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## Facilitating Peace and Rehabilitation in Somalia

The major causes of fragmentation in present-day Somalia are twofold. One is recent, the second centuries old. The former stems from the oppressive, capricious, and clan-based autocracy of the late dictator, Siyad Barre, who used his interpretation of clan institutions for his own ends, to oppress political opponents, create inequality, and promote conflict and violence. So great was his malevolence and abuse of power that virtually all Somalis now hold a deep-seated fear and distrust of any centralized authority. The older source of discord is the profound Somali individualism and resilience, rooted in a clan structure that, though it has sustained them in a harsh environment for centuries, makes it difficult to create and sustain a centralized state. These two powerful forces have created a setting in which Western concepts of the nation-state are unlikely to work, at least not in the next decade or so.

Somalia and the Somali people are an enigma to much of the world. How can the Somalis have journeyed to the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and have no modern state - no laws, no government, no courts, no taxes, no social services, no trash collection, no public schools, no post office, no official currency, no means to settle defaulted business contracts, no public health system, and no police? Do they exist, as Robert Kaplan's *The Coming Anarchy* (2000) would have us believe, in the depths of anarchy or even nihilism? There are many opinions about Somali identity. Our 1997 fact-finding mission heard them all.

Are the Somalis an entrepreneur's dream? Rudimentary yet efficient local banks, linked to large overseas institutions, now dominate the Mogadishu banking sector. Private phone systems in several of Somalia's larger cities may be more efficient and cheaper than any phone system in Africa. Private clinics and schools are springing up all over the country, with new equipment and supplies, trained staff, and clean facilities. Several new Somali-owned airlines fly regularly into the larger cities, keeping generally reliable schedules. While some use older prop jets of questionable safety, others operate newly refurbished jets with well-maintained equipment and efficient crews.

Joint ventures with Malaysian and Gulf business enterprises offer to rehabilitate airports and ports, institute new banking and fishing arrangements, and launch companies to export fruit and livestock to European and Asian markets - all at no cost to the public sector or the donor community. Are the Somalis at the forefront of Africa with their privatization enterprises, business acumen, investment strategies, and economic growth? Have they carried out structural adjustment to such an extent that such aid-giving groups as the World Bank have nothing more to tell them?

Or are the Somalis the last of the great outlaw nation? They expelled the United States and other external militaries and the United Nations between 1993 and 1995. Crimes of violence and retribution go unpunished by any formal state authority - only family and clan alliances work to maintain the uncertain balances of power among factions. The arms trade flourishes in Somalia, with automatic weapons and light assault ordnance readily available for sale in most of the larger towns. This equipment finds its way into the Somali hinterlands and probably to other parts of Africa and beyond.

Will Somalia turn out to be the environmental nightmare that panics the entire globe? Asian and European companies are reported to be dumping toxic waste off the Somali coast because there is no formal body to take police action. Other groups plunder the Somali fishing

grounds - one of the few remaining global resources still teeming with fish. Rangelands are overgrazed with little restraint because no one is in charge of water or pasture access. Wind erosion and deforestation in some parts of the former nation are among the most severe in the world.

Are the Somalis simply a peace-loving and innocent people who suffer the abuse of power-hungry, capricious leaders playing international agencies against one another? Is the impasse among Somali factions perpetuated by ambitious leaders who receive unprecedented attention in the media and expense-paid travel to peace conferences in comfortable hotels around the world - who enjoy power and attention far beyond the fruits of their own labors?

Are the Somalis harbingers of a new, decentralized, participatory, and democratic future for Africa? Are they the first to incorporate traditional law and governance into modern economic structures? Are they the leading African nation to encourage women's groups and to recognize specific formal authority for women in commerce, reconciliation, and peacekeeping? Are Somalis breaking new ground in localizing planning, decision-making, monitoring and accountability in water development, agriculture, credit, health services, livestock management, and export promotion?

Probably all of those broad-brush characterizations contain elements of truth. Certainly the many voices we heard suggest that there are many Somalias. The task to identify which voices represent the most important aspects of what is happening in Somalia and how a Somali leadership, working with external facilitators, can create an environment in which peace can return, economic growth can blossom, human rights and social equity prevail, and the productivity of Somalia's cultures and natural resources be sustained.

### Institutions emerging in the economic sector

Even though no formal governance, planning or financial management structures are currently in place, the economy is not idle. An energetic and creative spirit has prevailed in Somalia for many generations. It is reappearing in the form of a new laissez-faire posture for private initiatives. Trade between regions in Somalia is developing; exports are picking up in some of the traditional products, including livestock and bananas; hotels, restaurants, and small shops are appearing.

Yet there is a danger in the unrestricted environment in which this growth is taking place. In Mogadishu, Bosaso, Gardo, and Garoe, for example, home and commercial construction is booming - but without any plan or coordination. There is no regulation of what is happening, and the benefits of growth seem to be going to a very small percentage of the people. The potential for a new economic ruling elite, possibly as indifferent to the needs of the people as the previous political elites, is real. But even with the need for regulation, the economic changes of the past several years are undeniably impressive.

Airlines are flying - three Somali-owned carriers (Daallo, African Air International, and Kilimanjaro) fly to three different airfields near Mogadishu, bringing passengers and freight, mostly from Nairobi and Djibouti. There is a flight almost every day, more than in the 1980s when Kenya Airways and Somali Airlines each had one flight a week. Bosaso, previously without air service, has three or four flights a week, mostly from Djibouti and Dubai. In addition, all airports in Somalia receive frequent flights bringing khat from Kenya and Ethiopia.

Consumer goods are generally available. Virtually any food, clothing, or electrical goods one could hope for is available in Mogadishu and sometimes in Bosaso. These include fabrics, radios, stereos, building supplies, air conditioners, tools, clothing, steel sheets and rods, batteries, cigarettes, videotapes and cameras, books and newspapers, and even computers and disks.

Food is available. Basic foods are fully available in the major cities. While much is imported, there appeared to be no shortage, so long as one can pay. Bottled drinks (except for beer) were readily available as well. During the week we were in Bosaso, bananas were just beginning to appear from the Lower Shabelle farms in the south. While it was not exactly clear how they were being shipped, it appeared that they were coming up by truck rather than by sea.

Financial transfers are possible. The banking sector was active, in Mogadishu especially, but also in Bosaso. Because there is no official currency, the banks play little role in formal exchanges from dollars to local shillings. Instead, they deal largely in U.S. dollars. Working mostly through telecommunications facilities, the banking transfers, loans, and letters of credit are facilitated through intermediary banks, usually in the Gulf. We learned that the banking division of Barakaat Telecommunications handles about U.S. \$500,000 a month in transfers. Somali Telecommunications has banking branches in several cities in the south and handles about \$300,000 in transfers per month.

Telephone and communication systems are operating, as well as computers. Somali communications are among the most efficient and inexpensive in Africa. The technology is fully satellite-based and allows instant contact with any part of the world. Barakaat, the largest of the Somali companies, has 59 stations in Mogadishu, 400 mobile phones, and 60 satellite lines for overseas calls. It works through the U.S. communications company ITT and employs 350 people. Another firm, Somali Telecommunications, has 1,000 private phones installed in and around Mogadishu and handles about 5,000 outgoing calls daily. Rates are competitive, largely because of the intense competition among several suppliers of communications services.

Fuel is available - as long as one can pay. Diesel fuel and gasoline are fully available in most cities and towns. Pumped from 55-gallon drums, the fuel powers many trucks and cars that move people and goods around the country. Fuel is also available for generating electricity from local stations maintained throughout Mogadishu and in Bosaso, all under the management of local entrepreneurs. Charges seem to be about \$4.00 per month per fixture (light, radio, or fan) used, which compares favorably with other parts of Africa and Europe. In Bosaso, the power plant linked to the city 'government' generates 661 mega-watts per day and charges consumers U.S. \$1.80 per kilowatt-hour. In both Bosaso and Mogadishu, the power plants run most often from 6:00 p.m. to midnight.

#### **Political institutions appearing**

Organized governance is emerging though for the moment it functions only at local and regional levels, probably the only model that will be effective for at least the next few years. The continuing discussions toward a comprehensive peace agreement must include consideration of the types and scale of political institutions to be adopted. Whether the next set of discussions and possible agreements will focus only on local and regional models is not yet clear. What is clear is that any form of national institution will have only limited power and authority. The wounds and scars of the past ten years are too great at this point to think of a unified and centralized entity. It is therefore ironic - and not very practical - that many of the UN and bilateral agencies find local governance institutions of only minor interest and that centralized national institutions continue to receive the primary attention of donors and international bodies.

Even so, there is a number of encouraging examples of progress in local governance. Limited taxes are being collected, although tax collection continues to be an enormous problem. At present, though the economies of many localities are prospering there is little revenue coming into the public treasury. The port of Bosaso collects customs duties, though

they represent only a fraction of what should be paid. Airport landing fees are also collected but, as with the ports, are incomplete and may not find their way to public expenditures. Thus while there has been progress with some tax collection, it is probably the largest single impediment to moving beyond the current subsistence level in which many Somalis find themselves. For example, while we were staying in Bosaso, the regional governor resigned because he was unable to collect taxes from some of the more influential and powerful business interests, especially at the port, because his political power base in the Bari region parliament was insufficient to oppose the economic and military power of the sub-clan factions. And while there is no way to track diverted (rather than uncollected) funds, it is assumed that they find their way into private hands.

Regional parliaments sit in Bari and Nugal regions; elections were scheduled for the Mudug region. There have been elections in the Northeast Region and members of parliament designated. Yet the lack of formal authority leads to situations such as the governor's resignation. Power in Somalia still resides in combinations of the clan-based parties and the militias. In some cases, militias work directly for the political groups and are paid on the basis of services rendered. In others, the militias work for such private entities as banks, telecommunications, or trading companies, and are loaned, when convenient for the business enterprise, to political groups, usually clan-based.

Importantly, a collaborative committee for North and South Mogadishu is meeting on sectoral issues. The greatest impasse to creating a lasting peace has been in Mogadishu, where the famed 'green line' delimited the zone of Ali Mahdi to the north and Aidid to the south. Yet even this line is fading and barriers disappearing. Business and women's groups are cooperating across the line. A North/South Mogadishu committee, representing needs in education and health, meets periodically to discuss collaboration across zones. Business and commercial interests on both sides are also talking. While the Mogadishu airport and port are not yet open, there is still marked progress in reconciling priorities among different parts of the city.

A police academy is open in Bosaso, with refresher courses for former police officers. A training program is under way to rebuild the old Somali police force. The Bari Parliament has empowered officers to enforce local laws. In Bosaso our group visited a training group of about 125 police officers with the mandate to enforce the laws of Bari region; a problematic task because there are no formally enacted statutes. Instead, the laws are a combination of ordinances left over from the earlier government and the Islamic sharia law. Some of the police said they were enforcing sharia, but there was little evidence to substantiate the claim. Yet despite the fragility of local statutes and lack of money to pay police, these are concrete steps toward restoring local law enforcement.

Local government is beginning to function. Village development committees, councils of elders, and district administrative offices are starting up. For example, in Iskushuban, a District Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Committee has grown out of a PRA training course. The district committee plans to organize basic services such as health and education, as there is little prospect that the regional government will have the resources to do so in the immediate future.

Still, while some health providers are present in Mogadishu and Bosaso - and perhaps elsewhere - and a few schools are open and active, there is no structure within which these institutions function. Many of the staff are working as volunteers; standards are informal and opportunities for career development nonexistent. Yet some remarkable insights into new institutional forms have emerged that suggest that social and human services can be provided in partnership with government or external sources in ways that are sustainable, productive, and equitable. In the Bari region, there is a homegrown flowering of small project activity in

### In the Absence...

areas of education, health, agriculture, conservation, and reforestation. More needs to be learned and understood about these efforts, especially in health, education, police, and the judiciary. Means should be considered to entice overseas and highly skilled Somalis to return home. Raising financial support from the private sector and overseas Somalia is another high priority, and methods should be considered to share what is learned with other parts of Somalia.

### Somalia still a cohesive society

Though torn to shreds by clan hostility, the basic Somali identity, religion, and culture remain resilient. Loyalties to the literature, poetry, and art of Somali culture remain as strong as ever, perhaps in some cases even stronger because of the recent ordeals. Identification with Islam remains strong, and commitment to regaining respect for Somalia in the Horn of Africa is as important now as it was a generation ago. Somalis have learned the bitter lesson that no clan can impose its hegemony on others and that, historically, Somalis have survived precisely through decentralized power sharing politics and systems which have emphasized checks and balances. This cultural cohesiveness forms a substantial foundation upon which to rebuild. Though the shape and structure of the new Somali society is yet to be defined, though the style of decentralization is still emerging, and though the means of maintaining the economy and resource base are yet to be agreed, the will to do so is present.

### The role of donors

As Somalis struggle to create a polity that matches their relatively decentralized and energetic civil society, donors should consider ways to assist, facilitate, and catalyze responsible decentralization without suffocating it with inappropriate 'help'. There have been a number of encouraging precedents: European Community projects; jointed funded European Community, United Nations, and bilateral projects such as War-Torn Society activities; UN Development Program projects; several different NGO efforts; UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) offerings; the NGO program of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); and German Aid's community-based assessment and action program have all made important differences in local communities.

Future donors need to understand that earlier forms of 'aid through the center' were part of the problem of the old regime and that Somalia's future well-being lies in seeking balance between the center and the periphery. Unfortunately, donors, including NGOs, have very little experience with decentralized development. Major changes and restructuring of donor procedures will be required to accommodate small projects managed by local institutions. Donor efforts to train and develop local institutions are very important, and will be of value to all members of Somali society.

### Signs of a new civil society

Somalia is a different society than it was three years ago. While major problems continue and security issues are always smoldering just below the surface of daily life, things have changed greatly. At 10:00 p.m. in Bosaso, the streets are packed with people and the teashops filled with conversation. In a random and informal survey on a thirty-minute trek through the market, one team member did not see a single automatic weapon other than those of the security guards who still accompany almost every vehicle and patrol most residences and places of business. This is a major change from a similar trek three years ago, when two team members were in Bosaso and saw dozens of guns in the street, day and night.

Perhaps even more striking, in Mogadishu arms were carried only by security guards and the political militia. Private citizens apparently no longer feel the need to go about armed. In

another new development, a Mogadishu women's group is emerging as a powerful force, working in collaboration with elders, to bring together competing political factions. It suggests that most of the conflicting parties have agreed that Siyad's ways are unacceptable and the violence of the post-Siyad era is destroying the nation and the culture. Yet at present, progress is episodic. One promising exception has been the European Union's discussion seminars, which explore models of decentralization and suggest alternative modes of governance for Somalia to consider. A more systematic assessment of what is now working would be of enormous value.

### Facilitating peace

A set of 'enabling conditions' for a settlement that ensures sustainable peace and productive development will include at least ten elements.

These enabling conditions must take into account two persistent characteristics of Somali politics - abhorrence of centralization and fierce individualism. Rather, they are the themes that seemed to be most pervasive and that need to be discussed among the stakeholders in the new Somalia.

1. *Local autonomy.* A spirit of local autonomy pervades the society and ought to be enhanced and formalized. The most extreme reaction to Siyad has been the assertion of the right to self-determination by some regions, particularly the creation of the Republic of Somaliland. More recently, the leaders of the Northeast Regions have declared internal autonomy as the Puntland Federal Somali Republic.
2. *Power sharing.* People seek broad-based power sharing, both as an echo of the past and as a search for a more participatory future. External groups should join with local communities to reinforce quests for power sharing. Historically, Somali politics were based on the sharing of power among clans, families, and elders, and the tradition runs very deep. Clans would bicker and, if necessary, fight for the preservation of their land access, water rights, and grazing territory. Yet no elder believed that he could impose a military or political hegemony on the others. Instead, each sought only to preserve access to and control of the clan's livelihood resources, within a system of reciprocity.
3. *Decentralization.* People favor decentralization and devolution of power. Many examples have already emerged in local settings. These models should be examined for possible adaptations to other situations.
4. *Role of women.* Women are playing an increasingly prominent role in Somali civil society. These initiatives have won respect among men and women alike and offer a means to build bridges between hostile clan groups. Women's groups require special support and consideration for any lasting peace. In the past few years, women have assumed new roles in the economy, including taking jobs in retailing, money changing, and local distribution of imported goods. Somali women have adopted these practices as one of the few ways they can earn livelihoods for their families in the midst of the collapse of more traditional forms of agricultural and rural vocation. Given these new roles for women and women's groups, such a focus on gender represents an essential and serious element to incorporate into eventual peace strategies.
5. *Islam.* An Islamic revival is evident. It reflects core values based on Somali tradition rather than on the fundamentalist political forms seen elsewhere in the Middle East. Somalia's Islamic revival promises to strengthen institutions of civil society and should be reinforced. Regardless of the subtleties of Islam in Somalia, it is one of the few elements that virtually

all Somalis support to some degree. It provides a code of moral and ethical behavior, it bolsters Somali cultural tradition by offering a system in which the rulings of elders are accepted, and it brings a tradition of continuity greatly needed in Somalia's struggle to bring order out of the last decade of chaos. The presence of traditional Islamic ethics, codes, and laws of conduct offers one piece of a foundation upon which the new Somalia can be built.

6. *Market economy.* A free and unregulated market economy has emerged and its growth should be encouraged. As described earlier, there is now a thriving free-market economy in many Somali cities. Investments during the past few years have produced a solid foundation upon which to expand.

7. *Local adaptation.* Somalis have been ingenious at adapting external technologies and management systems to meet needs at local levels. The spirit of innovation and creativity ought to be encouraged at regional and national levels as well. Somalis have always been creative adapters. The extreme challenges of the past decade have elicited amazing technologies and systems, based mostly on the imaginative use of available resources. Any agreement for Somalia's future must consider how it can focus on and benefit from the remarkable creativity and resourcefulness of its people.

8. *Traditional institutions.* Somali culture is rich in traditional institutions evidenced in its system of land management, agricultural and grazing systems, conflict mediation, legal adjudication, and many related functions. These traditional practices are part of the support system needed to make any new settlement effective and sustainable.

Somalis are not lacking in traditional skills and institutions concerned with peace and reconciliation. For example, many clan traditions prohibit marriage within the sub-clan. Other examples exist of the *guurti* (body of clan elders) forming clan-based councils to make policy or decisions that will affect many sub-clans. The months long 1993 meeting in Borama that eventually set a constitution for the northwest was precisely this type of council meeting. This council included groups from three different major clans - Isaaq, Dir and Darood - in the northwest and succeeded not only in creating a constitution but also in appointing the government of the newly proclaimed Somaliland Republic. In this arrangement, the government is accountable to a multiclan council rather than to a particular clan. Other councils of elders have been just as successful in their areas, creating, for example, the Gardo Council of Elders. The institutions that have both mandates for and experience in conflict resolution have valuable and continuing responsibilities in establishing peace.

Many people throughout Somalia assured us that these institutions are alive and well and continue to enjoy great respect. While Western constitutionalism and legal proceedings are important in any settlement, so are the traditions that people already value and honor.

9. *Free press.* Somalis have a tradition of speaking frankly on any issue. At present, several informal newspapers, mostly in Mogadishu, present various perspectives on the current situation. Many of these views are highly critical of established political authority. Free speech and open debate need to continue if there is to be a lasting peace.

There is an active, influential, bold, and generally free press in many parts of Somalia, publishing in the Somali language and criticizing virtually all those in economic, political, and military power - domestic and overseas. Papers print many stories that would probably be judged libelous by standards of Europe and the United States. Yet Somalis tolerate and even encourage the criticism. The press provides a means of expressing new ideas and voicing opposition to the practices of some of the leaders.

10. *Regional links.* Relations with neighboring states are improving and need to be nurtured. Because of pan-Somali nationalism, Somalia's continuing relations with its neighbors have

generally been sticky, even belligerent. Somalia supported a limited guerrilla war in northern Kenya in the late 1960s, which British troops eventually quelled. There have been several border conflicts with Ethiopia, beginning in 1964 and concluding with the full-scale war in 1976-77. Perhaps most remarkable has been the emergence of generally good relationships between Somalia and Ethiopia. This is why Ethiopia was able to convene, with the support of UNOSOM, several major Somali peace conferences in Addis Ababa. At present, however, there are some clouds hanging on the Somali-Ethiopian horizon. Ethiopia is angry with the Somali Islamic fundamentalists, especially those of Gedo, because of the impact they are having on the Somali-speaking region of Ethiopia. Ethiopia has therefore sent several military parties across the Somali border, at the invitation of some of the Somali clan factions, to combat the fundamentalists. This has produced a minority anti-Ethiopian sentiment among some sectors of Somali society. Despite this blip in external relations, for the first time in history Somalia and its neighbors enjoy generally good relations. Unfortunately, a major war has broken out between Ethiopia and Eritrea, creating confusion in the Horn of Africa.

### Some thoughts for the future

Several steps need to follow if the leveraging tools are to have impact. Many efforts that are already underway require continued financial support. These include:

- instruction in democratic processes, civic education, voter/balloting procedures, and reconciliation activities, as currently supported by groups such as the Life and Peace Institute, the War-Torn Societies Project, ANAPAEST, UNICEF, UNESCO, and others;
- expanded support to Somali NGOs that have been spearheading much of the civic education efforts;
- more attention to converting humanitarian programs and civil society training into explicit community-based development planning and action;
- scaling up local community action plans to formulate district and regional rehabilitation and development plans;
- managing and regulating commercial entrepreneurship;
- ensuring independence of legislative action, policy, law, and court systems;
- supporting freedom of movement, including peaceful reentry of refugees, even if their homes are located in areas controlled by other clans;
- reestablishment of interpersonal relations that cut across clan lines; and resuscitation of local economies, with people able to reclaim their assets and to engage in their customary occupations.

These activities are already underway in small-scale operations. Methods are known, and institutions are in place to implement them. One needs only to consider gradual expansion of this work. To carry out such work involves new planning, reinvigorated alliances across clan and faction lines, new policy efforts on the part of donors, and new and creative sources of funding.

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