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**Research Report**

## 'Working with humanitarians is a nightmare': Dynamics surrounding locally led peacebuilding in Somalia

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Report

# ‘Working with humanitarians is a nightmare’

Dynamics surrounding locally led peacebuilding  
in Somalia

**Dustin Barter**

**August 2024**



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# Acronyms

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<b>ATMIS</b>	African Union Transition Mission in Somalia
<b>CPD</b>	Center for Peace and Democracy
<b>EAC</b>	East African Community
<b>FGS</b>	Federal Government of Somalia
<b>FMS</b>	Federal Member State
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>HIPC</b>	Highly Indebted Poor Country
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan
<b>IGAD</b>	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>INGO</b>	international non-governmental organisation
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>PBF</b>	Peacebuilding Fund
<b>RSP</b>	Road to Sustainable Peace
<b>SDC</b>	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
<b>SHF</b>	Somalia Humanitarian Fund
<b>SNA</b>	Somalia National Army
<b>SSF</b>	Somalia Stability Fund
<b>SSWC</b>	Save Somali Women and Children
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

# Executive summary

Somalia is currently at one of many historical crossroads, where international aid actors can play an important role in supporting locally led peacebuilding and improved state functioning. The country's most significant positive developments in recent years include relative stabilisation and improving governance, billions of dollars in debt relief, ascension to the East Africa Community (EAC), liberation of significant swathes of territory from al-Shabab and the lifting of an arms embargo in place since the early 1990s. The counter-argument is that people in need of humanitarian assistance and people displaced remain persistently high at 6.9 and 3.4 million respectively (USAID, 2024), insecurity remains acute, progress against al-Shabab is tenuous, a Somaliland–Ethiopia port deal could derail recent progress, climatic shocks are the new norm and corruption remains widespread. The country is highly aid-dependent through a system dominated by international actors. Relationships between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Federal Member States (FMSs) are fractious.

This paper examines these dynamics and the implications for international aid with practical recommendations on how it can best support locally led peacebuilding, which is underpinned by improved engagement with national and sub-national state structures. Chapters 1 to 4 elucidate Somalia's macro political economy and conflict dynamics, which is critical for embedding the ensuing analysis related to locally led peacebuilding in chapters 5 to 7, including a wide range of recommendations for different actors seeking to support peacebuilding. This structure is intended to foreground the importance of

macro-level factors and their influence across the country. Any effort to support or implement peacebuilding must engage with these dynamics, rather than operate in a silo.

Overall, the paper focuses on systems related to, rather than the granular details of, peacebuilding. This is because many Somali actors are astute at peacebuilding and conflict resolution, but the impediments they face are structural rather than technical.

## Main findings

- The scale and volatility of humanitarian aid to Somalia has created a political economy of aid that is antithetical to locally led peacebuilding and conflict resolution. It has created many vested interests related to aid capture and severely disrupts local civil society actors' efforts to achieve long-term impact, amongst other deleterious impacts.
- There are unique opportunities to support locally led peacebuilding considering the recent contextual improvements, but international aid actors must increase their trust-building with Somali peace actors and their informed risk tolerance.
- International actors continue to dominate the aid sector, but there are significant examples of locally led action, including peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The Road to Sustainable Peace (RSP) and Nexus consortia are notable examples, alongside numerous individual Somali actors. Their success is grounded in years of trust building with donors and other international aid actors.

- Long-term, consistent and flexible funding flows are critical for peacebuilding, as well as for humanitarian and development action, but they remain the anomaly rather than the norm.
- Most international aid actors continue to neglect financial engagement and collaboration with the FGS and other state authorities, which undermines aid coherence and the sustainability of impact.
- Peacebuilding is regularly compartmentalised rather than integrated into strategies and implementation, which undermines coherence amongst all aid actors, while exacerbating governance challenges.



# 1 Introduction

Peace-making is a long-term process [...] [it] will need to make a long-term commitment of people and resources. Approaches to peace-making in Somalia reveal the dangers of trying to impose an outside solution to the Somali conflict. (Bradbury, 1994: 3–4)

The above quote from a seminal conflict analysis rings as true today as when it was written over 30 years ago. It also sets the scene for the ensuing analysis, not just about the importance of long-term and locally led approaches to peacebuilding, but also the repeated inadequacies of international engagement in Somalia that have contributed to significant inertia. As 2024 unfolds, the country continues to achieve significant stabilisation and governance progress, yet major challenges persist, especially insecurity and large-scale humanitarian needs. Along with the quote used in the title of this paper, one international non-governmental organisation (INGO) interviewee summed up the tensions as follows:

International dominance is still a key problem; aid contractors are doing mega budgets with no grassroots connection. Peacebuilding is essentially trust-building, but mass aid influxes continue to aggravate many long-term relationships.

This paper examines the state of locally led peacebuilding in Somalia within the broader political economy and conflict dynamics of the country. It is intended to inform international

aid actors<sup>1</sup> and their political engagement with Somalia, with the intention of identifying how such actors can better support locally led peacebuilding through systems thinking. A deliberate effort was made to shape the recommendations in line with Somalia's unique contextual nuances, which have major implications for international engagement, particularly in areas relating to peacebuilding.

To enhance uptake, the analysis seeks to be informative yet concise, pursuing a balance between breadth and depth. Consequently, it explores significant tensions and divergences related to the current context in Somalia, from burgeoning optimism to a sense of acute fragility. Such discrepancy relates to a multitude of dynamics that can be interpreted differently. This paper suggests that careful attention be paid to how international engagement interacts with this context, where any support for locally led peacebuilding must be a long-term yet flexible commitment. It must also seek to work with national and sub-national authorities, rather than in parallel, as is too often the case.

The ensuing analysis is based on a wide-ranging literature review, synthesised with 22 key informant interviews and focus group discussions that involved a total of 13 women and 15 men, plus a moderated dialogue involving three Somali experts in early 2024. It also draws on the author's more than five years of working closely with Somali civil society actors and over a decade with international aid actors,

<sup>1</sup> The term 'aid' is used to refer to peace, humanitarian and development sectors, but does not imply a benign, nor purely altruistic relationship. International aid actors refers to donors, United Nations' agencies, INGOs and similar actors.

according to the ‘extended case method’, which values embeddedness, self-reflexivity and other ethnographic approaches (Burawoy, 2009).

Following the introduction, Chapter 2 examines key positive contextual dynamics, such as major improvements in stability and governance, alongside 99% debt relief. These dynamics are grounds for cautious optimism, as Somalia has made remarkable progress in recent years across many areas. International aid actors must be cognisant of and align support for peacebuilding with these positive developments.

Chapter 3 provides the countervailing argument, as it focuses on the more negative contextual dynamics, including persistent humanitarian need, violence and fragility. Along with Chapter 2, it is intended to provide a balanced contextual analysis, which is critical for understanding the prospects for locally led peacebuilding, and how international aid actors can design their support accordingly. Close attention must be paid to avoid aggravating risks.

Chapter 4 narrows the focus to the political economy of aid in Somalia, which has a major, largely detrimental impact on locally led

peacebuilding in the country. Of particular note is the immense scale and volatility of humanitarian funding, which is hugely disruptive and thus antithetical to long-term peacebuilding efforts. This chapter suggests that without addressing issues arising from Somalia’s aid economy, locally led peacebuilding will continue to struggle.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide a marked shift in analytical direction, as they focus more specifically on the state of peacebuilding in Somalia, including key enablers and barriers to locally led efforts. Examples of both bad and good practices are provided, which international aid actors should draw upon for their own strategy and action. The focus is intentionally systemic, as international efforts need to prioritise addressing obstructive structures over more granular issues.

Chapter 7 provides a variety of recommendations, ranging from advocacy and diplomacy to programmatic funding and design. These recommendations are intended to engage with structural issues identified throughout the report’s analysis, rather than community-level programming for which Somali actors are already well equipped to design, deliver and adapt effectively.

## 2 Context positive: unprecedented progress despite challenges

There are many factors that suggest Somalia is on an improving peace and development trajectory, particularly in contrast to 5, 10 and 15 years earlier. While there is recognition of ongoing fragility and potential risks, many interviewees expressed widespread optimism about the future. Positive examples ranged from people refusing to pay al-Shabab taxes in Mogadishu, to large crowds safely attending football matches and rapid urbanisation stimulating new economic opportunities. This chapter examines the key factors underpinning such a perspective, concluding that there are significant grounds for optimism about Somalia's future, although they will be tempered in Chapter 3. The following factors are highlighted because it's critical that any support for locally led peacebuilding is contextually embedded and reinforces these positive trends, rather than operating in relative isolation. For example, Somalia's stabilisation and improving governance have created new opportunities for peacebuilding, while they also demand a shift away from piecemeal interventions dominated by international actors.

### 2.1 A stabilising state and improving governance

A primary factor in the positivity about Somalia's future relates to stabilisation of the state and improving governance. This partly stems from a peaceful transfer of power to the current president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, in 2022, but more broadly relates to institutional strengthening of the state, particularly over the preceding decade. Interviewees consistently highlighted the willingness of the FGS to expand state services and

functionality, particularly in areas newly liberated from al-Shabab. This requires international aid actors to adapt their approaches to better engage with and support the state. The governance progress has been backed by increased tax revenue (Abshir et al., 2020). Concurrently, many interviewees highlighted that relations between the FGS and FMSs were improving; tensions and disputes were still prevalent, but they were seen to be less fractious than under the previous administration of President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo. Recognition of governance improvements are most evident through multiple tranches of funding from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, totalling hundreds of millions of dollars to the Somali state (World Bank, 2024a). This funding has not just supported institutional strengthening and state service provision, but also enabled the FGS to meet benchmarks required for debt relief.

These improvements, however, cannot be taken for granted and remain under threat. In recent months, tensions are escalating between the FGS and FMSs over the current constitutional review. The latter feel railroaded by the president and the FGS, who are seen as trying to consolidate power rather than pursue a collaborative and consultative process (Khalif, 2024). The impact may be severe for the state and governance writ large, as evidenced by Puntland declaring its withdrawal from the federal system in late March 2022 (Hasan, 2024).

## 2.2 Debt relief potentially transformative

Following completion of the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt relief initiative, Somalia secured 99% debt relief in early 2024 (Ali, 2024), which could be transformative for the country. Compared to many other heavily indebted countries accruing contemporary debt, Somalia's debt was unique in that it was accumulated prior to state collapse in 1991. The initially small debt continued to accrue interest in the following decades, even in the absence of a functioning state (SNC, 2018). This led to a high debt burden that prevented the country from accessing external finance, in what was labelled a 'noose around Somalia's future' (Barter and Ahmed, 2019). The HIPC process required extensive commitment from the FGS to meet a multitude of fiscal and governance benchmarks, where completion is not simply about reducing debt, but it provides an explicit endorsement of government efforts. The cancellation of debt also provides positive signals to foreign investors and opens opportunities to the government to stimulate development. For example, the World Bank's portfolio in Somalia has expanded across governance, human development, humanitarian and other areas, reaching US\$2.3 billion (IMF, 2023).

## 2.3 Major progress against al-Shabab

There have been extensive inroads against al-Shabab over the past 24 months. Militarily, significant parts of South-Central Somalia have been liberated from al-Shabab control. This began with community-led uprisings, backed by clan militias, the scale of which were unique and preceded Somali National Army (SNA) offensives launched from August 2022 (Muibu, 2024).

Many interviewees suggested that such community-level involvement indicated a marked shift in sentiment towards al-Shabab, as people tired of its oppressive rule, particularly when a multi-year drought was causing extreme hardship. In contrast to previous internationally led offensives, there was a positive perception towards the SNA taking a more prominent role. The initial results were encouraging, as the SNA liberated significant swathes of territory in Hirshabelle and Galmudug. Many interviewees felt this had severely weakened al-Shabab, but there was concern that aid and government services were not reaching liberated areas. Consequently, there was growing disillusionment amongst local populations about the FGS's commitment towards them (analysed in greater depth in the next chapter).

Beyond armed offensives, interviewees provided numerous examples of progress against al-Shabab, such as tighter control over affiliated bank accounts and revenue collection that are decreasing the group's financial resilience. Other examples included Bakara market businesses installing security cameras, despite al-Shabab threats, people across numerous locations increasingly refusing to pay the group taxes, and the reach of al-Shabab courts diminishing. Multiple interviewees felt such factors, along with the military offensive, meant that Somalia was the closest it's been to ousting al-Shabab, which would, in turn, greatly enhance security and thus spur development. However, nobody thought al-Shabab would collapse any time soon.

## 2.4 Normalising international relations: East Africa Community ascension and arms embargo lifted

In addition to the aforementioned domestic improvements in Somalia, many interviewees

highlighted the country's increasingly normalised international relations as further evidence of progress. Firstly, Somalia's accession to the East African Community (EAC) on 4 March 2024 was seen as a testament to Somalia's increasing stability and improved relations with nearby countries, which have often been fraught (particularly with Ethiopia and Kenya). Inclusion in the EAC requires various commitments in relation to the customs union, common market and monetary union, all of which are expected to improve Somalia's ability to stimulate trade and development (EAC, 2024). Furthermore, the lifting of an arms embargo, in place since 1992, was widely viewed as a further international endorsement of Somalia's increasing stabilisation, improved governance and normalising international relations. The decision was also justified as critical to support the FGS and SNA's efforts to lead security enforcement across the country, as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) continued its planned drawdown (UN, 2023a). Such normalisation was also boosted by a maritime security agreement between Somalia and Türkiye, agreed in late February 2024. This built upon a decade of cooperation, including Türkiye's establishment of its largest overseas military base in Mogadishu in 2017 (Hayatsever, 2024).

## 2.5 Natural resource exploration and potential benefits

Although less prominent during interviews, it was highlighted that Somalia's increasing stabilisation was enabling expanded natural resource exploration. In turn, there are mounting expectations that the country has significant untapped oil and other mineral resources. This perception was reinforced when Türkiye signed offshore oil and gas exploration deals with the FGS

in March 2024, following the February security agreement (Sezer, 2024).<sup>2</sup> For a country that is rapidly urbanising, yet also facing economic calamity exacerbated by climatic shocks and insecurity, resource wealth is an attractive proposition for stimulating development and poverty alleviation. Such potential has simmered below the surface for many years, as insecurity prevented any large-scale extraction, but recent improvements are increasing the anticipation.

The ability to effectively manage any new resource wealth, however, must be treated with extreme caution, as it has acute potential to heighten existing tensions and drive new armed conflict. In 2018, the FGS reached agreements with FMSs in relation to ownership, management and revenue sharing from natural resource extraction (Abshir et al., 2020), but these agreements have not been tested with the highly lucrative opportunities from oil and gas. It has long been noted that such revenues could exacerbate tensions, not just between the FGS and FMSs, but also between directly affected clans (Gundel, 2020). This can quickly descend into violent conflict, as regularly occurs over grazing land for herders.

Ultimately, although the future of resource extraction and its impact on Somalia remains highly uncertain, it is an issue that must be proactively addressed by different levels of government, international actors engaged in the country and domestic civil society actors. The possible implications of scaled-up natural resource extraction are a poignant illustration of the contrasting perspectives towards Somalia and its future, prompting us to turn to the countervailing negative analyses.

<sup>2</sup> It is also important to note that Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have had long-term engagement in the Somali peninsula, where the former worked closely with the Farmaajo government and the latter with Somaliland. The UAE has, however, significantly expanded cooperation with the FGS under Hassan Sheikh (Levy, 2024).

### 3 Context negative: drivers of instability persist

The counterargument to the preceding analysis centres on persistent fragility, various triggers for renewed hostilities between actors, governance issues, and the sheer scale of humanitarian need amidst broader economic challenges. This chapter examines the key elements pertaining to this more pessimistic view of Somalia's future. For international aid actors, it is important that significant attention is paid to these negative factors because they have the potential to undermine any support for locally led peacebuilding. Critically, working with Somali peacebuilding actors must be done in flexible ways that enable them to address the following challenges, while ensuring flexibility to adapt to an ever-changing situation.

#### 3.1 Al-Shabab is resilient and biding its time

Despite the significant liberation of territory from al-Shabab over the past 24 months, some interviewees argued that the organisation remained militarily and financially resilient. This analysis contended that the restrictions on financial flows to al-Shabab were relatively insignificant, as the group maintained extensive financial resources at its disposal, alongside continued strong revenue-raising capacities. The group's resilience is also grounded in its ability to 'appease communal demands and leverage grievances where necessary' (Hockey and Jones, 2020). Consequently, al-Shabab has been able to weather the ongoing government offensive, as it tactically retreated from areas. Conflict dynamics in recent months add weight to such a perspective.

Following the initial territorial gains by clan militias and later the SNA, the offensive has, at the very least, stalled, but in critical ways, it has actually regressed. The government has struggled to defend newly liberated areas, as al-Shabab has launched counterattacks that have reclaimed territory. The mobility of al-Shabab has also proven difficult to address, as SNA troops have been hampered by difficult terrain and weather conditions (Muibu, 2024). As SNA holding forces prove insufficient, the establishment of government services and provision of aid have been constrained. This has been frustrating for the FGS, as it seeks to demonstrate to local populations the benefit of ousting al-Shabab. Views amongst interviewed aid actors are varied: some are willing to operate in such high-risk areas, but are often constrained by security protocols, while others will not knowingly put staff in acute danger. An additional dynamic is that international aid actors are cautious about having humanitarian assistance leveraged for stabilisation and political purposes, which could undermine their claims to impartiality and neutrality. Consequently, there is a growing sense of frustration and disenchantment amongst local populations, as they feel neglected by the state and aid actors.

The conclusion of this strand of analysis is that al-Shabab may be diminished, but it is far from eliminated and is poised to retake further territory. As one interviewee, an expert on al-Shabab, stated:

Western media has got it all wrong. The offensive is a useless mission. The perspective



that this is a homegrown movement is incorrect. There is no long-term vision for after al-Shabab is cleared from an area.

While the early days of the offensive witnessed extensive cooperation between local communities and the FGS/SNA, there is now growing distrust. Some interviewees believed this could lead to further divisions and armed conflict beyond al-Shabab.

### 3.2 Risks associated with the ATMIS drawdown

In connection to al-Shabab biding its time, most interviewees indicated concern over the drawdown and eventual withdrawal of ATMIS, scheduled for the end of 2024. The SNA was already seen to be struggling to hold newly liberated territories, while the ATMIS drawdown, including thousands of troops withdrawn in 2023, is putting further pressure on the SNA. Multiple interviewees believed al-Shabab is waiting for further drawdowns before it increases offensives to retake territory. Despite the FGS remaining publicly committed to the scheduled ATMIS withdrawal, all interviewees believed there would be a continued international force of some description, similar to how ATMIS replaced the previous African Union Mission in Somalia.

Although a continued international presence was deemed both necessary and likely, with planning already underway (SCR, 2024), multiple interviewees also highlighted how this continues to feed into an al-Shabab narrative that Somalia is beholden to foreign interests. The high proportion of Ethiopian troops in ATMIS was highlighted specifically, as their presence was utilised by al-Shabab for recruitment and propaganda purposes, considering the long-term animosity between Somalia and Ethiopia.

Such a perception has been fuelled by the recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ethiopia and Somaliland.

### 3.3 Major flashpoint: MoU between Ethiopia and Somaliland

On 1 January 2024, Ethiopia and Somaliland signed an MoU that has become highly contentious and attracted widespread criticism. The deal would provide Ethiopia with a 50-year lease agreement that allows port access and establishment of a military base on the Red Sea coast near Berbera (Webb, 2024). In return, Somaliland claims Ethiopia will recognise it as an independent state, although Ethiopia has given no firm commitment that it will formally recognise Somaliland's statehood.

The MoU immediately drew strong opposition from the FGS, claiming it was a breach of Somalia's sovereignty. It has also been widely criticised by African and western states, while also drawing notable opposition within Somaliland, particularly in the region around Berbera that would host the port and military base. Although the future of the MoU remains uncertain, it has already had significant negative impacts across Somalia.

Beyond deepening tensions between the FGS and Ethiopia and Somaliland, the MoU is seen as an ideal recruiting tool for al-Shabab, according to interviewees. It reinforces a narrative that Ethiopia continues to assert undue influence over Somalia, where al-Shabab is portrayed as the only actor willing to forcefully resist this perceived imperialism. More broadly, the MoU is also seen as aggravating pre-existing tensions in the Horn of Africa, such as in relation to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, with potential regional repercussions.

It is worth noting, however, that Somaliland has long sought international recognition for which it contends it has a considerable foundation. The MoU can be viewed as antagonistic, but it is also reflective of a long-held Somaliland ambition. Although the issue of recognition remains contentious, one interviewee suggested that the international community has taken Somaliland's peace and stability for granted, without sufficient support. The MoU is illustrative of how the status quo can be quickly usurped, as was also the case with armed conflict in the contested border areas between Somaliland and Puntland in recent years.

### 3.4 Geopolitics and international meddling

Beyond Ethiopia's influence, geopolitical dynamics have had major impacts on Somalia for many years, as international actors' competition for influence disrupts stabilisation efforts. Although no country is immune to geopolitical influences, the impact is more severe in contexts of fragile state formation, like Somalia. Historically, the United States (US) has had extensive military, political and economic engagement in the country, from its 'war on terror' and extensive drone strikes to recent debt relief. The US engagement has often courted controversy, not just for the direct impacts, but also because its in-country presence is widely seen as a recruiting tool for al-Shabab (see Khalif, 2024). Over the past decade, however, geopolitical contestation between Türkiye and the Gulf states, while bringing some benefits such as investment and military support, has further complicated state stabilisation. The UAE was making significant inroads in Somaliland, while Türkiye and Qatar were more heavily involved in South-Central Somalia. Towards the end of Farmaajo's presidency, the UAE was also strengthening its presence in South-Central. This was upended by the 2024 military and economic

deals between Türkiye and the FGS (Soylu, 2024). Beyond geopolitical competition, violent conflict in Somalia (and the Horn) is also driven by livestock demand in the Gulf, as predatory and extractive capital disregards local needs and social structures (Duffield and Stockton, 2023).

### 3.5 Clan-based conflict and severe tensions in Sool and Sanaag

Clan-based conflict also remains significant across much of Somalia. The regions of Sool and Sanaag, at the contested border between Somaliland and Puntland, have seen some of the most intense inter-clan violence. This peaked in early 2023 around the town of Lasanod when Somaliland forces violently suppressed dissent, leading to over 100 people being killed and 600 injured (Amnesty International, 2023). Affected clans in the region are calling for their own breakaway state, to be part of Somalia (RLI, 2023). They have been courted by the FGS and denounced by Somaliland.

This series of events is indicative of the potential for clan-based tensions to rupture into violence, especially as never-ending droughts drive displacement and competition over scarce resources, such as grazing land and water (Foua et al., 2023). However, conflict is typically mediated and resolved locally, avoiding the large-scale violence seen in Ethiopia and Sudan. This is owing to community leaders' and clan elders' efforts, which many interviewees highlighted as a critical resource for locally led peacebuilding.

### 3.6 Mass displacement and humanitarian needs

When discussing conflict dynamics in Somalia during interviews, the scale and persistence of humanitarian need were generally not raised, despite 6.9 million people requiring humanitarian



assistance and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) equating to a large portion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), typically 10–25%. Climatic shocks are the new norm and are proving devastating. Multiple interviewees explained that they were focused on conflict dynamics, with humanitarian needs of less concern, although the humanitarian system was widely seen as disruptive. Mass displacement, however, was seen as both a result and often a driver of conflict,

particularly over land in urban settings. The scale of displacement, at 3.4 million people internally displaced as of early 2024 (USAID, 2024), is a critical cross-cutting issue. It is driving rapid urbanisation, where displaced people are typically some of the most vulnerable, particularly minority and marginalised clans, and women. Ultimately, the sheer scale of displacement and humanitarian response have created a detrimental political economy of aid across Somalia.

# 4 The political economy of aid in Somalia

By channelling billions of dollars into the country, the aid economy has profound impacts across all facets of life, undermining governance progress, creating many vested interests and encouraging short-termism. All of this negatively impacts the long-term trust-building and strategic thinking that underpin effective peacebuilding. The political economy of aid has evolved in response to decades-long armed conflict and extensive humanitarian need in Somalia. This chapter captures some of these dynamics and emphasises the scale of the challenge, particularly in relation to humanitarian financing. The aid economy must be addressed to ensure a more conducive environment for locally led peacebuilding.

This inadequate aid economy is arguably best illustrated through the immense scale and

volatility of annual HRPs and related funding, which offer a clear year-to-year comparison. Table 1 is demonstrative, where 2017 and 2022 involved significantly scaled-up responses to drought-induced crises. Drought persisted in 2023, but was punctuated by floods that affected 2.5 million people (OCHA, 2023). Humanitarian funding, however, halved. Although the HRPs do not capture development and peacebuilding funding, the scale and volatility of funding impact the entirety of the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. In contrast, international development assistance has been relatively stable at around US\$300-400 million per annum over the past four years, according to the World Bank (World Bank, 2024a) – both smaller and more consistent than humanitarian funding.

**Table 1** Scale and fluctuations of humanitarian aid to Somalia

HRP funding flows	2016 (\$ billions)	2017 (\$ billions)	2022 (\$ billions)	2023 (\$ billions)
GDP	7.4	8.3	10.4	10.7 (est.)
HRP request	0.9	1.5	2.3	2.6
HRP funded	0.7	1.3	2.3	1.2

Sources: OCHA, 2023; World Bank, 2024b  
Note: HRP – Humanitarian Response Plan

The scale and modalities of humanitarian aid to Somalia have created a multitude of dynamics in the country that are antithetical to peacebuilding. Firstly, the scale of humanitarian aid has made it one of the biggest industries and employers in Somalia. Consequently, it has created a wide range of vested interests, where there is significant competition for control over aid flows. Actors face pressure to secure aid for their clan, which heightens competition and contributes to the neglect of minority and marginalised clans. It has also been suggested that political arrangements benefit from the permanent precarity of displaced populations, as it brings in aid funding (Jaspars et al., 2023). This aid economy has attracted widespread criticism for perpetuating Somalia's aid dependence, from macro-level rent-seeking to camp gatekeepers that take a commission from displaced people's assistance (Thomas and Majid, 2023). 'Diversion of aid is systemic and widespread' (Hailey et al., 2023: 4), yet humanitarian assistance remains essential for averting famine. The availability of aid also influences displacement patterns, as people pursue available support. This has accelerated urbanisation, with displaced people relegated to the urban periphery (Gist Research, 2022). The consequences of humanitarian aid, however, extend beyond issues of dependence.

The vast fluctuations in humanitarian aid to Somalia run contrary to effective approaches for peacebuilding and reconciliation. As the figures in Table 1 illustrate, humanitarian aid volumes can halve or double from one year to the next, often with short, unpredictable timeframes. While this reflects responsiveness to the volatility of humanitarian need and has mitigated food security crises, it has deleterious impacts. Firstly, the scale of funding crowds out peace and development activities, encouraging short-termism – namely addressing and prioritising immediate needs rather than long-term structures

that drive and perpetuate these needs. Secondly, short-termism contributes to bad practices, as different actors end up having to spend funds expediently rather than thoughtfully. International aid actors then often force local actors into compromised positions of needing to spend quickly rather than being able to implement coherently. Finally, the fluctuations in funding undermine longer-term peacebuilding efforts. For example, staff at Somali organisations are poached by international aid actors, creating institutional instability. Such dynamics were reported across interviews, with interviewees providing numerous anecdotes of large-scale humanitarian funding disrupting peacebuilding efforts.

Although smaller in scale, development and governance initiatives further complicate the political economy of aid in Somalia. Long-running resilience programmes, such as the Somalia Resilience Program (SomReP) and Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRICS), are generally positively regarded for their impact, but are minuscule in comparison to broader humanitarian programming. They are also perceived as 'INGO clubs' by many Somali civil society actors, owing to INGOs receiving the bulk of funding and dominating decision-making processes. On the government side, the World Bank has invested hundreds of millions of dollars into the FGS in recent years, which has tested the state's absorption capacity. While being necessary to achieve benchmarks for debt relief, the large volume of funding has, to a degree, compounded the difficulties associated with humanitarian funding. On the one hand, millions of people are caught in perpetual crisis, but on the other, many actors are profiting significantly from incoming aid. Despite years of critiques of the aid system in Somalia, improvements have not been forthcoming to any significant degree; the

system remains oriented to the short term, and often complicates rather than improves locally led peacebuilding.

Before shifting to focus specifically on peacebuilding, it's also important to emphasise the continued dominance of United Nations (UN) agencies and INGOs within the aid sector in Somalia. This outsized influence persists, despite a multitude of Somali civil society actors calling for 'justice to an unjust system' (Ali, 2016). The earlier criticisms relating to aid capture are also valid for UN agencies and INGOs, where they operate through a competitive and expansionist mindset

that is antithetical to the localisation – let alone decolonisation – of aid. The Somalia Humanitarian Fund (SHF), which consistently channels over 50% of funding directly to Somali organisations, is often held up as a positive example. Zooming out, however, the SHF only makes up a tiny part of humanitarian funding in Somalia. Local and national organisations continue to receive under 3% in direct funding (Barter and Sumlut, 2023). Such international dominance must be addressed as an urgent systemic problem. A focus on only micro-level peacebuilding initiatives will struggle against a system that is often disempowering for local actors.

## 5 The state of peacebuilding in Somalia

Considering the many dynamics outlined in the preceding chapters, peacebuilding and conflict resolution remain as pertinent as ever across multiple axes in Somalia. This chapter provides a brief mapping of different levels of peacebuilding, before examining key barriers and enablers to locally led peacebuilding. The mapping is by no means all-inclusive, but is intended to give a sense of different mechanisms and efforts to support peacebuilding. It will be followed with some examples of good practice that are particularly informative for how international aid actors might want to better support locally led peacebuilding in Somalia. This chapter also looks at how various issues in the preceding sections play out in practice.

At the federal level, international actors are directing extensive funding towards stabilisation (and securitisation), centred on contributing to the degradation of al-Shabab, while improving relationships between the FGS and FMSs.<sup>3</sup> This includes extensive diplomatic engagement, alongside the pre-eminent vehicle for financial and technical support, the Somalia Stability Fund (SSF). Since its launch in 2012, the SSF was intended as a flexible and responsive vehicle for supporting peacebuilding efforts (Laws, 2018). In its third iteration, the SSF focuses significantly on political settlements, democratisation and related areas, rather than grassroots peacebuilding. It also produces extensive, high-quality research. SSF staff are respected as being highly attuned and connected to the nuances across Somalia. According to one interviewee, ‘the SSF is much

better than the big private contractors that USAID funds, but it’s difficult to connect big programmes down to local levels’. Another interviewee suggested the SSF was not particularly agile, citing an example of slow adaptation to a rapidly developing crisis, while the SSF also faced competition from UN agencies seeking to assert their authority. Such dynamics are again illustrative of the problems associated with international actors dominating the aid sector in Somalia.

Like the humanitarian system, competition between international actors is prevalent in the peacebuilding space in Somalia, leading to domestic actors often being crowded out. The UN supports peacebuilding in multiple ways, such as through the global Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), which transferred over US\$1 billion to Somalia initiatives between 2008 and 2021. It addresses various issues such as elections and security-sector reform (PBF, 2024). In 2023, the long-standing Somalia Multi-Partner Trust Fund was re-launched as the Somalia Joint Fund, which aims for an annual budget of US\$60 million, although with a cross-nexus focus (UN, 2023b).

Individual UN agencies, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), are also engaged in community-level peacebuilding. IOM programming that brings conflicting communities together and matches their contributions for peace and development projects was positively regarded by multiple interviewees. It is important to note that the World Bank, although focused

<sup>3</sup> Somaliland appears deprioritised, likely owing to relative stability and less al-Shabab influence in its territory. Violent conflict, however, is present, including scores of deaths in Sool and Sanaag, where tensions remain high. As one interviewee explained, Somaliland’s relative peace is problematically taken for granted by the international community.

more broadly on governance and economic development, also has a major influence on state functioning and the economy, and therefore on peacebuilding. This is particularly owing to the volume of financing it provides; for the World Bank's 2024–2028 Country Partnership Framework, it has secured commitments for US\$2.3 billion in international development assistance. Like humanitarian funding, this represents a significant portion of GDP (World Bank, 2024b).

At more localised levels, there is a wide range of peacebuilding initiatives underway in Somalia. Peacebuilding INGOs, such as Interpeace and Saferworld, have had decades of engagement in Somalia, alongside more nexus-oriented actors like Oxfam (which commissioned the conflict analysis quoted at the beginning of this paper). The latter, specifically Oxfam Novib (Netherlands), has a long history of supporting civil society development in Somalia, with a significant focus on peacebuilding. This included long-term, flexible funding that was critical for the establishment of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Adeso, the Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre, the Somali Women's Study Centre, NAGAAD and Candlelight (Mydlak, 2019). The prominence of these organisations many years later, many of which are women-led and committed to women's empowerment, is reflective of the value in sustained, agile commitments to civil society strengthening.

Despite the extensive presence of international aid actors, the bulk of direct community-level peacebuilding is by Somali civil society actors and communities. The peacebuilding sector has a burgeoning number of NGOs, such as the highly regarded Centre for Peace and Democracy (CPD), Life and Peace Institute, and Puntland

Development and Research Center, focused specifically on peacebuilding. Other actors, such as Adeso and Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC), are multi-mandate, with both organisations widely respected for their work on women's empowerment. Despite being at the coalface of peacebuilding and facing the most acute security risks, these organisations are beholden to wildly fluctuating budgets and minimal institutional support, including for security, while being marginalised from key decision-making processes. International support for localisation is often out of necessity, due to inaccessibility, rather than in support of endogenous civil society development (Barter and Sumlut, 2023).

Aside from the NGO sector, it is also important to note that communities often self-initiate peacebuilding and resolve conflicts without external support. They are also the first responders, since community leaders, particularly elders, meet to address conflicts. Their effectiveness is a key resource that is often overlooked and is also why violence in Somalia is typically sporadic and fluid, rather than at the scales seen in Ethiopia or Sudan, according to many interviewees. Preventing and mitigating inter-clan conflicts takes considerable time to ensure trust is built, such as through joint community development projects, dialogues and other initiatives. However, injections of funding to NGOs and communities in short timeframes can prove disruptive. As all interviewees reiterated, peacebuilding requires long-term, thoughtful support, yet such an approach is often lacking in Somalia. Instead, the aid economy and its major, but inconsistent, injection of resources can often prove counterproductive to many community-based initiatives. As some interviewees highlighted, clan leaders and elders are typically

adept at resolving conflicts, but funding can range from being too rigid to being a distraction, thus proving disruptive to local initiatives.

Other peacebuilding initiatives seek to address conflict dynamics specifically related to al-Shabab, but multiple interviewees highlighted the difficulty in accessing newly liberated areas. This was typically due to risk aversion and/or severe security concerns. Such a dynamic was common across interviews, as the FGS sought aid actors to provide aid and services in newly liberated areas to demonstrate the benefits of ousting al-Shabab. One interviewee explained that their organisation wanted to conduct activities in such areas, but they were then prevented by the consortium lead who determined security protocols.

In more successful instances, a diversity of approaches to peacebuilding are being deployed, such as using health and basic services for entry points, while there is an increasing focus on integrating environment and climate change issues into peacebuilding. Attention is also increasingly paid to addressing trauma and the importance of reforming inequitable UN practices as they continue to have outsized influence over aid flows and practices in Somalia compared to domestic actors (GPPAC, 2022). Addressing gender inequalities and minority clan marginalisation was raised during interviews, but the bulk of peacebuilding appears focused on engaging men, such as clan elders. However, various

organisations, such as NAGAAD in Somaliland and SSWC in Somalia, have sought to elevate the role of women in peacebuilding. A consistent theme amongst interviewees was the need for international actors to better align peacebuilding funding and initiatives with the state's governance efforts at national and sub-national levels.

The roles and impact of the African Union (AU) and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) were also elucidated throughout data collection, but they were considered less significant than the other actors and dynamics already outlined. The AU was considered important, particularly owing to its deployment of military forces through ATMIS. Its importance related to securitisation and stability rather than a significant role in peacebuilding. The presence of foreign troops was widely considered necessary, albeit perpetuating the problems associated with international intervention in Somalia. IGAD, on the other hand, was viewed as an important institution for promoting regional cooperation and development, but not particularly significant or influential in relation to peacebuilding in Somalia. The scale of violence in Ethiopia and Sudan were seen as absorbing IGAD's attention and energy, alongside Sudan suspending its membership in January 2024. Interviewees were definitive that international aid actors should focus on engaging and supporting Somali national and sub-national actors, both state and civil society.

## 6 Key enablers and barriers to locally led peacebuilding

This chapter examines the key enablers and barriers to locally led peacebuilding in Somalia, while emphasising that any international support must be attuned to the many political and contextual nuances explored in previous chapters. As such, many of the enablers and barriers are reflective of and responsive to Somalia's problematic aid economy, while shifting the paper's analysis to a more implementation and programmatic focus. Although grounded in a diversity of literature, the analysis is centred upon key themes that arose during interviews, of which there was significant commonality, despite the diversity of interviewees.

Most of the enablers and barriers are already widely known, indicating that the aid system in Somalia, like in many contexts, struggles with inertia and/or is beholden to aid systems that are antithetical to supporting locally led peacebuilding. While many geopolitical influences and the resilience of al-Shabab remain perpetually difficult to address, there is plenty of scope to improve the scaffolding of international support for locally led peacebuilding.

Rather than focus on the granular specifics of peacebuilding, which many Somali actors are highly experienced in implementing, this chapter focuses primarily on structural enablers and barriers. In many ways, addressing these systemic issues is about international actors reducing their interference, while enhancing respect for the agency and autonomy of Somali actors.

### 6.1 Enablers

- **Long-term support/funding.** This was universally seen as critical to supporting locally led peacebuilding, which requires trust-building between actors at different levels. Predictable funding also enables organisations to better recruit and retain staff that then improves programme coherency.
- **Flexible funding.** Bottom-up/community-led approaches were widely seen as the most effective, and these benefitted from flexible funding. This enables communities to steer initiatives towards their needs through genuinely participatory approaches, while allowing civil society actors to respond to sporadic or emerging violent conflict.
- **Success based on trust.** The importance of trust translates across levels, from donors to civil society actors to communities. When donors (including UN and INGOs) trust the actors they are funding, those actors feel better able to deliver and innovate, as there is less pressure. Trust takes time to build and requires commitment from international actors.
- **Equitable partnerships.** Local actors emphasised the importance of partnerships that were as equitable as possible, from decision-making to implementation. Sub-contracting relationships were regarded as not just inappropriate, but also undermining peacebuilding objectives, as they contributed to short-term approaches and undermined trust-building. In contrast, long-standing partnerships with allies, based on solidarity, were highly valued by Somali civil society actors.



- **Integrated approaches.** Locally led peacebuilding works best when integrated with broader development and humanitarian activities to ensure any material benefits connect rather than divide population groups. This is also important when donors fund predominantly humanitarian organisations with requirements that they consider peacebuilding dynamics or at minimum become more conflict-sensitive. Integration also means addressing governance dynamics and engaging the state.
- **Commitment to localisation.** Such a commitment, whether for donors, UN or INGO funding intermediaries, can be a critical enabler for locally led approaches. Incentives and approaches can be adjusted to support localisation, but if the underlying commitment is lacking, progress often remains stalled.

## 6.2 Barriers

- **Humanitarian funding.** The scale and volatility of humanitarian funding poses one of the most significant barriers to locally led peacebuilding, as consistently highlighted throughout this report. It crowds out peacebuilding initiatives, exacerbates an inadequate aid economy and undermines the stability of Somali civil society actors. In contrast, development funding is more amenable to peacebuilding through integrated programming, but continues to be undermined by volatile humanitarian financing.
- **Projectisation of aid.** This creates both short-term and inflexible aid, which contributes to ineffectual and even damaging peacebuilding processes. It also disincentivises holistic and systematic approaches to peacebuilding, as actors divert attention to resource mobilisation that may not align with their strategies.
- **International actors' dominance.** This pervades the entire aid sector in Somalia, creating counterproductive competition amongst actors. Local actors are crowded out and/or forced to accept problematic funding modalities. International actors then compete for local partners, while these local actors are marginalised from decision-making processes. International actors also poach staff, which continues to undermine the institutional strength and coherency of local actors.
- **Lack of trust.** This is prevalent across the aid sector in Somalia, owing particularly to major issues of aid diversion and misuse over the years. It must be noted that international aid actors rarely take responsibility for the inefficient ways in which they often channel high volumes of funding in short timeframes. The lack of trust is exacerbated because: (a) UN and INGOs dominate access to donors, which is critical for trust building; and (b) donors rarely, if ever, visit insecure locations, where important peacebuilding work occurs by local actors. Such visits build trust.
- **Funding misaligned with political events.** Funding cycles typically exist in isolation, despite consistency of funding being essential during key moments, such as elections. If funding ceases at an inopportune time, such as just prior to an election, it can have wide-ranging negative impacts on peacebuilding.
- **Disproportionate funding to pooled funds.** Although such funding can be comparatively accessible for local actors, they often provide relatively short-term funding and limited long-term partnership building. Pooled funds can crowd out longer-term funding to other intermediaries, such as INGOs, some of which may have deeper commitments to locally led peacebuilding.
- **Democratisation prioritised over peace.** Such a prioritisation means that long-term peacebuilding efforts can be disrupted, as donors push for democratisation before peace and stability are sufficiently secured. In turn, this can distort peace-oriented actors away from what is really needed to solidify peace.

- **Clan and elite capture of power and resources.** This can be detrimental not just to the immediate prospects for locally led peacebuilding, but it also exacerbates distrust within the sector. It is not easily avoided, as it requires nuanced understanding and analysis, yet many staff at donor and UN agencies are on relatively short rotations.

### 6.3 Good donor practice: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

This good-practice example is highlighted because it illustrates what can be done with sufficient donor commitment and in a way that addresses many of the aid system problems identified in this paper. In the broader context of localisation and in line with Switzerland's Grand Bargain commitments,<sup>4</sup> the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is in the process of shifting its approach in Somalia. A headquarters directive required country-level cooperation programmes to provide approximately one-third of funding each to multilateral institutions, INGOs and (directly to) local civil society actors. Staff are then held accountable for achieving the benchmark. This has contributed to SDC increasingly providing substantive direct and multi-year funding to local civil society actors across humanitarian, development and peace spaces in Somalia, while institutional relationships are solidified, thus building trust. Such an approach does, however, require sufficient human resources within SDC. Under SDC's monitoring approach, known as its Framework for Risk Governance and Adaptive Programming, and based on initial partner risk and capacity assessments, an external agency

provides institutional strengthening and third-party monitoring. This approach helps address issues relating to funding-absorption capacity, while also reflecting a long-term vision to support civil society actors institutionally.

Other significant actions underpin SDC's approach to supporting locally led initiatives. It commissioned major research pieces to inform its shift in approach, including a specific focus on meeting the needs of marginalised clans. SDC's funding is multi-year and relatively flexible. It has established a long-term agreement with the Road to Sustainable Peace (RSP) consortium, which is regarded as one of the best examples of locally led peacebuilding in Somalia. RSP was established with the support of SDC and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency to work on peacebuilding and good governance. Two RSP members, Academy for Peace and Development and Puntland Development and Research Center, had previously benefitted from significant institutional strengthening via long-term support from Interpeace, reinforcing the importance of long-term cooperation. Additionally, SDC has supported the locally led Nexus Consortium with seed funding and support for building donor relations, alongside critical support for the Elman Peace Foundation.

The SDC model is admirable for how it addresses many of the barriers and enablers to locally led peacebuilding, while being context appropriate and responsive. It demonstrates commitment to direct funding towards civil society actors, not through intermediaries, which continues to be the de facto approach for international aid actors. The caveat to SDC's approach is that it requires additional investment in human resources at the country-

<sup>4</sup> Switzerland is co-convening the localisation workstream of the Grand Bargain, which has provided extra impetus for systemic changes across SDC's portfolio to advance localisation efforts.

level to form and maintain relationships. It is this point that might make it less feasible for many international aid actors if operating individually, but there is still plenty to be learnt from the SDC approach, such as the institutional willingness, risk tolerance and rule setting that cumulatively created the conditions necessary to support locally led peacebuilding. The impact for local actors has been extensive and the model should be replicated, while there is also significant scope for like-minded donors to pool resources and engagement.

#### **6.4 Locally led good practice: the Road to Sustainable Peace and Nexus consortia**

These good practices are highlighted because they demonstrate how locally led approaches can evolve in practice and prove effective. As international aid actors resist change, these examples reinforce the importance of addressing the systemic problems within the aid sector to support Somali actors to flourish. The RSP consortium was highlighted across interviews as an excellent example of locally led peacebuilding, which should inform international actors' engagement in Somalia. RSP consists of three members: Puntland Development and Research Center, the Academy for Peace and Development (in Somaliland), and The Horn Centre (in South-Central Somalia), which ensures diverse geographical and political reach.

Each organisation has received long-term support from international partners, with Interpeace playing a particularly critical role. Support focused not just on programme delivery, but robust institutional strengthening. In 2015, Interpeace phased out from being the funding intermediary and RSP was established (albeit somewhat out of necessity rather than entirely intentionally). Subsequently, RSP has continued

to deliver high-impact work and garnered significant respect throughout the aid sector. RSP focuses on a diversity of work, such as research/analysis, conflict resolution, and community-led peacebuilding and related activities. As of 2024, RSP appears to be the only locally led peacebuilding consortium that receives direct donor funding, rather than receiving it through intermediaries.

The Nexus Consortium is comparatively new and more ambitious in scale than RSP, as it brings together eight Somali organisations from each FMS, Puntland and Somaliland. Its mission is to work not just on peacebuilding, but across the nexus, while being a thought leader on aid practices in Somalia. Founded in 2019, it has received extensive support from Oxfam, plus seed funding from SDC and a substantive pilot grant from Dutch Foreign Affairs. Although each member organisation is well established individually, Nexus seeks to challenge the many internationally led consortia across Somalia, while demonstrating what locally led work across the humanitarian–peace–development nexus can achieve. It has proven adept in thought leadership, particularly during the pandemic, and is becoming increasingly operational as a consortium, rather than just individual organisations. Its funding, however, remains unpredictable and short-term, which impedes progress. Ultimately, it offers a viable alternative to international aid actors.

For international aid actors, both RSP and Nexus offer illuminating examples of how things can be done differently. There are, however, various considerations and implications. Both consortia benefitted from established and trusted relationships with INGOs and subsequently donors, which take time to forge. They also required donors to take a leap of faith in providing financial support, rather than maintaining the

safer and easier option of funding international actors. This raises questions of whether other international aid actors are able and/or want to build such trust and make the commitment, along with perceived risk, to supporting such consortia.

## 6.5 Individual organisation good practice

Aside from RSP and Nexus as standout consortia, there are a multitude of Somali organisations implementing high-quality locally led peacebuilding, albeit funded nearly entirely through intermediary international actors. The CPD has been operational since 2003, with a primary focus on facilitating community-led peacebuilding. Adeso has been operational for 30 years, expanding significantly through long-term international support to civil society strengthening. SSWC is increasingly focusing on peacebuilding with prioritisation for supporting women leaders and advancing gender equity. Minority Rights Group, although not involved in operations, provides analysis and raises attention towards issues relating to minority clans in Somalia. Many of these organisations, such as CPD and SSWC, have an array of other donors, but remain beholden to predominantly short-term funding.

In terms of channelling funding towards locally led peacebuilding, it's important to recognise the significant divergence in approaches between intermediary UN agencies and INGOs. As far as the latter, actors such as Interpeace, Oxfam and Trócaire are widely regarded as committed to supporting locally led action, which is also evident in their operational structures and partnership modalities. If donors are reluctant or unable to directly fund local actors, then they should at least direct funding towards the international intermediaries that can demonstrate a commitment to locally led peacebuilding. This contrasts with most UN agencies and INGOs that tend to adopt a competitive, expansionist model of operations, where funding to local actors is largely a sub-contracting arrangement. Such inappropriate approaches remain pervasive and are defended on shaky grounds, including the following justification from one INGO interviewee:

In reality, we are working with very short timelines and strict guidelines and regulations. Unless we know partners, it's difficult to have something locally led and designed.

Such an explanation prompts the question of why international actors consistently do not 'know' their partners.

## 7 Recommendations for international aid actors

The following recommendations are designed with recognition of the diversity amongst international aid actors, such as financial scale and willingness and/or ability to influence aid systems. The recommendations are intended to be pragmatic, yet also adaptable, from programmatic approaches to systems influencing. Although the focus is on Somalia, the recommendations (and much of the preceding analysis) are relevant to a multitude of contexts.

Considering the political economy and aid systems analysis in the first half of this report, many recommendations are also designed to address the related problems. This is in recognition that good locally led peacebuilding will be greatly enhanced if structural issues are also addressed, from improving aid coherence with state institutions to transforming problematic aid financing practices.

### 7.1 Programmatic approaches

- **Implement long-term, flexible funding.** Despite being a common recommendation, long-term, flexible funding is ever-critical for effective locally led peacebuilding. Funding should be for minimum five-year periods, but with the intention of longer-term, consistent funding. Flexibility is critical to ensure participatory design processes and needs-driven contextual adaptation that will lead to higher impact.
- **Avoid or at least minimise international intermediaries.** International actors continue to dominate the aid sector in Somalia, despite years of local actors challenging the system. Wherever possible, donors should avoid perpetuating these systemic inequities.
- **Only fund international actors demonstrably committed to localisation.** If funding must be channelled through international actors to support locally led peacebuilding, this should only be with those demonstrably committed to localisation.
- **Ensure government engagement.** Locally led peacebuilding must engage Somali government structures, at all levels, with the intention of supporting overall governance and government-led peacebuilding and stabilisation.
- **Encourage women and minority inclusion.** This should not be dogmatically imposed, but it should be encouraged with any support to local actors, as both women and minority clans remain heavily marginalised in peacebuilding. This can include allocating funding specifically for women's and minority rights organisations.
- **Build trust with local actors.** This can take many forms, but it requires specific attention. Simple steps such as phone calls and meetings are useful, while effort should be made to avoid UN agencies and INGOs being relationship gatekeepers.
- **Expand informed risk appetite.** Ill-informed risk taking can be counter-productive and fuel aid system problems in Somalia, but increasing international actors' informed risk appetite is required to expand support to locally led peacebuilding.
- **Address reconciliation and trauma.** Both areas are underserved, yet critically important across the country. International actors should ensure they are addressed within any broader focus on peacebuilding.

## 7.2 Specific programmatic options

### Best option

Donors and other international aid actors fund directly to Somali organisations, drawing on the example of SDC. The RSP and Nexus Consortium offer ready-made, reliable options, with the latter having more pressing need for consistent funding, when it could be a flagship example for supporters. These locally led consortia reduce the risks associated with putting all of a supporter's figurative eggs in one basket, while being globally relevant examples that demonstrate a commitment to locally led peacebuilding and the decolonisation of aid. However, if individual budgeting is insufficient to support a locally led consortium, international aid actors should provide direct, long-term, flexible funding to individual Somali peacebuilding organisations, such as RSP's and Nexus's individual members. Joint financing by donors should also be pursued when individual support may be insufficient.

### Second-best option

Recognising the additional administrative burden associated with the direct funding related with the above option, donors could channel funding as directly as possible through an existing INGO partner. INGOs such as Oxfam and Trócaire are prime candidates, owing to their demonstrated localisation commitments and integrated programming over an extended period. This option will be easier for many donors and can be implemented more promptly, but it perpetuates international dominance of the aid sector. As articulated above, if funding is insufficient for consortium-level support, then donors should consider channelling funding to individual organisations.

### Third-best option

Donors should channel funding to the SSF, but with explicit conditions that it is utilised to support locally led peacebuilding with long-term and flexible contracts to partners. The SSF was far more positively regarded than UN agencies/funds and private sector contractors, but an INGO conduit is better placed to build a long-term relationship and provide institutional strengthening support, hence the preference for option two.

### Avoid

'Don't throw money into big pots!', as one interviewee expressed. Pooled funds are dominated by international actors who are often disconnected from contextual nuances, whereas SSF was seen as far more locally connected.

## 7.3 Advocacy and influencing

- **Challenge the humanitarian system.**

Its influence in the aid economy is widely detrimental, particularly for locally led peacebuilding. All international aid actors should advocate for systemic change, such as shifting towards more stable, longer-term funding, while challenging the competitive dynamics and international dominance of the system.

- **Champion locally led solutions.** From the micro to macro levels, locally led solutions are the most effective in Somalia, yet international actors maintain disproportionate influence and resources. Across different forums, all international aid actors should champion such solutions, not just by civil society actors, but also government. This also entails challenging and resisting externally imposed approaches and actors.

- **Ensure engagement with Somaliland.** It's critical that Somaliland is not neglected and its relative stability is not taken for granted internationally. International aid actors should ensure constructive engagement with and support for Somaliland to strengthen peace and stability, particularly in contested areas around Sool and Sanaag.
- **Raise attention to natural resource extraction.** Widespread extraction may bring substantial benefits to Somalia, but also exacerbate violent conflict and divisions. It is important that it's proactively addressed and not just at the FGS level, but with FMSs, Puntland and Somaliland. International aid actors should raise attention to this issue, as it is currently overshadowed by many other issues.



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