



Working to prevent
violent conflict

Saferworld briefing

A new approach to Somalia

Briefing ahead of the London Conference on Somalia - 23 February 2012

Introduction

For too long, Somalia has been synonymous with violence, insecurity and human tragedy. Recently, famine saw a great many civilians displaced, suffer and die. But drought resulted in famine due to conflict, insecurity and a slow response from international actors. On-going humanitarian needs must be met, including through better management of famine risk, but it will only be through addressing the factors that underlie Somalia's conflicts that the country will ever move from repeated crises towards lasting peace and prosperity.

There are many conflicts with many causes in Somalia but weak political leadership, an entrenched war economy and incoherent international engagement are key factors in most of them.

Unfortunately, the international community's efforts to support a peaceful transition have so far been inadequate. To date, no less than 15 internationally-sponsored peace talks have failed to produce a meaningful settlement¹. Too often, international efforts have revolved around exclusionary processes agreed between Somalia's political elites and foreigners. Many Somalis have felt shut out and become disillusioned. A 'trust deficit' has opened between ordinary Somalis and their national leaders and international actors.

Somalia desperately needs an approach that is based on the genuine inclusion and participation of a much broader cross-section of Somali society. Indeed, Somali-led solutions have sometimes enjoyed a degree of success whereas imposed solutions, not based on consensus or invested with a sense of shared responsibility, have consistently failed.

So it is welcome that the forthcoming London Conference on Somalia to be held on 23 February

is being billed as 'delivering a new international approach to Somalia'.

This briefing highlights the priorities Saferworld believes will be necessary for making this a reality and is based on our work to support a broad range of stakeholders in Somalia to engage in the decision-making that affects their lives (see annex for more information).

The rest of this briefing is organised in the following sections:

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Security, reconciliation and peacebuilding

Security and reconciliation are the bedrock on which all other goals in Somalia rely². Without security little progress can be made on addressing the humanitarian situation, promoting longer-term development or establishing a stable, peaceful country.

But 'security' is not something that can ever be delivered through a military defeat of *Al Shabaab*, naval counter-piracy operations or building the capacity of Somali security forces.

Instead, promoting lasting security will mean responding to a wide variety of local needs, ensuring communities actually *feel* safer and –

¹ See, for instance, *Whose peace is it anyway?* www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/somalia/contents.php

² In December 2011, with Saferworld support, the 'South-Central Somalia Non-State Actors Association' held a consultation with over 50 members of civil-society, professional groups and the private sector in South-central Somalia to discuss their views on Somalia's future. The participants in the consultation ranked their priorities as, firstly, security, followed by reconciliation, constitution-making, and progress on good governance. A summary of the consultation results can be found at: www.saferworld.org.uk/smartweb/resources/view-resource/604

crucially – will rely on successful efforts to build peace by addressing the many grievances that underlie violence in Somalia and reconciling conflicting parties.

Such reconciliation will, without doubt, need to take place between the national government and those within *Al Shabaab* who demonstrate their renunciation of violence. But if it is to successfully contribute to security, a focus on reconciliation must also extend to addressing the many lower-level conflicts that have proliferated across Somalia in the last 20 years. International efforts should support reconciliation within and between *communities* and *regions*, as well as nationally.

Such efforts should be based on and complement the work of Somali elders who traditionally lead on peace-making and reconciliation at community level. Indigenous efforts are far more likely to be successful and should lead, rather than be led by, international engagement.

The limits of military force

Counter-piracy, AMISOM, Kenyan and Ethiopian military interventions and Western counter-terror policies are all part of the picture of (in)security in Somalia. Undoubtedly, military responses have an important role to play – especially in meeting immediate or short-term security needs. But all too often debate around these issues detracts valuable attention away from Somalia's more deep-seated problems. Ultimately there will be no military 'solution' to what are fundamentally political problems in Somalia and so the role of military interventions should not eclipse efforts to promote lasting, sustainable security.

- **The international community's security interventions should first and foremost prioritise the security of the Somali people.**
Supporting, for instance, specialised VIP police units or anti-piracy courts may be successful in meeting certain, legitimate, objectives but by themselves do little to support the development of Somalia's security and justice system in the round, or to meet the security and justice needs of Somalis themselves.
- **Promoting broad-based reconciliation should be seen as core to achieving both stability and lasting security**
- **Any military strategy for Somalia should be conceived and implemented *in support of* an effective political strategy**
The past experiences of Somalia (and Iraq and Afghanistan) demonstrate the dangers of military strategies that are not underpinned by, or which overshadow, political efforts.

Stability

A major focus of the London Conference is likely to be on how the international community can best support 'local areas of stability' in Somalia.

This idea is based on the observation that insecurity is not homogenous across Somalia. Instead there are various parts of the country, varying in size from individual communities to entire regions, which enjoy relative security and stability.

The proposal is to target combined development, political and security (but not humanitarian) assistance at these areas in order to consolidate stability, provide immediate improvements in living conditions and incentivise peace.

These efforts would be guided by a set of principles setting out when and how such support would be appropriate. Work would be resourced and coordinated through a 'joint stability fund'.

Saferworld cautiously welcomes this proposal as *potentially* providing a way of supporting areas of local stability to act as 'stepping stones' to wider security.

However, we believe there will be a number of vitally important considerations if such an approach is to be effective.

First and foremost, lessons must be learned from past 'stabilisation' failures – particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan. Targeting assistance at emerging areas of stability should be about providing committed, careful and locally appropriate support to legitimate representatives of areas that show potential for transitioning from relative stability to more lasting peace and security. It will be necessary to support existing positive trends rather than looking for something that looks like international best practice. And it certainly should not be primarily about 'winning hearts and minds' or shoring-up military gains.

At the same time, great care must be taken not to distort or destroy promising indigenous efforts through well-intentioned but clumsy efforts to support them. International engagement in Somalia has a history of inadvertently derailing local initiatives by injecting them with more resources than they have capacity to absorb, making unrealistic bureaucratic demands, and operating without a good understanding of local power dynamics.

- **The principles being developed to guide efforts to promote local areas of stability should, inter alia:**
 - **Ensure references to 'security' are based on promoting the security of Somali people**

- **See promoting broad-based reconciliation as a core part of promoting stability**
- **Stress the importance of building peace and promoting reconciliation *between* as well as within areas of stability**
- **Encourage transparency and accountability to Somali stakeholders**
- **Underline the importance of understanding the local context**

Success in promoting such 'local areas of stability' will depend largely on the degree of sophistication with which the international community understands the local context. For instance, the viability of the different regional administrations, what they aspire to be, what has been tried in the past and what actually works in Somalia. This will mean being able to identify and successfully engage with a variety of local-level actors and knowing, for instance, what their relationship to each other is, what their motivations are, and what their potential is to act as champions for peace – all of which will need an extremely grounded and on-going understanding of the local-level political economy.

- **Promote legitimate representation but work with the grain of Somali society**
- **Recognise that international engagement *always* alters the dynamics on the ground**

Building on the importance of understanding the local context, the international community should recognise that what legitimate representation might look like in Somalia may be different than the expectation of international actors (for instance, past experience suggests that grounded traditional processes with a high level of popular buy-in may sometimes produce more legitimate leaders than externally driven local elections). Decisions about how best to support legitimate representation should therefore be taken case-by-case, on the basis of good understanding of the local context.

The whole reason for wanting a greater focus on supporting local-level processes is that – especially as compared to Somalia's national efforts – such indigenous, local efforts are actually *working*. Moreover, they have so far been working without much support (or interference) from the international community – instead they are a product of

local-level agreements and negotiations. The international community does have the potential to add value to these local processes, *but only if it is cognisant that its engagement (especially a surge of resources) will alter these existing dynamics and potentially de-stabilise them*. For this reason, the international community must keep its analysis of the local political economy up to date, monitor the impacts its interventions are having on an on-going basis, and offer careful incentives when engaging.

- **Any joint stability fund should ensure that the level of resources it disburses, and the bureaucratic requirements for accessing them, do not shut out local groups and individuals**

Many small community organisations and NGOs, or committed individual leaders, may lack the capacity to engage with the normal levels of bureaucracy that donors require of grantees and will not be able to absorb large amounts of money. Yet these may often be the very groups and individuals who are best placed in terms of legitimacy and local knowledge to build on areas of stability in Somalia. The fund's managers will need the capacity to administer many small grants with light bureaucracy rather than only a few large grants with more burdensome bureaucratic requirements.

- **Any joint stability fund should look to build the long-term capacity of a diverse range of Somali actors to engage in debate, decision-making and holding their representatives to account**

This should be done as part of helping to deliver specific interventions in local areas of stability, but also as an end in and of itself. Supporting a diversity of local actors who are committed to Somalia's peaceful transition but who have different views on how to get there to have increased voice within local, regional, national and international debates should be an explicit goal of the fund.

- **Any joint stability fund should operate on the basis of a thorough understanding of local actors and political economies**

Balancing the need for thorough contextual awareness against the need to disburse funds flexibly and responsively is likely to mean that the fund managers will need this contextual knowledge 'in-house' rather than relying on buying it in externally.

- **Any joint stability fund should ensure a broad-base of Somali actors have a role in its oversight and accountability**

Too often, the perception amongst Somalis is that the resources provided for their assistance are used without opportunity for their input or oversight – a perception which further serves to undermine their trust and confidence in internationally backed initiatives.

Inclusive politics

For far too long, Somalia's politics has been based around exclusive agreements between individuals with a narrow power base. Deals have often been brokered between Somalia elites and foreigners, with decisions not even being made in Somalia. Wider Somali society has been largely excluded from these decisions and has increasingly felt excluded from political processes. Many have become disillusioned with their political leaders and their international backers. We consider this to go a long way towards explaining why previous peace deals have failed.

The London Conference must, therefore, place a premium on looking at how the international community can ensure Somalia's political process better connects with the people of Somalia.

It is hardly surprising that many Somalis still disagree on issues that are fundamental to peacebuilding or statebuilding – from human rights to democracy, from the roles of women and religion in public life, to federalism. After 20 years of conflict and state failure, we cannot reasonably expect that a coastal farmer, a small business-holder from Hiraan, a constitutional lawyer and a professional diplomat based in Nairobi will have the same understanding of 'the state'.

So efforts are needed to promote broader societal involvement in decision-making, dialogue and awareness-raising work, and to support Somalia's traditional, local-level decision-making structures. Only in this way can we ensure that a critical mass of Somalis participate in decisions about their future and understand complex issues such as a constitution-making process. And only then will we be able to secure a political settlement that is more than a one-off agreement between elites.

But in order to ensure that Somali stakeholders are able to participate in political processes *meaningfully*, it will be important to think about the foundations this participation requires. For instance, ensuring timeframes are realistic for the daily realities of life in Somalia, translating working documents into Somali and giving people adequate time to think about and prepare their positions before consultation.

- **The international community and national government of Somalia should ensure that a broad range of Somali stakeholders are able to meaningfully participate in the design of**

any arrangements that follow the transitional arrangements from August 2012

- **At all times, the international community should consult with Somalis and listen seriously to their responses.**

This means talking with a wide range of Somali actors and reaching out beyond the 'usual suspects' to include religious leaders, elders, the diaspora, women's groups, business leaders and the media as well as NGOs.

- **Any initiatives designed to promote mutual accountability should ensure they also promote the downwards accountability of international and national actors to Somalis**

Mirroring a feeling of political exclusion amongst Somali people, many also feel shut out from decisions about how their country's resources are used. Once more, this has served to reinforce the 'trust deficit' that pervades Somali society. So developing mechanisms for ensuring greater transparency and public oversight of resources in Somalia would help make a contribution not only to the better management of those resources, but also to improved state-society relations. For instance, a proposed 'Joint Financial Management Board' to help monitor the use of funds in Somalia and combat corruption is welcome, but would be much strengthened if it set out an explicit ambition to ensure that a broad cross-section of Somali stakeholders is able to take part in the oversight provided by the board.

- **International engagement in Somalia should be predicated on realistic timeframes**

Successful peacebuilding and reconciliation, engaging in inclusive politics and helping to build a state takes time. However much it may wish things could move more quickly, the international community simply must work to the realities of Somalia rather than it expecting it to fit a timetable it finds convenient.

Humanitarian provision

Saferworld's mandate is around the prevention of violent conflict. But our motivation stems from the same respect for individuals' dignity and right to a peaceful life that underpins humanitarian action.

Whilst Saferworld believes humanitarian need will never be sustainably met in Somalia until its violent conflicts and insecurity are addressed, we strongly support the arguments that efforts to meet people's immediate essential needs should not be undermined by incoherent policies and that the international community should be better prepared to meet future humanitarian crises.

- **The ‘politicisation’ of humanitarian funding must be avoided**

Seeing humanitarian aid as a ‘peace dividend’ is dangerous, not only for aid workers attempting to provide assistance but also for the communities they are working with who may come in for reprisal attacks.

- **Resources must be balanced between meeting immediate humanitarian needs and addressing their underlying causes**

Adequate funding must continue for humanitarian assistance which addresses humanitarian risks as well as crisis needs³. More flexibility and longer-term funding is needed, with a switch from emergency assistance to development aid wherever possible.

- **More humanitarian assistance should be channeled through Somali organisations**

Somali organisations often have the best understanding of the context they operate in and better access to affected populations than outsiders. Where capacity allows, disbursing more aid through Somali organisations may help counter the perception that Somalis have no control over the way these resources are used.

- **All military interventions in Somalia should ensure they are fully compliant with the letter and the spirit of International Humanitarian Law**

All parties to the conflict are bound by IHL, should uphold it and should be supported to do so through training and monitoring. At the same time, counter-terror interventions should ensure they are not inadvertently exacerbating conflicts (for instance, by considering the effect drone strikes and targeted assassinations may have in generating further resentment amongst Somali populations).

- **Military operations should prioritise civilian protection**

Protecting civilians from harm during military operations is paramount and the shared responsibility of all actors present in active conflict zones. Conventional forces such as AMISOM, the Ethiopian and Kenyan military, should do their utmost to avoid civilian casualties. In cases where casualties occur during operations, they should support independent investigations.

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international NGO that works to prevent violent conflict and promote co-operative approaches to security. We believe everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives free from insecurity and armed violence.

We always seek to work constructively with others and do not usually engage in public campaigning. While we are not a traditional development agency, we seek to understand and influence the relationship between conflict, security and international development.

Saferworld has 85 full- and part-time staff and advisers working on our geographic programmes and in our policy and advocacy programme, funding and communications, and operations departments. Saferworld’s main office is in London and we have regional offices in Africa, Asia and Europe. Our funding for 2010-2011 was around £6.8million – mainly in the form of government grants from Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

With the support of DFID and the EU, Saferworld supports three platforms of ‘non-state actors’ (NSA) in Somalia, one in each of Somaliland, Puntland and South-Central.

Each of the NSA platforms is comprised of around 50 member networks and associations drawn from civil society, business and professionals. They engage in key domestic and international policy processes of relevance to peace and development in Somalia, on behalf of their members.

The platforms are legitimate representatives of a broad sector of non-state actors whose voices are not often enough heard. Their legitimacy stems from the inclusion of a wide range of geographical, clan and sectoral representatives.

For more information, see:

www.saferworld.org.uk/where/somalia

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³ See, for instance, Save the Children and Oxfam, *A Dangerous Delay*. www.oxfam.org/en/policy/dangerous-delay