus, re-emphasizing the need for synergy and collaborations.

The role played by non-governmental organisations in peacebuilding process over the years has been very immense which leads to a wide agreement on the complimentary peace initiatives and diplomatic peace efforts. NGOs have helped give voice to actors from conflict using human right tools. There is

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\(^10\) New York: United Nations

now a general consensus that national actors should take the lead in peacebuilding, and that outside intervention should be limited to their support (Lederach. J.P., 1997). It could be an established principle that effective delivery and sustainable development depend on locally appropriate and grounded structures from the first day and this can be undertaken by NGOs within these communities. This is exactly the reason for PRM’s intervention focus. In this study, the appropriateness of PRM’s intervention efforts taking into consideration their concern for community structures (for instance local leadership, culture and traditions of the targeted groups), lack of or inadequate funding, delay in disbursement as a result of institutional bureaucracies to name a few, are among the challenges assessed.

**Challenges Facing NGOs in their Peacebuilding Efforts**

Considering the tremendous work involved in the peacebuilding process, it is very crucial for NGOs to be inclusive considering how finite their resources are. There should always be an atmosphere that can be filled by NGOs so that they can aid societies to reconstruct their lives and their environments after heavy hostilities (Guttieri Karen and Kuhn Thomas, November 2005). Against this backdrop, PRM’s has tailored it activities along two key areas: Human Right in which good governance issues are key and livelihood support service in the form providing revolving funds (micro credits). But are resources needed for PRM to implement these activities readily available? This is a very crucial question when it comes to peacebuilding ventures. Fundraising from individual givers helps strengthen NGO independence, but it is time – consuming and expensive. Additionally, accepting money (funding) from governments poses problems of independence from Government policy but can also be useful. But getting projects off the ground requires funds which NGOs have vital role in supporting societies emerging from conflicts, half of whom are relapsed old conflicts where earlier efforts at peacebuilding and prevention have failed. Greater assessments of best practices and lessons learnt about the vast growth of NGO activity, both acting independently and in partnership with the UN, government and other organisations are indeed of immense importance. Conclusively, Barry Buzan, (1991) also revealed that there is always a challenge on information acquisition, sharing and dispensing among various actors. This has led to mistrust between the various factors including the forces as well as from the citizens. The mistrust can lead to loss or ignorance on information that could help maintain stability. This is equally attributed to the anti-social character of the NGOs towards the civilians in the societies that is believed to be a necessity in maintaining their credibility and status as social workers. However, there is a difference between stated doctrine and sufficient capability to match it and most of these challenges are debatable depending on the peacebuilding situation at hand.

**Methodology**

For this study a mixed methodology was followed. A survey study that took into considerations the use of both qualitative and quantitative techniques was employed. Tools used to collect data from both primary and secondary resources included semi-structured questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions. For data collection, a total of 100 respondents were targeted including: key informants (like the volunteers of PRM, local authorities, beneficiaries) from the services rendered by PRM within the targeted study area. Among various operational communities of PRM, three chiefdoms were selected purposively- Kakua, Jaiama Bongor and Baoma chiefdoms. Respondents were selected

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randomly for specific purposes. Kakua Chiefdom whose headquarter town is Bo City (the second city of Sierra Leone), accounted for 40. 30 respondents were selected from Jaiama Bongor and Baoma chiefdoms each. Kakua Chiefdom received the highest number of respondents because of its large size, strategic location, and it’s more populated than the other two chiefdoms.

Discussions and open interviews were held with key actors within these communities. The choice was prompted by timeline limitations and available resources. Desk research was also carried out reviewing several activity reports of PRM in all the various sectors they are operating and other relevant documents including data collected from PRM website to provide effective and efficient analysis.

Findings and Discussions

It came out glaring from the discussions carried out with all respondents especially from the Ministry of Social Welfare and PRM Volunteers, that the entire operations of NGOs have been supervised by a Unit that coordinates the activities of all NGOs in the country. The unit dictates operational areas, ensures that there are procedures to follow in the recruitment of personnel, which should not be tied to ethnic background, religion or sex. PRM therefore, has got personnel cutting across ethnic background, religion and sex.

With the end of the war in Sierra Leone, the Government established the Sierra Leone Association of Non Governmental Organisations (SLANGO) to coordinate the affairs of NGOs within the country. From the findings, it came out clear that the Peace Building Structures of PRM is in line with the structures of SLANGO. PRM has got Field Officers who directly work with Volunteer Peace Monitors that are assigned to the various areas of operation. The volunteer Peace Monitors stay and work in these communities and they liaise with the Field Officers to monitor, document and report for example human rights abuses and violations in the communities.

Level of Knowledge on Peacebuilding

Table 8: Distribution of Respondents on Their Level of Knowledge on Peacebuilding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
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Source: Field survey October, 2015.

From the above table, half of the respondents 50 (50%) are knowledgeable on issues relating to peacebuilding, whilst 40 940%) have fair knowledge and just a very small number have no knowledge on what peacebuilding is. At least most of the people targeted have some idea of what Peacebuilding is all about although it took some time for some of them to even understand what the concept means as for most it is a new vocabulary. But they are aware of the fact that there are peacebuilding efforts going on within their communities as a result of PRM’s intervention. Just a few numbers are not aware that such efforts are being made. The respondents were able to identify some of the peacebuilding activities going on in their communities and the role PRM plays in the peacebuilding process.

Organizations Engage in Peacebuilding Activities in the Study Area

To know the key actors that focus on peacebuilding activities in the form of organizations and institutions, question was design to unravel this. Figure 1 below indicates organizations operating according to their locations.
In all of the three chiefdoms, the table shows that majority of respondents are aware that PRM is playing key roles in the peacebuilding processes within its operational communities. Next to it is the central government. The above table clearly shows that PRM’s intervention in the three chiefdoms is indeed very glaring as they are visible within the various communities. The research also proved that PRM is very pivotal in promoting peace within these communities as most respondents clearly explained their importance in maintaining peace. From the figure therefore, there is no doubt that PRM is indeed a very key player in the peacebuilding process within the targeted communities.

Peacebuilding Activities by PRM within the Study Area

In post conflict environment like Sierra Leone, most NGOs especially those that are engaged in issues relating to advocacy and the promotion of human security are very much incline with information vital in building peace. Respondents pointed out that PRM major focus area is ‘Human Rights Advocacy’ and ‘Livelihood’ thus do have the structures in place to monitor, document and report human rights abuses and violations within these communities. PRM work with trained Volunteer Peace Monitors who are stationed in these communities and who work in concert with community stakeholders and always ensure they report early warning signals for possible conflict situation to the head office in Bo and also for the security sectors (Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and Armed Forces (SLAF)) if the need so arises.

The Volunteer Peace Monitors explained the mechanisms set up to address issues that have the potential to erupt into conflict and how they work with the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police Force to track perpetrators of rape and domestic violence. This study revealed that the presence of the Volunteer Peace Monitors in these communities is in itself making perpetrators jittery to carry out most of their heinous crimes. Hence, fighting to protect the right of individuals and ensure societal stability. Some of these actions, beneficiaries expressed go against their culture and traditional practices.

Awareness raising through trainings and sensitzations is considered very key by PRM in promoting stability in post conflict environments. In these communities there is an increase in the awareness level of respondents on issues related to human rights and human security in general. It came out crystal clear that PRM has been key in sensitizing community members on human rights issues. Several trainings on human rights have been conducted in the communities. This has raised the level of awareness on issues relating to human rights promotion and protection tremendously compare to few years back or what obtained prior to the conflict. In line with Human Rights Watch, (September 2005)\textsuperscript{14}, PRM has established structures that clearly inform the stakeholders in circumstances when there are human rights abuses and violations. At least community members are now aware of their rights and where to run to in situations when their rights are either abused or violated. Community people revealed that on several occasions, PRM played advocacy role in these communities, advocating on human rights issues with community stakeholders and security personnel. This has also

greatly increased the capacity level of community people as revealed during the Focus Group Discussions. Volunteer Peace Monitors who are stationed in the study area were selected from their communities (i.e. they are citizens of their targeted communities) and have got series of trainings from PRM in not only human rights but also livelihood. NGOs in general from community discussions helped community members travel to Capacity Building trainings organised by other organisations. In terms of Livelihood Support respondents revealed that PRM did not embark on infrastructural development within these communities but they however created the enabling environment for other institutions or organisations to come and establish those facilities. In Koribondo for example, respondents clearly stated that PRM provided livelihood facility by dishing out funds to community members to kick start small business ventures and improve on their livelihood. Some women now have skills in soap making and can now make some money out of it for their livelihood sustenance. Jackson Richard, (2000)\textsuperscript{15} established that most governments, especially third world countries do not have the capacity to employ all portions of the working population. NGOs in general create job opportunities for community people as identified during the study. For instance, some middle-level men and women majority of whom are youths, some of whom were part of the fighting groups during the war have been employed as Peace Monitors, administrative staff etc. The high unemployment level is therefore by the estimation of the respondents considerably reduced by NGOs intervention which has encouraged job creation.

Challenges Faced by PRM in it Peacebuilding Efforts

Challenges faced by PRM in executing their duties and functions within these communities has been categorised into two; institutional structures/arrangements and those that come as a result of community/government interventions (i.e. Institutional structures and external factors. This study also majority of the respondents indicated that PRM indeed faces challenges during intervention in these communities. From Institutional perspectives, the issue of policies to guide the operations of NGOs so as to adhere to the monition and evaluation procedures for effective and sustainable implementation is inadequate. Additionally, several NGOs experience overlapping activities in similar communities due to poor regulations as a result of weak policy. Lack of funding or resources for Project implementation is another key institutional limitation. At the beginning of the fiscal year, budget is prepared, but the implementation of the activities is contingent upon the availability of those intended resources. From the research it came up glaring that most of the times these resources are difficult to come by and even where they are available, transfers by donor partners arrive mostly very late. To start implementation in this case, the organisation has to reorganize their implementation strategy to be able to carry out their activities properly and sometimes some activities are left out not implemented because they are time bound. This has been very frustrating to members of the organisation (PRM) and the targeted beneficiaries. PRM staff members interviewed revealed that because their organisation’s focus is on implementation of mostly activities relating to Human rights, they face serious financial constraints with the outbreak of the Ebola Virus Scourge in the country. Their donors were not ready to give them funds to implement activities focusing on the fight against Ebola and also were not ready to dish out more funds because they think that nothing effectively was going on in the country during the outbreak. In addition to that PRM has less human resources compared to the volume of work they do and their area of intervention. It was established that most of the personnel recruited lack the requisite skills because most NGOs go in search of less educated personnel they can easily handle and pay with small

salaries ignoring their capacities. It is also the case that some of the social workers have built their careers and disciplines and at a point in time decides to join NGOs because of the believe that they can get better pay than government jobs. This study reveals that PRM has volunteer Peace Monitors who are suppose to be stationed in these communities but they do not have regular staff members frequently visiting these communities due to the inadequate staff: community ratio.

It was revealed that major challenge faced by PRM is ‘External Challenge’ (i.e. they are Outside the domain of PRM). For instance, some community authorities do not support the activities of PRM for several reasons, thereby resulting to the creation of an environment not conducive for their effectiveness. Some NGOs have very poor relation with the locals as evidenced in the discussions that ensued. The study proved that community elders are of the conviction that monies brought into their communities by NGOs should always go through their hands and when it is not the case they become lethargic in giving their support to these organisations. Some of them because during human rights training and campaign, they are advised not to beat their wives and women are asked to take up matters of domestic violence with the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone police force, they see PRM as encouraging their wives not to respect them. Majority see these actions of PRM as going against their culture and traditions, thus, sometimes prove difficulty.

Conclusion

From the study, it is evident that PRM has played significant role towards the Peacebuilding exercise in Bo District especially as it relates to the following: capacity building through awareness raising and training, advocacy, Livelihood support in the form of revolving funds, employment and security assurance. However, they are being disturbed by several lapses and loopholes discovered during the study. These challenges and/or problems are either as a result of their institutional structure or due to external factors ranging from the dynamic structure and/or functions of their operational communities including the conflict situations they face. Several NGOs have shifted from their traditional role of building the capacity of their communities and allow them to own the process for sustainability. There is dire need to tackle the human rights abuses and violations and the need for people’s liberties to be respected. Poverty has gravely eaten the fabric of the society as evidenced from many of the inhabitants in the study area.

The NGO been a non state actor cannot fully achieve development on its own and be able to surmount some of these challenges without the cooperation and intervention of several other actors like government, local and international organisations, security sectors, individuals, religious leaders and other stakeholders (Gerald M. Steinberg, Feb 11, 2006)\textsuperscript{16} An indication of this according to this study shows that locals are therefore more comfortable with their customary laws rather than the official legal system which is believed to be mired with corruption and too much bureaucracy. This is in confirmation of what the study assumption posits to address; that in their quest to play key roles in order to ensure stability in society, NGOs are easily undermined where synergy on the part of all the parties are lacking or inadequate.

It is in lieu of the above that the following recommendations are made:

- Government should review its policies to ensure conducive operational environment to guarantee NGOs effective functioning. For instance, there is also need for a policy Framework for NGOs operations in the district to be fully developed and implemented by Council. Such a policy should clearly state the roles and responsibilities of NGOs in the entire Peacebuilding process.
- The capacity of Law Enforcement Officers (especially the Sierra Leone Police force) should be built significantly and also ensure cordial relationship between these Law Enforcement Officers and community members is strengthened

\textsuperscript{16} Gerald M. Steinberg, (Feb 11, 2006). Ngo watch/articles: Funding NGOs Is No Solution; The Jerusalem Post.
There need to be synergy between or among various stakeholders in order to achieve the Peacebuilding strides. There should be effective communication between and among the various Peacebuilding actors in each district. In this respect NGOs should be meeting periodically within the district and the District Council should facilitate this venture. This will help NGOs to know what interventions are been made by other NGOs and this will promote collaboration.

Provision of adequate and timely disbursement of funding is a must to maintaining peacebuilding interventions so as to guarantee stability; and

The need for attitudinal and behavioural change campaign to modify the sentimental attachedment of these communities to their customs and traditions is of the essence.

References


Gerald M. Steinberg, (Feb 11, 2006). Ngo watch/articles: Funding NGOs Is No Solution; The Jerusalem Post.


