Opportunities for peace in Kismayo, Somalia

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

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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 practioner-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 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. 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.1 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.

- 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.1 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.

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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 (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 youth. 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.

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2 Gobol is a Somali term used to refer to an administrative geographic unit in Somalia
1. Introduction

Somalia has experienced over 30 years of armed conflict and violence, creating one of the most complex, multidimensional security crises in the world. The violent civil war that led to state collapse in 1991 created a vacuum that divided the country into a patchwork of fiefdoms fought over by warlords and armed groups, killing tens of thousands, displacing millions and creating a war economy that has shaped political dynamics since.

Section 2 provides an overview of the methodology used. Section 3 provides an historical overview of the various conflicts in Somalia and the Kismayo conflict in particular. Section 4 outlines some of the key challenges for peace in Kismayo, as identified by local Somali peacebuilders, and explores the themes of clan relations and the lack of governance and rule of law. It also takes into consideration the social, environmental and economic obstacles that hinder building peace and stability in the country.

Section 5 looks at what local peacebuilders are currently doing to contribute to establishing and maintaining peace. Both in contributing to the resolution of conflict, as well as the strategies they have developed to respond to and prevent violent conflict.

The final section puts forward a number of recommendations for national and international actors to consider towards building peace and stability in Kismayo, and more broadly in Somalia.
A history of Somalia’s conflict

1991 President Mohamed Siad Barres is ousted by the United Somali Congress after 22 years in power. Somaliland declares independence.

1992 The US leads a UN-sponsored peacekeeping mission, UNOSOM, to restore peace. It fails to avert famine and infighting.


1998 The northern province of Puntland follows Somaliland’s example and declares its independence from Somalia.

2003–2005 A transitional government is inaugurated, despite bitter divisions among its members.

2006 The Islamic Courts Union (ICU) seizes control of most of southern Somalia and captures Mogadishu. Ethiopian troops reenter Somalia.


2008 Al-Shabaab conquers the southern port city of Kismayo.

2010 The transitional period is extended by two years. Ethiopia completes a withdrawal. Al-Shabaab insurgents launch major attack on the government and gain upper hand, controlling large swathes of territory.

2011 Kenya invades southern Somalia. Ethiopia sends troops back in weeks later and AU forces step up operations, increasing pressure on Al-Shabaab.

2012 Ethiopian and government forces capture Baidoa. Kenyan-led AU forces push Al-Shabaab out of Kismayo, their last major stronghold on the Somali coast. The Somali parliament selects Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as the president.

2013 The UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) is established and the US officially recognises the Somali government. The Westgate Mall in Nairobi is attacked by Al-Shabaab militants.

2015 Al-Shabaab attacks Garissa University College in Kenya, killing 148 people, most of them students. AMISOM announces a new military operation against Al-Shabaab.

2017 Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmajo” is selected as Somalia’s president following a protracted and controversial electoral process. Somalia is struck by its deadliest attack when an Al-Shabaab truck bomb kills 587 people in Mogadishu.

2019 Somalia expels the UN top envoy, Nicolas Haysom, accusing him of interfering in Somali affairs.

2020–2021 Al-Shabaab launches an attack on the capital Mogadishu, killing more than 40 people.

2021 The government and opposition agree to form a national unity government.

Somalia Key Facts

- The population stands at 14.74 million (2017 estimate)
- GDP per capita in Somalia: $499.82 (2017 estimate)
- Average GDP per capita in Horn of Africa: $949.20 (2017 estimate)
- Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.50, leaving it in 188th place with Central African Republic

Kismayo Key Facts

- Kismayo is located in the Juba Valley in southeastern Somalia, on the Indian Ocean coast.
- A major port city and the capital of Lower Juba (Jubbada Hoose), it is the commercial capital of the autonomous Jubaland region.
2. Methodology

This report is based on the discussions that took place during the Peace Exchange workshop organised by Peace Direct with its partner the Social-Life Agricultural Development Organisation (SADO) in Kismayo between 10–12 December 2018.

The Peace Exchange workshop is a component of the Local Voices for Peace project (LVP), funded by the United States Institute of Peace. LVP aims to improve international peacebuilding policies and practice in fragile and conflict-affected states by bringing together local peacebuilders to inform a collective analysis of the local conflict and peacebuilding dynamics.

The workshop sought to provide a space in which local organisations and peacebuilders could work on a collective analysis of peace issues in Kismayo. It allowed local peacebuilders to identify and discuss the blockages they face in the peacebuilding process, mutual support systems, and successful examples of local peacebuilding. The workshop also provided the opportunity for participants to explore a broader, better co-ordinated collaboration between civil society and government entities, and identify how the international community could support peacebuilding initiatives in Kismayo specifically, and Somalia more broadly.

A facilitated discussion took place over three days on local peacebuilding needs, opportunities and challenges. A total of 24 representatives from grassroots civil society organisations (CSO) working in Kismayo were brought together for the workshop, with some limited representation from the business community, the local government and religious leadership for parts of the workshop. The choice of these organisations was based on the findings of a scoping exercise that took place prior to the event. The gender composition of the group was considered, with an equal number of female and male representatives invited to take part. While attempts were made to ensure that representatives from the various clans within Kismayo took part in the workshop, the leadership positions in most of the organisations and institutions that took part came from three main sub-clans. Where possible to do so, elders from smaller clans and associated groups were interviewed during or just after the Peace Exchange took place.

Findings were produced from discussions that took place during the Peace Exchange and follow-up conversations with key informants. Additional data was obtained from background research carried out by a local consultant and Peace Direct staff, using both peer-reviewed, and grey literature. Case studies presented in this report are based on additional semi-structured interviews of participants conducted at the end of, and immediately after the Peace Exchange.

The main conclusions and recommendations in this report were reached by consensus throughout the discussion. Participants sometimes held differing views during the Peace Exchange and these are highlighted in the report. Consent was given verbally by participants, who were willing for their insights, comments and pictures to be included in the findings of this report. A full list of participating CSOs can be found in the annex.

The contents of this report are the responsibility of Peace Direct. The text in this report should not be taken to represent the views of any individual.
A full-scale civil war erupted in 1989 and the government collapsed in 1991, ousted by rebel groups, most notably the United Somali Congress led by Mohamed Farrah Aidid. The collapse of the government left a power vacuum which resulted in further anarchy and civil war. The same year a serious drought took hold and food became increasingly scarce. Political and social chaos grew, and a war economy based on the control of diverted aid and illicit goods became entrenched, surviving to varying degrees to this day.

The ongoing conflict in Somalia has been characterised by a range of political, economic, cultural causes and drivers. Peripheral and internal actors have played different roles during the various stages of the conflict.

Clan identity, warlords and militia

Traditionally, the Somali people are divided by clan affiliations which form the most important component of their identity. The Somali population is divided into four major clans and a number of minority groups. Each of these major clans consists of sub-clans and extended family networks. Clan divisions have been a source of conflict that has been used first by the state and then by different warring factions to divide Somalis, to fuel endemic clashes over resources and power, and mobilise militia. This has made broad-based reconciliation very difficult to achieve.

The failure, collapse and eventual disintegration of the Somali state since 1991 has facilitated the emergence of civil militia groups, often aligned to various political clan groupings. These militia groups operate under the pretext of providing security to their clansmen and, in the process, have created security dilemmas where clans arm themselves in anticipation of attacks by rival clans. Competition for power and/or resources continues to be among the leading causes of continued conflict among and between clans and militia groups.

Access to weapons

Somalia’s strategic location on the oil routes from the Persian Gulf saw global powers vying to exert their influence and control over the country, providing both arms and economic aid to Somalia at different points during the Cold War. The military hardware left behind after the Cold War provided militia with the means with which to control food as a weapon of power and led to the country’s long-term destabilisation.

In an attempt to protect civilians and curb the further flow of weapons to those involved in the Somali civil war following the ousting of Barre in 1991, the UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo on the country in 1992. This embargo was partially lifted in 2013, as a result of which the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in South Central Somalia has legally received more than 17,500 weapons and nine million rounds of ammunition. It continues to campaign to have the embargo lifted, claiming that it needs new weapons for a poorly-equipped army, which is fighting Al-Shabaab. However, in spite of its claims that no government weapons will fall into the hands of the militia groups, the FGS is still considered to lack the capacity to prevent the continued diversion of its own weaponry and military equipment to other armed groups and to Somalia’s domestic arms market. Concerned that with few safeguards and controls in place, lifting the embargo could allow even more unregulated weapons into Somalia. Therefore, the UN Security Council voted in November 2018 to maintain the existing arms embargo and the ban on trade in charcoal, both of which were and continue to be important sources of income for Al-Shabaab militants.

3. A background to conflict in Somalia

Somalia has experienced continual political upheaval since its creation and formal independence from European rule in 1960. In 1969, a coup d’etat led by major general Jaalle Mohamed Siad Barre, overthrew the Somali Republic. While Barre’s early rule was initially characterised by a programme of widespread and accelerated modernisation, social and political unrest grew in the 1980s due to his increasingly dictatorial rule, the resurgence of tribal politics, the abuses of the National Security Service (including the Isaaq Genocide), and the sharp decline of Somalia’s economy.

In spite of the embargo, twenty years of civil war have left Somalia with significant unregulated stockpiles of small arms and light weapons. While the exact number of firearms in the hands of civilians is unknown, it is estimated that the figure is between 550,000 and 750,000, of which only approximately 14,000 are registered in some form. Between 2004 and 2011, the UN Monitoring Group reported almost 50,000 instances involving the transfer of small arms and light weapons, including the diversion from state stockpiles. Small arms and light weapons remain the primary tools of violence, causing the deaths and injury of military, militia and civilians alike. The relative ease with which they are available contributes to the escalation of insecurity and duration of violence. In turn, the increased military spending that results from these high levels of insecurity diverts state resources from critical areas of social and economic development.

**Intervention by international actors**

Since the collapse of the central government in 1991, Somalia has experienced foreign interventions involving several international actors, many of whom have become entrenched in Somalia’s statehood process.


Established in April 1992, the United Nations Operation in Somalia I (UNOSOM I) was the first part of a UN-sponsored effort with a mission to provide humanitarian relief in Somalia, and to monitor the first UN-brokered ceasefire of the Somali Civil War. The ceasefire was ignored, and relief operations effectively halted, the United Task Force (UNITAF), under the leadership of the US and its military, entered Somalia. At the beginning of 1993, the most prominent of Somalia’s political and rebel factions agreed to hand over their weapons to UNITAF, and over $130 million was pledged by international donors to assist in reconstruction. This did not bring about the stability hoped for, and in the same year the UN decided to transform the UNITAF mission to the United Nations Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II), with a mandate to restore peace and rebuild the Somali state and economy.

Although UNOSOM I & II and UNITAF averted mass starvation, the political and economic roots of the crisis remained unresolved. By dealing solely with military leaders and not including civil society in discussions, local efforts toward humanitarian reconstruction and ultimately peacebuilding went unsupported. Arguably, exacerbating existing difficulties by continuing to strengthen the position of militia leaders.

**African Union Mission in Somalia**

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was created by the African Union’s Peace and Security Council in January 2007. It was originally conceived as a transitory UN-backed peace support mission, mandated to support transitional governmental structures, implement a national security plan and to train the Somali security forces. It was also there to assist in creating a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian aid.

This mandate is reviewed every six months and has most recently been extended to May 2019. AMISOM also supports the Transitional Federal Government’s (TFG) forces against Al-Shabaab militants. Although initially a marginal peacekeeping force of privately trained Ugandan soldiers, AMISOM has since expanded in size and in scope of mandate and is now made up of approximately 22,000 troops from Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, and Sierra Leone. AMISOM is atypical, as unlike other peace-supporting missions it has taken the lead role in the counterinsurgency campaign. Arguably, the de facto army until the Somali National Army (SNA) is strong enough to counter insurgent groups on its own. Its extended presence in Somalia could contribute to the TGS lacking an incentive to invest in the SNA, and this lack of investment has the potential to create a vacuum that could be infiltrated once more by Al-Shabaab.

Religious groups

Religion has been a significant contributor to conflict in Somalia. Starting in 2000, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) — a union of Sharia courts — presented a significant challenge to the central government, at one point briefly taking control of the government and much of South-Central Somalia. In 2006, the ICU was defeated by Somalia’s TFG and its Ethiopian military allies, splintering into different groups. One of these, Harakat Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidin (known as Al-Shabaab, meaning ‘The Youth’) originated as the armed wing of the ICU. By this stage, Al-Shabaab had transformed into a formidable armed opposition to the TGF, garnering support in Somalia and across the Horn of Africa. A power struggle in the early 2010s led to splintering within the movement, enabling its most militant members to take over and engage in a more aggressive campaign against the Somali government.

By 2012, faced with a strengthened transitional federal government backed by AMISOM troops and US drone support, Al-Shabaab had lost all its major city strongholds, including Kismayo, and was forced to retreat into rural areas in southern Somalia. This retreat notwithstanding, Al-Shabaab has proven remarkably resilient, and continues to attract sectors of Somali society who see it as an ideological challenge to the Federal Government.

**Youth unemployment**

While no census has been taken since 1975, it was estimated in 2016 that by 2018, over 70% of the Somali population would be under 30. Data on youth unemployment is limited, but the World Bank estimates that around 67% of Somalis aged 14 to 29 are unemployed.

The State is unable to provide adequate education and health services, while vital sectors of the economy which could ensure employment are underdeveloped. In the absence of a tangible education and income-generating agenda, the largely illiterate youth with no livelihood skills, leave the country in search of better opportunities.

60% of Somali youth interviewed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stated that they intended to leave the country for better livelihood opportunities. Those that remain are vulnerable to manipulation by different warring elites.

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**12 GunPolicy.org. “Somalia – Gun Facts and the Law”**
**18 UNDP, “Somali Youth Feel Hopeful, Despite Challenges”**
**19 UNDP, “Somali Youth Feel Hopeful, Despite Challenges”**
**21 UNDP, “Somali Youth Feel Hopeful, Despite Challenges”**
**22 Ibid.**
With the fall of the Barre regime in 1991, Kismayo and its surrounding areas became a staging ground for a series of militias and warlords vying to control the city and the port. Between 1991 and 2012, Kismayo was controlled by more than 10 different groups, including clan warlords and Al-Shabaab, which still maintain control of the rural areas that surround it. The town became the destination for internally displaced people from other parts of Jubaland, who deserted their farms, livestock and homes due to prolonged drought, and the conflicts between Al-Shabaab fighters and the Jubaland federal member state forces backed by AU troops and the Somali national army.

As Al-Shabaab’s last remaining city stronghold in its fight against the federal government of Jubaland, Kismayo was seen as essential for defeating Al-Shabaab. By consolidating its control over the port’s shipping trade, it is estimated that Al-Shabaab was able to generate between US$35 and US$50 million per year in revenue from taxes imposed on charcoal shipments.23 This prompted the UN Security Council to impose an embargo on the export of charcoal to stem Al-Shabaab’s revenue stream in 2012. However, there is evidence that the Middle East is being used as a transit point for Somali charcoal exports, which continue to generate millions of dollars annually in tax for the fundamentalist group.24

After a prolonged bombing campaign by the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF, as part of AMISOM), along with support of a local militia (Ras Kamboni) the city was taken in September/October without significant battle as Al-Shabaab announced a ‘tactical retreat’. Yet, Al-Shabaab continues to attack the city and rival factions continue to compete for control of Kismayo.

Participants in the Peace Exchange identified a number of key challenges that undermine the potential for sustainable peace in Kismayo. These include issues around: the rule of law and governance; inter- and intra-clan dynamics; the legacy of the civil war and Al-Shabaab’s occupation; unemployment and continued insecurity; environmental degradation and land management; and gaps in education.

Participants further mentioned some more general challenges that local peacebuilders face in their work, including limited resources (both financial and trained human resources) to do their work, being targeted by extremist groups, and trust issues between civil society and local government.
4.1 Rule of law and governance

The absence of a strong federal, regional and local government and the lack of effective institutions for justice and rule of law was a recurring theme during the Peace Exchange. Despite the promises by the newly elected President Mohamed Abdullahi25 to focus on corruption, injustice, and extremism within Somalia, there are few if any government institutions that have the necessary legitimacy and authority to tackle these issues. In Kismayo, residents continue to face persecution, violence, injustice and other significant barriers to basic human rights. And there are no adequate means for addressing grievances. In particular, the security sector was viewed by many participants as “incapable of taking full responsibility” for preventing violent conflict and ensuring security within Kismayo.

That said, participants observed that in spite of the security sector’s limitations, Kismayo is peaceful relative to its surrounding areas. One anonymous participant noted that “the main reason Kismayo is peaceful is that the state government here, all the funds and resources they received (international aid, funds from the airport, etc.) are re-invested into security.” Kismayo thus enjoys higher levels of stability and less violent conflict relative to other areas of Somalia, but at the expense perhaps, of developing other aspects of community infrastructure.

When exploring the issue of ‘what works’ for peacebuilding in Kismayo, participants cited that community members and security institutions frequently collaborate to share information and control outbreaks of violence. This collaboration occurs through a variety of approaches. In many cases, community members who have received security training from the police collect information related to security concerns or violent outbreaks and disseminate this to formal security forces such as the police and the military. Furthermore, police checkpoints leading to Kismayo, as well as within Kismayo, hold records of key community elders who they can call upon as needed to resolve issues as they arise. Police forces ask elders to ‘vouch’ for people or to clarify incidents and provide facts to support the peaceful resolution of issues. The police will often call communities to confirm details before pursuing further action.

Participants did not cite the police or military forces as active contributors to conflict or instability in the region. As national and international security forces in protracted conflicts such as Somalia are known to have been perpetrators of violence and injustice themselves, the lack of discussion around this could potentially be a reflection of a reluctance to discuss such sensitive topics in a large group event such as the Peace Exchange.

4.2 Inter- and intra-clan dynamics

The power balance between clans remains the single most important factor for how society and communities in Kismayo manage conflict, as well as the most significant challenge to peace, when the systems to manage conflicts fail or break down.

An overwhelming theme of the Peace Exchange was the fact that community-level conflicts and formal institutions are associated with clan dynamics. For instance, insurgent groups arrange themselves and disseminate resources and weapons along clan lines, which reinforces negative affiliations and perpetuates conflict between clans. Clan relations were also mentioned as a route for securing access to economic resources, both inside and outside of formal institutions. One participant provided the example of land grabbing and stated that it is common for more ‘powerful’ clans to mount threats and target ‘weaker’ less-represented clans to obtain access to land.

Participants argued that one of the most damaging impacts of this dependence on clan associations is the way in which it fosters conflict. Participants pointed to the mistrust and prevalence of rumours between clans; the competition among clans for power; and the propensity towards “acts of revenge” to achieve justice, as major drivers of conflict. There is still a sense that individuals must be loyal to and protect their clan above all else. As such, when security issues arise, community members can take up arms to protect themselves or attack rival clans rather than going to the police.

Part of this challenge relates to the fact that police and law enforcement are also arranged along clan lines, and people seek out their respective clan member in the security force to address an issue. However, the dominance of ‘majority clans’ within the justice system leaves minority clan members with no effective system to address their grievances. As there are no cross-clan political parties, politics continues only along the lines of clan identities. Participants pointed to this tribalism/clannism as an impediment to development and sustainable peace.

"Weak and corrupt" formal court systems were discussed as core to this phenomenon. It was noted how extreme corruption along clan lines has plagued the justice system, which in turn has subverted objective provisions of justice. While the government of Somalia has attempted to establish formal institutions for justice and rule of law, clan dynamics appear to present a challenge to these systems actually becoming embedded within society. As one anonymous participant mentioned, “justice is there but it does not grow in the minds of the people.” The arrangement of political institutions around clan lines has led to the marginalisation and political exclusion of particular ‘weaker’ clans within governance systems. Participants stated that government forces regularly contest each other to protect clan positions and contest power relations within the government. This was discussed as a major challenge not just for justice and political representation, but also for the basic functioning of law enforcement within the city. This in turn contributes to latent conflict as high levels of distrust in formal government institutions lead local populations to seek justice outside of the formal sector. Some participants also cited that in Al-Shabaab

25 President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, also known as Farmajo, assumed office in February 2017.
Participants had contrasting views regarding the dynamic between formal institutions and clan representation. When asked why Kismayo is more peaceful than surrounding regions, participants pointed to the power balance among clans and stated that, in particular, there is not one dominant clan in Kismayo. They felt that this has led to a more inclusive power balance, both in political processes and representation. When asked why Kismayo is more peaceful than surrounding regions, participants argued that traditional systems remain the primary source of justice for the community.

Case study: Peace committees and clan mediation

Beled Hawo and Mandera are two cities located on the border between Somalia and Kenya, respectively. This border is rather porous and the Somali clans that live on both sides, the Marehan and Gare, trade regularly with one another but also have disputes that sometimes turn violent. These disputes are usually mediated by clan elders, but the encroachment of insurgent groups in the area had begun to undermine the system.

In late 2011, a Marehan man affiliated with Al-Shabaab killed a Gare policeman from the Kenyan Police Reserve in Mandera. The perpetrator was caught by a group of local Gare residents who, seeking revenge, tied him up and burned him alive. Al-Shabaab militants responded a couple of days later by killing a Gare resident, and another Gare mob then killed a Marehan resident in retaliation.

This spat of revenge killings escalated into a clan conflict as the Gare started targeting Marehan residents, vandalising their businesses and looting and burning their homes. Because security forces failed to protect Marehan locals in Mandera, a Marehan group of armed men in the neighbouring town of Beled Hawo began to mobilise and attacked the Gare clan in Mandera. This led to massive displacement of people in Mandera as the two armed clans clashed.

In turn, local peace committees were convened in Beled Hawo and Mandera. The committee in Beled Hawo, in particular, included several female members who played a vital role in resolving the conflict. One of them, Adar Ismail Abdullahi – Adar Jurati, went to meet the armed Marehan men and convinced them to head back to Beled Hawo. She then reached out to the peace committee in Mandera and organised a meeting with clan elders from both sides to resolve the dispute.

The clan elders engaged in a process called Dhuugyoojin (meaning "truce"), in which they discussed the causes of the clan conflict. The initial discussion, however, broke down as clan elders blamed each other for the violence and demanded restitution for those affected. In response, the peace committees then intervened and explained that Al-Shabaab was responsible for the violence, that it was a common threat for both clans and that the crimes committed by the militants could not be pinned to one clan. This convinced the clan elders and they jointly agreed to reparation terms and put an end to hostilities. The clans have since cooperated with security providers to maintain peace between Beled Hawo and Mandera.

4.3 Remnants of the civil war and Al-Shabaab occupation

The continued operation of Al-Shabaab and the lack of a functioning government poses a significant threat to security in Kismayo specifically and the region more broadly. Unemployed youth are targeted to join insurgent groups and communities have retained their possession of high numbers of illegal arms, whilst Al-Shabaab continues to attack both civilians, military compounds and AU forces. In addition, one of the main challenges reported during the Peace Exchange was that Al-Shabaab blocks essential humanitarian aid to the region. This significantly undermines any capacity for socio-economic recovery. As a result, high rates of poverty continue, and violence is perpetuated as a means to gain access to scarce resources.

4.4 Unemployment and insecurity

Peace Exchange participants reported that high rates of unemployment in Kismayo and wider Jubaland – particularly amongst youth – are a key challenge towards building peace in the region. Kismayo is home to a high number of refugees who have returned from the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya over the past few years.27 This influx of refugees has further exacerbated unemployment rates, and according to the participants, has resulted in high levels of mental and financial stress amongst the population.

There are very few job opportunities within the city or surrounding region, and those that do exist often come with caveats. For example, the Jubaland regional state institutions provide a number of job opportunities, but these tend to operate through patriarchal networks and are limited to certain clan affiliations or to those well connected to existing staff. Youth who have managed to gain some level of education try to emigrate to other regions or countries in search of work. And it is common for young men particularly to seek economic opportunities through joining Al-Shabaab.

Participants noted that Kismayo has high potential for livelihood opportunities such as fishing, farming and livestock management, but with limited local and international investment in creating new opportunities, this potential remains largely unmet. Those individuals engaged in the movement of goods through Kismayo face harassment, extortion and illegal checkpoints by the Jubaland security forces, the Somali national army, and Al-Shabaab. As such, employment opportunities are either inaccessible to the majority of the population, or for those who might access employment, come with significant risks.

26 Beled Hawo is the territorial region of Gede within Jubaland State.

4.5 Environmental degradation and land management

Participants identified environmental degradation and land tenure as one of the main contributors to conflict and food insecurity in the region. The production and illegal export of charcoal by Al-Shabaab has led to mass deforestation. This deforestation contributes to recurrent droughts in the region, which in turn impacts on the livelihoods of those who use traditional grazing land for livestock. Droughts led to the loss of livestock and internal displacement of populations, which has created further conflict between pastoralist communities and charcoal producers. Addressing conflict around charcoal production remains one of the highest priorities for peacebuilding.

Access to land poses a constant threat to peace. Currently, there are no formal channels or institutions for managing land tenure, making investment by local or diaspora-led businesses difficult. Participants viewed land as an economic resource and stated that both minority and majority clans, and some government actors, participate in unlawful or illegal 'land grabbing' practices. With weak governance and a lack of land administration systems in place, land grabbing has been identified as one of the main safety issues concerning community members in Kismayo.

4.6 Lack of education

Despite the potential for economic activity through fishing and agriculture and the availability of a potential workforce, individuals lack the skills necessary to take advantage of these opportunities. Participants mentioned that the fishing sector has substantial socio-economic potential, which could make a significant positive contribution to peace and stability in Kismayo. However, the lack of appropriate skills means that either opportunities are not seized; or existing resources are mis-managed or misused, which in turn increases the conflict dynamics. The hope was expressed that addressing the educational gap could contribute to the peace and prosperity of different groups within Kismayo.

Local peacebuilders in Kismayo have been engaged in both formal and informal efforts to bridge divisions in their communities. The Peace Exchange provided them with the opportunity to come together to share their contributions to peacebuilding in the communities in which they live. It brought to light the growth of the influence and peacebuilding role of women and youth in recent years, whilst also showing that some groups – the clan elders for example – are becoming less important in their traditional roles as arbiters.
Case study: The role of elders in mediation – the case of Mohamed Yussuf

Relative peace in Kismayo has helped raise the value of land, but without effective institutions to manage land tenure, corrupt practices that lead to land disputes have become more common. In turn, traditional elders have a role to play in mediating such disputes. Such is the case for Mohamed Yussuf.

In late December 2014, a man sold an empty piece of land to three different people, collecting thousands of dollars in the process. The land was in safe hands.

To mediate the dispute, elder Mohamed Yussuf convened a Kismayo peace committee and investigated the case. They determined that the seller was a con man and had him arrested. Elder Yussuf then invited the three buyers to explain what had happened. Some of the buyers had vowed to kill the man who had tricked and taken their money, but the elder convinced them not to act and promised that they would be reimbursed.

Elder Yussuf subsequently convened other elders to discuss the matter of reimbursement and they considered two options: to auction an empty plot of land owned by the con man or collect the funds through clan contributions. In the end, they auctioned one of the con man’s plots of land to pay back one of the buyers and collected funds from the clan to reimburse the other two buyers. The con man was eventually released without provocation and the original owner’s land was kept in safe hands.

Participants described the various ways in which conflict is resolved and peace is built. Interactions within and among communities, including forums for dialogue, were cited as key to managing conflict. Confidence and trust building are considered fundamental, as is a sense of collective responsibility for resolving issues which arise.

Participants described the typical roles and collaborations which take shape when tensions arise, and conflict is brewing. Initially, local communities themselves attempt to resolve disputes. Many local disputes over land or resources are dealt with autonomously by local community members and those party to the conflict. If this is not possible, local groups (community based or non-governmental organisations) tend to intervene to prevent escalation, which might typically happen after a few days. It was noted that at this stage women’s groups and youth groups have an important role and are often able to mediate and de-escalate conflicts.

However, if they are not successful, the next stage is to involve the clan elders to help resolve the conflict. Though their influence is diminishing, clan elders still command the most respect and are usually able to intervene effectively to build peace. The security forces are involved as a last resort if there is significant violence or killing. If groups are fighting, the security forces are able to enforce ceasefires if necessary.

Participants agreed that the various groups collaborate effectively among themselves to ensure that disputes are dealt with in a timely manner. On the whole, there is respect for the various roles that different groups play and an understanding of the value of each brings to managing conflict and maintaining peace. Fluid communication among the different groups, and also between the clan elders, ensures they are able to rapidly respond to crises. The respect that the local government has for grassroots approaches to conflict resolution was also described as very important to ensure that none of the actors’ roles are undermined. It was noted that the role of local peacebuilders is indeed legitimised by the local government.

Participants felt that the national state building processes threaten grassroots and traditional approaches to conflict resolution. Participants highlighted the importance of collaboration between the various state and non-state actors. It was noted that this collaboration might be unique to the Kismayo context. The groups often inform each other of the different issues at hand, share information and they discuss the way forward and how to best confront issues. They may also set up committees; nominating individuals to mediate and oversee disputes or tensions.

Civil society groups will also give information to the government so that the relevant authorities can track and continue to monitor the issues. Once disputes are resolved, outcomes are shared with local communities.

5.2. Community-led peacebuilding

The Peace Exchange discussions suggested that local civil society actors are the strongest and most significant peacebuilders in Kismayo. As mentioned, the elders are also relied upon by both formal and informal institutions to establish trust during dispute processes, such as conflicts that arise at checkpoints. Given that state institutions have historically been weak and clan dynamics remain a root cause of conflict, local communities have established ways to deal with disputes and conflict.

In addition to the traditional elders, youth groups, women’s groups, and local communities also play extremely important roles in peacebuilding.

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In addition, participants at the Peace Exchange mentioned how public awareness of peacebuilding has improved as a result of the different activities, workshops and advocacy for peace, which have been carried out by local civil society organisations.
Case study: The role of youth in solving land disputes

As civil society diversified in Kismayo, youth groups have become influential and are increasingly seen as effective mediators.

In mid-2018, young Abdifatah Ali Farah and other youths from her local community had intervened in a long-standing land dispute between two residents from different clans in Kismayo. The case hadn’t been resolved for more than nine months, despite the interventions of the local administration and traditional elders.

The youth group met the claimants separately to collect background information and were given consent by both parties to resolve the matter. With government and elder approval, the youths created a youth peace committee made up of different clans, who began to interrogate neighbours and other witnesses, as well as looking into legal documentation. The committee also held follow-up meetings with the parties in question and concluded the case.

It was determined that one of the men had bought the piece of land informally because there was no government at the time of purchase, while the other had grabbed the piece of land at that point and invested money in the demarcation process. The committee requested that the man who demarcated the land pay the other the amount he had spent to buy it in the first place. Both parties agreed. The committee presented the findings to the Kismayo district commissioner and traditional elders, and the case was deemed closed.

According to Farah, their success was based on the fact that youth are not authority figures: “We realised that you can do a lot, show our potential and become peacebuilders and not part of the problem.”

5.3. The role of women in conflict and peace

In Kismayo, women have played significant roles both in sustaining conflict and in building peace. During the Peace Exchange, some of the contributions to the discussions revealed stereotyped perceptions of women’s role in conflict and peace. The role of women in peacebuilding was highlighted, with women being described as “the glue” that holds and binds clans and conflicting parties together, thus mitigating conflicts within society. Participants mentioned that, according to Somali culture, women, children and elderly people are considered “birmeeydo” or “those who are spared from the sword”: vulnerable groups who it is prohibited to kill.

Some participants highlighted the impact of conflict on women, and this drives many women to work for peace. Women’s agency as actors in their own right was not emphasised, but rather their roles in relation to their fathers, mothers, husbands, children and in-laws were highlighted. These relationships were given as the main reason that women often provide the first channel of dialogue between conflicting groups.

Participants in the Peace Exchange described women in Kismayo as having, to some extent, broken through the strict patriarchal structures and gendered nature of clan-based decision-making which tends to prevent women’s participation. Indeed, participants described how many women have become peace ambassadors, activists, and actively engage in peacebuilding. Their peacebuilding efforts encapsulate both a struggle for women’s rights and recognition, as well as work towards the betterment of their wider communities. Participants stated that during conflict, women often organise peace meetings, carry out peace rallies and work to bring people together.

Women have formed pressure groups and have been at the forefront of peacebuilding initiatives. Participants referred to the various approaches that women have used: poetry and folk dance, preaching for peace, even physically forming human chains, lining themselves up between the warring parties and continuing to sing, refusing to leave until the fighting groups back down. Women have often facilitated contact and communication between two warring parties and, when tensions are running high, women are sometimes sent as delegates to calm down hostilities.


Related research

In 2016, the Somali Women’s Solidarity Organisation, Life and Peace Institute and Peace Direct carried out research into the various roles that women play in conflict and peacebuilding in Kismayo, producing the publication ‘Women, conflict and peace - learning from Kismayo, Somalia’. While the Peace Exchange conversations did not go into the same level of detail on the various roles of women in conflict and peace, the findings from the Kismayo Peace Exchange reinforce a number of the findings of the research. Although it also contradicted some findings, revealing the stereotypes which dominate understandings of women’s roles. The overlapping or complementary findings include:

- Women’s influence and agency in peace-making remains greatest in the home. The respect and deference shown to women by the men close to them (usually husbands or sons) mean that women are often able to exert a great deal of influence over the men in their lives. Decisions about when to contribute to conflict or when to work for peace are often greatly influenced by, and at times made by, women.

- In Kismayo, most women have taken action in response to the impact of violent conflict in their communities. Many of these actions could be described as humanitarian, in the sense that they were undertaken to relieve the suffering of others. During the civil war, many women were specifically striving just to ensure basic needs for their communities.

- Women have an ability to move in and out of conflict and are able to alter their roles based on their motivations. This can mean being seen as more ‘neutral’ parties, and thus being able to facilitate dialogue among different clans or move between different conflicting parties.

- Some women took part in the civil war directly, fighting alongside their kinsman. Others supported war efforts by motivating clan militia and singing songs against their rivals to provoke hostilities.
Case study: The Kismayo Women’s Group

In November 2018, a bloody clan conflict between the Aramale [part of Hawiye clan] and the Harti [part of Darood clan] occurred on the outskirts of Kismayo. 21 people were killed, and 16 others were injured, several houses were burnt down, and the movement of goods and people was restricted. The conflict directly impacted Kismayo and both clans started mobilising to carry out counter attacks against their opponents.

The root cause of the conflict was based on land. The Harti, who are mainly a business community, wanted to dig a shallow well and establish a village in the area. But the Awramale, who are mainly pastoralists, felt that the project would present a threat for their animals. They therefore rejected the project, which led to the violence between the two groups.

The Kismayo Women’s Group established a committee consisting of representatives of various clans residing in Kismayo, including the two conflicting clans. In consultation with the Jubaland Interior Ministry and the Kismayo District Administration, the committee invited the traditional elders of both clans, as well as elders from other clans to intervene and mediate the dispute. Within a matter of hours, the committee managed to hold separate meetings with elders of the conflicting parties. They then brought them together in a single venue and jointly agreed to stop the violence.

The elders separated the conflicting clans by going directly to the areas where fighting had taken place. Each elder talked to those from his clan and demanded that the conflict stop. This was followed by the Jubaland government deploying soldiers to the area in order to avoid further conflict and retaliation.

A few days later, a successful dialogue was brokered by the traditional elders and the Jubaland government. The Kismayo Women’s Group also provided support to those who had been affected by the conflict, including giving utensils, mats, mattresses and food to those whose homes had been destroyed in the violence.
Over the past three decades the nature of the Somali crisis and the international context within which it is occurring have faced constant change. From civil war in the 1980s, through to state collapse, clan factionalism and warlordism in the 1990s, by the first two decades of the new millennium it had morphed into a globalised ideological conflict.

Over the same period, the international environment has also changed, from the end of the Cold War to the ‘global war on terror’, impacting directly on the crisis and international responses to it. This presents a challenge for Somalis and international actors working to build peace. Initiatives that may have appeared to offer a solution in earlier years, may no longer be applicable. Peacebuilders must adopt both short-term and long-term strategies with which to approach the conflict. In the short-term, priority should be given to establishing a viable state. In the long-term, peacebuilders should encourage the creation of inclusive state institutions that foster the growth of a national Somali identity.

Kismayo is living in a period of uneasy peace. Al-Shabaab was expelled close to six years ago, but basic services remain run down or non-existent; youth are disaffected and lack opportunities for development; and issues of gender and social exclusion impact on political participation of key stakeholder groups in the process of peacebuilding.

Based on the findings of the Peace Exchange, Peace Direct has identified a number of recommendations to contribute to the peacebuilding policy and practice in Kismayo in particular, and in Somalia in general. Some of these recommendations have come out of earlier Peace Exchange processes but are applicable to Somalia’s emerging post-conflict context.

The recommendations can be acted upon by local, gobol (regional), national and international actors to contribute to peacebuilding policy and practice in Kismayo in particular, and in Somalia in general.

- **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. These 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 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 provide adequate resources and support. This 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 – at all levels within 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.

Annex – Participating organisations

Centre for Conflict Transformation Social & Education Development (CONTRASAD)
Disability Aida Association (DAA)
Iftin Environmental and Forestry Organisation (IEFO)
Jubaland Chamber of Commerce & Industry (JCCI)
Jubaland House of Elders (Guurti)
Jubaland Non State Actors Association (JUNSAA)
Jubba University of Somalia (JUS)
Kismayu Peace Committee (KPC)
Kismayu Women Peace Platform
Madasha Maan Kulan (MMK)
Midnimo Peace Umbrella (MPU)
Social-life and Agricultural Development Organisation (SADO)
Somali Women Solidarity Organisation (SWSO)
TALO Initiatives, Ltd. (TALO)
Youth Against Violence (YAV)

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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.

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