SPECIAL REPORT

NGOs and Peacebuilding in Bosnia's Ethnically Divided Cities

by Julia Demichelis

About the Report

The United States Institute of Peace has devoted a major amount of programming, largely through its Bosnia Initiative, to discovering ways of facilitating the Dayton Accords' implementation. Though much effort to reconstruct war-torn Bosnia lies outside of the accords, they nevertheless affect how reconstruction and reconciliation are carried out.

After nearly two years of managing a multiethnic reconstruction program on behalf of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) in the Bosnian city of Gornji Vakuf, Julia Demichelis, the author of this report, spent three months interviewing Bosnian officials, donor representatives, and other nongovernmental organization (NGO) project managers and community participants in grassroots reconstruction programs to discover the organizational and political obstacles to investment in community-based peacebuilding in more than twenty divided Bosnian communities.

This report is the product of a United States Institute of Peace grant awarded to UMCOR to fund Ms. Demichelis's research. It begins with an overview of the political boundaries in many of Bosnia's municipalities that have prevented postconflict reconstruction and reconciliation. The next section describes effective and ineffective strategies among aid donors and humanitarian-relief NGOs operating in these locales, followed by a case study of successful grassroots programs in the city of Gornji Vakuf. The report concludes with recommendations for NGOs and donor organizations.

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Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Two years after the Dayton Accords were signed to stop the fighting among Bosnia's main ethnic groups, refugees have come back to find their war-damaged cities divided by physical boundary lines that separate majority and minority ethnic communities. There is often no freedom of movement, nor any formal employment, across these dividing lines. Freedom of movement and return are determined locally, regardless of national or international law. These cities' ethnic divisions pose serious obstacles to the international community's peacebuilding efforts to reconstruct Bosnia and foster reconciliation among its main ethnic groups.

Many of Bosnia's divided cities are controlled by "half-mayors," who oversee the municipal functions on their side of a city's ethnic dividing line. Aid donors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved in Bosnia's reconstruction have been stymied in their attempt to build up local capacities, as these half-mayors often use aid to achieve their political ends, strengthen their sides, and funnel aid disbursements to favored local suppliers and contractors.

The lack of progress in adhering to Dayton at the grassroots level has not only further contributed to local divisions, but has also blocked needs-based community programming in Bosnia's reconstruction effort. Without a strong, comprehensive, and clear donor strategy, large humanitarian-relief agencies and NGOs have tried to deliver goods and services based on need, but became immersed in local politics and have been forced to negotiate aid based on ethnic and political divisions. **Create a guiding donors' strategy and a practical set of coordination principles to accomplish it. Reconstruction aid should try to bridge ethnic dividing lines by focusing on projects that integrate local firms and municipal officials on both sides of the ethnic divide.**

Establishing national standards for programming aid based on refugee return quotas is not an effective way to plan or implement assistance. Each community should be addressed as a fundamental unit according to its basic needs, and then in relation to the country's overall socioeconomic situation. As each community is different in its level of suffering, so are the solutions and the leaders' capacities to

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deal with specific problems and priorities. **Aiding only refugees or minorities increases local tensions. Help the whole community to improve conditions.**

The tendency of NGOs and donors to advertise their presence is a significant drawback in reconstruction efforts. Specifically, NGOs try to advertise their presence in news broadcasts seen in their home countries to encourage donations. Symbols dominated the war and do not serve the interests of peace when donors and implementers spend funds to promote their own interests rather than those of the people they serve. **Reduce the commercialization and symbols of the international community at the local level.**

The successes of NGOs will inevitably prove to be short-term unless they make sure their efforts are sustainable once they leave. Reconstruction programs should use local resources—including those of the private sector—in their design and implementation. The public sector should also be integrated in rebuilding communities while supporting NGO activities to strengthen the institutions of civil society. **Direct humanitarian resources through private-sector channels, where possible, to reintegrate resources. Strengthen the public sector—particularly at the canton level—to establish partnerships with the emerging civil society. Work through partnerships within a community.**

A variety of independent grassroots peacebuilding projects have made a difference at the local level in the divided municipalities of Banja Luka, Gorazde, Gornji Vakuf, Jajce, Mostar, Sanski Most, Sarajevo, Vitez, and elsewhere. Successful NGO programs have been characterized by the inclusion of families on both sides of dividing line in the planning and design of reconstruction projects, recognition and use of local resources and political leaders, and commitment to communities—not to donors only. **Use participatory programming in postconflict relief work. Strengthen the community, not the leaders of the conflict. Empower community leaders on both sides of the city's ethnic dividing line to create their own solutions.**

The success of NGO reconstruction efforts based on community needs is evident in two types of community centers: The Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje Youth Center, a bottom-up, community-based program, is an example of the local population's responsibility for and ownership of its programs. Information- and advocacy-oriented "second-generation" centers facilitate the resolution of disputes in areas such as property and employment rights, access to health education and social services, and the reconnection of utilities, with Bosnian professionals providing legal counsel and referral services.

Bosnia's alternative political leaders should take a more formal, anticipatory, and enthusiastic role in influencing a precise donor agenda for peacebuilding activities through multisector community redevelopment that integrates resources on both sides of cities' ethnic divides. Years of Bosnian postconflict experience have revealed that the main political parties do not encourage the kind of work that is necessary to promote peacebuilding in a balanced fashion.

Divided Polities/Divided Societies

Two years after the Dayton Accords were signed to stop the fighting among Bosnia's main ethnic groups, a subtler war continues to divide the country's Bosniacs (a historical term recently revived to refer to Bosnia's Muslims), Croats, and Serbs. More than half the population of Bosnia (comprising two entities: the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Srpska Republic) still lives in segregated cities and towns. The accords sought to facilitate stability in Bosnia by encouraging refugees to return to the cities, towns, and villages they fled when the conflict erupted and ethnic cleansing swept over the former Yugoslav republic, and to reintegrate these "returns" back into their communities. Yet these refugees have come back to find their cities divided by physical boundary lines that separate the majority and minority ethnic communities. Municipalities such as Novi Travnik and Vitez/Old Vitez were formed into ethnically cleansed halves by the cease-fire lines that bisected the jurisdictions when the fighting stopped. Other towns, such as Brcko and Stolac, were split by the Inter-Entity Boundary Line, which was originally drawn as the temporary demarcation between the territories held by Bosnian Serbs on one side and Bosniacs and Bosnian Croats on the other. Proposed legislation to recognize these "new" municipalities or to formally divide old ones throughout Bosnia failed in Bosnian national government assemblies in 1997. Yet people's daily lives reflect the powerful reality of these divides.

Two of the ten cantons in the Bosnian-Croatian Federation (Middle Bosnia and Neretva) are ethnically mixed; the others have sizable majorities of either Bosniacs or Bosnian Croats. This division is important to security and stability issues because canton representatives establish and control the joint police force, as well as ten key policy areas, including education, culture, housing, local land use and zoning, and radio/television. In one canton, children may be told to go to school with neighbors of a different ethnic group and there may be extensive independent media. In another canton, parallel school systems may be the rule, along with limited independent media. While canton representatives serve for two years, the 1996 elections offered little choice of candidates; thus many of today's policies reflect immediate postwar dictates of the main ethnic political parties rather than a long-term, reintegration-minded strategy, created with at least some degree of citizen participation. In many cases, municipal officials are the same ones who served during the conflict, advancing the interests of the cities' predominant ethnic community.

For most Bosnian civilians, being displaced and forced to live on one side of a cease-fire line that divides their towns and society remains a principal characteristic of their self-described existence. A glance at a typical divided community would reveal the markedly abnormal social and business movements across a dividing line. Civilians have modified their transportation patterns to accommodate the security forces "protecting" them. Freedoms are directly restricted to varying degrees by local authorities. In many towns and cities across Bosnia, there are separate public services on either side of the dividing line, including separate treasuries, public safety (police and fire), health care and sanitation, communications and power, public transportation, and community recreation programs.

In general, basic freedoms stop at these municipalities' dividing lines, which are typically reinforced by land mines. There is no freedom of movement, nor any formal employment, across the local divide; there is no independent media and no freedom of expression against the politicians. In spite of Dayton and international

The USIP Bosnia Initiative

The Bosnia Initiative of the United States Institute of Peace uses the efforts of the Institute's various programs to support the peace implementation process in Bosnia. The Institute has conducted training programs for staff of international and local NGOs working in Bosnia to help them in their relief and reconciliation work in the aftermath of this intense conflict. The Institute's Religion, Ethics, and Human Rights Program has supported the efforts of top religious leaders in Bosnia to form an Inter-Religious Council to work "together to replace hostility with cooperation and respect" and to acknowledge their shared moral commitment; it is also working with other members within the religious communities to support their efforts at reconciliation. The Institute also recognizes that, if any measure of reconciliation is to occur for Bosnia, war victims, regardless of ethnic affiliation, must have access to fair hearings and due process. To support citizen participation in the justice process, the Institute's Rule of Law Program has begun to work with a variety of Bosnian officials on a number of initiatives, including establishing protection for trial witnesses, more effective police screening procedures, and programs to improve the efficiency of the International War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague; it is also helping to create a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Bosnia in response to requests from the country's judicial officials and community leaders. The Institute's Grant Program funds a variety of scholarly investigations of the Bosnian conflict and conflict-resolution projects for NGO and other practitioners in the country. Through these and other efforts, the Institute seeks to fulfill its mandate to find and explore creative solutions to international crises and conflict.

The Bosnia Initiative is under the direction of **Harriet Hentges**, executive vice president of the Institute.

guarantees of human rights, people in divided municipalities do not enjoy many basic rights. There are much higher proportions of displaced persons living in divided communities, as armies or political parties have transferred people to these volatile front-line areas. Freedom of movement and return are determined locally, regardless of national or international law. The resulting distrust of politics—national and international—among Bosnia's citizens cannot be exaggerated.

Today, the most important concern of many Bosnians is whether they will be permitted to return to their homes or exchange their properties, or will be instructed to do something else. Their interest and participation in an evolving democracy remains minimal, because local government officials have not yet been forced to respect the highest legal declarations from the Bosnian government aimed at protecting citizens' human rights. The national and canton-level representatives elected in 1996, and the special commissions established by the Dayton Accords, have yet to resolve the existence of divided communities and the issue of returns. Although the Dayton Accords created several bodies to protect people's rights, municipal officials routinely ignore orders issued by these bodies. For example, the Federation Ombudsperson's Office may write a letter, citing all appropriate Bosnian legislation, to a mayor stating that a claimant may not be prevented from immediately returning to his or her home. However, when the town's mayor refuses to comply with the order—in the presence of international police, lawyers, and civil affairs specialists—it is easy for Bosnians to realize the extensive power of incumbent politicians. Until the situation changes, farmers, teachers, engineers, and pensioners will not risk returning to land that is not governed by the political party they believe will protect them. Peacekeepers, albeit a smaller force, with a decisive protection mandate, must oversee the impending transitions during periods of potential new conflict.

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Rebuilding Bosnia: NGO and Donor Strategies

Bosnia's divided municipalities continue to violate the Dayton Accords and federation law, as the political leaders of an ethnically dominant side refuse to acknowledge the needs of the other side. Yet over the years, many donors and NGO implementers in Bosnia's reconstruction effort have met frequently with "half-mayors" (leaders of one part of a divided municipality) to sign authorizations for projects, thereby validating the authority of these quasi-officials. At least one major donor did not permit formal recognition of these half-mayors' status, yet required their approval before carrying out any project. This resulted in much confusion among NGO implementers, politicians, and civilians.

In the meantime, the lack of progress in adhering to Dayton at the grassroots level has not only contributed to local divisions since the emergency aid began, but also blocked needs-based community programming. Without a strong, comprehensive, and clear donor strategy, large humanitarian-relief agencies and NGOs tried to deliver goods and services based on need but became immersed in local politics and were forced to negotiate aid based on political divisions. Since 1994, housing construction materials have more often been distributed in equal quantities to Bosniacs and Bosnian Croats (known as "50-50" deals), regardless of local demographics or the extent of damage on both sides of the dividing line. In 1995–96, a donor required this equal split throughout Central Bosnia, ignoring the vast difference in economic recovery power between the two groups. In 1996, another donor selected a two-to-one political ratio of housing reconstruction in certain

areas (rebuilding two Bosniac houses for every Bosnian Croat house). Throughout 1997, aid embargoes were maintained against unfriendly municipalities, and reconstruction funds rewarded cooperative mayors who permitted minority returns in a "carrot-and-stick" strategy. Without long-term enforcement capacity by donors to ensure original-owner occupancy of rebuilt homes, this strategy may serve ethnic cleansing as much as it serves political authorities' efforts to secure aid to reconstruct houses on their ethnic side only.

In a broader sense, the lack of an early and uniform strategy among organizations funding Bosnia's reconstruction has frustrated the development of civil society institutions in that country. Bosnian civilians have long waited for the opportunity to contribute to political decision making at the community level; this is particularly true in the assessment of needs and distribution of aid. Yet the model of local decision making that still prevails today was established as soon as aid began to flow into the country: Municipal authorities and representatives of displaced ethnic minority communities use aid to achieve their political ends, to strengthen their sides, and to funnel aid disbursements to favored local suppliers and contractors. Civil society building and local capacity development programs started relatively late in this aid-heavy scenario. Introducing a new, long-term strategy of needs-based programming involving community participation in these politically divided areas still proves challenging today. Had a long-term multidonor strategy been defined earlier—including, for instance, adequate protection for minorities—reintegration may have proved the goals of ethnic cleansing (whether violently or politically achieved) a fallacy.

Millions of relief and reconstruction dollars channeled through local officials have fortified the physical barriers between ethnic communities by allowing political leaders to distribute aid to their side before the efforts to challenge ethnic cleansing were in place. The rush to spend too much relief and reconstruction money "efficiently"—for example, by relying on mayors' beneficiary lists to determine aid recipients—has blocked community participation in the reconstruction and reconciliation process and has bred defeatism and resentment among many Bosnians. While international agencies must work with public authorities after any disaster, reconstruction in the aftermath of ethnic conflict presents a specific problem of political legitimacy, particularly at the local level. In Bosnia, such obstacles could have been better addressed by adopting an inclusive strategy for reconstruction and ethnic reconciliation in the immediate postconflict stage.

As conditions in Bosnia's municipalities differ greatly, establishing national return quotas for programming aid is not an effective way to plan or implement assistance. Each community should be addressed as a fundamental unit according to its basic needs, and then in relation to the country's overall socioeconomic situation. People have reunited through mutual interests and in mutual capacities with neighbors to reestablish relations. Communities have re-formed relations when convenient, too.

The 1996 UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) pilot project in Stolac, Bugojno, Travnik, and Jajce failed to generate or sustain ethnic minority returns to these cities. The project provided sets of home reconstruction materials for groups of 100 or 200 minority-only returns. However, the mayors of these four towns also needed resources to assist ethnic majority members in their jurisdictions to minimize hostility and violence over the distribution of humanitarian aid. Furthermore, ethnic cleansing had resulted in widely differing demographic, social, and economic conditions in the towns; however, since the two predominantly Bosnian Croat and two Bosniac towns were "paired" for the project's distribution of aid, politics played

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out even more dramatically. The mayors forcefully expelled members of local minorities not on the UNHCR lists to compensate for the new ethnic minority arrivals.

The effort taught UNHCR that simple political negotiations, including those that result in official agreements on all sides, do not necessarily provide harmonious conditions for returns. "There is a natural pace to reconciliation and return at each location. It is determined by the minds of the population, not the international community. The international community provides the money, and has been frustrated with the lack of power of (their) sticks," was the consensus of UNHCR staff members in its Mostar field office, who added that the donors funding such projects should have more flexible budgets and adaptable criteria. "If you give $1 million to a municipality, there will still be no return. It is the attitudes and mindset of the people who will determine the process of return."[1]

Working closely with local firms and municipal authorities across ethnic lines, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has contributed significantly toward rural reelectrification; income generation through vocational training and building up small industry and agriculture; capacity building among municipal authorities through computer training and project planning courses; and the establishment of mobile and outpatient clinics. DRC also works closely with civilians to help reestablish and support dozens of local associations to find sustainable solutions to problems beyond the reach of the public and for-profit sectors. The varying combinations of these programs as prioritized from area to area have successfully reestablished business as well as social and economic links among residents, officials, refugees, and displaced persons. Such an approach has also created new links to the European Union by forging regional connections in the promotion of trade, employment, vocational training, and other components of the reconstruction effort. The success of DRC's long-term projects stems from its ability to integrate public and private sector approaches that accommodate both returning refugees and residents of divided cities. It is able to accomplish this integration through the accessibility of its staff in decentralized field offices throughout its areas of operation.

Leveraging aid to reintegrate communities (the common strategy with various approaches by most donors) requires working with nonpolitical persons, particularly merchants and entrepreneurs. A Croatian working in Bosnia states, "Money has no ideology. Profit is the only goal. Within 24 hours of the Washington Agreement, interethnic trade started with all groups conducting business with each other."[2] This is well illustrated through the World Bank's investment through the autonomous, nonprofit Local Initiatives Departments. These bodies contract with NGOs to serve as local microcredit service providers that lend funds to clients based on feasibility analyses, not ethnic identity.

In another example, in Novi Travnik's buffer zone, mono-ethnic schools, apartments, and two municipal buildings surround a multiethnic marketplace repaired with funds from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Bosnian Croat and Bosniac shop owners, employees, and customers stream in and out of the building all day for goods from everywhere. They joke dryly about their "other" lives outside of business and about their desire for things to return to normal. More investments in projects like this would reinforce their success and show the highest-level policymakers that people can tolerate neighbors from different ethnic groups.

The implementers of this project used a strategy of getting the city's two mayors to realize that their joint agreement would not only gain them political support in their respective parties, but encourage one of the few business development efforts for the entire city. Also, when political leaders on both sides of the city began to

view the NGO implementers with suspicion for spending too much time negotiating with "the other side," the implementers brought in a representative of the project's donor to finalize agreements between the two sides. The donor was viewed as more credible, since it had not spent time meeting with either side's leader and was devoted to the completion of the project, not to the nettlesome details.

The tendency of NGOs and donors to advertise their presence is a significant drawback in reconstruction efforts. Specifically, NGOs try to advertise their presence in news broadcasts seen in their home countries to encourage donations. Hence, staff members don T-shirts, and trucks feature signs with the NGO's logo. Project signage on schools, hospitals, and homes that Bosnians use daily pays homage to the foreigner rather than to the community. The practice of USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance of nailing project signs onto the front walls of partially repaired houses has degraded rural Bosnian men's worth, since their houses traditionally symbolize their commitment to their families and represent the moral quality of the family members.[3] It has also caused friction among neighbors in a cultural "donor war," where a donor from the Islamic community funds a home repair according to a different standard than the more "efficient" Western-funded repair project across the street. Symbols dominated the war and do not serve the interests of peace when donors and implementers spend funds to promote their own interests rather than those of the people they serve. Such funds would be better used to rebuild more homes and facilities, or to enhance local capacity. As one politician has candidly observed: "NGOs have created something like a business for themselves here. . . . We need more private sector investment."[4]

The International Mennonite Organization (IMO) maintains a very low profile in its Kakanj, Konjic, and Jajce projects, where IMO volunteers have worked successfully for years with mixed and minority ethnic groups in locally managed emergency aid distribution, home reconstruction, youth programs, and other peacebuilding efforts. IMO's low-key, residential team approach has allowed it to pursue strategic objectives in a way that is regarded as nonthreatening to municipal authorities. IMO's intentional use of old, unmarked vehicles keeps it in good stead with the local community. "They see the van with rust and damage, and they know we do not have money to waste, or we would have to pay triple for repairs," says an IMO worker. "Going to the mechanic forces us to work together, to depend on the locals, and develops good relations. Besides, we have discussed buying a new vehicle and we prefer to use that money for the program, not for ourselves."[5]

Unlike the Bosniacs who were clients of other NGO programs in Jajce, those who were served by the IMO program were not targeted in the August 1997 expulsion of minorities from the town. Perhaps IMO's unthreatening manner and long-standing presence in the community helped to protect them. To be sure, IMO's consistency in its relations with both sides of each divided city it serves—even when one side turns hostile—has contributed to its acceptance in cities where other nonresident NGOs or donors have been forced to abort their reconstruction efforts.

In a postconflict situation, the establishment of the principles of trust and transparency among players is imperative, particularly when high-level political negotiations are in process as work begins on the ground. Major aid programs change as frequently as do politics. If community participants know and understand donor strategies and conditions, they will also respond better to changes made in the strategies.

Above all, however, the need for all NGOs and donors to coordinate their activities in Bosnia's reconstruction is more than obvious. While donors and implementers

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talk about coordination a great deal, the scale of the effort in Bosnia, and the organizational imperatives of humanitarian-relief operations in general, make such coordination an elusive goal. Today, "[t]he coordination of NGOs is not effective, because to a certain extent NGOs are competing with each other for money, competing with each other as to who's Number One. There are too many chiefs and not enough Indians due to the proliferation of small NGOs. Everyone is a director and not enough people are doing the work. NGOs must realize that to perform a function (and not to have an office) is their main purpose of existence."[6]

Many agencies do not attend coordination meetings, of which there are far too many—by sector, geographic area, security interest, and more. "I am fed up with coordination, attending meetings all the time and we still have nothing," said a project worker from a human-rights international organization. "We have tried to coordinate activities, but each organization has its own interest. It is very difficult to do. Where it does work, they have a genuine interest in the goal. Otherwise, I am a little critical of the scope of these groups."[7]

Yet, regardless of the degree of coordination among NGO implementers, their successes will inevitably prove to be short-term unless they make sure their efforts are sustainable once they leave. This requires integrating the public sector in rebuilding communities while supporting NGO activities to strengthen the institutions of civil society. The Danish Refugee Council has crafted a broader approach to improving multisector community redevelopment, managed in a decentralized fashion through its field offices in Jablanica, Zenica, and other Bosnian towns. In an effort to sustain returns to the homes it repairs, the DRC addresses the needs of the entire community, providing much more than construction materials and labor.

DRC's long-term commitment to the communities it serves is evidenced in the five-year anniversary celebration of its Jablanica operations, where ethnic and return tensions remain high. The sustainability of its programs is exemplified in Tuzla, where the Bosnian agency it established, BOSPO, works independently as a microcredit service provider of World Bank funds, in addition to other roles it plays in that better-covered, more stable area. DRC's philosophy of sustainability is reflected in its program implementation. The strategic integration of reconstruction with social services through the same multisector field offices has lowered administrative costs. DRC's international staff presence is minimal, compared with that of U.S. NGOs' reliance on expatriate staff. Thus, its internal management mechanisms have long promoted sustainability through extensive training of professional Bosnian staff.

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) has successfully trained public financial managers at the municipal and canton levels throughout Bosnia. These public officials now use the same set of budget accounting procedures, while political parties (i.e., ethnic majority parties in control) still require separate municipal budgeting for areas under their control. ICMA's program seeks to minimize the fiscal and administrative confusion that will inevitably result when these separate budgets are consolidated under unified municipal governments. The program has also clearly demonstrated that public officials can participate professionally in capacity-building programs regardless of their ethnicity.

This program's success can be attributed to many factors: the integrated nature of its participant population; the universal standards and knowledge base of the profession itself; the professional capabilities of its international staff and the high level of training given to indigenous implementers; and the fact that the institutional setting for the project is a professional association of Bosnian finance officers—created

by ICMA—whose members can discuss technical and professional issues. The project is also facilitated by the general agreement among Bosnia's political leaders on its functional tasks: fiscal federalism, budget development, the use of automated budgeting software, and intergovernmental financial reporting.

The type of approach ICMA used with financial managers has proved successful in other technical specialties (e.g., medical training through the International Medical Corps), but there is still a great need for this kind of training in other professions that are crucial to the reconstruction effort, particularly among urban planners. Programs such as these should find wide acceptance, since their products—the development of professional skills—are usually the most needed in the reconstruction phase, involve the least amount of controversy, and are the easiest to transfer. Some canton representatives have requested to learn specifically how to establish partnerships with civil society groups to address common interests cooperatively.

The integrated resettlement pilot project in Travnik, implemented by the UN Development Program (UNDP) and cofinanced by the European Union, addresses this issue thoroughly. "The key strategy of the program is to empower local authorities and civil society and to involve them as fully as possible in prioritizing needs and formulating the response" to "foster local ownership and create sustainable mechanisms" to solve community problems.[8] The project exercises a fundamental change of the definition and understanding of the role of public servant as it was previously performed in Bosnia. A joint government/local civil society unit handles matters related to refugee returns. In addition, five working groups, comprising public and private sector and civil society representatives, meet regularly to discuss community redevelopment issues.

The new Travnik pilot seeks to prove that the strategic interaction of local public, private, and nonprofit actors in a community that faces great pressure to expedite returns will create sustainable solutions. A number of other compartmentalized projects that have been tried, each with different targets and conditions, failed to accomplish this basic goal. The pilot is facilitated by resident Bosnian-speaking staff trained in human rights and peacebuilding who work closely with Bosnian engineers, lawyers, and other indigenous professionals in a team-based model. Their well-focused methodology to institutionalize local control of community-based reconstruction and reconciliation efforts may become the new paradigm in the postconflict arena, as international development agencies and NGOs discovered long ago.

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The Travnik pilot program offers many lessons to NGOs on how to plan and structure comprehensive and sustainable reconstruction and reconciliation programs.

First, the project was designed to include only those foreign implementers who were fluent in Serbo-Croatian, or who could become so quickly. That the program's staff could converse with the city's residents and read local newspapers helped to ensure that the grassroots, needs-based goals of the program were being satisfied. Also, foreign professionals recruited to work in the project were paid little more than their local counterparts to ensure that their interest was in peacebuilding and Bosnia's reconstruction rather than in the prospect of high-paying project work funded by an international organization.

Second, local candidates for staff positions were interviewed and screened by the project's creators for technical skills and team-work attitudes, as well as for their general understanding of the project's goals in multiethnic community reconstruction and their willingness to work in a participatory process. Successful candidates received valuable on-the-job training in their daily work assignments, along

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with consistent "partnering" with their foreign teammates. Indigenous professionals were a crucial component of such teams; as the local staff expanded, so did the network of prospective professionals, who received the same screening as local candidates applying for administrative staff positions. While the higher UNDP pay scales attracted many local candidates, the project's creators tried to minimize the pay differential to make the program easily transferable and sustainable.

The Success of Small Grassroots Programs in Divided Communities: The Case of Gornji Vakuf

Peacebuilding among civilians actively involved in finding ways to improve their daily lives and communities in collaborative practices across ethnic lines remains Bosnia's strategic challenge—and perhaps its best triumph so far.

Civilians throughout Bosnia have, in fact, regenerated multiethnic relations amidst the forces of separatist politics. This is particularly striking in the country's divided municipalities, where a street or park divides people from working or going to school with former neighbors who fought with each other and who now remain so physically close. A variety of independent grassroots peacebuilding projects have made a difference at the local level in Banja Luka, Gorazde, Gornji Vakuf, Jajce, Mostar, Sanski Most, Sarajevo, Vitez, and elsewhere. Once basic educational activities are under way, alternative Bosnian leaders have then begun to create broader-based programs of advocacy training and networking, including some with moderate or opposition politicians, to reinforce their community's self-help efforts.

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In Gornji Vakuf, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) tried to implement a "federation-building and multiethnic reconciliation" project by repairing structures and infrastructure for joint use. It had to secure the authorization of the city's two mayors (actually, the minority ethnic representative was the interim municipal assembly president) for each proposed repair, so the project's managers established close daily working relations with the authorities. The mayors' reconstruction priorities (i.e., one mayor's own district in the municipality and the main road leading into it) were quite different from the people's real needs for schools and jobs. Hence, the effort became known as "the politicians' project." The project staff, like the UN civil affairs representatives, were viewed as "political people," not as impartial humanitarian-relief providers, because of the time spent in mayors' offices negotiating with them.

When serious problems in the project (such as unfinished work, questionable beneficiary identification, and changed ownership and use of structures) led to new disagreements between the two politicians, no one on either side of the municipality's dividing line would help. The potential ramifications (such as the loss of a family's house) of getting involved in a purely political duel, as opposed to resolving a community dilemma, were clear.

Had the project strategy begun with a broader base of participation to identify joint projects based on community need rather than political interest, and to verify official beneficiary lists, the resources would have been better used. Instead, UMCOR's project team left Gornji Vakuf with two buildings in the town center standing unfinished and empty.

During the USAID project, the two mayors "traded" four central urban apartment buildings along the dividing line, transforming them from mixed-ethnic use to mono-ethnic use following their repair. The World Bank financed the repair of

another two central buildings for mono-ethnic use. The implementer of the multiethnic project agreed to undertake two additional mono-ethnic home repair projects. With the growing emphasis on mono-ethnic use, the importance of the original multiethnic project faded, but the rules did not formally change. Soon, no negative consequences of failing to accept the increasingly insignificant multiethnic project could motivate the mayors to comply with the donor's outdated conditions.

Meanwhile, the UN Office at Vienna (UNOV) defined its 1995 Gornji Vakuf project to repair house windows and secure winter firewood by meeting with *families* on both sides. Using a participatory assessment methodology, UNOV identified those who fell outside of the mayors' lists of aid recipients and what they needed, and then solicited independent local businesses to supply the materials. This was the first phase of a long-term community reconstruction program that built upon these relations and emergency services provided *with* Bosnians throughout the divided community, not *for* them from outside. The dignity preserved through their participation encouraged Gornji Vakuf residents to continue to work with UNOV to implement new programs in income generation, house reconstruction, and recreation and education.

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Today, the UNOV/UNDP team in Gornji Vakuf continues to narrow the gap between the two halves of the divided community through joint strategic programming, advocacy, networking, and microenterprise training with its three local NGO partners. UNOV/UNDP's priority commitment to the community—instead of only to the donors—has demonstrated an effective way to sustain postconflict relief efforts by focusing its program planning efforts on the recipients of the aid. There are many other examples.

In one of the most war-damaged towns of Central Bosnia, Gornji Vakuf's residents had suffered tremendous casualties, though they still had the capacity to help themselves, and they certainly needed work. While their home-reconstruction needs were high, they would not accept assistance in obtaining building materials from "experts" from another town. Homeowners and officials on both sides turned down UMCOR's offer to sponsor a vocational training program and provide all related materials and funding, because the training experts came from outside Gornji Vakuf. As in every typical Bosnian community, Gornji Vakuf's residents believed in their own professional resources and believed that they needed to reestablish relations within the community. Particularly troublesome to the intended participants was that the proposed "expert" staff was from only one ethnic group, not both. In a postconflict environment, foreigners assisting in the reconstruction of divided communities must try to find local solutions wherever possible.

After planning for the UMCOR vocational training program was completed, UNOV recruited "the headmasters of the two schools on either side of the community, who are former colleagues and have agreed to work together again" to design and oversee the program.[9] It not only provides training and material assistance, but "brings key figures from both sides of the town together, and at the same time roots the program firmly in the community."[10] The educators' partnership now operates as an independent local agency, which is managing rising tensions over housing issues stemming from refugee returns.

The Key to Reconciliation: Planning a Community Center

The ethnic division of towns that are still plagued with reminders of the war usually means that there is no *neutral space* for people to move freely, to think about and discuss the future, to relax, to learn about human rights, to learn new vocational skills, or simply

to meet other people. The dividing line, even if surrounded by a supposed "buffer zone," puts all community space on either side in political territories that are constantly monitored by the officials who drew the line. This division underlies the fundamental strategic value of creating a neutral space that is open to people who do not want to live only within the segregated confines imposed by the municipality's dividing line.

In Gornji Vakuf, political authorities force children to go to ethnically segregated schools, adults to work in ethnically segregated firms, and families to live in ethnically segregated communities. Only in the new Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje Youth Center may children meet "friends from the other side, without fear of what adults will say. We wondered why our schools didn't teach us the same things any more. . . . We discovered we like being together, talking together. . . . We learned that we are the same. . . . In our center, WE make the decisions and WE decide our future. We know our future is together and not separated."[11] In the center's first year, one-third of the town's children attend its classes: eco-mountaineering, agriculture, computers, English, mine awareness, dance, drama, video production, and more.

The Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje Youth Center exemplifies the desire of the people to reunite over and above the politics of Gornji Vakuf's main Bosniac and Bosnian Croat political parties that separate them. This bottom-up, community-based program has achieved what higher-level, politically focused negotiations over territory have not: the reintegration of people who "hate" each other.

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A few obstacles impede the success of multiethnic community centers in the divided municipalities of Banja Luka, Bugojno, Gorazde, Gornji Vakuf, Livno, Mostar, Sarajevo, Travnik, and Vitez/Old Vitez. First, the centers remain relatively underrated by policymakers who view cooperation between the cities' halves primarily as a function of mutual economic interests. More important, though, the nature of their participatory programming remains problematic for large donors whose guidelines require pre-project investment schedules. Such a requirement ignores the conflict's human element of extreme suffering and the subsequent need to recover, which cannot be made secondary to the task of securing investment in the project.

The central element of the community centers' long-term success is the *local population's responsibility for and ownership of its programs.* This precludes an international agency from making a precise annual budget in advance of identified interests and needs. Further, these centers periodically conduct self-evaluations throughout their communities to improve their services. The resulting program changes often cause budget modifications that large donors cannot accommodate without tremendous bureaucratic effort. Thus, most of these centers raise their funds through private channels, which are traditionally more flexible and less demanding in their support of grassroots programs. Adequate laws for privatization do not yet exist to remove the control of major Bosnian firms from politicians. However, the World Bank's work with the Local Initiatives Departments has established an impressive network of microcredit service providers throughout the country, which has coordinated well (so far) with other major credit donors to limit the duplication of services. Above all, control of politically neutral community centers belongs to the people, not the politicians: "Not only are children involved, [but] teachers, parents, and Federation Women collaborate to work towards a different lifestyle and differ-

ent approach toward organizing a community."[13] The broad base of user participation through a joint advisory board for programming gives these centers an "all of ours" identity.

"Second-Generation" Centers

Several international organizations have recently established information- and advocacy-oriented "second-generation" centers across the country. These centers facilitate dispute resolution in areas such as property and employment rights, access to health education and social services, and the reconnection of utilities, with Bosnian professionals providing legal counsel and referral services.[14] With staff trained in human rights, these centers can handle property exchanges and resettlement, as well as "offer local people a means of expression, giving those who have been disenfranchised for the last five years a real say in their futures."[15] The second-generation centers, as the new focal point for returns and residents alike, command high visibility, as opposed to the low-key approach required by multiethnic community centers. Their role may expand as their capacities grow and social welfare needs change.

The second-generation centers require better legislation and coordination of field support and training. At least five international agencies are starting networks of information centers and databases, each offering different services and methods for obtaining them. Unfortunately, the variety and increased amount of information can confuse potential clients. Responding to the need to standardize this information, the UN Office at Vienna/Gornji Vakuf has published a directory of the services that the centers offer to help Bosnians decide where to go. New staff members of these centers need technical training in, for example, legal and legislative research and community outreach, and the centers themselves need institutional support in working with public and private sector partners. Local public authorities need orientation to recognize the partnership value of such facilities. The World Bank provides an attorney to assist Bosnian lawyers in creating their own civil society legislation, in collaboration with the Legal Education Advocacy Project, funded by the Soros Open Society Foundation. This approach will ensure that Bosnians have a vested interest in protecting their legislation.

Lessons from NGO Implementers' and Donors' Experiences in Bosnia

- Use participatory programming in postconflict relief work. Strengthen the community, not the leaders of the conflict. International agencies and NGOs that worked through only official government (i.e., political) channels to distribute aid reinforced the physical divisions and dependencies created by these politicians during the war. Organizations that went directly to the communities to distribute aid were able to reunite segregated ethnic groups or work with minority ethnic groups successfully. These agencies have continued to strengthen multiethnic relations in Bosnia through community building with the empowered participants.
- Empower community leaders to create their own solutions. Work through partnerships *within* a community. The only way to prevent the reemergence of conflict is to support local and national leaders to build up appropriate institutions that reflect their cultural values and capacities. The ethnic cleansings and expul-

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sions in the Bosnian conflict have created strong local identities among the residents and political leaders who remained in the municipalities when the fighting stopped. Donors and NGO implementers must realize that each community has its own leaders and resources that must be included in the design and implementation of sustainable reconstruction and ethnic reconciliation programs.

- Help the whole community to improve conditions. Aiding only refugees or minorities increases local tensions. The key to a peaceful Bosnia is the reestablishment of community life in a *stable region.* This approach assumes that refugees and displaced persons will return to their communities, where basic conditions such as security, jobs, and education exist. Supplying reconstruction materials or helping only one small group does not help the community as a whole, but instead fragments it. People who stayed to defend their communities have significant needs and untapped capacity to participate in their own redevelopment.

- Direct humanitarian resources through private sector channels, where possible, to reintegrate resources. Promoting investment in small-scale, privately owned businesses has resulted in promising multiethnic, cross-entity relationships. Tile-making machines, hand tools for craftsmen, clothing manufacture, furniture repair, small dairy and agribusiness equipment, and the construction of cross-border infrastructure have brought people together in a country where minority ethnic returns remain the exception. Said one official, "Economics drives things. We have cross-border cooperation for all energy projects."[16] This approach will be prevented as long as aid is distributed through programs under contract to large publicly owned agencies or firms. Current laws provide for the governmental (i.e., the main political party in power) management of these large firms, but government officials throughout Bosnia do not generally employ or reemploy people from different ethnic groups. Regardless of the institutions used to carry out reconstruction projects, though, accountability—making sure funds are used for the purposes intended—is imperative.

- Reduce the commercialization and symbols of the international community at the local level. Community redevelopment work calls for different kinds of advertising and promotional campaigns than emergency-relief work. Pervasive symbols of foreign organizations in Bosnian villages are not desirable and do not contribute to the goals of community ownership and participation, key elements of redevelopment. Signage should be minimized because of the violence-inciting role that various signs and symbols have played in the conflict's demarcation of territory. While nationalist propaganda continues to bombard people with separatist sentiments, self-congratulatory advertising by NGOs and donors also continues to emphasize the presence of and dependence on foreign actors. Such advertising trivializes the real purpose of these programs—to help families and communities reestablish themselves.

- Create a guiding donors' strategy and a practical set of coordination principles to accomplish it. There should be a consistent postconflict rehabilitation strategy among donors and NGOs to avoid confusion and conflict among residents, NGO workers, and officials in the same municipality trying to comply with different donor conditions. In Gornji Vakuf, European donors did not require multiethnic use of central urban apartments or other housing for repair, nor did different U.S. government agencies require multiethnic use of schools or other facilities for repair. However, one USAID project required extensive demonstration of "multiethnic

reconciliation value" and property ownership of apartments before the donor would consent to fund repair activities. The lone multiethnic program in town had very little political leverage when the other projects could simply repair the buildings with no reconciliation requirements imposed on the politicians.

- Strengthen the public sector—particularly at the canton level—to establish partnerships with the emerging civil society. Training new civil society leaders can be threatening to new government officials, who often lack the training to perform their own jobs. The canton is the most important level for public sector training because it regulates key areas: regional education, cultural activities, land use, and other crucial policies that are integral to Bosnia's postconflict reconstruction and reconciliation. Building strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors will strengthen community redevelopment more than adding resources to the public sector alone.

Meanwhile, there are hundreds of Bosnian NGOs and professional associations whose capacities can be built up through training and practice (and better legislation) to lead to their independent membership in global peacebuilding networks.

Conclusion

In Bosnia's divided communities, politicians have made very little, if any, progress toward resolving their boundary-line disputes to define or maintain their power bases. Meanwhile, civilians displaced on either side of these lines have made great strides in innovative, reintegrated activities: income generation; health care; vocational training; social welfare; and social, educational, and recreational programs. The relatively repressive conditions of life in these communities are easy to see, as aid is generally distributed along political lines rather than according to the degree of human need. Further, given the generally dehumanizing manner in which emergency aid was distributed to them, these civilians' accomplishments are even more striking. But they still have a very long way to go to achieve peace in their communities outside of these programs. The situation worsens as more refugees and displaced persons compete for housing and basic services.

Donors and implementers simply need to take more time to listen to Bosnians at the local level, in all their diversity. As each community is different in its level of suffering, so are the solutions and the leaders' capacities to deal with specific problems and priorities. Strengthening and coordinating the work of the second-generation centers will allow them to possibly serve as a critical link between people and resources—and across the globe in the near future—to resolve many issues. But they cannot resolve the critical problem of security, which will exist as long as major war criminals are free, or the problem of economic redevelopment, which will exist as long as factories refuse to employ people based on their ethnicity. A locally institutionalized mechanism to respond to identified community needs will better address this situation. Donors need greater flexibility to support this long-term process.

Coordination of, and strategic planning among, NGOs remains a serious problem in Bosnia. Large, parallel humanitarian-relief networks must establish a more effective scheme in which Bosnians' long-term interests are better served.

Meanwhile, there are hundreds of Bosnian NGOs and professional associations whose capacities can be built up through training and practice (and better legislation) to lead to their independent membership in global peacebuilding networks. There are many more groups of veterans, women, intellectuals, youth, writers, engineers, doctors, and other members of professional associations or cultural clubs who should be brought into a broader dialogue about how their particular community or canton could better address their needs. Croatian and Bosnian organizations, particularly the Center for Peace Studies, have trained thousands of teachers and other professionals in a long-term civilian empowerment strategy to link community leaders

Until much more space for Bosnian civilians is free from ethnic-based, separatist-oriented political control, the international community will have a role to play. We have seen Bosniacs, Bosnian Serbs, and Bosnian Croats willfully reunite when they are allowed to define and pursue their mutual interests.

across the globe as they address local priorities. These indigenous groups are the critical players in the design and implementation of a regional peacebuilding or community redevelopment/reconciliation strategy. New experts from international agencies will interfere with the growth and stability of a functioning public sector in Bosnia if they attempt to establish entirely new systems of training, finance, and other crucial reconstruction programs when local institutions and leaders already exist.

Coordination of, and strategic planning among, NGOs remains a serious problem in Bosnia. Large, parallel humanitarian-relief networks must establish a more effective scheme in which Bosnians' long-term interests are better served. A few independent Bosnian organizations (e.g., The Coalition for Return) should closely and objectively monitor the progress of returns and reintegration across the country. Bosnia's alternative political leaders should take a more formal, anticipatory, and enthusiastic role in influencing a precise donor agenda for peacebuilding activities through multisector community redevelopment, as illustrated in this report. Years of Bosnian postconflict experience have revealed that the main political parties do not encourage the kind of work that is necessary to promote peacebuilding in a balanced fashion.

Until much more space for Bosnian civilians is free from ethnic-based, separatist-oriented political control, the international community will have a role to play. We have seen Bosniacs, Bosnian Serbs, and Bosnian Croats willfully reunite when they are allowed to define and pursue their mutual interests. They have found sufficient commonalties after having committed unimaginable atrocities against one another. It is our human and legal responsibility to protect and support them in pursuit of their rights until we are sure that when we depart, their situation will not readily lapse back into destructive conflict.

Notes

1. Interview with officials of UN High Commissioner for Refugees/Mostar Office, June 26, 1997.
2. Interviews with officials of the Danish Refugee Council, March 12 and June 26, Mostar; March 18–September 20, 1977, Jablanica; April 8, 1997, Zenica.
3. See Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).
4. Interview with member of Alternative Council of Ministers' Executive Council, May 28, 1997, Sarajevo.
5. Interviews with officials of International Mennonite Organization, April 3 and September 11, 1997, Jajce and Kakanj.
6. Interview with officials of America's Development Foundation, April 18, 1997, Zagreb.
7. Interviews with officials in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Human Rights Office, June 13, 1997, Sarajevo.
8. Interviews with officials of the UNDP/EU Integrated Resettlement Program, June 5–September 11, 1997, Travnik.
9. UN Office at Vienna/UN Development Program, "Social Reconstruction Project in Gornji Vakuf" (Gornji Vakuf: UNOV/UNDP, 1997).
10. Ibid.
11. United Methodist Committee on Relief/United Nations Office at Vienna, "Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje Youth Center" (Gornji Vakuf: UNOV/UNDP, 1997).
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Interviews with officials of the UNDP/EU Integrated Resettlement Program, June 5–September 11, 1997, Travnik.
15. Ibid.
16. Interviews with officials of USAID/Municipal Infrastructure Services, May 22, 1997, Sarajevo.