

How Somali-led peace processes work

Section introduction

Dr Pat Johnson and Abdirahman Raghe

How do Somali communities deal with their need for security and governance in the absence of a state? The reality is that since 1991 numerous Somali-led reconciliation processes have taken place at local and regional levels. Often these have proven more sustainable than the better resourced and better publicized national reconciliation processes sponsored by the international community.

Some Somali reconciliation processes have provided a basis for lasting stability and development, such as those in Puntland and Somaliland. Others have addressed an immediate crisis but have not been sustained. But few processes are known beyond their immediate context. A recent study by Interpeace and its partner organizations has catalogued over 100 such indigenous peace processes in south central Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland since 1991. This has deepened our understanding of the methods and efficacy of Somali peacemaking.

This introduction to Somali-led peace processes draws on the findings of the Interpeace research (www.interpeace.org/index.php/Somalia/Somalia.html) and peace initiatives by other civic actors.

The contributions that make up this section refer to different types of Somali-led peace processes. Many processes draw on traditional practices of negotiation and mediation conducted by clan elders that have a long heritage in managing relations between clans and sub-clans [*please refer to the glossary for a description of clan and elder*]. Adapting to the context, they also incorporate modern practices and technologies and involve educated professionals.

Several of the articles also describe innovative peace initiatives by women and other civic activists to end violence and deal with security threats, which do not draw directly on traditional practices. Some of the essential features of Somali peacemaking and the generic lessons about peacemaking in the Somali context are highlighted in the articles that follow.

Procedure

Thorough preparation is an essential feature of Somali-led peace processes. Typically this involves making initial contacts to establish a cessation of hostilities (*colaad joojin*) and the formation of a preparatory committee to mobilize people and resources and to ensure security. The committee will usually set guidelines on the number, selection and approval of delegates and the procedures for conducting the negotiations.

The preparatory committee will assign other committees to oversee different aspects of the process, including fundraising. The choice of venue is critical for practical, political and symbolic reasons. The hosting community has responsibility for providing security and covering many of the expenses, which are predominantly raised locally.

Respected and authoritative leadership and mediation talks are chaired by a committee of elders (*shirguudon*), sometimes from neutral clans. Since effective reconciliation is heavily influenced by the quality of the mediation, facilitation and management, it is fundamentally important that the chair is a trusted and respected person who commands moral authority, and is often a senior elder.



Elders at a peace conference in Puntland discuss payment of *diya* (blood compensation) © PDRC

Three senior Somali elders from Somaliland, Puntland and south central Somalia, Hajji Abdi Hussein Yusuf, Sultan Said and Malaq Isaaq, talk in this section of the publication about the qualities that elders are expected to possess. They describe the vital role they play in maintaining peace within their own community and in settling disputes with neighbouring clans. Abdurahman ‘Shuke’ also explains (see p. 58) the importance of traditional institutions, based on *xeer* (customary law), in laying the foundations for reconciliation and the emergence of stable political structures in Somaliland and Puntland.

Inclusiveness is an important principle of Somali-led peace processes, although women and displaced populations are rarely involved in political deliberations for reasons elaborated in the articles on women and on displacement. The numbers of official delegates are agreed in advance according to an established formula, usually based on proportional representation by clan. Delegates speak and negotiate on behalf of their community, to which they are also accountable. Parties that are not directly involved but who could become an obstacle to a settlement also have to be accommodated.

Poetry, religion and ritual are all significant features, helping to facilitate or sanctify an agreement, and therefore the range of actors includes not only traditional and religious leaders, politicians, military officers, diaspora, business people and civic activists, but also poets, ‘opinion makers’ and representatives of the media – all with recognized roles to play.

Meetings typically attract a large unofficial contingent of people who are part of the constituency to whom delegates can defer and who may contribute through informal mediation, specific expertise, drafting agreements or mobilizing support. Often the final stage of a process is witnessed by delegates of neighbouring clans, adding weight to its conclusion. Inclusiveness is just as important in non traditional processes, as illustrated by the account below of the operation of the District Committee in Wajid (see p. 70).

Women’s roles are rarely recognized beyond their support for logistics in traditional inter-clan processes. As Faiza Jama Mohamed explains in her article on women and peacebuilding (see p. 62), women’s position in society – as daughters of one clan or lineage and often married to another – has denied them

a formal role in politics. Nevertheless women have organized themselves using innovative tactics to mobilize support and to pressurize parties to stop fighting and continue dialogue when it appears to be faltering.

In Somaliland peace conferences, women recited poetry to influence proceedings. In 1998 in the Puntland parliament a woman poet shamed male delegates into allocating seats for women. Elsewhere women have pressed elders to reach an accord and avoid conflict by offering to pay outstanding *diya* (blood compensation).

In many urban settings women have been able to play more influential roles, as Faiza Jama highlights in her account of the remarkable efforts by women civic activists who have ‘waged peace’ in Mogadishu and elsewhere.

Consensus decision making is another key principle of Somali peacemaking. The time needed to negotiate consensus is one reason for the length of some Somali peace processes. Malaq Isaaq observes (*see p. 50*) that speed can kill peace processes. Different forces may be brought to bear to encourage resolution, including the burden of financial costs being borne by the hosting community or lobbying by groups of stakeholders (often women). The authority of peace accords derive from the consensus decision making process as well as the legitimacy of the leadership, the inclusiveness of the process, and the use of *xeer*. Abdurahman Shuke explains how the use of *xeer* has been fundamental for the restoration of peace.

Somali negotiators adopt an **incremental approach to peacemaking**. First attempts to resolve a conflict often fail and a process may be restarted with new strategies and participants learning from one initiative to the next. Many of the larger conferences are the culmination of several smaller, localized meetings.

It is not uncommon for Somali peace processes to spread over many months or even years. The process leading to the conference and implementation of the accords produces the peace, not the conference itself. Hajji Abdi Hussein (*see p. 60*) explains how Somaliland’s successes in reconciliation and statebuilding in the 1990s are attributed to a sustained focus on resolving issues at a community level before tackling broader governance issues.

Somali-led peace talks typically ensure **effective public outreach** throughout the process and wide dissemination to ratify the outcomes. This is recognized as critical to the legitimacy and sustainability of peace accords.

“ It is not uncommon for Somali peace processes to spread over many months or even years. The process leading to the conference and implementation of the accords produces the peace, not the conference itself”

Substance

The aim of Somali peace meetings is to **restore social relations between communities and reinstitute a system of law and order**. Reconciliation is considered central to success and is achieved through restitution and restorative justice rather than retribution.

The declaration of responsibility by the aggressor is seen as representing more than a third of the path to a solution. Both Malaq Isaaq and Sultan Said (*see p. 56*) stress the importance of ‘telling truth’ or ‘confessing wrongdoing’ as an essential precursor to a settlement.

Many local peace processes reach agreements on re-establishing institutions for **governance**. Ibrahim Ali Amber ‘Oker’ discusses the many different forms that such institutions take in the still fragmented south central area of the country.

Abdurahman Shuke explains the need to restore the social contract between clans after it has broken down and rules have been broken. **Compensation (*diya*) payments** are agreed and one of the jobs of an elder is to collect the agreed amount from the clan members, as Malaq Isaaq describes. A key factor in the recurrence of conflict can be delayed payment of *diya* and some accords therefore include a timeframe for payments to address this. Ibrahim Ali Oker suggests some of the factors that have worked against instituting a more stable framework of governance in south central Somalia.

Agreements usually institute **sanctions** for those violating the accord, as highlighted below by both Abdurahman Shuke and Malaq Isaaq. Often there is an agreement on mechanisms for monitoring implementation and managing future conflicts.

Restorative justice supports social reconciliation through collective responsibility but militates against individual responsibility. Some local accords tackle this by specifying

that violations will be addressed through application of *Shari'a* (Islamic law), rather than payment of *diya*. Ibrahim Ali Oker observes that one of the weaknesses of locally negotiated agreements in south central Somalia is the absence of a central (or local) authority or administration to uphold or enforce them.

In terms of the agenda for peace conferences, a clear and pressing objective of virtually every Somali led peace process studied was that of **ending violence and re-establishing public security**. The cessation of hostilities that preceded many initiatives was reaffirmed and translated into a ceasefire at the conference, and measures were instituted to maintain security and build confidence.

In places where disarmament has taken place, like Somaliland and Puntland, consensus is reached to put weapons at the service of the local authorities. But there is an implicit understanding that communities may withdraw these commitments should the agreements be violated, thereby generating sufficient confidence for the peace accord to be sustained. The Somali commitment to consensus in peacemaking processes is reflected in commitments to joint responsibility and management of ceasefires and social control of the means of violence.

Outside the formal Somali framework of dispute settlement and peace conferences, Somali men and women in many walks of life have had to find innovative ways of dealing with the security challenges they face. Women have played a particularly important role as civil society activists seeking to broker new arrangements for public security, as Faiza Jama's article describes.

The extraordinary efforts that have been made by the public in Mogadishu to contain violence and establish local systems of law and order is also covered in Jama Mohamed's contribution on neighbourhood watch (*see p. 66*). The remarkable survival of Mogadishu's Bakaaro market is also described below (*see p. 68*). These are important examples of the innovation that has taken place to achieve security in urban settings.

Different kinds of outcomes The large, region-wide conferences in Borama in Somaliland in 1993 and Garowe in Puntland in 1998 were political processes that produced lasting agreements on power sharing. The important role that traditional elders played in these peace processes is noted in the article by Abdurahman Shuke and in the interviews with elders from Puntland and Somaliland.

These conferences formulated a political vision of a future state, articulated in charters that defined the structure and responsibilities of public administrations and the establishment

of public security services. Such structures are still lacking in south central Somalia where, as Ibrahim Ali Oker points out, there are occupied territories and serious imbalances of power, and where a capable administration is needed to uphold and sustain agreements.

Finally, local processes are **not divorced from national or regional level politics**. They can be heavily influenced by factors beyond the control of the local communities, whether political manoeuvring by their elite, external sponsors of local conflict (including the diaspora), or dynamics emerging from national level peace conferences.

Both Sultan Said and Malaq Isaak in conversations that took place hundreds of miles apart each observe how difficult it is to make or keep the peace when 'politicians' are involved, people who are generally perceived as self interested, unrepresentative and unaccountable. And as the articles by both Jama Mohamed and Faiza Jama show, the neighbourhood security arrangements that had flourished in Mogadishu foundered largely as a result of national and international politics.

Interpeace's peace mapping study was carried out from January 2007 by Somali researchers from the Academy for Peace and Development in Somaliland, the Puntland Development Research Center and the Center for Research and Dialogue in south central Somalia. Using Interpeace's participatory action research methodology to interview over four hundred people.

The CRD also undertook research on internationally sponsored national peace conferences in collaboration with Professor Ken Menkhaus. Five films were also produced as part of the research.

Dr Pat Johnson has been Senior Program Officer with the Interpeace Somali program since 2005, having previously worked with Oxfam-GB and the UN in Puntland, and the EC Delegation in Nairobi. She has played a major role in Interpeace's peace-mapping study, undertaken by the three Somali partner institutions, which reviews Somali-led peace initiatives and lessons learned from national-level peace processes.

Abdirahman Osman Raghe was the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Interior until 1989, later working for the UNDP. He returned from Canada to the Somali region/ Nairobi in 1998 as one of the co-founders and deputy director of the Somali program for WSP (later re-named Interpeace) and plays a lead role in supporting reconciliation and peacebuilding throughout the Somali region and democratization with the local communities in both Somaliland and Puntland.