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Sustainable community approaches to peacebuilding in securitised environments: case study of Somalia



Group exercise
at a learning event
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Saferworld, Conflict Dynamics International (CDI) and the Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law Secretariat (KPSRL) organised a three-day learning event in Nairobi, from 9– 11 July 2019, to share experiences on sustainable community approaches to peacebuilding and to explore the relationship between community-level work and accountable policing in securitised environments. This event was informed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Addressing Root Causes (ARC) fund, which aims to tackle the root causes of armed conflict, instability and irregular migration in a number of countries in Africa and the Middle East. It seeks to address two main challenges: a political system that is not delivering responsive and inclusive governance; and a lack of trust between communities which blocks leaders from building a more inclusive political structure that promotes peace.

The event focused on challenges and lessons learnt, as well as ways in which programmes can support and strengthen good practices. Saferworld and CDI showcased evidence that has been generated through the learning component of the ARC programme in Somalia. Participants from both organisations, from Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda, also shared their experiences of the challenges and lessons learnt of working in similar environments. The event was attended by representatives of the Somali government, specifically the District Commissioner of Kismayo, the Director General of the Ministry of Justice from South West State, and two senior officials from the office of the Mayor of Mogadishu.

The main findings from the event were:

- Community-based structures, such as community action forums (CAFs) and district peace committees (DPCs), are critical in peacebuilding and conflict-resolution processes. They have made tremendous strides in supporting communities in preventing conflict and play an important role in identifying the drivers of conflict across different regions. These community-based structures have managed to work well in areas with limited or no access to formal justice systems and have helped fill a void in many of these areas.
- At the same time, community-based structures face challenges affecting the delivery of their work, including a lack of clarity of how they should interact with administrations, access challenges resulting from high levels of insecurity and legitimacy issues due to a lack of legal frameworks.
- The roles and responsibilities of administrations and community structures should be clarified, to manage expectations and to harmonise the efforts of different conflict resolution systems that interact with each other. Conflict resolution systems that can effectively deal with highly sensitive cases such as inter-clan land disputes also need to be established, as well as women-only CAFs and DPCs, to effectively meet communities' security needs.



After class in
Kismayo
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Video
Productions

Background

Understanding the root causes of Somalia's challenges requires knowledge of how political structures and practices have failed and how these systems are further weakened by incomplete or limited reconciliation efforts.¹ The prolonged state of conflict in Somalia has prevented Somalis from experiencing peaceful coexistence. A pervasive culture of violence – used to maintain power and resources – has polarised Somalis and restricted social cohesion. Informal security provision is carried out by clans in a context of inter- and intra-clan division and violent rivalry. The absence of platforms for communities to play a role in shaping security responses and reducing tensions also contributes to a disconnect between civil society, which is increasingly vulnerable to manipulation by violent extremist groups. This situation leaves communities disenfranchised, without access to fair and unbiased security services, and fuels a culture of mistrust and conflict among and within communities and between society and the state.

The south-central regions² are faced with similar challenges: weak capacity and unresponsive governance structures, unresolved clan disputes and existing tensions between rival clans – which all play out at national, regional and community levels – as well as a weak economy and easy access to weapons. These are proximate causes of insecurity, irregular migration and recruitment into violent groups.

The lack of political inclusivity at the national level and among and within federal member states – coupled with incomplete reconciliation at the community level where the government is often absent or exclusionary – creates space for opportunistic leaders to exploit clan grievances. As a result, since 1991, clan-based violence has been used by semi-political and military leaders as a political instrument outside the institutions of the state, through clan mobilisation at the community level.³ This has fostered deep clan divisions that have been exploited by national political leaders for personal and political gain, as well as by clan leaders in the pursuit of clan domination in the form of resources and territories of control. Weak regional and district-level governance structures enable national and federal member state-level actors to mobilise the clans they are aligned to and use violence for their own interests. These dynamics further prevent a coherent and inclusive approach to human security,⁴ encourage irregular migration and create an environment in which violent extremist groups such as al-Shabaab can thrive. The conflict in Somalia has spread to the Horn of Africa and beyond.

¹ Tamaru et al. (2014), 'Cultivating Consensus. Exploring options for political accommodation and promoting all Somali voices', Conflict Dynamics International, February (<http://www.cdint.org/resources/publications/somali/cultivating-consensus/>)

² The regions are generally considered to be all those south of Galkayo city.

³ For example, see Kapteijns L (2012), *Clan cleansing in Somalia. The ruinous legacy of 1991* (University of Pennsylvania Press).

⁴ Human security encompassing 'physical, political and community security', as discussed during the development of the ARC results framework.

Introduction: the role of community-level conflict resolution mechanisms

Traditional conflict resolution structures continue to play an important role in the prevention and resolution of conflict, especially in areas with limited access to formal justice systems. Somalis have long-standing traditional systems for resolving conflict within and between clans at the community level. Over the years, these traditional structures have evolved into more inclusive structures, and have developed links with formal government structures.

In Somalia, CAFs and DPCs are important mechanisms for community engagement. They are formed at the local level and hold dialogues within communities and between communities and state authorities, work collaboratively on security issues and plan responses. More specifically, CAFs and DPCs often play an important role in conflict management, especially at the community level. Their work includes conflict early warning and resolving issues related to: land, water, marital and gender-based violence, inheritance and property disputes, murder, rape, banditry, inter-ethnic and inter-clan conflicts, and petty crime.

In many parts of the country, Somalis still use customary law (xeer) to resolve conflicts within their communities. Somali customary law continues to be the preferred justice system due to the overall lack of trust in the formal justice system. DPCs and CAFs are preferred because they are cost effective, are more accessible by communities in conflict, and because people believe they provide swift deliverance of justice. In many instances, communities work in close coordination with formal authorities through DPCs and CAFs. In some areas, DPCs and CAFs have established a positive reputation and are respected and called upon by local governments and other traditional leaders to assist in dispute resolution.

Cooperation between Saferworld and CDI

In Somalia, CDI and Saferworld work in similar geographical areas on peace and security issues, establishing local-level community structures to support peacebuilding initiatives among communities in conflict. CDI's DPCs and Saferworld's CAFs work together with local authorities including the police and local courts to respond to a range of issues affecting the community. To avoid duplication of activities, CDI and Saferworld have quarterly planning sessions to share ideas and plan for joint initiatives that help build the capacity of community-based structures to better respond to the needs of their communities. These engagements have helped improve information sharing and enhanced coordination of activities. Some of the components of the engagement include coordinating training activities for community-based structures, cross-learning meetings, and exploring approaches to better information sharing, thereby improving their work and enhancing their impact.

Saferworld's community action forums

Saferworld's ARC project is designed to support the safety and security of communities in Mogadishu, Kismayo and Baidoa. Saferworld works with three partners: the Somali Women Development Centre, the Isha Human Rights Organization and the Somali Women Solidarity Organization. Saferworld also collaborates with a wide range of other organisations including CDI and the Danish Refugee Council, as well as other entities that support the Somali government, such as the African Union Mission to Somalia and the United Nations Mission in Somalia.

Saferworld's project creates links at community, state and national levels. By adopting an innovative combination of community security, civilian oversight and advocacy that brings evidence from the community to national, regional and international levels, the project has a flexible and responsive approach to Somalia's fluid conflict dynamics. The project seeks to achieve three outcomes:

- Outcome one: communities and civil society in Banadir, Jubaland and South West State, including women, youth and marginalised groups, work across clan lines on identifying, prioritising, analysing and resolving security issues and promoting cross-regional cooperation.
- Outcome two: police and state institutions implement inclusive responses to communities' security needs through improved coordination, information sharing and accountability to police advisory committees, resulting in increased citizen-state trust.
- Outcome three: national, regional and international policies on security in Somalia reflect the security needs of communities, in particular the concerns of women and youth across clan divides.

Outcome one focuses on the formation of CAFs at the community level. CAFs hold dialogues within communities and between communities and state authorities, as well as working collaboratively on security issues and planning responses with seed funds provided by Saferworld to support the implementation of community-level action plans. From 2017 to 2019, a total of 15 CAFs were formed in the three regions, with a membership of 300 community members from diverse backgrounds. There were 124 meetings conducted by CAFs, where members resolved security issues such as emerging communal and intra-clan conflicts, land disputes and the referral of cases to authorities. CAFs also developed 20 action plans that respond to community security needs, and Saferworld and partners trained 300 CAF members on gender, conflict sensitivity and advocacy. The project also conducted two community security assessments and produced region-specific community security assessment reports.

Saferworld's main achievements



Achievements of the CAFs



LAND DISPUTE CASES
RESOLVED: 26



RAPE CASES
REPORTED/REFERRED: 20



FORCED/EARLY MARRIAGE
CASES: 6



COMMUNITY
AWARENESS/ADVOCACY: 56



SMALL COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES
(SEED GRANTS): 15
COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Main findings of the community security assessments



Land
conflicts/disputes
are the major
drivers of
insecurity



Sexual and
gender-based
violence – key
driver of conflict



Weak governance
institutions –
including lack of
appropriate
training and
discipline of the
police and poor
state institutions –
is also a driver of
prolonged conflict
and insecurity



Traditional
leaders are
regarded as the
major justice
providers within
communities



Clan conflict is
one of the major
conflict drivers in
all locations

CDI and the Somali Youth Development Network's district peace committees

By creating and supporting inclusive local-level peace architecture, CDI focuses on addressing community-level human security challenges faced by communities across Somalia as a result of an incomplete reconciliation process. One of the programme's main goals is to support communities in the districts of Jubbaland, Puntland, South West State, Galmudug, Hirshabelle and Banadir, by contributing to: enhanced human security, reconciliation, a culture of peace, gender equity, and improved relationships between communities, local government and the federal system. As well as directly addressing local-level human security challenges, the aim is to help reduce the ability of state and national political actors to exploit local-level (clan) grievances for political ends, and to reduce the chances of local disputes disrupting inclusivity at state and national levels. To achieve this, CDI and its partner, the Somali Youth Development Network (SOYDEN), support the establishment and training of DPCs to sustainably manage and resolve conflicts, support the capacity building of women to shape and take a lead in peacemaking, and enhance collaboration between DPCs and the local government. DPCs include women, internally displaced persons, traditional and religious elders, business people and youth, who represent clans within several districts in Somalia.

Through their increased knowledge and capacity and through enhanced linkages and information sharing with other relevant actors – most importantly local government officials – DPCs and their members (including women) are able to understand local conflict dynamics and how they are interlinked with gender dynamics, and can mitigate and resolve existing and emerging local conflicts in their districts in a conflict- and gender-sensitive manner. Communities also benefit from existing and successfully functioning DPCs, which represent the communities, share information, and collaborate and coordinate with local government actors. This increases communities' confidence in local government actors and the federal system at this level, enhancing their confidence in the federal system overall and therefore improving human security at the local and wider level.

CDI works closely with its partner SOYDEN, government actors (at the federal and state levels), Somali civil society leaders and organisations, women actors, other local peacebuilding infrastructures and local communities to achieve these outcomes. Over the years the programme has supported the establishment of 32 DPCs in seven regions in Somalia (lower Jubba, Gedo, Hiraan, Middle Shabelle, Bay, Bakool and Banadir), each with 15 to 21 members. The membership comprises women, youth and minority groups including internally displaced persons, as well as more traditionally powerful groups such as elders, religious leaders and business men/women. Women within DPCs make up between 28 and 35 per cent of the total number of members; currently there are 174 women members, many of whom hold high positions like vice chair, secretary and treasurer.

CDI and SOYDEN's main achievements



32 DPCs established in seven regions in Somalia; 174 women members



Training of 108 DPC members (46 women, 62 men) and members of the district administration in peacebuilding and conflict management



Supported engagement with DPCs' and local government authorities' monthly meetings



Capacity assessment of women DPC members



Experience-sharing workshops for women DPCs

Lessons learnt on the work of community-based structures: learning from Somalia and other contexts in East Africa

Participants from Somalia and other contexts in East Africa contributed insights into lessons learnt and challenges encountered working with community-based conflict resolution structures.

Insights into contributions community-based structures can make to conflict resolution

- CAFs and DPCs play significant roles in social reconciliation and peacebuilding programmes. They provide community support in the absence of formal government structures and contribute to building strong relationships with communities, which reduces space for violence. By demonstrating a strong sense of community ownership and voluntary work, they have gained legitimacy and effectively represent community needs and interests. As such, they have a vital role in society, particularly in areas with limited or lack of access to formal justice.
- CAFs and DPCs provide accountability between communities as well as links between the community and local government, by forging relationships between the police and communities.
- CAFs and DPCs can help to inform national-level processes from the bottom up. Through CAFs and DPCs, communities increasingly and effectively participate in peacebuilding processes.

The work conducted by community-based structures has not been without challenges, as is the norm when working in conflict areas. They have however continued to meet regularly and solve disputes, despite the challenging contexts they work in. The challenges range from a lack of capacity and a lack of coordination with other actors to tensions with local government.



Waiting to vote
in Kismayo
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Abukar

Main challenges faced by community-based structures

- Very high expectations from communities and the local administration of what community-based structures can resolve, which overburdens them and affects their roles.
- Overlapping mandates and the perception of community-level administrations that community-based structures are taking over their role and are in competition with the authorities.
- Poor coordination among donors, civil society organisations and local-level government authorities, and among different organisations implementing similar structures, which leads to an overlap of work.
- Hostile environments and poor security in most areas affect the role of community-based peace structures, including their freedom of movement, sometimes endangering the lives of their members.
- Political influence from the authorities on the daily activities of community-based structures affects the speed and effectiveness of their work. Sometimes delays in approval of activities affect their delivery.
- Shrinking space for civil society; if communities complain of any shortages of services, the government automatically blames non-governmental organisations for not doing their work.
- A lack of appropriate skills among members – for example in gender sensitivity, conflict analysis management and resolution, mediation, reconciliation and trauma healing – weakens the capacity of community-based structures.
- A persistent culture of mistrust, intra- and inter-community conflict and state-society mistrust. This occurs within and between clans as well as between the state and communities.
- Legitimacy: there is a lack of legal frameworks (at federal and state levels) that recognise the role of community-based structures.
- Gender and age discrimination within community structures, especially in highly patriarchal societies where the role of women and youth is limited or non-existent.

Recommendations and solutions for how government and community-based structures can work together

As ARC is a five-year project, it is important to lay strong and clear foundations for sustainability – and this requires lots of time and effort. In the process of ensuring ownership it is likely that there will be delays in some activities, but engagement is important. There is a need to put in place processes and steps to establish relationships between community-level structures and institutions to enhance sustainability:

- The roles and responsibilities of government and community structures should be clarified through government policies, to avoid tensions. Clear terms of reference and systems for accountability should be developed for both informal community-based structures and government institutions.
- With support from community-based structures, the government should develop policies to enhance the consistency and efficiency of how government and other stakeholders implement peacebuilding interventions. These policies need to take into account community needs.
- Government institutions should gain a better understanding of the work of informal structures and should be able to take up ownership of peace processes.
- Structures should be strengthened and the terms of reference of CAFs and DPCs harmonised. There should be monthly meetings between CAFs, DPCs and local administrations. Community-level agreements should be documented and shared with the local administration. Collective responsibility and coordinating activities are important.
- The efforts of security sector institutions should be harmonised and should be made more inclusive. Improving security coordination at community and national levels will help avoid overlap and duplication of activities by building upon existing community structures.
- Women-only CAFs and DPCs should be established in both urban and rural areas to create a safe space for their engagement.
- The government should work with CAFs and DPCs to develop joint solutions/response initiatives for safety and security needs, as identified in conflict assessments carried out by CAFs and DPCs.
- Vulnerable community members should be connected to dispute resolution mechanisms such as DPCs and CAFs.
- The ARC fund should be replicated in other districts and federal member states. Sixty per cent of the Somali population live in rural areas, where there is a lack of police stations. DPCs and CAFs play a significant role in identifying the drivers of conflict across different regions.
- Building systems that effectively deal with highly sensitive cases, such as inter-clan land disputes, will strengthen community structures and help them manage such conflicts. For example, if CAFs/DPCs have legitimacy and support from the government, their decisions will carry more weight, which will minimise clan clashes and neighbourhood conflicts.
- Local administrations and district commissioners should be included in capacity-building activities. This might ensure their buy-in and facilitate their meaningful participation and long-term ownership of the ARC programme.
- It is important to recognise the links between sectors and issues. Community security work is closely connected with access to justice, and the ARC project would have more impact if it engaged with the justice sector. For example, land ownership is identified as one of the key drivers of conflict – but this can only be addressed if the legal, security and justice sectors are connected.
- Existing initiatives and organisations working on paralegal support should be linked with communities, to ensure referrals are actioned and communities are given feedback.