

A Reflection

LEARNING FROM SOMALILAND ON PEACE BUILDING

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BACKGROUND

Somali Republic was a state formed in 1960 combining the British Somaliland a protectorate, with Italian Somaliland, an enclave stretching from Cape Asir to the Kenyan border. In 1969, Siad Barre took power through a coup after the assassination of Abdirashid Ali Shermarke the second President of Somalia. Under Barre Somalia fought the Ogaden war in 1977 -1979, in which the forces of Somalia were pushed out of Ogaden by the combined Cuban-Russian support to Ethiopia's Mengistu. In 1988, the Barre regime committed massacres in Somaliland and this led to disaffection between communities in this region with the rest of Somalia. When the Somali civil war broke out in 1991, and Siad Barre ousted from power Somaliland wasted no time but declared unilateral independence.

Somaliland carved its border into twelve regions from the border with Djibouti to its border with Puntland at the very tip of the horn of Africa. Somaliland did not experience the type of conflict as is witnessed in Somalia, but it has had its own types of instability and challenges of security. Internally insurgency of Al-Shabaab threaten stability. But as the current President Salanyo pointed out, these are part of its responsibility as part of the international community.

These aspects notwithstanding, Somaliland has experienced a period of conflict transformation. This happened, without any of the so popularized truth commissions elsewhere in the developing countries. The aspect of not using truth commissions the way they are known to function lends some different experiences worth noting. It is perhaps the only country in its situation to thrive without any international recognition for over 20 years. It has peacefully conducted 3 Presidential elections (1997, 2003, & 2010); a constitutional referendum (2001); and elections for House of Representatives (2005)¹. This is not to suggest that things were rosy and smooth. Along the shores of its coastline thrives piracy and terrorism in the high seas². Somaliland has therefore gone through a challenging time in resolving conflicts and promoting transformation of its people to accomplish its peace building momentum and this provides lessons to learn from. The local zest of approaches to peace dominate and are conspicuous as pillars in its peace processes.

The following lessons are shared courtesy of the learning and exchange portal of the DM&E, as well as Insight on Conflict. It is also informed by the author's personal experiences in peace building in the context Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and Sudan and Southern Sudan.

LESSONS

The Somaliland peace process was independent from an external influence, and the interests of the Somaliland people were at center-stage. Though admittedly some international NGOs were providing funds and logistics to the process, however their involvement was kept to minimum by the Somaliland leaders.

Internally, understanding the genesis of conflict and not defining it from external frame of reference for conflict transformation and pillars of peace that are sustainable: Often the issues and drivers of conflict are analyzed and defined by externalities (external persons, institutions and parameters of reference) to the problem. In Somaliland, communities and the local authorities including central government understood their source of conflict as division and contention with who they are (identity) and also defining a common enemy as a cause of division among themselves. They defined the channels of dialogue and action for themselves. They defined dialogue as he means for use in identifying the root causes of conflict, the drivers of conflict and linked the solutions to conflict transformation at household and clan level, and to building pillars of peace that were sustainable.

Peace as a process independent of security mechanism and agencies: Peace is not an event, activity or intervention but a way of life with its genesis in individual choices. The process begins with one individual and not in the larger community or country to individuals.

Peace as a different paradigm from security and from safety. Peace as a concept is different from security and safety although the three are intertwined. In Somaliland, people embraced peace as a dimension of no aggression or violence whether armed or otherwise, between people and this led to the dialogue, disarmament, demobilizations and reintegration process.

Peace as borne of individual people's interest, motivation, choice and decisions for action. In Somaliland, was independent from an external influence, and the interests of the Somaliland people were at center-stage. The people demonstrated commitment to a choice for peace in that they accepted that dialogue process as it always led to local decisions for action. This contributed to a process of reconciliation.

Local paradigms of peace can lead into legitimate effective peace processes: It is noteworthy that in Somaliland the idea of Truth and reconciliation commission was not adopted. This presents another level of learning that local paradigms of peace lead into processes that bring out dialogue for reconciliation, healing, peace building and cohesion. Cohesion cannot be at the beginning as people have to make choices towards forgiving, healing, letting go the past and reach out to embrace each other for peace.

The central idea of local reconciliation and peace-building before rushing to central state-building is relevant both in time, context and content in the peace processes of any given people. In Somaliland, this was true of the process that was undertaken. Even though supported by Civil society, the government and civil society played limed roles.

The peace paradigm is different for the paradigm of security or stability: the peace paradigm includes within it an immediacy of justice and freedom as imperatives. Even though the three concepts are intertwined and feed one into the other, the approach to each is different. In Somaliland, the local safety and security aspects were left to local communities but had support from central government. The local communities dealt directly with imperatives of justice where wrong were done and restored the aggrieved as well as the aggressor. *Restorative justice* had elements of promoting justice and freedom at the same time. Lengthy bureaucracies associated with formal court procedures were not in play at the community level and this tendered to enhance application of the local justice system which the majority of community members embraced thus promoting immediacy of action and conclusion of cases in acceptable manner to communities.

Peace initiatives based on non-legitimate means and practices lead to very transient measures of peace: Central government might itself be vested with unperceived drivers of conflict due to actions, decisions, approaches and manner of pursuing peace initiatives in non-legitimate means and practices. In Somaliland, even the national leaders were sanctionable by local peace groups at the clan and "gate" (sub-clan) level

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on these aspects is as instructive and it is challenging. Every conflict situation requires sensitivity; adaptation of local insights; identification and proactive engagement the local wealth of resource persons and also content. These lessons call for deeper analysis and appropriation to different conflict situations and contexts of conflict content. Drivers of conflict, time and stage of conflict in contrast to *Pillars of Peace*, also need to be explored along the way if the lessons will help to address conflict transformation.

¹ World Bank: World Bank Fact Book 2011