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Peacebuilding
perspectives

Inclusivity in Peacebuilding

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Do internationally supported peacebuilding initiatives manage to reach all of the people engaged in and affected by conflict? How can the international community move beyond token engagement of local stakeholders to support a peace that is genuinely locally owned and locally led?

These are pertinent questions that the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and partners explore in case studies on Somalia, Timor-Leste, Liberia and Burma. Without youth participation, information sharing, reconciliation and focus both on local and national aspects, international peacebuilding support is bound to fail. These are some of the preliminary findings of the first two studies.

Photos: UN Photo / Stuart Price



The importance of including a broad diversity of local perspectives and contributions in peacebuilding processes has been well known for some time. Peacebuilding practitioners and policy makers frequently stress the importance of inclusivity, with best practices and methods to broaden and deepen local participation in peacebuilding debated both within various fora at the United Nations as well as in civil society circles.

In his 2012 report *Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict* the UN Secretary General highlighted inclusivity as a priority direction, and called on the international community to identify entry points for inclusion and social dialogue. Inclusivity is defined here as ‘the extent and manner in which the views and needs of parties to conflict and other stakeholders are represented, heard and integrated into a peace process’ (A/67/499:11).

How inclusivity is applied in practice, however, and how the international community can move beyond token engagement of local stakeholders to support a genuinely inclusive peacebuilding process which is locally owned and locally led requires further exploration. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF) aims to bring local perspectives on and experiences with inclusivity more prominently to the center of these discussions through case study research in Somalia, Timor-Leste, Liberia and Burma. A preliminary review of existing literature and consultations with select interlocutors in Somalia and Timor-Leste have identified some important considerations in the two contexts, including the importance of harnessing youth participation; the critical aspect of communication and information sharing as part of peacebuilding processes; the benefits of building on local capacities and approaches to reconciliation; and the need to balance support for statebuilding with local level peacebuilding activities.¹

Somalia

Official reports from the international community have been generally positive about developments in Somalia while at the same time conceding that much is still needed in terms of creating a stable and peaceful Somalia. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) drafted a constitution for a permanent government in line with the Kampala Accords of June 2011 and the Garowe Principles of December 2011. The newly created parliament elected Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as President of Somalia in September 2012 to lead the new Somali Federal Government (SFG) and to establish a viable state. Several foreign governments, including the US and the EU, lauded the developments as the beginning of a new chapter for Somalia. Local stakeholders voice less optimism, pointing out that the current government is not inclusive and that the top-

down approach to peacebuilding, primarily focused on statebuilding, will not lead to sustainable peace.

Clan Structure

With the instability in Somalia largely due to conflicts between clans, it is important to view the clan structure in terms of its potential to act as a positive force, strengthening ties between local groups across regions and with the national government. International practitioners disagree on how these structures should contribute to inclusive peacebuilding, with suggestions including the creation of a pan-clan identity or a representative body of all clans and sub clans. Clan elders are seen to have the ability to draw business leaders and militant groups such as al Shabaab into the Somali peace process. Xeer, the customary law led by clan elders, historically used to foster reconciliation in land, resource, and social disputes, also has the potential to contribute to promote inclusive peacebuilding.

Women

Traditionally held back in local and national politics, Somali women are actively involved in local civil society organizations. While they continue to be underrepresented at the national level (a quota for women representation in the Somali Parliament has not yet been reached), Somali women are widely included within the traditional clan and social structures. The international community faces a dilemma in navigating between (and pushing for) western ideals of inclusivity for women and local structures and traditions of engaging women in peacebuilding initiatives.

Diaspora Communities

Diaspora communities play an important, albeit controversial, role in the Somali peace process, contributing through remittances and the provision of basic social services, such as healthcare and education. Some remittances are used to fund militia groups and warlords and members of the diaspora have been known to lead militant groups either in their countries of residence or in Somalia itself. Diaspora groups drive important policy work and development programs such as upgrading medical facilities and institutions of higher education but these are typically divided along clan lines and between those who support the government and those who support al Shabaab. Diaspora organizations rarely work together on projects in Somalia or on projects that affect all of Somalia.

Spoilers

Militant groups and warlords, particularly those involved in the arms trade and piracy, largely benefit from a continuation of conflict in Somalia. Efforts have been made to integrate these so-called

spoilers, including al Shabaab, Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama, and Harakat Ras Kamboni into the military and government structures, but these groups still have the potential to derail the peace process. In April 2013, for example, Harakat Ras Kamboni declared the formation of an autonomous Kismaio-Jubbaland state sparking an escalation in violence and conflict in the region.²

US officials and others in the international community have been resolute in their insistence that al Shabaab is a terrorist group that should not be engaged in peacebuilding discussions. Others acknowledge, however, that this and other armed resistance groups represent a Somali voice against what is perceived as Western interference and that they should be seen in terms of their capacity to contribute positively to peace consolidation under a Somali agenda. Traditional leaders, women's groups, and civil society organizations have begun working on demobilizing armed groups and reintegrating members into society. Disarmament, security sector reform, and reconciliation remain key issues in all of Somalia and will likely require integrating clan-based structures into the national armed forces and government.

Local Business Community

A flourishing local business community has emerged in Somalia, partially thriving on the economy of conflict, but gradually also becoming a key actor in the peacebuilding process. Some business ventures fund militant groups such as al-Shabaab either directly or indirectly, but others have contributed to a de-escalation of conflict through the provision of jobs, the reduction of incentives to fight, and the creation of cross-clan alliances.³ There are efforts underway to encourage the business community to become a more active and systematic actor in peacebuilding, including the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Private Sector Development Initiative that supports market development through, for example, business councils and entrepreneurs, and the Somali Private Sector Development Working Group.⁴

Timor-Leste

After 13 years of peacekeeping and other missions, the United Nation (UN) departed Timor-Leste at the end of 2012. That same year Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao was re-elected and his former subordinate from the resistance, former army chief Taur Matan Ruak, was elected President. Today the situation in Timor-Leste is considered stable, though many of the factors that contributed to the violence in 2006 are still present, including high unemployment especially among youth, and a fragile economy where 95% of government revenue comes from oil, and the level of reserves is uncertain.

The government of Timor-Leste has been one of the leading countries in the work on the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, an agreement between International donors and countries that are or have been affected by conflict to support country-owned and country-led transitions out of fragility.⁵ The government has made clear their determination to be in charge of an inclusive development and peacebuilding process in Timor-Leste. Civil society interlocutors have indicated skepticism however, noting that the international community still often sets the terms and priorities of development and peacebuilding. From their perspective inclusivity of local communities by government representatives and most international actors is largely superficial, with pre-determined plans being socialized as opposed to genuine consultations taking place.

Growing Disconnect Between Citizens and the Political Leadership

The growing disconnect between citizens and the political leadership of Timor-Leste is regarded as a concern to the peacebuilding process. Country-wide consultations led by a local civil society group found that leaders often consider the public to be uninformed and highly demanding, and the public view on decision-making on development investments as being driven by political interests and partisan battling rather than the needs of citizens.

Lack of Understanding of Government Structures

A related issue is the public's lack of understanding of government structures and political procedures. This may be a natural result of having such a young democracy, but local and international NGO practitioners have identified a need for increased civic education to address this concern, as it contributes to suspicion and allegations of illegal actions and corruption against the government. Growing inequality between the rural and the urban areas further exacerbates the above-mentioned issues. Rural areas receive little in the way of social benefits or investment from the large oil revenues flowing into the government's coffers, and according to a Health and Demographic Survey conducted by the National Statistics Directorate within the Ministry of Finance in 2009-10 the population in urban areas, is generally much better off than those living in the countryside.⁶

Language

The rural-urban divide is also accentuated by questions of language and access to education, employment and justice. Local actors and communities feel less engaged in the peacebuilding process since they often are not able to interact with international actors

who primarily communicate in English. While Portuguese and Tetum are the official languages, many communities only speak local dialects and thus are unable to participate in ongoing programs or to access information.

Diaspora

The political and social life of Timor-Leste is still deeply affected by the decades it lived under occupation. Consultations with local communities indicate that political leaders are often judged by what they did during the resistance, and not based on their capacity and suitability within the current system.⁷ Similarly, there is a divide in society between those who remained in the country and former diaspora who returned once the occupation was over. This divide is reinforced by language, as the diaspora often speaks Portuguese and English, rather than Tetum or other local languages. Some of the tension between the military and the police is also rooted in the occupation, as many in the police previously served with the Indonesian police, while the military to a large degree consists of former guerrilla-fighters who fought on the opposite side.⁸ Resistance networks and veterans groups are typically still used to mobilize support in election campaigns, although some veterans feel that their contribution to the independence of Timor-Leste is undervalued and remain marginalized.⁹

Parallels

Although Somalia and Timor-Leste are strikingly different post-conflict contexts, a number of interesting parallels have emerged when exploring issues of inclusivity in the peacebuilding processes of these two countries.

Youth

In both Somalia and Timor-Leste, the recruitment of youth for violent purposes (by al-Shabaab in Somalia and martial arts groups in Timor-Leste) is facilitated by unemployment and the lack of social and economic opportunities. In Timor-Leste, where 70% of the population is under the age of 30, engagement of youth was identified as one of the foremost security problems in the fragility assessment recently carried out as part of the New Deal process.¹⁰ In Somalia, though many recognize the importance of including youth in local peacebuilding processes, traditional clan structures often prioritise engagement of elders. In both cases, youth represents a group that could undermine peace if excluded, or contribute significantly to peacebuilding if engaged in a constructive manner.

Communication and information

In Somalia, as in Timor-Leste, a lack of communication and access to information undermines inclusive peacebuilding. In Somalia, communication between the government and the people and between various peacebuilding actors is poor. Similarly, in Timor-Leste there is a general lack of information and awareness at the local level about how the government works and what it does, further accentuated by language barriers. In Somalia, government officials often visit elders and elder councils to discuss the peacebuilding process, but these elders do not have an active role in the process. In Timor-Leste, NGOs are typically invited to meetings but are frustrated over having little impact and limited say in setting the agenda. In both cases, peacebuilding is carried out with a top-down approach and little local ownership or cooperation between the national and local levels.

Starting with the local context

As in many post-conflict contexts, the international community in Somalia and in Timor-Leste has tended to underestimate the importance of starting with local capacities and structures already in place. In Somalia, traditional and cultural structures have long been and are still being used for peacebuilding (including mediation and reconciliation) but are not fostered by the international community. Similarly, in Timor-Leste, local communities often feel that external actors favor foreign approaches with disregard to local social structures and methods of conflict resolution, often resulting in a waste of resources or, worse, an increase in tensions. In both contexts, external actors devise their approaches to local peacebuilding through pre-existing conceptions with little effort to identify, understand and activate existing structures, such as clan structures, women's roles and traditional mechanisms within a community.

Statebuilding as peacebuilding

The balance between peacebuilding and statebuilding is a recurrent theme in both Somalia and Timor-Leste. The international community tends to view statebuilding as peacebuilding, with the assumption that a strong state will create the stability needed to address social grievances and for reconciliation to take place at the local level. Thus, in Somalia the primary focus of international efforts is on building government capacity and institutions. This has resulted in a top-down government-controlled process supported by the international community, as opposed to a national and local led process grounded in reconciliation and peace between the Somali people. In Timor-Leste, a focus on statebuilding and development has drawn attention—and much-needed resources—from other aspects of peacebuilding such

as national reconciliation. In both cases, statebuilding initiatives are experienced as top-down and as taking place at the expense of rather than in parallel with peacebuilding efforts such as reconciliation and dialogue at the local level.

The way forward: devising new strategies

The international community still has much to learn about how to operationalize the concept of inclusivity in peacebuilding and to move beyond token engagement of local stakeholders in devising and implementing its support for peacebuilding programmes. Local actors can help identify elements needed for strategies that broaden and deepen inclusivity. A preliminary exploration of these issues in Somalia and Timor-Leste has confirmed that youth are key to any inclusive peacebuilding process and that communication on development and peace processes vertically from the national government down to the community level and back up as well as horizontally between communities may be as important as engaging all groups in peacebuilding projects. Findings also highlight that a suitable balance needs to be found between support given to statebuilding and resources dedicated to local level peacebuilding activities including reconciliation.

Until the international community takes inclusivity in peacebuilding one step further and addresses important questions about how to tackle key

issues related to its operationalization, we are likely to continue to see externally supported peacebuilding processes that are top down and insufficiently anchored in the local populations to lead to sustainable peace.

Notes

- 1 Data for the case studies was collected through a desk review of existing reports and publications followed by interviews with international interlocutors working on peacebuilding efforts in or with a focus on Somalia and Timor-Leste.
- 2 Mareeg (2013): Somalia: Raskambooni Militia challenges US, UN credibility. 24 June, <http://www.mareeg.com/fidsan.php?sid=29381&tirsan=3>.
- 3 Wam, P.E. & SarDesai, S. (2005): Conflict in Somalia: Drivers and Dynamics. World Bank.
- 4 The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (2012): Somalia. October, <http://www.enterprise-development.org/page/somalia>.
- 5 For more information on the New Deal Process see www.newdeal4peace.org
- 6 For example, 84.4% of the population in urban areas has access to electricity vs. 24.8% in rural areas and 57.8% of the urban population was in the highest wealth quintile vs. 8.7% in the rural areas.
- 7 CEPAD (2009): Priorities for Peace: Timor Leste: Voices and Paths to Peace.
- 8 Robinson, Geoffrey (2011), "East Timor Ten Years On: Legacies of Violence", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 70, Issue 4, p. 1011.
- 9 ICG (2013), Timor-Leste: Stability at what cost?
- 10 Summary Report: Fragility Assessment in Timor-Leste (2013). Produced as a part of the work of g7+





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