

## **EPES Mandala Consulting      Democratic Governance, Civil Society and NGOs**

Some of the leading consultants of EPES Mandala have more than 25 years of experience with managing civil society programmes and planning and evaluating projects run by non-governmental organizations (NGO). Our field experiences show that civil society organizations (CSO) – in particular spiritual leaders, inter-faith organizations, children and youth groups and women’s associations- have a crucial role to play reorganizing society after conflict, rebuilding the social economy and creating jobs and wealth.

Peace, disarmament and reconciliation cannot be achieved without the active participation of civil society and this is one area in which peacemaking models are often defective. It frequently happens that governments are part of the conflict and it is unwise to rely entirely on imploded government institutions for building peace and reconciliation., more especially in Africa.

We see civil society as one of the pillars in the modern African state, alongside the Executive, the Legislature, Security Forces and the Judiciary. The concept of Nation State was imported to Africa with colonial rule. The inherited State structures were often weak and not always well-adapted to African life and politics.

Rebuilding a Failed State therefore means strengthening civil society at the local and national levels. This is vital in Africa especially, where CSOs (including village and inter-faith councils, press associations and the media) have become indispensable partners for governments and international institutions undertaking disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconciliation (DDRRR) and longer term development programmes.

EPES Mandala approaches the issue of democratic governance and peace-building by promoting partnerships between governments through a strategic series of steps that embrace international NGOs and local, community-based organizations or federations. These steps include:

- Rebuilding social structures and social organization
- Strengthening social capital, community organizations and NGOs
- Democratizing peace-building and development processes to make them lasting and durable
- Working to promote sustainable economic growth at the micro-level and in the social economy
- Re-integrating ex-combatants into civilian and economic life with training and reconciliation
- Working with child affected by war or disaster and child soldiers to make them valuable citizens
- Confidence-building, creating a sense of overall national and local security
- Strengthening local civil society’s voice in debate and its role in decision-making

- Training and capacity-building that bring together civil society leaders and people who are responsible in local government for providing security and enforcing the rule of law

EPES Mandala fieldwork and action-research confirms UN, academic and NGO findings that we need a better understanding about the composition of Peace and Human Security, and a new approach to the nature of the Nation state. Many countries still suffer from the failure of post-colonial centralized regimes, consolidated by incompetent dictatorships or military regimes.

Decentralized representative governance structures offer a new way forward. Since the early 1990s, countries like Senegal, Ghana and Mali have been creating new mechanisms for decentralized governance. Decentralization strengthens civil society- not just the urban groups that are so often perceived by donors as the most important but the real civil society organizations of Africa and Asia: village associations and cooperatives, unions of workers and artisans, women's credit unions, youth groups and a thousand other associative networks.

Civil society was also repressed by young political parties building up new States (often One-Party States) and believing in centralized government. This new Millennium has seen civil society emerge as one of the five pillars of the African State, regaining its historic position as second only to the Executive. In many African (and Asian) countries (especially with the creation of decentralized governance mechanisms and representative, transparent local government) civil society is replacing a discredited legislature as the most representative voice of the people and supplanting the Judiciary as a primary source of conflict mediation.

EPES Mandala believes in looking for a new approach to peace negotiation and reconciliation, based on using the strengths of African civil society and the capacity of grassroots and women's organizations to negotiate peace. The same is true in a different way in Asian societies which have very different structures from Africa. In Central Asia, for example, the mosque may be the centre of civil society action from which we have to build our peace and disarmament work. Peace- we cannot say it too often is a cultural construct and it means different things in different places.

Civil society plays a vital role in reducing local violence and enforcing the rule of law. Without human rights organizers and strong local governance groups, security sector reform will be weaker and abuse of power will not be curbed. Without the pressure of organised civil society, judges will be weak, police will be venal and there will be no rule of law. Without civil society organisations and especially the mobilization of women, children and youth, disarmament, reintegration and reconciliation cannot succeed.

## **An Expert Team**

Robin Edward Poulton has 25 years experience with NGOs and civil society in Europe, Africa and Asia as participant and civil society leader, and as a manager of rural development, post disaster construction and weapon collection programmes. Michelle Elcoat Poulton's field work in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America and management of large international NGOs has brought her unrivalled expertise in civil society and building social capital.

Dennis Brennan and Tore Rose both created significant NGO projects when they were directing major country development programmes respectively for USAID and UNDP in Africa. The modern evolution of partnership programmes between donors and international NGOs and between INGOs and local civil society organizations owes a great deal to their philosophy and the success of their programmes.

EPES Mandala has a remarkable group of development experts and NGO managers in its list of consultants, including significant civil society leaders like Salem Mehzoud, Djely Samoura, Ibrahim Ag Youssouf, Aart van der Heide, Idrissa Maiga and Mary Daly in Africa, Rick Schroeder, Noor Akbari, Seng Song and Ghassan Rubeiz in Asia and the Middle East. Alongside them are distinguished civil society women's leaders like Bushra Gohar and Miriam Bibi in Pakistan, Binta Barry Mansaray, Mariam Diakite and Kawther Elmi in West Africa and Lucy Lainfiesta in Latin America. We have access to a wide range of men and women from civil society, each with specialist skills, and we choose our consultant teams to fit the cultural needs and the political economy of each assignment.

## **A Range of Relevant Experience**

### **Strengthening civil society and local governance institutions**

Our combined experience covers many of the countries of Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, working with a range of institutions, including consultancy work for UNDP (designing post conflict strategies with community based organizations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Rwanda, Algeria, Senegal-Casamance, Albania and former Yugoslavia), UNICEF (developing community structures around children and youth in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Angola, Timor Leste), UNIDIR (developing civil society networks and action-research to limit illegal small arms), USAID (promoting democratic governance and decentralization in Mali, Senegal, Nepal, Afghanistan), Swiss Cooperation (building management and evaluation capacity of peasant organizations in Cameroon and Chad) for the European Union (disarmament and governance issues in Cambodia, West and East Africa)) as well as work for UN agencies and many NGOs in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

## **Project design, management, and planning with civil society**

Having designed, managed and evaluated projects with government funding up to \$50 million (a USAID governance programme was the biggest), EPES Mandala consultants have experience on all sides of the project cycle. We have experience of working at every level of decision-making, from the grassroots pre-cooperative group to the local government, ministerial, national, regional and international level (working with inter-governmental organizations like African Union, or NATO, EU or the United Nations).

Some of us have researched and written extensively about civil society and NGOs: in our publications section, there are several books and articles that deal with the role of NGOs in peace and development and that tell the story of how and where we first worked in Asia and Africa.

## **Participatory evaluation and in-service training for NGOs**

Many years of experience in rural development and conflict resolution have focused the skills of EPES Mandala consultants on programme design and evaluation as a participatory training process. Evaluation planning should be integral part of programme design (see for example the OXFAM Field Manager's Handbook and Dr. Poulton's 1988 book **Putting People First**).

Participatory training and action-research tools (RRA, PRA, Haswell poverty equation, poverty research carried out by some of our consultants, role play, mapping, community calendars, before-and-after analysis, star-grading systems, SWOT analysis, etc) are very successful for evaluating projects and strengthening civil society organizations. Evaluations are especially valuable if they are used as a participatory training exercise so project workers and beneficiaries understand the process and buy into the conclusions. The best way to start the process is with a SWOT analysis: once the participants have finished their long list of Strengths, they are in a good frame of mind to analyse their Weaknesses and ready to identify Opportunities and Threats. This works even if (as once Happened in Cameroon) you find yourself dealing with a group of 40 cooperative leaders speaking five different languages.