

# THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL NGOs AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS ON THE PEACE PROCESS IN BURUNDI

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## INTRODUCTION

At the end of its transition period, Burundi is a country that faces many problems. The disarmament, the poverty, the delay of the elections, the conflict between the FNL and the government's army, the land rights problems, the returning refugees and IDPs, etc. are just some of the issues that can undermine the peace process. Therefore it is important for the international community to put all its efforts in supporting Burundi to keep the country out of an escalation of the violence.

The international NGOs are a financially small but psychologically important part of the international community, and their presence and programmes should leave a positive effect on conflict regions. In recent years, researchers have worked on this theme, with different results. For investigators like Goodhand and Hulme, the INGOs are wishful thinking organisations whose impact on a country or a peace process is all but non-existent.<sup>1</sup> Others, like Havermans, see a more positive impact of the programs of INGOs and believe that these organisations can make a difference.<sup>2</sup>

This study tries to evaluate the impact of the INGOs and the CSOs (civil society organisations) in Burundi, and was written to receive the degree of Master in Development Cooperation (option: politics and conflict) at Ghent University. The paper is supported by Prof. Dr. Koen Vlassenroot and is mainly based on field research conducted in the Great Lakes region - Uganda, Kenya, and especially Burundi - during the months of April and May 2004. The study was written in Dutch, and this paper is a summary of my findings. I would like to thank the cooperating Burundian civil society organisations - RPA, Centre Ubuntu, Cafob, Acord, Justice et Paix, OAP, Ligue Iteka Gitega, Pères Blancs, Action Batwa, Ucode, OAG, BurundiDirect, Scouts Burundi, Radio Isanganiro, Studio Tubane, Ligue Iteka Bujumbura - and the cooperating international NGOs - 11.11.11, International Crisis Group, Novib, RCN Justice & Démocratie, Broederlijk Delen, Cordaid, NCB - for their time and support for this research.

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<sup>1</sup> Goodhand, Jonathan & Hulme, David, "Peacebuilding in Areas of Conflict - What can NGO's Contribute", p. 11, March 2000

<sup>2</sup> Havermans, Jos, "Burundi: Peace-Initiatives Help Stem the Violence", in: Searching for Peace in Africa, 2000. Website consulted on 05 July 2004:

[http://www.conflict-prevention.net/dev/ECCP/ECCPSurveys\\_v0\\_10.nsf/vwWebSurveys/0524DCEF270B615EC1256B2700317DAF?opendocument](http://www.conflict-prevention.net/dev/ECCP/ECCPSurveys_v0_10.nsf/vwWebSurveys/0524DCEF270B615EC1256B2700317DAF?opendocument)

## THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN BURUNDI

'Civil society' in Burundi came into existence at the end of the 1980s. Under international pressure president Buyoya had to democratise the country, which gave the civil society organisations air to breathe, and to develop. In the last ten years this resulted in an outburst of associations which operated more and more independent from the Burundian political classes. Especially the months before and after the free elections and the victory of Ndadaye in 1993 gave a strong impulse to local organisations. For the first time they voiced their own opinions and the first contacts and cooperation between different organisations were made.

However, the murder on Ndadaye and the beginning of the civil war can be seen as patricide for civil society. The 'Burundian Renaissance' was abruptly broken off and the civil society organisations were again at the level where they stood 5 years before - nowhere. It is clear that during the first years of the civil war it was difficult for the organisations to survive. Especially after the coup of Buyoya in 1996, the CSOs had a hard time. The country went through a crisis and the organisations were silenced by the country's rulers. Therefore, it took many years for the organisations to leave their marginalized position and again to acquire the strength to create a counter force against the political powers. An important juncture for Burundian civil society was the signing of the Arusha peace agreement in 2000 and the democratisation of Burundi's institutions. This resulted in a spectacular but chaotic growth in the number of associations and created an immensely complex Burundian civil society, where different identities, ideas and opinions were trying to survive next to each other.

Today, Burundi has more than 1400 civil society organisations, and each year hundreds of new associations see the light of day.<sup>3</sup> To develop a better view on this civil society, Sebudandi and Nduwayo classified the associations in 15 groups<sup>4</sup> as they stood in 2001. The largest and most important group (22.16%) in the Burundian civil society are the economic development and self-development organisations. Other quantitatively important groups (each about 10%) are the religious associations; research and formation organisations; solidarity organisations; and associations that help the most vulnerable. The other organisations form only some percentages of the whole civil society, but are not therefore less important. These are the civil rights organisations; culture and sports organisations; humanitarian associations; special interest groups; human rights associations; environment organisations; youth associations; women 's organisations; the media and press freedom associations; and non-classified organisations.

During the field research it soon became clear that not all the Burundian civil society organisations are as active as others. Therefore I classified this complex group of organisations in 3 main groups.

- The associations that are working on a high level and get financial support from the international community are the 'Group A' organisations. These organisations perform effective activities – by which I mean activities that do make a difference for the local population - and are respected in Burundi as well as by the international community. Examples of these organisations are Ligue Iteka, OAG, OAP.<sup>5</sup>
- The second group consists of associations that are working, or did work well but cannot attract the necessary donors today. These associations are the 'Group B' organisations. We can divide this group into two main parts. First of all there are the organisations that have clear plans and are able to work like 'Group A' organisations, but, by a lack of knowledge and visibility they do not succeed in attracting the necessary financial support from the donors. Examples of this group are UCODE and

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Emmanuel Ntakarutimana, coordinator of Centre Ubuntu, 27 April 2004, Bujumbura, Burundi

<sup>4</sup> Sebudandi, Christophe & Nduwayo, Gérard, "Etude sur la stratégie et le programme d'appui à la société civile burundaise", 2001, p.29-33

<sup>5</sup> Ligue Iteka is an human rights organisation; OAP supports the self development of the Burundians; and OAG functions as a government watchdog.

to a lesser degree RPA. The other group in this B section are the organisations that had efficient and effective activities in the past and that could count on external financial support, but lost their recognition by becoming corrupt. A.B.D.P. is a striking example of this.<sup>6</sup>

- The last and biggest group of organisations 'Group C' are associations that have almost no program, no activities, and are little more than just a name. They cannot attract the external support of donors and most of them wait for financial support before becoming active. Some of these organisations were established for the profit - financial or political - of the founder of the organisation.

We can represent these groups in table 1:

CSOs IN BURUNDI	%	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Group A	5%	Reliable organisations with a clear profile, they can count on external financial support.	Ligue Iteka, OAG, OAP
Group B	10-20%	I. Good working organisations which get almost no financial support from donors (lack of visibility, lack of knowledge, etc.) II. Organisations who had financial support in the past but lost the support because of mismanagement and corruption.	I. UCODE, RPA II. A.B.D.P.
Group C	75-80%	Quasi non-working organisations without a clear profile that have no access to the external financial funds.	

**Table 1. Different kind of civil society organisations**

By interpreting this table we may conclude that only Group A and some organisations of Group B - together 5-10% of the civil society organisations - are really active. It is important to consider these findings because it means that today the active civil society in Burundi counts no more than 100 associations. That is a very small foundation to create a counterforce with a strong voice.

In the study I used these findings to research the impact of the Burundian local organisations on the peace process in this country. In other words, I tried to examine to what extent today the civil society influences the political process. The findings, together with conclusions and recommendations for the civil society of Burundi will be discussed later in this paper.

<sup>6</sup> UCODE is an civil society organisation active in the interior of the country (Ngozi). UCODE gives micro-credit, has health programmes, supports research in agricultural techniques, etc. RPA is a popular radio station in Burundi and A.B.D.P. is an organisation that tries to protect the rights of prisoners.

## THE INTERNATIONAL NGOS IN BURUNDI

The relationship between Burundi and the INGOs is a special one. Although conflicts like the genocide in Rwanda and the conflict in Eastern Congo get more attention by the international community, the democratisation of Burundi and the fact that it is important to create a safe Burundi in the fragile Great Lakes Region means that today the INGOs are well represented in Burundi.

This differs with the situation of the last decade. There had long been a strained relationship between the INGOs and the government in Burundi. During the seventies and eighties the Tutsi-regime distrusted everyone who criticised its policies. The international community, and especially the INGOs, had many questions about the repression and the military dictatorship of the Tutsis. As a reaction on these accusations the regime became more and more repressive. This created a society in which the INGOs in Burundi could not operate freely anymore. Many international NGOs left the country or stayed at their offices in the capital city.

These events resulted in the fact that during the repressive decade, the population of Burundi could only count on the churches for support. But this kind of support also became more and more restricted. During the 1980s, Burundi's President Bagaza distrusted these churches for their so-called support of the emancipation of the Hutus. Under pressure and scared for their safety, many religious organisations had to flee Burundi.

The situation in Burundi changed rapidly after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the emergence of a worldwide neoliberal discourse. These events gave the churches and especially the INGOs air to breathe. However, for the INGOs in Burundi, neoliberalism has two different faces. On the one hand, it creates a more democratic state with a lot of freedom where INGOs and local organisations can operate more independently, but on the other hand, the structural adjustment programmes created a fall in international coffee prices which resulted in more poverty in Burundi. This resulted in more emergency aid and less sustainable development activities.

The increase of poverty, but also the beginning of the democratisation process, make the presence of INGOs in Burundi important. In spite of their restricted budget - in comparison with the international financial institutions - during the 1990s, the INGOs were important for Burundi. Especially after the outbreak of the genocide in Rwanda, some researchers claim that the continuous international pressure of INGOs was an important actor in preventing a Rwanda genocide-scenario.<sup>7</sup> Other researchers like Filip Reyntjens and Ould Abdallah see a more restricted and modest role of these organisations during the difficult years between 1993 and 1998.<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned before, there are many INGOs active in Burundi today. In an attempt to evaluate the international NGOs and to have a clear view on the broad representation of these organisations, I divided the INGOs in three main groups based on their activities:

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<sup>7</sup> Havermans, Jos, "Burundi: Peace-Initiatives Help Stem the Violence", in: Searching for Peace in Africa, 2000. Website consulted on 05 July 2004: [http://www.conflict-prevention.net/dev/ECCP/ECCPSurveys\\_v0\\_10.nsf/vwWebSurveys/0524DCEF270B615EC1256B2700317DAF?opendocument](http://www.conflict-prevention.net/dev/ECCP/ECCPSurveys_v0_10.nsf/vwWebSurveys/0524DCEF270B615EC1256B2700317DAF?opendocument)

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Filip Reyntjens, 23 July 2004, Antwerp, Belgium, & Ould Abdallah, Ahmedou, "La Diplomatie Pyromane", Entretiens avec Stephen Smith, 1996, p. 97

- The direct intervention NGOs:  
These direct intervention NGOs are organisations who deliver direct assistance to the beneficiaries, without working through a go-between.
- The capacity-building NGOs:  
These kinds of INGOs work with the local partners and support the civil society organisations in their efforts to improve the conditions of the local communities.
- The advocacy NGOs:  
Through lobbying and advocacy, these INGOs try to convince the policymakers to tune their policy to the needs of the population. These INGOs also try to support the reintroduction of peace in Burundi.

In line with the ideas of Goodhand and Hulme, there are three scenarios in which we can define the effectiveness and the impact of the INGO's interventions on the conflict in Burundi.<sup>9</sup>

- Interventions that stabilise the current situation and have no meaningful impact.
- Interventions that stimulate or fuel the conflict - which cannot be the purpose of the interventions.
- Interventions that result in a direct impact, furthering the construction of peace in a conflict area.

We can represent these classifications in Table 2:

INGOs in conflict areas	Direct Intervention	Capacity building	Advocacy
<b>Fuelling conflict</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• aid used to purchase arms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing support to political front organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advocacy which supports one of the warring parties to the conflict</li> </ul>
<b>Holding operation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "smart" distribution of relief so that it does not increase underlying tensions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support for local organisations such as irrigation councils, church-based groups etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• protection of civilians against human rights abuses</li> </ul>
<b>Peace building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• projects that bring different ethnic groups under the same programmatic umbrella</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support for civic peace groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advocacy for peace, justice and reconciliation</li> </ul>

**Table 2: The impact of the different INGOs-interventions<sup>10</sup>**

In this paper I try to investigate the INGOs active in Burundi - with the cases 11.11.11, Novib, International Crisis Group, Broederlijk Delen, Cordaid and RCN Justice & Démocratie - and I try to evaluate their impact on the peace process in Burundi. Findings, conclusions and recommendations were made and will be discussed below.

<sup>9</sup> Goodhand, Jonathan & Hulme, David, "NGOs and Peacebuilding in Complex Political Emergencies, an Introduction", Paper No 1, October 1997, pp. 17-24

<sup>10</sup> Goodhand, Jonathan & Hulme, David, "NGOs and Peacebuilding in Complex Political Emergencies, an Introduction", Paper No 1, October 1997, p.24

## FINDINGS ON THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND THE INGOs ACTIVE IN BURUNDI

Based on the literature study and the many interviews with representatives of civil society organisations, representatives of INGOs and other Burundi experts, I made some conclusions on the situation of the CSOs and INGOs active in Burundi, and on their impact on the peace process today.

I have to admit that it is difficult to investigate the impact of these organisations as it is almost impossible to see the results of an intervention and activity in the short term. Nevertheless during the fieldwork some clear aspects surfaced from which I could extract characteristics of the activity of both civil society organisations and the INGOs in Burundi.

### I. The civil society organisations

Most analysts of Burundi have their doubts about the role of the Burundian civil society as it is today.<sup>11</sup> They see civil society as rather weak because the associations show considerable discord, have a lack of knowledge and competent staff, and are not politically neutral. The field research did endorse many of these opinions.

- It is a fact that today the civil society of Burundi is strongly divided because of a clear lack of cooperation between the local organisations. Especially within associations with the same goal there is a pernicious rivalry which by consequence reduces the force of these organisations. The non-cooperation between radio stations RPA and Radio Isanganiro is just one example of this.<sup>12</sup> A lack of cooperation can also be seen between associations with different goals. It is well known that a broad spectrum of organisations working together can form a strong voice and can generate new momentum within the civil society. With the exception of some initiatives - CenAp, OAG, FORSC – such cooperation is missing in the civil society of Burundi today.
- Many Burundi experts mention political influences in civil society organisations. However, during the interviews with the local organisations and during a quick view through their activities, there did not seem to be any political influence. Therefore it was necessary to execute a more intensive and open research to determine whether civil society organisations in Burundi do labour under a strong political influence. Striking examples were seen at the top positions of the civil society where many executives are Tutsi or extreme-Tutsi minded persons.<sup>13</sup> These examples, next to many others, make the civil society of Burundi political influenced and by dint of this, a weak one.
- Another finding during the field study was the enormous difference between the civil society in Bujumbura and the civil society in the interior of the country. The civil society is almost nonexistent in the interior of the country. This means that only the Bujumbura-related and minded associations have a voice and get support from the international community. Striking examples of this

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Eveline Roomans, Novib country director Burundi, 22 July 2004, Den Haag, The Netherlands; interview with Theo Groot, Broederlijk Delen country director Burundi, 17 April 2004, Kampala, Uganda; interview with Geerte Bossaert, 11.11.11. country director Burundi, 22 April 2004, Kampala, Uganda; Interview met Pierre Bardoux, ICG-analyst on Burundi, 18 May 2004, Nairobi, Kenya.

<sup>12</sup> Alexis Sinduhije of Radio Publique Africain and Nestor Nkurunziza of Radio Isanganiro declared independently of each other that they could have more influence if they decided to work together. Interview with Alexis Sinduhije, director of RPA, 14 – 15 May 2004, Bujumbura, Burundi & Interview with Nestor Nkurunziza, programme director of Radio Isanganiro, 13 May 2004, Bujumbura, Burundi

<sup>13</sup> An example can be seen in the person of Jean Marie Vianney Kavumbagu, the new director of Ligue Iteka. It's an open secret that Mr. Vianney Kavumbagu is/was a member of the extremist and UPRONA-minded Tutsi-club AC Génocide. Without having doubts about the qualities of this man, his appointment has a negative effect on the credibility of Ligue Iteka. In the interior of the country this political influence is even more visible. In cities like Gitega and Ngozi many organisations are established by local politicians only to protect their own status.

concentration can be found in the meetings which almost always take place inside the capital and in expensive hotels abroad. A result of this ascendancy is a big frustration within the provincial organisations. They feel neglected while they are convinced that the inland organisations know best the needs and demands of the population.<sup>14</sup> Many domestic organisations believe that the Bujumbura-related organisations operate from a hierarchical, top-down fashion and that they do not know what is really going on in the interior of the country.

- There is also an important lack in continuity of competent leadership staff, both in the interior of Burundi as well as in the capital Bujumbura. The tendency of capable personnel to take up better paid positions at the government level and the international institutions is enormous and creates a constant weakening of the civil society of Burundi. But not only on the higher levels there is a lack of competent staff. In each section of the organisations it is difficult to find loyal and capable persons.<sup>15</sup>
- One of the biggest - perhaps the biggest problem - of the Burundian civil society is the lack of means to finance their working. Every association, big or small, in Bujumbura or inside the country, complains about the fact that there is not enough money to execute good working programmes. Today in Burundi, the civil society associations cannot count on government subsidies. The drive towards self-enrichment of the politicians, the weak mandate of the transition government and the tense situation between the objectives of government bodies and the civil society are some of the causes of this lack of funds. Inevitably, this results in a situation where the local associations have to negotiate with the INGOs about financing their activities, which creates new problems. It is known that most of the INGOs prefer to finance specific program points - and not the general working - and that they desire a more or less identical ideology as their own. This creates many frustrations and inequalities within the civil society associations.<sup>16</sup> If the organisations are not able to pay the general costs (rent, transport, salaries, etc.), they adapt, little by little, their own program and ideology to the ideology of the international NGOs, so they cannot create a long term vision. It is not surprising that many activities suffer because of this. Many of the big Burundian associations desire nothing more than an independent and financially secure future.<sup>17</sup>
- Another, and earlier mentioned problem, consists of the different faces of the civil society. Only 5 to 10 per cent of the Burundian organisations are really active. This means that today the effective civil society in Burundi counts no more than 100 associations. Together with the other conclusions it soon became clear that this little group of associations is too divided, politically aligned and little educated in order to become a true force that contributes to a stable and equitable Burundi.

## II. The International NGOs

During the field research I could also draw conclusions about the activities of the international NGOs in Burundi. Researchers like Goodhand, Atkinson and Hulme claim that today INGOs are more wishful thinking organisations than policy changing groups.<sup>18</sup> They are too weak to have a positive impact on conflicts. The

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Jean-Claude Ndikumana, UCODE, 7 May 2004, Ngozi, Burundi

<sup>15</sup> Annonciate Ndikumasabo, Program manager of OAG, admitted the fact that some of the reports were of bad quality because the organisation has a lack of capable staff, 07 May 2004, Bujumbura, Burundi.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Pascasie Kana, Director of OAP, 4 May 2004, Bujumbura, Burundi, Interview with Emmanuel Ntakarutimana, coordinator of Centre Ubuntu, 27 April 2004, Bujumbura, Burundi, . Interview with Alexis Sinduhije, director of RPA, 14 - 15 May 2004, Bujumbura.

<sup>17</sup> Emmanuel Ntakarutimana, Coordinator of Centre Ubuntu, was clear about this topic. For him the involvement of most of the INGOs in the activities of the civil society organisations leave a negative impact on the civil society. 27 April 2004, Bujumbura, Burundi

<sup>18</sup> Goodhand, Jonathan & Hulme, David, "Peacebuilding in Areas of Conflict - What can NGO's Contribute", p. 11, March 2000

researchers even give examples of INGO interventions that left a negative impact on the conflict. An example of this can be found in Liberia, where INGO aid was used by warlords to arm their groups.<sup>19</sup> The situation in Burundi is of course different from Liberia, but during the study I tried to summarize the main weaknesses of the INGOs active in Burundi, and looked at their possible influence on the conflict.

- There is clearly a lack of cooperation between the different INGOs active in Burundi. It directly reduces the impact of the interventions. This is an old reproach towards the INGOs, but the situation on the ground shows again that working independently is common in Burundi today. A striking example is a meeting concerning cooperation about the Cotonu agreements organised by 11.11.11.<sup>20</sup> Only one INGO found it sufficiently important to come to the meeting to discuss this theme. This means that by a lack of collaboration, the INGOs hamper each other and that the capacity of non-coordinated activities is less effective than in a scenario where all INGOs tune to each other.
- The fact that the INGOs do not use their innovative and flexible character is another important remark. Today in Burundi the INGOs support almost only risk-free activities and they are only interested in the respected, highly functional and reliable associations. Only these 5% of the civil society organisations - like Ligue Iteka, OAP, CAFOB - can be sure of external financial support, while the other less visible or progressive associations can not claim attention and support from the INGOs. This creates a dangerous situation where the INGOs unintentionally support a separation of the civil society. This will inevitably result in a more unstable society, where instead of cooperation between the civil society organisations there will be a negative concurrence.
- The INGOs have to be aware of the impact they can have on the conflict and on relations within the society of Burundi. The presence of expatriates stimulates an uprising of the rents of houses, salaries and foods. This creates a bipolar society of 'Haves' and 'Have-nots' where everybody is trying to find an entrance to the small group of the 'Haves'. Because of this the 'Have-nots' find themselves in a weakened situation which results in a hostile attitude towards the expatriates and the existing society.<sup>21</sup>

The civil society organisations too are victims of a strong public presence of the INGOs. The tendency of the staff to look for better paid jobs in the INGOs, the difference between the salaries and lifestyle of the expatriates and the representatives of the CSOs, etc. are pernicious for the relation between these two classes of actors. It is obvious that an INGO whose aim is the creation of a peaceful society cannot at the same time avoid the creation or reinforcement of a bipolar Burundian society.

- A lack of understanding and knowledge of the motives of the Burundian conflict is also a frequent problem for the INGO operatives, especially for those who execute short term positions. Many expatriates do not know the true causes, interests and convictions behind the conflict. During the field research I met expatriates without a real understanding of the situation in Burundi and with little

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<sup>19</sup> Atkinson, Philippa "The War Economy of Liberia: a political analysis", May 1997, p.19. Website consulted on 4 July 2004:  
<http://www.odihpn.org/documents/networkpaper022.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Geerte Bossaert, country director Burundi of 11.11.11, 22 April 2004, Kampala, Uganda

<sup>21</sup> During my field research I had many talks with people on the street and with people in the interior of the country. A topic that caused a lot of resentment was the luxurious lifestyle of the expatriates. Almost everyone had his own view on this issue, where incomprehension and distrust towards this lifestyle was predominating. April – May 2004, Burundi



knowledge of the French language. This is of course bad for developing effective, realistic and updated projects. The Burundian situation today is very complex and many documents about the Burundian society and about the latest developments are only written in French. An average knowledge of the French language and the Burundian history should be a must for every expatriate.

### III. The donors

Of course we have to recognise that difficulties are created not only by the operational shortcomings of civil society organisations and the INGOs. The role of the donors in this process should not be underestimated and neglected.

- During the research it became clear that the behaviour of the international donors obstructs the activities of the INGOs on several areas. The discord between the international actors, the lack of coordination between the international institutions, the short term thinking, the system of conditionality for financial support and the demand to create quick and visible results are fundamental obstructions for the working of the INGOs. To meet these demands the INGOs are forced to operate less flexibly and innovatively as they both want and should do.
- However, at the same time, the INGOs commit similar practices when we consider their support to the civil society organisations in Burundi. The INGOs wish to see clear results from the activities of the SCOs that they support. Therefore it is difficult for associations to create long-term programmes or progressive and more risky activities. Also the practice of financing only programs, and not the general working - costs like rent for the office, fuel for the car, a photocopier - has a negative effect on the local organisations.

In addition to this, the lack of coordination and mutual discord by the INGOs creates considerably more work for the local organisations. This work is caused by the fact that they have to tell the same stories over and over to the different INGOs and that they have to write different evaluations for each INGO. Besides these points, there is also the defection of key figures from the civil society to the INGOs, which creates a continuous weakening of the civil society.

### THE IMPACT OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND THE INGO'S

Considering the above mentioned facts about the civil society, the INGOs and the donors, we can conclude that the impact INGOs and civil society organisations have on the peace process in Burundi is rather limited. Moreover, in some cases there is a 'negative impact' on the conflict and developments of Burundi.

- In the past, and even today in FNL-controlled areas, the indirect support of INGOs and CSOs to the rebel fractions occurs sometimes. By paying tolls to enter rebel controlled areas or by mismanaging the humanitarian aid, rebels get supported. Only some organisations dared to admit the fact that they pay a sum of money to FNL rebels to get safe and free access to the rebel-controlled territory.

Nevertheless, it can be said that such activities occur in many other organisations. This means that the INGOs and CSOs finance the rebels which can prolong the conflict.<sup>22</sup>

- It is not only rebels who abuse humanitarian aid: the Burundi government can also take advantage of it. Today, the government pays almost no attention to the Batwas - 1% of the Burundi population - or to the many street children in Bujumbura and other cities. Sooner or later this will result in an outburst of anger. These neglected groups not only undermine the society by stealing or looting, they also easily get influenced by the discourse of the rebels. It must be clear for the government – which claims to be democratic - that depending on international NGOs to investigate these vulnerable groups is avoiding its responsibility and stimulating social inequality.
- As described above, the INGOs need to be aware of the marks they leave on Burundian society. The creation of a divided civil society, and the creation of a bipolar society where the 'Have-nots' act with ever greater hostility towards the 'Haves' are dangerous situations. Today in Burundi this is already noticeable. During many conversations, civil society representatives and Burundians wondered about the extravagant life style of the expatriates and about the effectiveness of so many INGOs in their little country.
- Another tricky fact is the political influence exerted on civil society organisations. Because of this, the credibility of these organisations is undermined, which creates an atmosphere of distrust by local communities. This biased attitude can do more harm than good, especially during a crisis

The fuelling of the Burundi conflict by CSOs and INGOs needs to be avoided in all cases and can never be justified. A Code of Conduct needs to be implemented in every organisation and a good follow up and evaluation of the activities must avoid negative results of the interventions by civil society organisations or INGOs.<sup>23</sup>

Of course this does not mean that INGOs and CSOs are completely impotent. It would be wrong to say that INGOs or civil society organisations can not play a positive role on the developments in Burundi. Looking at the INGOs there are some areas where these organisations can contribute to the peace process in Burundi.

- Not everyone is convinced by this, but in general we may say that in Burundi, INGOs - albeit to a small extent - have contributed to the avoidance of a Rwanda genocide scenario.<sup>24</sup> The lobbying and the initiatives INGOs took - together with the international donors - to dismantle the breeding ground of the Burundian conflict can be seen as a positive impact on the peace-building process. The most well-known examples are INGOs like International Alert, International Crisis Group, Search for Common Ground, etc.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> One of the organisations who dared to admit the fact that they did pay a sum of money to get free and safe access to rebel controlled areas was the successful micro-finance organisation BurundiDirect. Bob Smit, Director of BurundiDirect claimed that in the past, and even today several INGOs and SCOs have done the same. 12 May 2004, Bujumbura, Burundi.

<sup>23</sup> International Rescue Committee, "The role of international NGOs in the reintegration process", 6 January 2004. Website consulted on 24 June 2004: <http://www.reliefweb.int/rwb.nsf/0/42f7c892c98ab01b49256e15002206e2?OpenDocument>

<sup>24</sup> Filip Reyntjens, Professor of African Law and Politics at the University of Antwerp, don't follow the thinking of Jos Havermans, who claims that many international NGOs are engaged in efforts to boost peace in Burundi. ([http://www.conflict-prevention.net/dev/ECCP/ECCPSurvey\\_s\\_v0\\_10.nsf/vwWebSurveys/0524DCEF270B615EC1256B2700317DAF?opendocument](http://www.conflict-prevention.net/dev/ECCP/ECCPSurvey_s_v0_10.nsf/vwWebSurveys/0524DCEF270B615EC1256B2700317DAF?opendocument))

<sup>25</sup> International Alert was the first foreign organisation that tried to implement preventive programmes in Burundi. The INGO also established the Burundi Steering Committee which coordinates peace-building initiatives taken by NGOs, the UN representatives and other actors, such as foreign parliamentarians. An other important INGO is Search for Common Ground. This INGO opened a field office in Bujumbura in 1995 and initiated three

- Also during the creation of the Arusha peace process the importance of this international pressure cannot be denied. Without underestimating the merits of the Burundian negotiators, the pressure and lobbying of the INGOs may be seen as an important contribution towards the signing of the Arusha agreement. Of course, peace cannot be created with only an agreement - the implementation of it is every bit as important. Realising a meeting with all the different political parties who signed an agreement - even with their reservations - can be seen as an important step towards peace.
- Another important and positive role of the INGOs is their support for the creation of a civil society in Burundi. In the beginning of the 1990s, civil society was out of the question in Burundi, while these days civil society is growing rapidly and is trying to gain more and more influence. The support of the INGOs in this process can be seen as one of their biggest accomplishments.<sup>26</sup>

During the conversations with the representatives of civil society organisations, it was mentioned many times that they have a big influence on politics in Burundi. Arguments like *'everybody knows our organisation'* and *'the political mandatory listens to our findings and longings'* was frequently heard. But of course there is a world of difference between listening to and executing demands. Therefore the perceived importance of their organisations by representatives of the civil society should be put into perspective.

- In spite of this it must be acknowledged that civil society organisations do influence the political class. For example, there is the women's association CAFOB which played an important role during the peace talks in Arusha. Also, the research of Ligue Iteka, investigating the expectations of the population prior to the elections, attracted the attention of the politicians. These examples, together with many large and small interventions, are all steps towards a more democratic and reliable society.
- Also, the attempts of the civil society - some more praiseworthy than others - to mobilize the population and to make them aware of their rights, need to be encouraged. At this time, the population is badly informed in almost every domain. The people have no idea about the content of the Arusha-agreements; they don't know their rights; they do not grasp the duties of the government, etc.<sup>27</sup> Informing and mobilizing the population can be seen as one of the main tasks of the civil society, and their efforts need to be seen as a positive attempt towards a stable society.<sup>28</sup>

All the aspects we mentioned above are important to improve the influence of these organisations on the peace process in Burundi. But during the field research it soon became clear that INGOs and CSOs can be and must be

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programmes aimed at creating mechanisms for ethnic reconciliation. It established the first independent radio studio in Burundi, Studio Ijambo, in March 1995. Ijambo produces unbiased news programmes, and cultural and social magazines. It also produced a soap opera for radio - Our Neighbours, Ourselves - depicting a Hutu and a Tutsi family living next door to each other. Common Ground has also opened a women's peace centre in Bujumbura and started a political dialogue project. The Political Dialogue Project addresses the ethnic conflict via quiet diplomacy among the Burundian political players.

<sup>26</sup> International NGOs like 11.11.11 and Novib finance the general costs – rent, fuel, computers, etc. - of local organisations like OAP and ACORD, which gives these associations the possibility to act more independent and visible in the Burundian society.

<sup>27</sup> The research "Lecture citoyennes de l'Accord d'Arusha et de sa mise en application: entre espoirs et défis, enjeux et désillusions" of OAG showed that more than 51% of the population has an insufficient knowledge of the Arusha peace agreement.

<sup>28</sup> In Burundi, the radio stations inform the population in different ways. By broadcasting political talk programmes, radio soaps concerning the problems in Burundi, educative programmes etc. the majority of the Burundian population can be reached and informed. Also the cooperation between a radio station like Radio Isanganiro and the human right organisation Ligue Iteka can be seen as a positive step towards informing the population about their rights.

the most successful in their 'indirect support' to the peace process. The research makes it clear that it is important to reduce and get rid of the breeding grounds of an armed conflict. Therefore it is important to create a base for peace on a political level, but it is the people of Burundi who need to support and execute the peace. In other words, if INGOs and CSOs claim that they contribute to the creation of peace, it will be less on the political level, but more in the support of the communities, the refugees, the disarmed soldiers and rebels, IDPs, etc. which - hopefully - will remove the breeding grounds of the conflict for good.

This means that an organisation like BurundiDirect - which gives micro credit to the poorest people - is helping to create a more stable society in Burundi. Their activities stimulate the population to be self-supporting and by this they give a future to the people of Burundi. If, furthermore, an INGO like RCN Justice & Démocratie is using effective local theatre to improve the reconciliation between the Burundi people, we can then speak of indirect support towards sustainable peace.

For that reason peace building is seen as a broad concept, where a large spectrum of activities can be seen as peace building activities. Examples of these activities are countering pro-war propaganda, improving the contact between the different communities, reintegrating disarmed soldiers and rebels, stimulating the creation of peace-agreements, emphasizing economic growth, supporting reconciliation, sabotaging the struggle for the few precious raw materials, shutting down traffic of arms, disposing of rebel recruitment bases, fighting against poverty, etc.

Therefore the real challenge for the civil society and INGOs in Burundi is to realize this kind of 'indirect support' to the peace process.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND THE INTERNATIONAL NGOS**

Based on all these findings gained during this study, I venture to formulate some recommendations to improve the impact and the role of CSOs and INGOs.

### **I. The civil society organisations**

For the civil society organisations I tried to formulate some recommendations that can strengthen the action and the policy orientation of their activities.

- First of all we need to emphasize the necessity for a better coordination and cooperation between the different associations. In previous years, different umbrella organisations - like FORSC, CAFOB, and OAG - came into existence. Today these organisations are operating more and more effectively, and are the proof that such cooperation can multiply the strength of the civil society in Burundi. Of course, this collaboration must be more than just a meeting in a luxurious meeting room in a hotel in Bujumbura or in foreign countries, where more attention is spent on the diner instead of the creation of coordinated interventions. This is a big responsibility for the representatives of the civil society, who need to realize that cooperating in a meeting in foreign countries can be pleasant, but that the real work is waiting in Burundi.

- It is also important that the civil society disposes of the political influence which infiltrates every section of the organisations today. It is not surprising that the biased character of the associations creates a decrease of credibility and an increase in distrust by the population as well as by the international community. If the intention of the CSOs is really to operate as a counterforce to politics, it will be necessary that they give a sign that they are independent, impartial and reliable enough to succeed in this goal.
- As seen during the field research, the civil society organisations in the interior of the country are marginalized and politically influenced. Therefore it is important that the big organisations active in Bujumbura decentralise their general working and respect the local organisations in the interior as equal partners. Especially since the joining of the CNDD-FDD to the government in 2003 and the safe return of displaced inside the former CNDD-FDD areas, the development of the associations in the interior of the country must be supported and stimulated.

## II. The International NGOs

For the INGOs it was also possible to make some recommendations based on the research findings. It must be said that the INGOs that contributed to this research can be seen as reliable and sincere working organisations. But this does not mean that some generalities could be formulated from which the entire group of INGOs active in Burundi can draw their own conclusions.

- The study showed that today in Burundi there is a great need for cooperation between the INGOs. As mentioned before, the INGOs have heard this reproach many times before. However, in the field, we were frequently confronted with organisations that are doing just their own thing without looking or listening to other INGOs. Other organisations claim to cooperate but do not get past organizing insignificant meetings with the other organisations to evaluate the situation in Burundi. Instead of this, there is a great need to strong coordinated activities where information is shared and where activities are tuned to each other. A scenario where INGOs are involved in a competition where they sabotage each other needs to be avoided in all cases.
- It also became clear that it is desirable that the INGOs systematically give certain civil society organisations the freedom to operate independently. This means that in the near future these big civil society organisations (some Group A organisations like OAP, Ligue Iteka, OAG) should have direct access to the financial support of the international donors. This needs to be supported because - just like the INGOs have a lower operating cost then the international institutions - the civil society organisations have a lower cost than the INGOs. Another important effect of this would be the possibility for the INGOs to play their innovative role much better by using their finances to alternative activities like supporting the civil society associations which I defined before as the Group B organisations.
- This research also exposed some more controversial findings. I think that it is important for the INGOs to extend their activities to the higher classes in Burundi. The support for the poorest people and the lobbying for attention for these groups is and must be the principal part of INGO-working, but next to this there needs to be attention for the Burundian intellectuals, elite and high placed militaries. Recent polls show that many UPRONA and FRODEBU politicians will lose their mandate

and their income after the elections. They need to be supported and provided with alternative financial resources to avoid another sabotage of the elections, or worse, a new coup.

Of course this is a strategy that is difficult to sell to the donors of the INGOs, where the high costs of such programs can lead to indignation. Another argument against this proposition is the financially weak position of the INGOs to investigate these kinds of programs. That is why I do not assert that INGOs have to concentrate their activities to the higher classes. Instead I mean that for the INGOs it is important to lobby the international institutions - UN, IMF, WB, etc. - and Western governments to get attention for this problem and to convince these actors to make finances available towards the highest classes in Burundi.

- We also saw a lack of knowledge of the expatriates about the complex causes and interests in the Burundi conflict. Because of this it is very important for the INGOs to follow up the developments of the conflict and to create a database where new expatriates can find the information they need to execute adapted activities.
- Next to this, the role of the INGOs to convince the Hutus in exile to go back to Burundi, must be brought forward. It is most likely that CNDD-FDD will lead and govern the country in the coming years, which means that there is a big need for staff that can handle the governmental functions.<sup>29</sup> Many of the capable persons still live in exile where they set up a new, safe life. Therefore it is important to convince these persons to assume their responsibilities and to return to Burundi by providing them with the necessary - financial - guarantees. Here we have to handle the same problems that rose during the discussion about the role of the INGOs in supporting the political class. Not the direct intervention, but lobbying with the international donors needs to be seen by the INGOs as their most important task concerning this recommendation.
- INGOs should also be aware of the real role they can play in Burundi. On the one hand they have to realise that the INGO-activities are not sufficiently strong and important enough to really influence the situation in the country. On the other hand it is also necessary to be conscious of the fact that both the rebels, the government or the population can abuse the INGO interventions. This kind of abuse can give these interventions a more negative result than a positive one

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study showed that it is important for the INGOs and the CSOs to improve their interventions because these are – and now, during the preparations for the elections, more than ever - important to keep Burundi out of the violence. For the INGOs and CSOs, one of the main demands was the holding of the elections as mentioned in the Arusha peace accord. The delay of these elections to a later date in 2005 can be seen as another sign of the weakness of the INGOs and the civil society. This shows again that awaiting the elections before coming out with a clear, strong and adapted program - like many donors do today - can result in a mistake of historical proportions. Now - during the renewed postponement of the elections - the most important work has to be done to create a sustainable election result. Where the donors fail, the INGOs

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<sup>29</sup> During the field research, the elections were a daily topic, in which the preference of the population went mostly to CNDD-FDD. This tendency is also perceptible inside the political class, where many politicians leave Uprona and Frodebu to find access to CNDD-FDD.

and the civil society organisations have to assume their responsibilities and, in cooperation with the Burundi government, try to find an answer to the many problems.

Of course, sufficient funds are indispensable for the realisation of the Arusha peace agreement. Obviously the CSOs and INGOs lack direct access to such funds. Nevertheless I am convinced that not only financial means can offer solutions to the many problems. Efficient and effective interventions can improve the investments in the creation of peace in Burundi and can improve the effectiveness of the action. We can only hope that, if the organisations try to incorporate some recommendations of this study into their interventions, the programs and activities will be more successful and can be an important contribution to the construction of a peaceful Burundian society.

March 2004, Stijn De Reu

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