Imagining the Great Lakes Region

Discourses and Practices of Civil Society Regional Approaches for Peacebuilding in Rwanda, Burundi, and DR Congo

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Introduction

> "Countries in the region are communicating vessels"[1]
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> "A regional approach is not so much the fashion of the day, it is a necessity"[2]

Although peace agreements have been concluded for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and elections in Burundi and Rwanda have formally ended the transition to democracy, the outcomes of processes towards peace in the Great Lakes Region (GLR) are still uncertain. Over recent years, a discourse is developing that the problems in the individual countries are strongly interlinked and should be understood in the context of the region. Moreover, efforts to solve those require approaches that transcend the level of individual countries, it is argued. Needed are regional approaches for peacebuilding. Thus, the last few years witnessed an increase in the regional activities of international organizations, governments, and NGOs, as well as of local NGOs from the GLR. The promotion of regional approaches goes along with an importance attributed to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in realizing peace. This attention for the regional dimensions of conflict and its resolution, and the predilection for CSOs in this, is also becoming a dominant approach in other parts of the world. But why would a regional approach to peacebuilding be more effective than an approach focussing on individual countries? How can regional interpretations of conflict be successfully translated into regional peacebuilding strategies? And what can be the role of civil society in regional peacebuilding?

This paper attempts to provide insights into those questions by exploring how discourses of national and international NGOs on civil society and regional peacebuilding work out in practice. After a reflection on current thinking on regional approaches and their effectiveness for peacebuilding, and a review of the regional dynamics of conflict in the GLR, the paper outlines a variety of strategies currently being implemented by and with CSOs. It then considers how regional analyses and strategies come about. For practical reasons, the paper limits itself to organizations working in Burundi, Rwanda and the Kivu provinces in eastern DRC. The paper underscores that regional discourses are ordering mechanisms to understand complex conflict dynamics (cf. Law 1994). In the daily practices of CSOs, however, it turns out difficult to effectively translate regional understanding into applicable development interventions. At the same time, regional exchanges and programs represent interfaces where different regional discourses meet, representing alternative political readings of regional

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[1] Representative of a US-based conflict resolution NGO, interview Bukavu 27 January 2005.
[2] Representative of a Norwegian development organization, interview Kigali 12 January 2005.

conflict. Regional peacebuilding is thus not just about acknowledging the regional character of conflict, but about reconciling different regional discourses at both a practical and a political level.

The paper is based on interviews with representatives of 49 local organizations and 29 international organizations and donors, in Burundi, Rwanda, and the Kivu provinces, over the period September 2004 to September 2005, in the context of a research programme on peacebuilding policy and practice.[3]

Discourses of regions and regional peacebuilding

> "The fact that internal conflicts generally produce instability at the regional level means that effective strategies to proactively engage conflict situations will require a co-ordinated regional approach […]"[4]

The attention for regional approaches in the GLR coincides with a worldwide tendency to emphasize regional characteristics of conflict. While contemporary conflict analyses highlight the intra-state nature of conflicts and their civilian character, it is often realized that those conflicts are not simply 'internal' wars, but that their causes and consequences transgress national borders. Terms such as 'trans-national war' (Kaldor 2001), or 'regional conflict formation' (Rubin 2001) point to the regional character of contemporary conflict. Several authors suggest that since the end of the Cold-War, conflicts indeed have become more 'regionalised', as an outcome of Cold-War strategies or a by-product of globalization (FitzGerald 1999; Collier 2000; WorldBank 2000). Nonetheless, the interest for regional conflict dynamics could also be seen as a policy response to the failure of dealing with conflicts in individual countries, or as a non-engagement with particular individual conflict. Here, it is proposed to see the current attention for regional approaches as a discourse: a particular representation for understanding and acting upon the world around us. There are always multiple discourses, and they are constantly renegotiated (Hilhorst 2003).

The regional discourse coincides with an increasing attention for the region within development debates, and comes as an alternative to discourses that differentiate between interstate and intrastate conflict to categorize conflicts, or that are preoccupied with 'nations' as the central protagonists in conflicts. Often, the discourse on regional approaches particularly focuses on CSOs. The attention for civil society in regional approaches should be seen in the light of the general popularity of the concept in peacebuilding discourse that sees CSOs as contributing to good governance and democracy. CSOs are seen as representing the forces in favour of peace, or the 'shared vision' of a local population as opposed to the machinations of states. Civil society is defined as politically neutral, or even a-political. Similarly, in the regional peacebuilding discourse CSOs are considered to facilitate the coming together of communities in favour of peace but separated by state borders. Further, CSOs are seen as an alternative or complementary to regional diplomatic initiatives, as being more prone to peace than the heads of states in the region. This article will consider the initiatives of international organizations to facilitate regional exchange and collaboration of their partners, as well as the regional projects and imaginations of civil society itself.

Various notions circulate as to why 'the region' would be an appropriate and more effective entry for peacebuilding. An important notion is that regional cooperation contributes to peace as it creates mutual benefits and dependencies. In particular in Africa, there is much attention for regional bodies, such as the regional diplomatic initiatives of the OAU, and the peacekeeping mechanisms of regional economic communities such as IGAD and ECOWAS (see e.g. Juma and Mengistu 2002). Such bodies

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[3] 'Beyond Conflict' is a collaborative research program of the Dutch development organization Cordaid and Wageningen Disaster Studies. The program aims to investigate views and practices of peacebuilding of Cordaid and its partners. I wish to thank WOTRO (Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research) for providing funding for my research.

[4] DAC (1997) Guidelines on conflict, peace and development co-operation, chapter VI, paragraph 293.

are promoted on the assumption that through them conflicts may be earlier detected, and easier resolved. Although experience shows that attention for conflict prevention (let alone conflict resolution) in existing regional bodies came only *after* economic cooperation and political integration had been achieved (Lund 1999a: 58), the idea continues to be strong. Regional bodies may further decrease the role of the international community in conflict-intervention at the advantage of countries *from* the region, which supposedly are closer and more acceptable to the governments involved (see e.g. OECD-DAC 1997: §297). In the GLR, a localized version of this notion is to build forth on cross-border cultural or linguistic affinities, and continuities in the form of family relations, trade and intellectual exchange. A related idea is that mutual dependencies can bring parties together that otherwise are not on speaking terms. For example, a hydro-electrical power plant in the Ruzizi River at the DRC/Rwanda-border was never affected by conflict, and some see such economic dependencies in the region as starting points for regional peace. Within debates on natural resources and conflict, a developing idea is that cooperation on shared ecological challenges might be an entrance for peacebuilding. Even if wider dialogue has come to an end, discussion on shared natural resources may be established or continue. It is also considered that the resolution of cross-border ecological problems is often a precondition for broader peace (Conca et al. 2005).

A central idea -exemplified by the quote at the beginning of this paragraph- is that if conflicts in a region are connected, focussing on their manifestations in individual countries separately is ineffective. Strengthening good governance in one country in a bad neighbourhood of failing states is doomed to fail, as well as addressing fluid cross-border networks for trading small arms in particular states only. This implies that strategies for peacebuilding should take into consideration or address conflict dynamics in different countries at the same time. The positive counterpart of this argument is that developments in one country may also positively influence developments in the other. For example, regional approaches might help surpass patriotic discourses, and can help to acknowledge the own role in the history of others. An exponent of this idea is Mamdani (2001), who identifies Rwanda as the epicentre of the wider crisis in the GLR. He sees Rwanda as the source of a citizenship problem, in which full citizenship is denied to residents that are branded as ethnic strangers. In his view, to reform Rwanda, a regional reform of citizenship is necessary. A political reform process in Burundi could be significant, as in the past, developments in Burundi have been read by Rwanda as prophetic signs of their common fate and vice versa (Mamdani 2001: 280). In a similar vein, expatriates in the GLR expected a positive influence from successful elections in Burundi on the electoral process in the DRC. Several development organizations pointed to the peace building potential the media could have at regional level. Exchanges and common programs for journalists would enhance freedom of expression in individual countries and stimulate a better mutual understanding in the region.

Lastly, an assumption underlying various regional perspectives is that the region offers the opportunity to surpass the country level, and to go beyond individual governments and their particular sensitivities. In this perspective, the region is a forum where the international community can intervene and launch opinions, criticism and ideas, without addressing and confronting particular governments. The idea of the region as a safe heaven for the generation of ideas also motivates a focus on civil society organisations. This is based on the assumption that they are in a position to influence their governments to accept compromises without losing face, or to introduce new ideas. On a more practical level, regional perspectives assumedly provide the opportunity to civil society organizations to take advantage of experiences from elsewhere in the region. To realize this potential, exchanges and meetings between different actors from the region are stimulated. The exchange of experiences is the major objective of most civil society regional initiatives so far taking place in the GLR.

Realizing that conflicts have regional dimensions is one thing, analysing those and identifying regional strategies on the basis of this analysis is another. Tschirgi (2002) points out that the external dimensions of internal conflicts are still often seen in terms of 'spill-over effects' while in fact many conflicts need to be seen as 'trans-national' in nature rather than as an aggregation of internal conflicts. Moreover, it appears difficult to deal with the notion of 'region'. While regions could be

defined in terms of social groups or political identities (countries, provinces), in many cases regional conflicts include actors and networks that are far beyond such limitations. They may concern networks of armed groups, but also (illicit) economic or social networks, or region-wide grievances that mobilize people (Tschirgi 2002: 8). Regions should thus be seen more as the arena for networked interactions rather than as geographic entities. Networks may expand or diminish, and their focus may shift. In the GLR, the centre of regional conflict could be located in Rwanda in the early 1990s, but later moved to the DRC (Rubin 2001: 3).

An important question is then how to identify regions? Constructivist perspectives within geography try to understand regions as a result of the meaning people give to their surroundings, and the regional identity they inscribe on them (Simon 2004). The constructed identity of a region may be accepted by others and be reproduced, or be rejected or redefined. To substantiate their interpretation of regions, people may refer to attributes such as cultural-historical inheritance, ethnicity, religion, language (Pater et al. 2002: 127ff). This notion comes close to the work of the anthropologist Anderson, who talks of nations as 'imagined communities': a nation comes into being because individuals feel related to each other and hence form a community (Anderson 1983/91). Similarly, regions may be seen as imagined communities that are a collective social achievement. Regions are thus constructs of their inhabitants, but also of others, such as national states, international development organizations, and analysts. Those outsiders may recognize and build forth on local regional imagination or rather give their own meaning to what constitutes 'the region'. As we will see in the case study of the GLR, local and international actors have their own interpretations of what constitutes the region depending on what characteristics are considered, what issues are looked at, how those are analysed and by whom. Such interpretations are often heavily politicized. In this chapter, we will focus on the regional imagination of national civil society organizations, as well as the international organizations supporting regional exchanges and programmes of their local partners.

Regional conflict in the Great Lakes Region

Often, the regional character of conflict in the GLR is explained by reference to a series of key-events underlining the relatedness of conflicts in different countries. The first of those is the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the resulting mass exodus of Hutu refugees to then eastern Zaire.[5] From the refugee camps, extremist militia and members of the former army of Rwanda started attacks on Rwanda and Burundi, while the presence of the Rwandese refugees in the eastern Kivu provinces of Zaire fed strongly into local tensions. It was in this part of Zaire that in 1996 the Kabila-led rebellion started that -with support from Rwanda and Uganda- resulted in the dethroning of president Mobutu in 1997. However, internal support to Kabila vanished rapidly, and his failure to remove Rwandan and Ugandan rebels from Congolese soil deteriorated relations with his allies. A new rebellion by the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD) started in the Kivus in 1998, again supported by Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, evolving into the second Congolese war, with Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Chad and Sudan intervening on Kinshasa's side. At the end of 1999, half of the Congolese territory was in hands of various rebels, and a stalemate developed. Shortly, relations between Rwanda and Uganda turned sour and their troops started fighting in north-east DRC, resulting in the splintering of the RCD into several factions.

International diplomatic interventions in this regional crisis led to the signing of the Lusaka ceasefire agreement, the deployment of a UN force in eastern Congo, and an 'Inter-Congolese Dialogue' to facilitate a transition to a democracy. Over the course of 2002, Rwanda agreed with a complete withdrawal of troops, Kinshasa would disarm the extremist Rwandan rebels on its soil, and a national agreement on power sharing was reached. In 2003 a transition period started which concluded with the elections in 2006. Nonetheless, at the time of fieldwork in 2005, violence in eastern DRC was still continuing, resulting from the presence of various militia and troops from Rwanda, and Uganda, as

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[5] Some accounts include the 1993 assassination of Burundi's first elected Hutu President Ndadaye as an element in the chain of crises.

well as the indigenous Mai-Mai movements and other local defence forces. In the eastern Kivu provinces, the relationship between the local RCD faction and the populations under its control remained problematic, with Kivutians perceiving RCD as dependent on Rwanda's Tutsi leadership, trying to profit as much from the 'occupied territories' as possible. In June 2004, the temporary take over of Bukavu by an RCD-commander led to the flight of thousands of Banyamulenge (who had become closely identified with the Rwandese), fearing reprisals by the Congolese army. As a result of the incident, fighting broke out north of Bukavu and around Goma, and Rwandese troops allegedly crossed the border to intervene and clashed with the DRC army. While Rwanda was relatively stable, at the time of fieldwork, in Burundi not all rebels had laid down their arms, despite various dialogues.

In scholarly analyses of the regional character of conflict in the GLR, several themes appear frequently. The first is the failure in all countries to establish inclusive political systems, guaranteeing equal access to decision-making and recourses. In the DRC, Mobutu established a system of governance characterised by corruption, personal enrichment, patronage and ethnic favouritism (Rogier 2003: 3). Democratization in the early 1990s facilitated that the ethnic divisionism introduced under Mobutu came to full growth, with ethnic identity, citizenship and land rights getting closely connected (Mamdani 2001: 25ff). Both in Rwanda and Burundi states were established on the basis of ethnic and regional differences (Reijntjens 1994; Prunier 1995/1997). Rwanda became characterized by a high level of institutionalization, with a hierarchical, omnipresent and forceful state system (Reijntjens 1994). Political exclusion is often seen as the key to understand the difficult relations between Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi and Rwanda, and Banyarwanda and non-Banyarwanda in eastern Congo (e.g. Lemarchand 2000: 326-7).

Ethnicity is often considered as a regional issue in itself. Events of ethnicitized political violence in either Rwanda or Burundi have had repercussions on civil strives in the neighbouring country. Cross border ethnic affiliations with groups living in the DRC have facilitated the reproduction of ethnic fault lines after the genocide to North Kivu (ICG 2003b; Vlassenroot and Huggins 2005) and South Kivu (Jackson??). Since 1996, increasingly all Tutsi in eastern Congo have come to be referred to as Banyamulenge (Lemarchand 2000: 330, 350). However, various organizations in eastern DRC point out that the division was also between various Congolese groups and Kinyarwanda speaking people. For example, the violence that erupted in Masisi in 1993, in the context of growing land shortage, was directed against all Kinyarwanda speakers, whom had acquired most land in the region. After the June 2004 take over of Bukavu, civil society in Goma split up into two 'factions': Kinyarwanda speakers and non-Kinyarwanda speakers. Resentments by the indigenous population in North Kivu were re-ignited by local leaders who suggested the involvement of Kinyarwanda speakers in alleged intentions of Rwanda to annex the area.

According to various analysts, the large scale refugee movements in the GLR had an important role as 'vectors of contamination' (Lemarchand 2000: 332) in the reproduction of ethnic polarisation across borders. Moreover, refugee camps have been used as training and recruitment camps for rebel militias, and as bases for attacks on the home countries. This was the case in the 'Mulelist' insurgency in 1964-1965 in eastern Zaire, the RPF rebellion in Rwanda that started from Ugandan refugee camps in 1990, and the attacks on Rwanda from militia that reorganized in the refugee camps in eastern DRC after the 1994 genocide (Reijntjens 1994; Prunier 1995/1997). According to Lemarchand, "[d]ynamics of violence in the Great Lakes involves the transformation of refugee-generating violence into violence-generating refugee flows" (Lemarchand 2000).

Many analysts interpret conflicts in the region from the abundance of natural resources. Mineral wealth in the DRC provides decision makers with continuous resources to sustain violence (Collier 2000). In the absence of an effective state system in DRC, a warlord system of exploitation has come into being, which includes not only the Congolese elite, but also that of Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and Zimbabwe (UN 2001). This war economy has become such large-scale that several observers have come to regard it as an explanation in itself for the failure of the peace accords and the continuation of the war, with control over mineral resources becoming a military objective in itself (amongst others Reijntjens 2001: 312).

Other analysts focus on the scarcity of resources, how land shortages through political manipulations have resulted in violence. This analysis was initially made for Rwanda, where the economic situation and pressure on land has been explained as a central issue behind the 1994 violence (Prunier 1995/1997: 364; Pottier 1997). Land was highly politicized, with the pre-genocide government using the scarcity of land as an argument against those Tutsi in exile that wanted to repatriate (AfricanRights 1994). In Burundi, land problems related to the reinstallation of returning refugees and IDPs is a sensitive issue, considering that one of the issues triggering violence in 1993 was the expected return of Hutu refugees and their reclamation of land (ICG 2003a; Kamungi et al. 2004: 19). However, land disputes are also common among the on-staying population (Leeuwen and Haartsen 2005). Land plays a dominant role in local disputes and has been a root cause of violence in Ituri and the Kivu provinces (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004). Various authors analyse how in eastern DRC land access has become linked to citizenship, as being considered indigenous became a necessity for ethnic groups to get access to land (Mamdani 2001; Vlassenroot and Huggins 2005: 150).

There is thus a variety of conflict issues in the Great Lakes Region that are considered to have a regional character. So far, there appears to be no agreement among authors on the relative importance of those different factors, nor on how all those factors and conditions interact with each other. Lemarchand has for example pointed to how theories explaining conflict from the abundance of natural resources contrast to those starting from shortages of land.[6] As we will see below, local and international organizations alike differ considerably on how they understand the interrelatedness of conflict in the region.

Regional responses to the crisis

"The region of the Great Lakes is an instable region that for long has been characterized by armed conflicts, ethnic struggle, failing states, flows of refugees and underdevelopment. In such a context, to assure an effective Dutch contribution, an integrated as well as regional approach is needed […]"[7]

"[T]he development of a regional policy is crucial […] Ethnic, linguistic and economic ties between the countries have deep roots in the region's history. The economic and social situation is similar across the three countries, and the causes of poverty and conflict are strongly interlinked. Instability easily spills over national boundaries. Consequently, efforts to solve the region's problems are bound to fail if they do not take into account such cross-border dynamics. The success of national efforts towards peace and reconciliation will depend heavily on progress made towards finding regional solutions"[8]

"Dans la région des Grands Lacs, il est clair que le processus de réconciliation dans un pays est fortement lié à ceux des autres. Toute solution viable aura donc un caractère régional"[9]

At the time of fieldwork, many international and local organizations alike were strongly convinced of the need for regional approaches for peacebuilding.[10] Based on considerations such as the above, organizations responded through a multiplicity of initiatives to the regional character of conflict.

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[6] Lemarchand (2005), *Geopolitical Issues in Central Africa*. Presentation at the first Regional Expert Meeting Central Africa, convened by the Instituut voor Ontwikkelingsbeleid en –beheer (IOB), and the Development Policy Review Network. Final report, p.4.

[7] Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003) *Great Lakes Policy Note 2004-2007*, The Hague. P.1

[8] EURAC (2004) *Think Regionally, Act Practically; An EU Regional Approach for the Great Lakes, Africa*. Position Paper. Brussels, Réseau Européen pour l'Afrique Centrale/ European network for Central Africa. EURAC is a network of European NGOs with partners in the region in the fields of development, human rights and humanitarian assistance.

[9] PaxChristi (2003) 'Consultation Régionale sur les Pays des Grands Lacs: Déclaration; La Paix et la Reconciliation dans les Grands Lacs; historique, causes et pistes de solution', *Au coeur de l'Afrique* (3-4: Guerir les Populations et Reconstruire la Sous-Region; le rôle des laïcs).

Various diplomatic initiatives have been taken in response to the regional conflict formation. A prominent initiative was a series of regional conferences convened by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN. The initiative built forth on the notion of regional cooperation to enhance peace. The first meeting in Dar–es–Salaam in November 2004 resulted in a declaration of the Heads of State expressing commitment to promote peace, stability and unity in the region through the promotion of economic growth. DRC President Kabila held the door open for regional arrangements for the exploitation of natural resources in eastern DRC. In follow-up meetings, proposals were elaborated on issues as the proliferation of small arms, joint border security management, and refugees. It was considered to revive the *Communautée Economique des Pays des Grands Lacs*, to promote economic and social integration, as well as prevention and resolution of conflicts.

> "Civil society within countries in the region themselves is of great importance, in particular in light of the large problems confronting the region and for the cross-border nature of problems. Ethnic ties, economic relations and other communal characteristics imply that civil society might play an important role in regional processes […] The establishment of an open and pluriform society cannot be enforced from above, but needs to develop, in which civil society from the countries concerned has to fulfil an essential role"[11]

Many international actors considered the need for involvement of civil society organizations in regional strategies, and next to those initiatives at a diplomatic level, there was a multitude of initiatives taken by both international and national civil society organizations. Facilitated by international agencies, several national CSOs liaised regularly with partners from neighbouring countries to exchange experiences or policy analyses. Some of these exchanges had formalised into regional platforms (such as the human rights network LDGL and the women network COCAFemme). To local organizations, such regional networks gave credibility to their members and facilitated encountering sponsors (cf. Verkoren 2006). Regional networks further provided protection to their members against their governments or served as a means for collectively voicing dissent. For example, CSOs protested together after a parliamentary inquiry in Rwanda in 2004 singled out various human rights organizations as 'divisionist', and came up with a collective declaration after the murder of the Vice-Secretary of LDGL in Bukavu in 2005. To international organizations regional partner meetings were useful for giving trainings or enhancing their lobby-work. Often, contributing to reconciliation among partners from different counties was also a direct objective of the facilitation of partner meetings by international development organizations.

strategy	Examples of regional initiatives for peacebuilding	initiators
Regional meetings	• United Nations International Conferences on Peace, Democracy, Good Governance and Development in the Great Lakes, including preparatory meetings with civil society representatives	Transnational organization
	Exchange of experiences and training of local partners • Yearly workshop with partners on conflict transformation (ICCO) • regional exchange visits between the churches on their contribution to peace and reconciliation (Association Convenance Epsicopal d'Afrique Centrale - ACEAC) • regional exchanges between universities on food security and land issues (Swiss cooperation) • consultations with partners to come to a shared understanding of conflict and obstacles to peace (Pax Christi International) • Exchange meeting on experiences with working on HIV/Aids (Trocaire)	International NGOs
	• regional encounters as a preparation for the UN Great Lakes regional conferences (COCAFemme) • regional meeting on traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution (Chair UNESCO, Bujumbura University)	National CSOs

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[10] Organizations arguing for regional approaches include various UN-organizations, donors such as SIDA, the Dutch government and the OECD; international organizations such as International Alert, CECI, NPA, Christian Aid, Life and Peace Institute, Search for Common Ground, Pax Christi International, and numerous local organisations.

[11] Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003) *Great Lakes Policy Note 2004-2007*, The Hague. P.14

	• regional discussions on Banyamulenge refugees (convened by LDGL)	
Regional platforms and networks	• 'Initiative for Central Africa' – INICA, platform for discussion and action in the field of peace and development. INICA promotes the development of common visions, facilitates regional co-operation and information exchange, and links field level actors with national, regional and international decision-makers (OECD)	Transnational organization
	Research and conflict analysis • seminars for church leaders on regional conflict analysis (RIO Bukavu) • yearly regional meetings on themes such as 'regional economic integration' and 'land and identity' (Pole Institute Goma)	National CSOs
	Lobby and advocacy • The Ligue des Droits de la Personne dans la Région des Grands Lacs (LDGL), membership organisation with 27 members from Rwanda, Burundi and DRC in the field of human rights or development • Concertation des Collectifs des Associations Oeuvrant pour la Promotion de la Femme (COCAFemme), platform of collectives of women organizations from Burundi, Rwanda and DRC	National CSOs
Regional programs	• Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program - MDRP (sponsored by the World Bank)	Transnational organizations
	• The 'Femmes pour la Paix' program intends, through a series of regional trainings, to establish a framework that enables women to have influence on policy making (International Alert) • The 'Global Partnership for Conflict Prevention in Central Africa' aims to integrate civil society in diplomatic initiatives for conflict prevention at a regional level (convened by the Netherlands-based European Centre for Conflict Prevention) • Cross-border programme on the return of refugees from Tanzania to Burundi (JRS) • Media programs, in which journalists from the region are trained together and collectively make radio-items about regional issues (Search for Common Ground - SfcG) • Youth program, including exchange visits to guarantee the peaceful return of Banyamulenge refugees (SfcG) • International lobby activities against sexual violence (International Alert)	International NGOs
	• 'Commission Mixte' of the Catholic Church, a regional program of the peace commissions of several Burundian and Tanzanian Dioceses, to facilitate the return of refugees to Burundi (initiated by the Bishops) • Research on human rights violations in eastern DRC and training of local organizations in monitoring human rights (Ligue Iteka Burundi)	National CSOs
Intra-organiza-tional regional strategies	• Special representative to the region (EU) • Regional approach for programs in the region (EU / Dutch, Belgian, Swedish governments) *Mainstreaming of regional themes in country programs*	Transnational organizations / governments
	• Regional offices (CRS / Action Aid), regional coordinators (International Alert), regional meetings between country offices (Christian Aid) • Streamlining country programs towards themes of importance in the whole region: land rights, rights of youth to participate, violence against women (NPA)	International NGOs
	Copying successful approaches and experiences • In Goma, NRC builds forth on experiences with juridical assistance for people in land conflicts in its Burundi program. • In Burundi, Oxfam Quebec replicates its experiences with reconstruction work in Rwanda	International NGOs
	Regional cooperation • The development program of Cordaid Rwanda, together with the provincial health authorities of Cyangugu, was able to facilitate medical staff for a Cordaid emergency programme after the volcanic eruption in Goma	International NGOs

Though various regional exchanges aim to establish programmatic co-operation at a regional level, CSO regional programs are relatively limited. For many CSOs it is already problematic to work in synergy at a national level, let alone the regional level. Representatives of international and national CSOs alike considered this as the major shortcoming of civil society regional initiatives, which in their eyes were talk-shops that do not translate into action. Hence, regional programs mostly remained an affair of international organizations. Those programs mostly focus on joint lobbying at an international level, while some aim at mobilizing CSOs in various countries to exert influence on policymaking or

to participate in diplomatic initiatives. Some international organisations have national programs with a strong regional focus.

> A notable regional program is that initiated by the *Centre Canadien d'Étude et de Cóoperation Internationale* (CECI). For its 4-years project *Action Citoyenne pour la Paix* (Acipa), regional offices were established in Rwanda, Burundi and the Kivu provinces, each focusing on their own prioritised themes among the regional themes of public participation, non-violent conflict resolution, promotion of Human Rights, and access to information. The offices each have their own partners, but meet regularly to guarantee a common context-analysis, and to harmonize activities. CECI/Acipa also supports the regional networks LDGL and COCAFemme, and helped facilitating the input of civil society into the UN-organized conferences for the GLR, by organizing meetings in Goma and Kigali.[12]

For some international organisations, a regional strategy is more of an internal organisational affair, for example the integration of region-specific themes in diverse country programs, or the regional exchange of best practices. Some consider that programmatic regional cooperation may increase operational efficiency, for example the sharing of emergency supplies among country offices. However, this is little tried and few successful examples could be identified.

The practice of regional strategies for peacebuilding

How do CSOs interpret the regional dynamics of conflict and how do they translate those into regional peacebuilding strategies? Before considering this at a more general level, let us briefly reflect on a particular example of a regional initiative, the regional association of Catholic Bishops ACEAC, and in specific on one of the regional meetings it organized. This regional initiative was supported by Caritas International and several members of the international Caritas network, including the UK-based development agency CAFOD and the Dutch development organization Cordaid.

> In November 2004, ACEAC convened a 2-days regional forum on peace and reconciliation in Bujumbura, which was attended by about 80 priests and members diocesan development bureaus and justice and peace commissions from Burundi, Rwanda, eastern DRC, and Tanzania. Aim of the forum was to identify whether at a regional level, agreement could be reached on how the Catholic Church could contribute to peace at community, national and regional level. The first day existed of presentations by several Bishops from the region, to provide their perspectives on conflict. The archbishop of Bujumbura emphasized the evolving economic rather than ethnic marginalization of groups in Burundi, and the involvement of the church in local reconciliation activities. The bishop of Kilwa-Kasenga underlined the role the Catholic Church played in providing basic services to local communities, the protection provided to refugees from Burundi and Rwanda, and the efforts of the church in preparing communities for the upcoming elections. The archbishop of Kigali pointed out the difficulties in Rwanda to achieve reconciliation, with for example continuing insecurity about land of the Hutu population and large numbers of traumatized people, and the important role justice played in the aftermath of the genocide, to which the impending *gacaca* courts might contribute. On the basis of those presentations, the participants came to discuss the regional importance of trauma and local reconciliation, as well as local justice.

> During the second day, the discussion focused on the question of how the churches in the region could work together for peace in the region. One of the working groups lined out the importance of sharing experiences, and the importance to debate on analyses of local conflict. A participant pointed out the need to look not so much at ethnicity in those conflicts but to look how ethnocentrism pervades politics within all the countries in the region. Another participant pointed out that to come to a regional analysis of conflict, it needed be considered to invite an outside neutral research institute to come to an interpretation acceptable to all. Agreement could be reached on some regional issues, in particular the presence of arms and the need for demobilization. The group acknowledged a need for 'moral formation' to assure the proper reintegration of ex-combatants into the communities. A second working group focused on how at a local level through activities, people could be mobilized to exchange experiences, for example agricultural projects or youth activities. Though the representatives of international organizations present introduced ideas for various regional activities (a representative of Caritas France proposed manifestations in border regions, referring to the burning of candles on a bridge in Sarajevo; another mentioned the organization of diaspora meetings involving different nationalities), the focus of

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[12] Interviews in Kigali, January 2005; Bujumbura, February 2005; Goma, August 2005.

representatives of local organizations was on exchanges and collaborative lobbying for commonly experienced human rights violations.

It can be observed, that in this forum regional dynamics of conflict were understood primarily as similar experiences of violence in the various countries, in particular human rights violations, and trauma. The presentations of the Bishops during the first day were along this line and analyzed not so much the background of conflict, but rather its effects on the population. As a result, in considering adequate responses the focus was very much on responding to the effects of local manifestations of violence, rather than prevention or containing the sources of conflict. The forum did not openly consider how conflicts in the different countries were related to each other. When talking about collective strategies to address conflict, the interest was consequently not so much on collaborative programming, but rather on exchanging of experiences between each others individual programs. In effect, regional dynamics of conflict were understood in a rather limited sense. Such an outcome was not quite uncommon in regional peacebuilding approaches. For many civil society organizations it was difficult to effectively translate perceptions about the regionality of conflict into regional programming.

The difficulties in regional analysing and programming

In the first place, there were practical limitations to regional analysing and programming. With the exception of those organizations specialized in lobby and advocacy CSOs often found it difficult to envisage regional context analyses that related directly to their work. Most peace activities of local and international organizations so far were on a pretty local scale: focussing on reconciliation between communities in one country, rather than cross-border. For many there was no apparent need for regional analysis in their daily practices. Apart from the impact of regional processes on their localized interventions, they could continue business as usual with or without a regional approach.[13] Further, in many instances, regional analysis and programming was limited because of the absence of regional expertise, or the limited number of sponsors willing to fund regional activities. Those that considered giving more attention to regional dynamics in their work encounter few scientific analyses on the interconnectedness of conflict, peace and development in the region (notable exceptions are Reijntjens 1994; Lemarchand 2000; Chrétien 2003).

Those that made regional analyses often found it difficult to come to terms with the idea of 'regionality'. In theory, for example, a distinction could be made between common issues (e.g. unequal access to power, or the politicization of ethnicity), connected problems (e.g. the presence of refugees or militia from other countries, the spill-over of identity conflicts), and generalized problems (e.g. the illegal exploitation of natural resources, and the spread of arms). However, in practice it was difficult to make such distinctions.[14]

Land-related conflicts, for example, were interpreted both as a 'common' regional issue and as a cross-border problem. In northern Kivu, local land problems were seen as inextricably linked to the issue of nationality. A case in point was Masisi, where over recent years large tracks of land had been bought by a small group of people, many of which were Kinyarwanda-speaking, and (senior) members of RCD and the Rwandan politico-military establishment.[15] The conflicts resulting from this were considered by some

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[13] For example, international organisations often assumed that regional cooperation was at the advantage of their partners, who would learn from each other. However, the question was whether the presumed advantages of regional cooperation were as important for CSOs from the region as they were in the view of donors. Rwandese organizations often considered that organisations from other countries could profit from their experiences but did not assume they could learn anything from them. This attitude did not contribute to their motivation to participate in regional initiatives. Some people observed that without motivation from donors to exchange experiences, organizations were not inclined to meet.

[14] See for example Uvin et al. (2004), who distinguish actions at regional level and multi-national acitivties to address trans-border dynamics; and activities in several countries to address national problems that share common characteristics, or that have an indirect regional impact.

[15] Interviews Goma, August 2005.

as a cross-border issue. However, several organizations in Goma argued that -though land conflicts in the region had become entwined with the presence of Rwandese- the problem was still basically about citizenship, and the failure of the local administration to properly manage land. In that sense, land was more of a 'common' issue: land disputes in the region showed similarities in the sense that they resulted from past failures of local authorities to manage land problems, while in all countries the ability of local mechanisms for resolving land disputes had eroded. Land issues were identified as a (critical) regional dimension in various platforms, and have been topic of some regional exchange. Most often, the focus was on the local dimensions of land conflicts, considering that local organizations had primarily experience with the impact of conflict on land and community conflict resolution. Cross-border dimensions of land conflicts were less frequently discussed. Overall, donor interests in regional land issues were limited, and land issues had not been high on the agenda of regional exchanges facilitated by them.

Within or among organizations no agreement could thus be reached on the regional character of particular issues. In the end, it depended often more on the scope of interventions envisaged by particular organizations whether they considered particular local conflict dynamics as showing similarities across countries, or were the effect of developments across borders. Many organizations were not concerned at all in what sense issues were regional. Instability was seen as spilling over from one country to the other anyhow, and always had repercussions for other countries. If instability was contagious, any problem in any country required a regional strategy. This argument for a generalized need for regional strategies de-emphasised regional analysis, but underlined regional approaches. Other organizations assumed certain comparability in the region, on the basis of which best practices were replicated. For example, considering their country in a later stage of transition from conflict, Rwandese organisations promoted their experiences with demobilization and community reconciliation in Burundi. Others warned for drawing inferences from such apparent similarities, considering for example the differences in the significance of ethnicity between the 'false twins' Rwanda and Burundi (see Reijntjens 1994).

Organizations also struggled with how a regional program should get shape as a collaborative effort of organizations from different countries. In theory, regional issues can be addressed in different ways: e.g. regional programs coordinated among organizations, or similar programs copied in different countries, or local programs that take regional dimensions into account. Interventions could target geographic areas (e.g. the Kivu provinces) or influential groups that fulfil key positions in linking conflicts (e.g. civil society, regional media, trade networks), or focus on key issues (for example small arms) (Armstrong and Rubin 2002). In practice, local organizations often failed to produce a focused analysis, identifying different levels of intervention and related strategies, and ended up with an amorphous shopping-lists of issues and related projects. An example was a network of women organisations that in its regional analysis identified 9 pages of themes and projects to address those. Such in-specific analyses made prioritization and common programming difficult. Various organizations, rather than selecting developments they considered at the core of regional conflict in the GLR, prioritized some general themes: 'governance', 'ethnicity', 'gender', 'trade in arms'. Such a strategy reduced region-specific dynamics of conflict to general trends that legitimized standard interventions. Others ended up with a 'minimalist' regional approach, which only considered the (potential) influence of regional issues on its own interventions (cf. Tschirgi 2002).[16] As a consequence, there were not so many programs that really included regional activities. Exceptions were various programs on refugees: the Catholic Church organized exchange visits between refugees and people from their home areas, and the LDGL platform conducted cross-border research on the background and situation of refugees. Another exception was a cross border radio programme organized by the US-based peace organization Search for Common Ground.

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[16] This kind of difficulties were not just experienced by international NGOs and organizations from the region. The proposal for a regional approach of the Dutch government (Uvin et al. 2004), for example, started from the general development priorities of the Dutch government. After a consultation with the Dutch embassies in the region, the above regional approach was reduced to giving attention to regional issues in individual country-programs.

Even more difficult for organizations analysing regional conflict was not only to come to agreement in what way particular issues were of a regional character, but also to agree on how different issues and conditions interacted. For example, when addressing land shortage related disputes, how should those be seen as related to conflict resulting from the abundance of natural resources? And, how to consider exclusionist governance and criminalisation of the state when addressing regional development problems? In the end, interpretation of regional conflict dynamics depended a lot on the type of organization, location and background and came to focus on a few issues only. Analyses of international organizations often featured governance issues. Organizations from the region tended to see governance in the context of land, ethnicity and citizenship. For example, while CSOs in Bukavu and Goma highlighted the presence of Rwandese rebels and troops on Congolese soil and their influence on the local population, organizations in Uvira emphasised local insecurity caused by the Maimai, and CSOs in Kinshasa were more concerned about elections and the process of democratization. Organizations from Bujumbura city highlighted the political dimensions of violence, while organisations in the country side also considered how violence in the rural areas has gained an ethnic dimension. Staff members of human rights organizations highlighted impunity, and the deplorable record on human rights of various politicians, in their regional analyses. Farmers' organisations emphasised the problems around land and the return of refugees. Hence, regional analysis and programs were always partial and limited, and, at the end of the day, organizations appeared to focus most on those themes fitting their expertise and organizational priorities.

Regional analysis and programming thus came out as processes of defining the region. How the region was constructed around particular issues depended much on how, and by whom problems were analysed. The regional discourse is thus an ordering practice, a way of understanding or framing the world, as creating coherence out of fragmented ideas, experiences and practices, a means by which we make sense of complexity (Law 1994). In fact, different modes of ordering or regional approaches come about, depending on the expertise, organizational considerations, but above all, the identification of the region of the organizations concerned. As it was difficult for CSOs to arrive at a shared understanding, common regional programming became complicated. Consequently, it was not surprising that most existing regional platforms were thematic rather than general, considering the level of common ground needed for that. Nonetheless, the difficulties in coming to a shared regional discourse and collaborative programs were not only of a technical character, but were highly political.

The politics of regional imagination

Civil society organizations make ideological choices and wittingly or unwittingly play political roles. Rather than just value-driven and a-politically taking care of the interests of local communities affected by conflict, members of civil society organizations directly experience themselves the effects of conflict on the ground, and position themselves within conflict discourses. The coming about of civil society regional approaches can thus not be seen separate from the developing regional political context. Regional imagination in the Great Lakes Region was deeply embedded in politics. Coming to a shared analysis among civil society organizations from the region was not only a theoretical endeavour, but also a political one.

In the first place, regional initiatives were sensitive to instability and the day-to-day experiences of conflict of the participating civil society organizations. Progress made in months could be undone in a matter of days. The anarchy after the rebellion by a group of RCD soldiers in Bukavu in June 2004 set back rapprochement programs between the Banyamulenge (who were perceived as close to the Rwandese) and the other communities, thereby complicating the return of Banyamulenge refugees from Burundi. Continuing instability in DRC and Burundi brought many to question whether it was at all the appropriate time for regional approaches. This made some conclude that internal political change was needed before international rapprochement was possible. At the same time, organizations positioned themselves within the national discourses of conflict in their home countries. At the time of fieldwork, the relationship between the Burundese and Rwandese governments was fair, with the electoral victory of the ethnically mixed CNDD-FDD in Burundi in late 2005 resulting even in a

further rapprochement. Rwandese-Congolese relationships continued to be tense, however, due to the unwillingness of Rwanda to withdraw its troops from the Congo. At the same time, serious political divisions existed within the Kivu provinces, among those political leaders liaised to the RCD power-holders and those supporting the acting Kinshasa government. Those tensions were replicated in regional civil society relations, due to the closeness of civil society organizations to their governments and political movements.

Civil society in eastern DRC was often considered activist and outspoken. However, violence and insecurity had severely restricted the freedom of action of organizations. Civil society in the Kivus was also ethniticized and no stranger to partisan tendencies. The Catholic Church was not exempted from these divisions. The Bishop in Goma and many priests there were considered as pro-Rwandese, while in Bukavu the Catholic Church was seen as a major symbol of resistance against RCD. In some instances, the distinction between civil society and formal politics was blurred, with CSOs functioning as spring-board to state politics. In Rwanda, although there was an active associational life, NGOs always had always been state-controlled and had difficulties developing an oppositional attitude towards the government (see also Unsworth and Uvin 2002). Rwandese CSOs had to participate in umbrella organizations, which were said to be firmly government controlled. NGOs working in Rwanda had to perform a balancing act in the themes they could identify to work on, and in their criticism of government policies.[17] Congolese and Burundese organizations doubted the independence of those Rwandese organizations they encountered in meetings. There were for example indications, that for preparatory meetings to the UN regional conference, Rwandese civil society representatives had been appointed by the presidential office. In Burundi, in recent years, civil society had started to openly express itself politically, partly in opposition to and partly in conjunction with the government (Ntsimbiyabandi and Ntakarutimana 2004). Still, many in- and outsiders doubted the independence of Burundese civil society: associational life seemed dominated by Tutsi organizations, and rumours abounded about organizations being supported by politicians.

Many representatives of organizations interviewed considered the involvement of civil society in conflict politics as *the* major challenge to regional peacebuilding approaches concerning civil society. As a result of the affiliation of civil society to national political discourses, regional encounters were not only a platform for exchange but also for political confrontation. A crucial point of disagreement between civil society from Rwanda and North-Kivu was their different understanding of the presence of the Interahamwe. The Rwandese authorities had blamed the Congolese for not taking action against the presence of those militia on Congolese territory, and this had been the legitimization for entering the DRC. However, several Congolese CSOs considered the Rwanda government part of the problem, as it was not providing space for dialogue on a possible return of the Interahamwe, and its presence in the DRC was seen to cover up interests in resource exploitation. Furthermore, many Congolese in Bukavu were disappointed with the lack of understanding from the Rwandese for the suffering the Interahamwe were inflicting on their people. This issue was breaking up many a regional initiative.

> At a regional women conference in Kigali in the summer of 2004, as a preparation for the UN Great Lakes regional conference, the participants were not able to reach agreement on how peace in the GLR should look like. Before the meeting, the representatives from DRC were urged 'not to go and talk to our attackers'. At the meeting, both Rwandese and Congolese organizations had difficulties in taking distance from the discourses of their governments. The Rwandese women focused on the genocide in their country, and the ensuing right of Rwanda to fight the militia responsible that were still residing on DRC soil. To the Congolese women, it appeared that the Rwandese women condoned the violence from their government in DRC, and failed to see that 'peace for the Rwandese is a continuation of human rights violations by the Interahamwe in our areas'.[18]

In other cases, the political positions civil society organizations occupied resulted in that regional encounters were seen as strategic events, at which positions could be strengthened and legitimized, and where the definition of the region could be contested politically. At various regional exchanges,

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[17] Nonetheless, some organizations were able -very carefully- to criticize the government, for example regarding proposals for new land legislation.
[18] Interviews in Bukavu, January 2005; Bujumbura, July 2005; Goma, August 2005.

the delimitation of participation was fiercely debated. In this, the discussion was frequently between organizations from eastern DRC and Rwanda. Often, the Congolese regarded civil society from Rwanda as only representing the vision of their authorities. At the same time, various Congolese organizations interpreted singling out the eastern Kivu provinces in donor programs as supporting claims for a different status of those in the Congolese state, and threatening national sovereignty.

> In 2002, the CECI-Acipa program deliberately included Kinshasa-based organizations, to counter the impression among Congolese organizations that it favoured Kivutian civil society, which was perceived as collaborating with Rwanda. In a meeting in 2004, a day was lost on the discussion on where the secretariat should be based. The Rwanda and Burundi delegations proposed Goma, and strongly opposed Kinshasa, afraid for problems with the Congolese migration offices. Goma, however, was unacceptable to most Congolese, being considered under Rwandese influence, and arguing that their capital was Kinshasa. The Congolese proposed Bukavu as a middle course, which was refused by Rwanda and Burundi. Finally the office remained in Rwanda.[19]

Rather than civil society organizations serving as forces of peace, and as counter balance to their national governments or sub-national contenders for political power, civil society organizations were thus deeply involved in regional politics. The political complications of regional civil society initiatives, and the fact that several regional civil society meetings had been accused of partisan tendencies resulted in that some donors had become hesitant to get involved in regional approaches.

The political implication of civil society in regional politics had consequences for the coming about of regional approaches, in particular for the analysis of regional issues and the approaches adopted. Among civil society organizations from the region themselves, the affiliation of CSOs with home governments fuelled suspicions on the sincerity and intentions of the other players in regional encounters, and reduced the willingness to talk openly about issues of regional concern. A frustrating experience of various international organizations was that often the preparation of regional meetings was a transparent process, in which CSOs from individual countries or regions would bring together their viewpoints, while during the encounters with organizations from other countries they moved towards the positions of their governments. Suspicion of the intentions of others and identification with the positions of their respective governments made a genuine exchange of experiences among civil society organizations difficult.

> To deal with returning refugees and to rationalize land-use, in 1996 the Rwanda government started a program for villagization and resettlement (*Imidugudu*). During preparatory meetings for a regional workshop on land issues in Bujumbura, organized by the Catholic organization CED-Caritas, representatives of Rwandese organisations were quite critical on the programme and underlined the practical problems in its implementation, in the meeting itself, those people gave presentations of the program that were fully in line with the position of the Rwandese government. This also happened at other regional meetings. Consequently, several organizations in Burundi had come to consider the *Imidugudu* programme as exemplary for dealing with land problems in their own country.

Various international development organizations organizing regional meetings between their partners deliberately chose not to discuss regional politics, considering those to sensitive. Circumventing the sensitivity of regional politics was also what happened at the November 2004 regional forum of ACEAC discussed above. At that occasion, little reference was being made to government politics at national level, while in the formal part of the encounter, conflict in participants' home regions were discussed without the slightest reference to the regional conflict history. This was all the more striking, considering, that a few days before the forum the first of a series of UN regional conferences had taken place in Dar es Salaam. In the brakes between sessions participants discussed the outcomes and commented on the renewed threats of the Rwandese president a few days after the conference to intervene militarily in the DRC, thereby ridiculing the commitments convened a few days earlier. In the brakes, I had various discussions with participants from DRC on the role of Rwandese military in the insecurity affecting their areas. People also commented on the likely cooperation between militia from DRC and the Burundese FNL and the latter's involvement in the Gatumba massacre in August

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[19] Interview Bujumbura, February 2005.

2004.[20] In the official parts of the forum, such issues were not taken into consideration. This had to do with the delicateness of the subject and the fact that like the rest of civil society, also representatives of the Catholic Church to some extent were involved. The unwillingness or inability of participants to address regional conflict issues resulted in that the in the case of the ACEAC forum, the concern was mainly with the effects of conflict (and how to deal with those) rather than with the causes of conflict.

Similarly, in many regional encounters considering solutions for regional problems, the outcomes reflected a preference for national strategies rather than regional ones. For example, various expatriates considered that land scarcity in Burundi and Rwanda implied a need for a regional solution, including regional economic specialization and more flexibility in migration policies. Organizations from the region considered the scarcity of land in their own countries as a given, and to them the problem was the failure of governments to develop agriculture or alternatives to it. To them, the considerations of the expatriates would become relevant only after their heads of state would have reached regional agreements, but for the time those issues remained too sensitive to lobby on. Important in this imagination of regional vs. national solutions was probably also the fact that the different governments in the region also focussed on national rather than regional solutions to their respective problems. The first UN regional conference for the Great Lakes region in November 2004 resulted in a shared commitment among the region's leaders to advanced peace, stability and unity in the region through the promotion of economic growth. In follow-up meetings proposals were elaborated by teams of experts from the region to promote regional cooperation (the extension of an oil pipeline, a regional railway), the establishment of sub-regional mechanisms against the proliferation of small arms, joint border security management, the equitable participation and autonomy of women, youth and marginalised groups, and the establishment of a regional forum for the protection, assistance and search for durable solutions for refugees, IDPs, communities and vulnerable groups affected by the conflicts and natural disasters in the Great Lakes region. All of those proposals were foremost of a technical nature –to promote regional economic integration, to respond to the needs of conflict-affected populations- rather than politically dealing with the conflicts underlying regional differences.

Highlighting the national character of problems and solutions rather than their regional aspects was likely also a political strategy in itself. Though the Rwanda government has emphasized the harmful presence of Hutu militia, and the ethnicitization of community relations in eastern DRC, regional dynamics seldom play a role in the discourse of the Rwandese government explaining the building up of the 1994 genocide.[21] This issue was also not much discussed between Burundese and Rwandese civil society organizations. I speculate that emphasizing those regional dimensions might have drawn the character of the Rwandese and Burundese state into the analysis. This was an issue which organizations were willing to discuss in private, but not to address in exchanges with representatives from the other countries, as this would imply that they would be seen as criticising their respective governments.

The 'politics of regional imagination' thus played an important role in how regional civil society peacebuilding in the end came about. In many cases, coming to a shared analysis was not so much a theoretical struggle, but a political endeavor of coming together. We might even consider that part of the earlier discussed difficulties in achieving commonly shared regional analyses were not so much a technical or knowledge problem, but resulted from the fact that organizations circumvented thorny political issues, by deemphasizing regionality.

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[20] See Human Rights Watch (2004) Burundi: The Gatumba Massacre. War Crimes and Political Agendas. Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper, September 2004

[21] The official documentary produced at the event of the commemoration of the genocide in 2004, nor the elucidation of the genocide memorial in Kigali make any reference to this (personal communication with Thea Hilhorst).

Conclusion

"International organizations all have the same agenda. Everybody works on peace and security and a regional approach, everybody works with the same partners. What is the added value of a regional approach? The regional approach is a hype"[22]

The above quotation shows the belief of several interviewees that regional discourses were not more than a trend in the development scene, exposing the regular need to come up with a new notion to legitimize its existence, or as a discursive practice to hide the failure of national and international organizations to effectively address conflict in the Great Lakes Region. Nonetheless, as this paper pointed out, many representatives of national and international organizations considered regional approaches as imperative and contributing to a better understanding of what conflict was about and to better peacebuilding practice. Rather than evaluating which of those considerations was closer to reality, this paper explored how interventions got shape as a result of the regional discourse and in the practice of implementation.

It was observed that it was difficult to make workable translations from regional theory to regional practice. Part of this came from mundane reasons, such as limited funding, or the fact that regional approaches required a level of cooperation that often did not even exist at a national level. At the same time, local and international organizations had difficulties to analyse the connectedness of regional issues in such a way that it helped them in their programming, and to come to a shared understanding of interrelatedness of issues. Regional discourses turned out to be different ways of ordering complex conflict dynamics, in order to better understand them. Understanding of complexity, however, did not provide for strategies to effectively deal with this complexity.

Moreover, how regional discourses on peacebuilding got shape and thus how regional peacebuilding came about was also the result of the political space for CSOs, their relation with the government, and their abilities to work on peace and human rights in their own countries. CSOs appeared to be fundamentally political in nature and deeply involved in the everyday politics of peace and conflict. This political nature of organizations resulted in that regional platforms for peace were not necessarily peaceful. Rather than the coming into being of a an imagined regional community (cf Anderson 1983/91) of CSOs in the GLR -as hoped for by many outsiders- state borders and the regional political map continued to play an important role in how civil society identified itself. As a result, it was difficult to facilitate exchange of experiences and establish regional cooperation, and to come to shared understanding of regional issues and regional solutions. Rather than providing neutral spaces for the generation of ideas and the launching of opinions and criticism, often regional fora and exchanges came to function as interfaces where different regional discourses met, representing different readings of conflict. At many regional exchanges, to circumvent conflict among the participants, such differences were silenced. As a result of this, depoliticized regional strategies came about, that focused on the similarly experienced consequences of regional conflict, rather than on the political differences underlying those.

The challenge of civil society regional peacebuilding is thus not just about acknowledging the regional character of conflict, but more about reconciling different regional discourses of the civil society organizations involved, and coming to a shared regional imagination. Some considered that in order for this rapprochement to happen, first agreement needed to be reached among governments. Considering existing networks that had overcome regional differences to some extent, this author is less pessimistic. The question is whether civil society organizations will be able to challenge the regional policies of their governments or other regional players, as long as they have not overcome the differences dividing themselves. Maybe we should not expect that of civil society organizations. As Mamdani suggests, regional reform may also come about through the examples set by other countries in the region (Mamdani 2001). Maybe then the most important role CSOs can play in achieving regional peacebuilding is through achieving political reform within their own countries.

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[22] Diplomat, interview Kigali 10 January 2005.

What could be the role of international organizations in this? Civil society regional approaches for peace require a long term perspective, starting from the premise of fostering regional identification among participating CSOs, rather than assuming it. International organisations might support and facilitate this. Regional identification will never come about without encountering the other players from the region, thus 'let one thousand conferences blossom' (Galtung 1996/2003: 271). To achieve a shared regional identification, maybe indeed the sharing of similar experiences may be more important than exchanging dissimilar views on what conflict is about. Therefore, exchanges and platforms might turn out to be more effective than regional civil society programs. Even if the resulting exchanges are depoliticized, maybe we should consider those as a first step necessary in a process of regional identification and (finally) reconciliation. Further, regional identification might be strengthened through other initiatives. Parallel to the actual formal regional structures, a lot of informal regional contacts exist (trade relations, universities). Cooperation in common areas could be stimulated, for example through thematic exchanges.

In addition, the fact that many international organisations –let alone national organizations- only have limited presence in the region, and in the first place work at community level, underlines the importance of considering the regional implications of localized interventions. It would make sense to give more attention to regional sensitive programming, and to consider how the dictum of 'Do No Harm' (Anderson 1999) applies to localized interventions that nonetheless might have regional impacts. Maybe even more important than *regional* approaches are *integrated* approaches, considering the relatedness of conflict issues in the region, whether at local or regional level.

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