

The Role of Non-State Actors in Conflict Resolution: A Comparative Analysis of Peacebuilding Efforts in Colombia and Nepal

Camila Ramirez¹

¹ Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia

Correspondence: Camila Ramirez, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia.

doi:10.56397/SSSH.2024.02.02

Abstract

This paper examines the role of non-state actors in conflict resolution through a comparative analysis of peacebuilding efforts in Colombia and Nepal. Drawing upon the experiences of NGOs, civil society organizations, religious institutions, and community-based groups, the study explores similarities, differences, and lessons learned from these contexts. In Colombia, non-state actors have confronted political violence and drug trafficking, while in Nepal, they have addressed ethnic tensions and Maoist insurgency. Despite distinct challenges, non-state actors in both countries have contributed to fostering dialogue, promoting reconciliation, and advocating for human rights. The analysis highlights the importance of inclusive approaches, dialogue facilitation, and community resilience in promoting sustainable peace. Policy implications and recommendations emphasize the need for supportive legal frameworks, conflict prevention strategies, and inclusive peace processes to empower non-state actors and advance peacebuilding efforts.

Keywords: non-state actors, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, Colombia, Nepal, comparative analysis, inclusive approaches, human rights

1. Introduction

Conflicts, with their complex and multifaceted nature, have remained a persistent challenge throughout human history. Addressing conflicts and achieving sustainable peace require the involvement of various actors, beyond just state entities. In recent years, non-state actors have emerged as pivotal players in conflict resolution efforts worldwide. These actors, which encompass a diverse array of organizations and groups such as civil society organizations, religious institutions, and grassroots movements, contribute significantly to peacebuilding initiatives.

This paper embarks on a comparative analysis of the role of non-state actors in conflict resolution, with a specific focus on the peacebuilding endeavors in Colombia and Nepal. The selection of these two countries stems from their distinct historical contexts, unique conflict dynamics, and varied approaches to peacebuilding. By delving into the experiences of non-state actors within these contexts, this study aims to illuminate the effectiveness, challenges, and contributions of non-state actors in navigating and mitigating conflicts.

This introduction serves to outline the conceptual framework that underpins the analysis, delineate the specific objectives of the study, and underscore the significance of comparing peacebuilding efforts in Colombia and Nepal. Furthermore, it lays the groundwork for an in-depth exploration of the role played by non-state actors in conflict resolution, offering insights into potential lessons learned and implications for policy and practice.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Definition and Classification of Non-State Actors

Non-state actors refer to a broad spectrum of entities that operate outside of governmental structures but exert

influence on societal, political, and economic dynamics. These actors encompass a diverse array of organizations, institutions, and groups, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), grassroots movements, religious organizations, multinational corporations, and community-based associations.

The classification of non-state actors is multifaceted, often categorized based on their objectives, affiliations, and methods of operation. NGOs, for instance, are typically characterized by their non-profit status and commitment to advancing social, environmental, or humanitarian causes. Grassroots movements, on the other hand, emerge from local communities and mobilize collective action around specific issues or grievances. Religious organizations may play significant roles in conflict resolution by offering spiritual guidance, fostering dialogue, and promoting reconciliation.

Furthermore, non-state actors can be classified according to their level of engagement and influence within conflict resolution processes. Track I actors refer to formal governmental entities engaged in diplomatic negotiations and policymaking, while Track II actors comprise informal networks and intermediaries, including civil society organizations and religious leaders, who facilitate dialogue and mediation efforts. Track III actors encompass grassroots initiatives and community-based organizations that directly engage with affected populations at the local level.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Non-State Actors in Conflict Resolution

The involvement of non-state actors in conflict resolution processes is viewed through various theoretical lenses, each offering unique insights into their roles, motivations, and impact. These theoretical perspectives contribute to our understanding of how non-state actors contribute to conflict resolution efforts.

Liberal Pluralism emphasizes the vital role of non-state actors in promoting diversity and inclusivity within societies. Civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and advocacy groups advocate for marginalized groups, champion human rights, and facilitate the integration of diverse perspectives into conflict resolution processes. They are seen as essential agents for fostering democratic governance and peaceful coexistence.

Transnationalism underscores the interconnectedness of global actors and the flow of ideas, resources, and information across national borders. Non-state actors operate transnationally, forming networks and alliances to address common challenges such as armed conflict, environmental degradation, and human rights violations. Transnational advocacy networks mobilize public opinion, shape policy agendas, and pressure governments to adopt peacebuilding measures on the international stage.

Constructivism highlights the socially constructed nature of conflict and peacebuilding processes. Non-state actors contribute to conflict resolution by shaping norms, identities, and discourses that underpin peacebuilding efforts. Through dialogue, education, and cultural exchange, they promote reconciliation, build trust, and challenge divisive narratives that fuel conflict. Constructivist approaches emphasize the role of non-state actors in creating shared meanings and narratives that facilitate conflict transformation and reconciliation.

Critical Theory interrogates power dynamics and structural inequalities that drive conflicts and peacebuilding interventions. Grassroots movements and civil society organizations challenge dominant power structures, advocate for social justice, and demand accountability from state and corporate actors. Critical perspectives stress the importance of addressing root causes of conflict, including poverty, inequality, and marginalization, and call for transformative, participatory approaches to conflict resolution.

2.3 Factors Influencing the Role of Non-State Actors

The effectiveness and impact of non-state actors in conflict resolution are shaped by various factors, reflecting the complex dynamics of conflict environments:

Legal and Institutional Frameworks: The regulatory context within which non-state actors operate profoundly affects their ability to engage in conflict resolution activities. Supportive legal frameworks that safeguard the rights of civil society organizations and ensure freedom of expression and association facilitate their participation in peacebuilding efforts. Conversely, restrictive legal environments, marked by limitations on civil liberties or NGO activities, may impede their effectiveness.

Resource Capacities: The availability of financial, human, and material resources significantly influences the capacity of non-state actors to engage in conflict resolution initiatives. Access to adequate funding, skilled personnel, and technology enhances their ability to implement programs, mobilize support, and sustain peacebuilding efforts over the long term. Conversely, resource constraints such as funding shortages or organizational capacity limitations can hinder their effectiveness.

Political Context and Power Dynamics: The political landscape and power dynamics within conflict-affected settings shape the opportunities and challenges confronting non-state actors. Negotiating complex political environments characterized by competing interests, power struggles, and vested interests requires skillful navigation. Non-state actors may encounter resistance from state authorities, political elites, or armed groups

opposed to peacebuilding initiatives, necessitating careful strategic engagement.

Sociocultural Dynamics: Sociocultural factors, including norms, values, identities, and historical legacies, profoundly influence the attitudes and behaviors of non-state actors and their constituents. Sensitivity to cultural diversity, respect for local customs, and inclusive approaches are critical for building trust and fostering meaningful dialogue and reconciliation. Non-state actors must navigate complex sociocultural dynamics, including ethnic, religious, and tribal affiliations, to promote social cohesion and address the underlying causes of conflict.

External Support and Partnerships: Non-state actors often rely on external support and partnerships to enhance their capacity and effectiveness in conflict resolution efforts. Collaborating with international organizations, donor agencies, diplomatic missions, and academic institutions can provide access to funding, technical expertise, and networking opportunities. However, reliance on external actors may also pose challenges related to dependence, accountability, and sovereignty concerns.

Local Ownership and Participation: Non-state actors' engagement in conflict resolution processes should prioritize local ownership, participation, and empowerment. Meaningful engagement with local stakeholders, including marginalized groups, women, youth, and indigenous communities, enhances the legitimacy and sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives. Adopting inclusive, participatory approaches that prioritize local perspectives, knowledge, and priorities is essential for fostering community resilience and promoting lasting peace.

3. Non-State Actors in Conflict Resolution: Colombia

Colombia has grappled with armed conflict and internal strife for decades, fueled by various factors including political instability, socioeconomic inequality, and illicit drug trafficking. The involvement of non-state actors in conflict resolution efforts has been instrumental in addressing the root causes of violence and fostering peace in the country.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a pivotal role in promoting human rights, advocating for social justice, and providing humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected populations in Colombia. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Peace Brigades International have documented human rights abuses, campaigned for justice and accountability, and monitored peace processes to ensure compliance with international standards.

Civil society organizations have emerged as important actors in facilitating dialogue, reconciliation, and community empowerment initiatives at the grassroots level. Organizations like the Colombian Commission of Jurists, the Colombian Red Cross, and the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes have mobilized communities, facilitated truth and reconciliation processes, and advocated for the rights of victims of violence and displacement.

Religious institutions have also played a significant role in peacebuilding efforts in Colombia, leveraging their moral authority and spiritual leadership to promote forgiveness, reconciliation, and social cohesion. The Catholic Church, in particular, has been actively involved in mediating conflicts, providing humanitarian assistance, and promoting dialogue between conflicting parties.

Community-based organizations and grassroots movements have been at the forefront of local peacebuilding efforts, mobilizing communities, fostering social cohesion, and promoting alternative livelihoods in conflict-affected regions. Initiatives such as the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó and the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca have advocated for the rights of marginalized communities, resisted violence and exploitation, and pursued collective strategies for peace and development.

The role of non-state actors in conflict resolution in Colombia has not been without challenges. They have faced threats, intimidation, and violence from various armed groups, including guerrilla organizations, paramilitary forces, and criminal gangs, opposed to peacebuilding initiatives. Limited resources, institutional capacity constraints, and political polarization have also posed obstacles to their effectiveness and sustainability.

Nevertheless, the contributions of non-state actors in conflict resolution in Colombia have been significant, fostering dialogue, promoting reconciliation, and advancing human rights and social justice. Their efforts have complemented state-led initiatives and contributed to the broader peacebuilding process in the country. Moving forward, strengthening partnerships between state and non-state actors, enhancing resource mobilization and capacity-building efforts, and fostering inclusive, participatory approaches will be essential for sustaining peace and promoting reconciliation in Colombia.

4. Non-State Actors in Conflict Resolution: Nepal

Nepal has experienced a prolonged period of armed conflict, political instability, and social upheaval, culminating in the decade-long civil war between government forces and Maoist insurgents. The involvement of

non-state actors in conflict resolution efforts has been instrumental in navigating the complex dynamics of the conflict and fostering reconciliation and peacebuilding in the country.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a significant role in advocating for human rights, promoting social justice, and providing humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected communities in Nepal. Organizations such as the Nepal Red Cross Society, the Centre for Victims of Torture, and the National Network of Families of the Disappeared and Missing have provided support to victims of violence, documented human rights abuses, and campaigned for justice and accountability.

Civil society organizations have been at the forefront of efforts to promote dialogue, reconciliation, and peacebuilding in Nepal. Groups such as the National Peace Campaign, the Human Rights Organization of Nepal, and the Nepal Bar Association have mobilized communities, facilitated dialogue between conflicting parties, and advocated for the inclusion of marginalized groups in peace processes.

Religious institutions have also played a significant role in peacebuilding efforts in Nepal, leveraging their moral authority and spiritual leadership to promote interfaith dialogue, tolerance, and reconciliation. Religious leaders and organizations have facilitated dialogue between conflicting parties, promoted non-violent conflict resolution mechanisms, and provided spiritual support to individuals and communities affected by the conflict.

Community-based organizations and grassroots movements have been instrumental in promoting local-level peacebuilding initiatives, fostering social cohesion, and addressing the root causes of conflict in Nepal. Initiatives such as community mediation programs, peace education campaigns, and livelihood support projects have empowered communities to resolve conflicts peacefully, build resilience, and promote sustainable development.

Despite their contributions, non-state actors in Nepal have faced challenges in their peacebuilding efforts. They have encountered resistance from entrenched power structures, political elites, and armed groups opposed to peace and reconciliation initiatives. Limited resources, institutional capacity constraints, and political polarization have also posed obstacles to their effectiveness and sustainability.

Nevertheless, the contributions of non-state actors in conflict resolution in Nepal have been significant, fostering dialogue, promoting reconciliation, and advancing human rights and social justice. Their efforts have complemented state-led initiatives and contributed to the broader peacebuilding process in the country. Moving forward, strengthening partnerships between state and non-state actors, enhancing resource mobilization and capacity-building efforts, and fostering inclusive, participatory approaches will be essential for sustaining peace and promoting reconciliation in Nepal.

5. Comparative Analysis

5.1 Similarities and Differences in Peacebuilding Approaches

In comparing the peacebuilding approaches of non-state actors in Colombia and Nepal, several commonalities and distinctions become apparent.

Both Colombia and Nepal have witnessed the active engagement of non-state actors, including NGOs, civil society organizations, and religious institutions, in fostering dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion. These actors have worked tirelessly at the grassroots level to mobilize communities, facilitate dialogue, and advocate for the rights of marginalized groups.

Despite these similarities, significant differences exist between the peacebuilding approaches in Colombia and Nepal. The nature of the conflicts in each country differs considerably, with Colombia's conflict revolving around political violence, drug trafficking, and insurgency, while Nepal's conflict stemmed from political instability and Maoist insurgency. Consequently, non-state actors have tailored their strategies to address the distinct challenges and opportunities presented by each context.

Furthermore, the role of external actors varies between Colombia and Nepal. While international NGOs and multilateral institutions have played significant roles in Colombia, local non-state actors have assumed more prominent positions in Nepal's grassroots peacebuilding initiatives. The involvement of international actors has shaped the dynamics of peacebuilding efforts differently in each context.

Sociocultural and religious dynamics also influence peacebuilding approaches in Colombia and Nepal. In Nepal, with its diverse ethnic and religious landscape, interfaith dialogue and religious diversity have been central to peacebuilding efforts. In contrast, while religious institutions have participated in Colombia's peacebuilding process, the conflict has been more politically and economically driven, with religious dynamics playing a less central role.

5.2 Effectiveness of Non-State Actors in Colombia vs. Nepal

The effectiveness of non-state actors in conflict resolution varies between Colombia and Nepal due to

differences in the nature of the conflicts, the socio-political contexts, and the strategies employed by non-state actors in each country.

In Colombia, non-state actors have made significant contributions to conflict resolution by advocating for human rights, facilitating dialogue, and promoting social justice. NGOs, civil society organizations, and grassroots movements have played key roles in documenting human rights abuses, providing humanitarian assistance, and mobilizing communities for peace. However, the effectiveness of non-state actors has been hindered by persistent challenges such as threats, violence, and political polarization. Despite their efforts, the implementation of peace agreements and the achievement of lasting peace remain elusive in Colombia.

In Nepal, non-state actors have also played important roles in peacebuilding efforts, particularly at the grassroots level. NGOs, civil society organizations, and religious institutions have mobilized communities, facilitated dialogue, and promoted reconciliation. The effectiveness of non-state actors in Nepal is evident in the successful negotiation of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006, which ended the decade-long civil war between government forces and Maoist insurgents. However, challenges such as political instability, ethnic tensions, and limited resources have posed obstacles to sustained peace and reconciliation in Nepal.

Overall, while non-state actors have made valuable contributions to conflict resolution in both Colombia and Nepal, their effectiveness is influenced by a range of factors including the complexity of the conflicts, the political landscape, and the level of support from external actors. Moving forward, enhancing collaboration between state and non-state actors, addressing underlying socio-economic grievances, and promoting inclusive and participatory approaches to peacebuilding will be essential for achieving sustainable peace in both countries.

5.3 Impact of Sociopolitical Context on Non-State Actor Engagement

The impact of the sociopolitical context on non-state actor engagement in conflict resolution is profound and varies significantly between Colombia and Nepal. In both countries, the sociopolitical environment shapes the strategies, effectiveness, and challenges faced by non-state actors in their peacebuilding efforts.

In Colombia, the sociopolitical context is characterized by deep-rooted political violence, drug trafficking, and historical grievances. Non-state actors operate in a complex environment marked by political polarization, institutional weaknesses, and the presence of armed groups. The legacy of decades-long conflict has created deep divisions within Colombian society, complicating efforts to build trust, foster dialogue, and promote reconciliation. Non-state actors face threats, intimidation, and violence from various armed groups opposed to peacebuilding initiatives, posing significant challenges to their engagement in conflict resolution.

In Nepal, the sociopolitical context is shaped by political instability, ethnic diversity, and historical inequalities. Non-state actors operate in a dynamic environment characterized by shifting power dynamics, ethnic tensions, and socio-economic disparities. The country's transition from monarchy to democracy and the end of the decade-long civil war have created opportunities for non-state actors to engage in peacebuilding efforts. However, challenges such as political fragmentation, weak governance structures, and limited resources have hindered their effectiveness in addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting sustainable peace.

The impact of the sociopolitical context on non-state actor engagement is evident in their strategies and priorities. In Colombia, non-state actors focus on addressing human rights abuses, advocating for justice, and documenting violations, reflecting the country's history of political violence and impunity. In Nepal, non-state actors prioritize dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion, reflecting the country's diverse ethnic and religious landscape and the need to bridge divides and promote inclusive peacebuilding processes.

6. Lessons Learned and Best Practices

The experiences of non-state actors in conflict resolution in Colombia and Nepal yield important insights and best practices for future peacebuilding efforts. Non-state actors have demonstrated the value of inclusive and participatory approaches to peacebuilding. By engaging diverse stakeholders, including marginalized groups, women, youth, and indigenous communities, they foster ownership, legitimacy, and sustainability of peace processes. Addressing root causes of conflict, such as socio-economic disparities, political grievances, and historical injustices, is essential for building lasting peace. Non-state actors advocate for social justice, promote human rights, and work to rectify structural inequalities as foundational steps toward reconciliation. Building trust and fostering dialogue between conflicting parties are central to promoting understanding and cooperation. Non-state actors serve as mediators, facilitators, and bridge-builders, creating spaces for constructive dialogue, negotiation, and conflict resolution at various levels. Mobilizing community resilience and solidarity empowers communities to withstand the impact of conflicts and pursue shared aspirations for peace. Strengthening social networks, promoting mutual assistance, and fostering collective action enable communities to resist violence and pursue sustainable development. Advocating for human rights, accountability, and justice is crucial for addressing past atrocities and preventing future conflicts. Non-state actors document human rights abuses, amplify victims' voices, and advocate for accountability measures to promote reconciliation and prevent

impunity. Strengthening partnerships and collaboration among diverse stakeholders enhances the effectiveness and impact of peacebuilding efforts. By leveraging complementary strengths, resources, and expertise, non-state actors can address complex challenges and promote sustainable peace and development. Adapting to contextual dynamics is essential for the success of peacebuilding initiatives. Understanding local histories, cultures, and power dynamics enables non-state actors to navigate complexities, build trust, and promote locally-driven solutions to conflict resolution challenges.

By embracing these lessons learned and best practices, non-state actors can contribute to transformative change and foster sustainable peace and reconciliation in conflict-affected societies worldwide. Their experiences in Colombia and Nepal underscore the importance of collaborative, adaptive, and inclusive approaches to peacebuilding.

7. Conclusion

The experiences of non-state actors in conflict resolution in Colombia and Nepal underscore the importance of inclusive, adaptive, and contextually sensitive approaches to building peace and reconciliation. Throughout their engagement, non-state actors have navigated complex sociopolitical environments, addressing root causes of conflict, fostering dialogue, and advocating for human rights and social justice.

In Colombia, non-state actors have confronted the legacies of political violence, drug trafficking, and historical grievances. Despite facing threats and challenges, they have played pivotal roles in documenting abuses, facilitating dialogue, and promoting reconciliation at the grassroots level. In Nepal, non-state actors have contributed to ending the decade-long civil war through dialogue, mediation, and community mobilization. They have leveraged the country's ethnic diversity and religious pluralism to foster interfaith dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

The policy implications and recommendations derived from the experiences of non-state actors offer valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders involved in conflict resolution efforts. By prioritizing inclusive peace processes, investing in conflict prevention, and promoting human rights and justice, governments and international organizations can create enabling environments for non-state actors to contribute effectively to peacebuilding initiatives.

Moving forward, it is imperative to recognize the agency and expertise of non-state actors in shaping peace processes and building resilient communities. Strengthening partnerships, fostering collaboration, and supporting local initiatives are essential for sustainable peace and reconciliation in Colombia, Nepal, and beyond.

In conclusion, the contributions of non-state actors highlight the transformative potential of grassroots peacebuilding efforts. By embracing diversity, promoting dialogue, and addressing systemic inequalities, non-state actors play critical roles in building bridges, healing wounds, and laying foundations for a more peaceful and just future. Their experiences offer valuable lessons for navigating the complexities of conflict and advancing shared aspirations for peace and reconciliation in diverse societies around the world.

References

- Azad, S., (2019). Peacebuilding between state and non-state actors: A comparative case study of Afghanistan and Colombia. *2019 NCUR*.
- Bolton, L., (2020). Lessons from conflict resolution interventions.
- Dudouet, V. (Ed.), (2014). *Civil Resistance and Conflict Transformation: Transitions from armed to nonviolent struggle*. Routledge.
- Dudouet, V., (2012). Final technical report/From War to Politics: Non-State Armed Groups in Transition, 2009-2011.
- Herman, O., (2021). Righting Wrongs: Non-State Armed Groups and Reparations for Victims of Armed Conflict, with a Case Study of Colombia.
- Podder, S., (2013). Non-state armed groups and stability: Reconsidering legitimacy and inclusion. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 34(1), 16-39.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).