

# Opportunities for peace in Kismayo, Somalia

Executive Summary

Insights from local peacebuilders on the causes  
of violent conflict and the prospects for peace

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AMISOM

# Executive Summary

**Over 3.5 million people in Somalia have been affected by war and famine in the past 30 years. Fighting between rival warlords and the activities of Islamic militants like Al-Shabaab have destroyed much of the country's infrastructure and forced over one million people to flee their homes to Kenya.**

Between 1991 to 2012, successive Transitional Federal Governments (TFG) were unable to implement rule of law. This left the country largely dependent on health relief and food aid, and much of its population were left to deal with the consequences of conflict without adequate access to aid.

In 2012, a limited, indirect election of a new federal parliament and president took place. The new Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) was established in August, concurrent with the end of the Transition Federal Government's mandate, and represents the first permanent central government in the country since the start of the civil war.

The city of Kismayo in the south-east of the country is home to more than 30 rival clans and 2,000 militia members, all competing for political and economic power. Al-Shabaab remains approximately 30 km outside the city, its threat ever-present. Political, economic and social tensions threaten a hard-won sense of stability, and marginalisation coupled with large scale population displacement and ineffective state security contribute to the volatility of the

context. Since 2015, Peace Direct has worked in Kismayo with the Social-life and Agricultural Development Organisation (SADO), a Somali organisation that provides livelihoods opportunities to young people in the region through skills training in mechanics, electronics and tailoring. SADO supports local young people to get jobs and earn an income, providing a practical alternative to militant groups or the treacherous boat journey across the Mediterranean.

This report presents the findings of Peace Direct's first Peace Exchange workshop in Kismayo, a practitioner-led conflict analysis workshop (subsequently referred to as 'Peace Exchange'), bringing together 24 representatives from grassroots peacebuilding organisations from within Kismayo. The main objective of the workshop was to provide a forum where local peacebuilding organisations could discuss the drivers of conflict, the key challenges to peace in Kismayo, and to collect information on best practice in local peacebuilding to identify successful peacebuilding initiatives within Kismayo.

## The main findings

The participants in the Peace Exchange process identified two primary obstacles to peacebuilding in Kismayo:

- **The absence of functioning state institutions.** Though the government of Somalia has attempted to establish formal institutions for justice and rule of law, the formal court systems are fairly weak and corrupt, and are beholden to clan competition for positions of power. While governance systems within Kismayo are more representative and less corrupt, Kismayo residents still rely primarily on traditional systems of governance and justice.
- **The over-reliance on navigating social systems through clan dynamics.** Clan relations determine how groups can secure access to economic resources both inside and outside formal institutions. Police and law enforcement are largely arranged along clan lines, and residents rely primarily on their respective clan members to address issues.

In addition, local peacebuilders identified four secondary obstacles to peacebuilding:

- Peripheral insecurity resulting from the continued operation of Al-Shabaab and the absence of functioning state entities with the capacity to shut these operations down;
- High rates of unemployment in Kismayo and wider Jubaland – particularly amongst youth – leaving the population vulnerable to manipulation by warring elites;
- Land tenure and environmental degradation – specifically the impact of the control over the production and illegal export of charcoal by Al-Shabaab;
- An education gap whereby youth lack particular skills required to maximise economic opportunities open to them.

Throughout the Peace Exchange it became clear that traditional local peacebuilding actors continue to play a vital role in Kismayo. However, both short-term and long-term strategies involving all actors – including grassroots organisations – would need to be adopted if peacebuilding processes are to be successful.

## Key strengths of local peacebuilders

- Local civil society actors, including women's and youth groups, play an extremely important peacebuilding role in Kismayo. When local disputes cannot be dealt with autonomously, local peacebuilding groups are relied upon to prevent escalation. They have been the primary actors in developing conflict resolution mechanisms, and communities depend on them to establish trust during dispute processes.
- The roles of traditional clan elders, while not as prominent as they had once been, still command the most respect and influence in Kismayo. As state institutions have been traditionally weak, communities prefer to rely more heavily on the traditional systems than they do on the police and justice system. Elders are relied upon to vet the recruitment of police officers and civil servants. The traditional clan structure and its associated justice mechanisms has been one of the most durable and authentic institutions that Somalis have trusted throughout the conflicts.
- Local civil society groups and clan elders frequently collaborate with one another to support dispute resolution, ensuring that disputes are dealt with in a timely manner. This collaboration extends to information sharing with security institutions to control outbreaks of violence and resolve security issues as they arise.
- Women in Kismayo play a critical role in brokering peace. Women's position in Somali society is often contradictory – expected to mobilise and arm sons and husbands, they are equally associated with teaching and parenting against violence, stepping in and disarming their kinsmen.<sup>1</sup> However, with their ability to move in and out of conflict their role is increasingly seen by participants in the workshop as one of a relatively 'neutral' party, providing them with a potential role in facilitating dialogue among conflicting parties. In many cases, they have broken through the strict patriarchal structures which have previously prevented women's participation. Many of them have become peace ambassadors and activists who actively engage in peacebuilding.

Despite these strengths, the challenges faced by local peacebuilders in Somalia and Kismayo are significant. Limited resources (both financial and trained human resources), limited accurate information sharing from government and security forces, potential targeting by violent actors, and mistrust between civil society and local government, will need to be addressed if the nascent peacebuilding processes are to have any impact.



<sup>1</sup> Women, Conflict and Peace: Learning from Kismayo (2018): <https://www.peacedirect.org/publications/women-conflict-and-peace-learning-from-kismayo/>

## Recommendations

As a result of the findings, and building on earlier Peace Exchanges, Peace Direct has identified a number of recommendations. These can be acted upon by local, *gobol*<sup>2</sup> (regional), national and international organisations, and would contribute to peacebuilding policy and practice both within Kismayo, and Somalia at large.

- **Identify the strengths of traditional social structures and government institutions in order to support peacebuilding processes.** Stakeholders at all levels in the peacebuilding process should work towards an integrative system of stable governance. They should focus on supporting the creation of inclusive state institutions that foster a united national Somali identity. To be successful at a local and national level, the importance of traditional governance mechanisms – such as the role of clan elders in the community – should be acknowledged and respected. It is critical that ways are found to incorporate traditional systems (principally clan kinship) such that these can function within the political boundaries of state institutions as they are re-established and strengthened. Establishing shared consultation and decision-making processes between clan leadership and national institutions would provide a starting point for this process.
- **Strengthen local frameworks that allow meaningful national dialogue on peacebuilding.** A cohesive and strengthened dialogue framework is needed at local and *gobol* levels to connect to dialogue at the national level. This should start with the creation of relevant public channels through which the security forces can responsibly share information on security threats and incidents and should include frameworks through which CSOs and citizens can provide feedback on the performance of the security forces.
- **The participation of women and youth in peacebuilding processes should be better coordinated and supported to ensure their meaningful inclusion.** Women have played significant roles both in sustaining conflict and in building peace. Youth represent the majority of the Somali population, yet they are most affected by economic insecurity and are often targeted by extremist groups for recruitment. At the same time, youth have had a growing influence as peacebuilders. Support for inclusive processes should continue to be developed at local, *gobol* and national level. They must afford these groups an equal voice about how the conflict has affected them, what peace looks like and how peace can be achieved, as well as the measures needed to achieve their rights. Existing women's rights and youth platforms in country should be supported by actors from the local through to the international level to have the capacity to engage in peace dialogues.
- **Civil society and grassroots groups should have prominent roles in peacebuilding processes.** Like women and youth, ensuring a prominent role for civil society and grassroots groups in the process of conflict resolution and peacebuilding is fundamental. Within the context of strengthening institutions and enhanced governance structures, the spaces occupied by civil society and grassroots groups must be respected, allowing both civil society and grassroots actors to function as an independent counterpoint to government at a local, *gobol* and national level. These groups must retain their independence if they are to support and strengthen governance through both a collaborative and a constructive approach.
- **Build the capacity of local peacebuilding organisations.** Although CSOs prioritise the development of local human capital, they lack access to practical training on technical skills, including financial and organisational management. Access to this training will require the commitment from international and local donors or partners to providing adequate resources and support. This type of capacity building should be considered as part of a broader process of coordinating and supporting peacebuilding processes at a *gobol* and national level.
- **The stabilising process should look beyond military actions towards building a resilient society and state.** The continued physical security challenges – the consequence of a weak national security sector – across Somalia mask the broader and more fundamental challenges resulting from a lack of investment in infrastructure, education and health services. If these challenges are to be addressed, a significant resource investment is needed urgently. Ensuring a commitment at a national and international level for this purpose should be prioritised.





AU-UN IST / Stuart Price

## About Peace Direct


Peace Direct works with local people to stop violence and build sustainable peace. We believe that local people should lead all peacebuilding efforts, and this report is the latest in a series canvassing local views on violent conflicts around the world in an effort to highlight local capacities for peace and local expertise.


For more information on this series of reports, please contact us.

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