



## Africa Summary

# Somalia: Views from the Frontline

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## INTRODUCTION

The following document provides a summary of a meeting held at Chatham House on 3 May 2013.

As world leaders gathered in London for a second year to discuss Somalia's future, leaders of civil society from the country reflected at this event about the reality of life in Somalia. The speakers, who come from and work in all areas of the country, commented on changes in the security and political situation, and addressed if Somalis are becoming more optimistic about the future of their country.

This event included an exhibition of photos depicting a powerful glimpse of Somali life.

The meeting consisted of four presentations by the speakers, which were given on the record, followed by a discussion. The following summary is intended to serve as an *aide-mémoire* for those who took part and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

## **FARTUUN ADAN**

Mrs Adan spoke about the Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre, which was set up in 1991 by her husband Elman Adan. The centre supported children affected by war, showing them alternatives to violence. Elman Adan was killed by a warlord because of the centre's work in helping to rehabilitate child soldiers. Mrs Adan left Somalia for a time with her daughters but returned to carry on the work of the NGO, which continues to work with children today.

Sisters Somalia was set up to support women who have been victims of rape, especially those living in refugee camps. Sisters Somalia failed to gain support from the previous Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which denied any incidences of rape in the refugee camps. Today, international organizations are working with Sisters Somalia. The new government has promised to help Somali women who are victims of gender-based violence and to ensure that women and children are protected and have access to equal rights.

Expectations are high and the government does not have a lot of capacity, but one must not give up on helping to support Somali women. The government should prioritize women's rights. There are not enough women in employment or education. The government should work with civil society organizations in order to make sure that women have equal access to these opportunities.

Sisters Somalia was founded with no budget. Today, it works with private donors as well as international organizations such as the UN. Sisters Somalia established the first crisis centre and telephone hotline in Mogadishu for women who have been victims of violence. NGOs such as Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre and Sisters Somalia need support; not just financial but political in order to continue advocating to the government that women's rights must be taken seriously.

## **AYDRUS DAAR**

Mr Daar spoke about his organization, Wajir South Development Association (WASDA), which was founded in Kenya, and is operational in Kenya and Somalia.

WASDA has large programmes working on WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) strategies. Accessibility to safe drinking water in order to reduce the spread of diseases is an important component that it advocates. The NGO also works to train youths who have defected from militia groups, and support women.

WASDA has aimed to be as transparent as possible; it attempts to keep operational costs down to a minimum of 10 per cent to ensure that aid money is spent in an efficient manner.

There are numerous challenges facing NGOs working in Somalia. After the collapse of the government, many international NGOs fled the most dangerous areas, leaving local NGOs to work under conditions of conflict and uncertainty. WASDA continued to work in warlord-controlled areas in Somalia despite challenges including the presence of al-Shabaab, a lack of infrastructure between remote villages, political instability under the TFG.

One particularly difficult challenge for NGOs working in Somalia was the 2009–11 humanitarian crisis, which caused a severe food crisis and forced tens of thousands of Somalis to flee their homes. WASDA found that few Somalis were speaking out about public health.

There are funding gaps. Donor funding plans are based in the short term, and it is difficult to get the right experts to help during emergency situations. Another challenge is the unhealthy competition between international organizations working in Somalia, many of which prefer to work in safer areas.

Somali people are strong and will improve their lives if given the opportunity. In order for this to happen, there must be peace. It is a struggle to work as an NGO in Somalia, with restrictions even in safer or more liberal areas. Local NGOs need support from the international community in order to help those in need in every area in Somalia.

## **ABDI ADEN ALI**

Mr Ali discussed his work in Somalia and Somaliland with the NGO Saferworld and the political progress of Somalia.

Somalia is currently at a crossroads: there have been many positive developments, and there are many areas where more work is needed. One major positive development has been the establishment of the first internationally recognized government and its related institutions in 20 years. However, these positive developments must be viewed within the difficult context Somalia currently faces. The government has to contend with particularly difficult challenges, of which security is paramount. It lacks the capacity to take responsibility for the security of Somalia, and must rely on foreign troops such as those provided by the African Union.

The Somali government takes a state-centred approach to security, but there needs to be a change in leaving responsibility over security to the national government, with a greater voice given to Somali people. An important area where this can be achieved alongside the government is through peace and reconciliation. Six new pillars have been devised by the government to improve Somalia. A misguided approach by the government would be to attempt state-building from the top, which has failed Somalia before. The government should give priority to build an inclusive national reconciliation effort.

It is important for the government to allow space for Somali civil society to continue to operate as they have been doing during the past 20 years in the absence of political institutions.

## **RAHMA AHMED**

Ms Ahmed spoke about the Somalia Relief and Development Forum (RDF). The forum brings together members of the Somali diaspora in order to increase their political impact and promote a more collaborative approach towards development in Somalia.

Recently, SRDF conducted research in various cities including Mogadishu and Hargeisa on the views of local civil society groups working in Somalia. Groups were consulted about the challenges facing NGOs working in the areas of humanitarian aid and gender-based violence, as well as on issues including transparency and accountability, diaspora engagement and structural integration.

The research highlighted the negative aid culture and levels of dependency that Somali NGOs contend with. One particular issue was the trend of giving participants or interviewees sums of money in order to attain their input. This was not found to be a unique issue to Somalia. Another key issue was the lack of accountability for NGOs across the aid sector in Somalia, with any NGOs exaggerating their impact and activities. There is a need to make sure funding is better spent and more accountable. At the local level, some anger was expressed at the lack of impact aid has had given the funding allocated.

NGOs were found to be competitive, and working in the aid sector is seen as a business. Competition on the local level is unregulated and as such there is no body determining which NGOs are working effectively and which are not.

One point made on local capacity was the need for supporting local government capacity in order to ensure NGO compliance and accountability. As local government generally has weak capacity it is important for local actors to comply voluntarily. NGOs cannot be forced to work with local government, so cooperation is essential. There debate should begin on how to build up this local capacity by investing in human capacity in Somalia.

Inclusive aid frameworks need to be developed in order for the work of NGOs to improve in Somalia. Communication must be improved from the ground up to improve transparency and accountability. There needs to be a conversation about collective responsibility for how aid is given in order to curb the dependency culture seen in the country. NGOs need to work together to make an impact and benefit the whole of Somali society. NGOs need to develop a new approach in order to work out how to do this.

## DISCUSSION

### Fartuun Adan:

NGOs have begun cooperating more with the government in the past two years. The problem is how to improve livelihoods for people who have had no authority or stability for so long. As such, there is often a need to offer an incentive to participants in order for them to participate with NGOs programmes; whether that is in the form of food, transport or per diems. Many families prefer girls to work and earn money rather than go to school and militias will offer support and resources to those who join them. This is why such support from international organizations is critical.

### Questions:

There is no accountability regarding gender-based violence in Somalia; no support from society or from the government. NGOs do not have the capacity to change people's behaviour. How can NGOs work with the government in order to find out how best to solve these problems?

Are Somalia's problems down to a question of resources? How can the government, donors and local communities collaborate so that development aid is split effectively between these three sectors?

Aid dependency is normal for a state that has lacked a functioning government for so long. However, NGOs that spend money yet produce little results do not encourage accountability and transparency. How can this be overcome?

### Fartuun Adan:

It is true that there is no accountability for those who commit crimes against women in Somalia. This is why we originally set up a safe house to protect girls and women in danger. We as an NGO really wanted to have a stable government, and for that government to find an answer in the search for justice for women. We have been working with people suffering in refugee camps for instance and are very aware of the situation.

NGOs must foster relationships with these people and gain their trust. They can see which NGOs are carrying out effective work. The people in Mogadishu are not the ones who are suffering the most but they are the ones approached by NGOs most often.

There is a need to highlight women's interests, especially those suffering in the refugee camps. We also want to appeal to everyone in the diaspora, including Somali men, to be aware of this situation and to garner their support in order to help these women.

### **Abdi Aden Ali:**

For the government to be able to work with civil society and other actors there needs to be strong institutions. The main issue Somalia is facing is poverty; no country is 100 per cent resourceful, but Somalia has also suffered from constant conflict. The civil service needs to strengthen its capacity to be able to follow through initiatives. There is a need for more professionals and experts, as the government lacks capability in this area.

Regarding NGOs, there has been a form of research fatigue, linked to the problem of short-term donor funding programmes. Constant assessments only look at the beginning and end of programmes. There needs to be a shift toward looking at how programmes progress. We are advocating for donors to work within longer time frames in order to properly assess programme outcomes and reduce research fatigue.

All of our cash programmes are regulated, and assessments and surveys are necessary to ensure accountability. The inherent difficulties of implementing cash programmes have meant that there has been a concentration of NGOs working in safer areas. Some NGOs have simply moved further afield, even to Kenya, attracting people from around this area. There is a need for conditional cash programmes, and a greater emphasis on working directly in refugee and IDP camps.

### **Rahma Ahmed:**

The aid industry in Somalia has become very sophisticated. There is a culture of giving monetary incentives. We need to make sure NGOs are spending money responsibly. Some people are abusing the resources of NGOs; there have even been reports of people going from camp to camp to collect money. At the root of all this is dependency. Development is key; there has been no progress from the 1990s in some areas. Development can enable people to become more self-sufficient.



### **Questions:**

There is a culture of dependency in part because service providers are focused on major cities. Would decentralization provide solutions for the challenges mentioned?

Civil society replaced functioning government for a long time. Under the new government, will civil societies be given the space to continue doing their work and helping people?

As civil society actors, what do you expect the government to do for you?

Is all the research on rebuilding or decentralization actually divisive for Somalia? Should we focus more on the existing communalities Somali people have, such as a national identity?

### **Abdi Aden Ali:**

The concept of decentralization arose in Somalia from around 1995. Recently there was a conference in Nairobi held with the EU looking at what type of governance structure could work in Somalia? The debate centred on centralization versus decentralization. The Somali government has been used to centralization although Somali culture is fundamentally decentralized. This does not mean that it is not united. Decentralization should allow people to have more of a say in the administration their own government. Decentralization works well in many contexts; for example it could work with regards to Somalia's relationship with Somaliland. There have been elections for the Somali parliament at the top level. Now there needs to be participation at the grassroots.

### **Fartuun Adan:**

There is no local capacity in government to work on issues such as women and children, and this is where civil society can help. Civil society needs to work with the government until it has the capacity to take over when the rule of law has been firmly established. What civil societies want from the government is protection and security, and collaboration.

### **Questions:**

What is your advice to the new UN Special Representative to Somalia (Nicholas Kay)?

Are there any examples where civil society and political authority have worked together, which can be used to work towards peace between Somalia and Somaliland?

How does the Sisters Somalia hotline work as a response to sexual violence in Mogadishu?

**Abdi Aden Ali:**

My advice to the Special Representative to Somalia would be to engender a more people-centred approach; to be more inclusive rather than just working with government structures.

**Aydrus Daar:**

My advice to the Special Representative is to emphasize that the UN is a very important stakeholder for Somalia, and that the UN can be much more efficient in its dealings with Somalia if it works with civil society organizations within Somalia.

**Fartuun Adan:**

The Sisters Somalia crisis hotline was a new concept, and it worked very well. Now we have expanded to completely new areas. The hotline really makes a difference. My advice to the Special Representative would be simply to support the Somali people.

**Rahma Ahmed:**

To the Special Representative: there needs to be coordination between all actors on the ground. There also needs to be inclusive aid frameworks, with a priority to curb dependency.

I do not see national identity in Somalia; I see more tribal and regional identities.

In regards to political authority and civil society in Somaliland, there have been successful relations between these actors in Somaliland. We have not seen this functioning in the same way in other parts of the country.