

# Re-Assessing the Conflict Resolution in South Central Somalia: A Hybrid Approach

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**Abstract:-** This study explores the causes of conflict in South Central Somalia. It further proposes a hybrid approach towards the conflict resolution mechanism. In Somalia, Al-Shabaab, thriving on a narrative of Islamic jihad and an Islamic caliphate expansion ideology, has made the area haven of perennial and incessant conflict. The stem of conflict can be traced to the poor governance of President Barres' Regime that culminated in his overthrow and the subsequent collapse of the State. Despite numerous political, diplomatic, and military efforts to resolve the conflict in South Central regions of Somalia, there seems to be no proper solution attained yet. This paper uses a descriptive survey design. The researcher targeted the Somali population residing in the South Central Somali region, AMISOM security forces, Government officials, local women leaders and religious leaders and the youth. Data was collected using questionnaires, observations and focus group discussions and then analyzed using content analysis and statistical software. The paper found out that the Somalia problem is a function of a multiplicity of political, economic, religious and environmental causes that resulted in spiraling of the conflict through corresponding reaction for each conflict and/or conflict causative action. This paper thus calls for an overhaul of the existing peace processes with an emphasis on a peace process which is a hybrid of top-down and bottom-up approaches to ensure lasting peace in Somalia.

**Keywords-** Conflict, Resolution, Governance, Grassroots.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Barre's regime focused more on defense and security expenditure at the expense of civil sector needs. This contributed to Somalia becoming one of the States in Africa which was highly militarized. The unsustainable military size, forced the Government to divert financial resources from essential Government functions (Ahmed & Green, 1999). The perceived military superiority propelled Siad Barre to attempt a war with Ethiopia to annex Ogaden region. The defeat from the Ogaden war was the beginning of the Somalia current problems (Elmi, 2010, p.21).

The subsequent decline of the regime of Siad Barre in 1991 brought about anarchy, lawlessness and competition for resources. Warlords fought for control of Mogadishu and Kismayo ports to access resources. Major clans, Darood and Hawiye fought for domination and control of the major rivers in Somalia; Juba and Shabelle as well as the main

supply routes running along the two rivers. According to Mbugua (2013), Somalia had performed low in terms of economic growth following the effects of long instability of war and exploitation of resources which were reasons for the exacerbation of the protracted conflict in Somalia. The clan conflicts led by clan warlords resulted into countrywide civil war which saw production of millions of refugees into the neighboring countries while others fled to far off countries.

Somalia had received sustained international conflict resolution intervention but to no avail. Probably, the conflict resolution approach seemed not to address the root causes and therefore the numerous political, diplomatic, and military efforts was wasted. Symptoms of state collapse kept resurfacing which included clan rivalry, insurgency, political instability, economic collapse, and environmental degradation. Possibly, the peace conflict resolution parties could have been part of the problem or the real root causes may not have been identified. This paper aims at analyzing the root causes of the Somalia conflict and propose a conflict resolution mechanism.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The research commenced with a literature review of published sources. This was followed by field work which encompassed interviews, participant observation, ethnographic and geographic surveys. Further the study adopted a descriptive survey design where the target group was the accessible Somali population residing in the South Central Somali region, AMISOM security forces, Government officials, local women leaders and religious leaders and the youth. Owing to the inability to access a wide population, different social stratas were incorporated. A total of 175 respondents spread across the targeted groups were selected using purposive sampling. The researcher employed a number of instruments to collect data including the use of questionnaires, focused group discussions and observations. Content analysis was then employed in the analysis of data and use of the statistical software.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The responses from the interviewed sample population pointed out that there had been struggle on how the state of Somalia had to be controlled, which brought in economic and political power being a primary cause of instability. Further, lack of good governance had made the Somalis lack trust with any form of Government. The respondents added that a strong confederate state was suitable to stabilize

Somalia. While, the interests of external players including neighboring Kenya and Ethiopia played a big role in derailing the peace process.

There were incessant struggles for control of the state as a means to use political power to harness economic powers. Furthermore, the conflict was fueled by the hangovers of the Somalis from decades of repressive governance under the autocratic leadership of Siad Barre. This was supported by Collier's (2003) assertion that conflicts were bound to emanate in situations where skirmishes resulting from the struggle for power control in the state as well as the entire process in building the nation was seemingly the reason for exacerbated armed conflict and instability (Collier, 2003). The realization of a centralized structure of the state in Somalia was viewed as a game of Zero-sum which created losers and winners over very potentially high risk factors. The state-control of the government by special clan groups was potentially considered as a scheme which would give the country the opportunity to gather its economic wealth at the expense of terror groups and at the same time use security forces and the rule of law to gain strong political dominance.

Most respondents confided that the most leading cause for instability in the State of Somalia was the fight over control of sea ports and the main supply routes. Further, the diaspora money transfer system (hawala) was funding warlords and fuelled conflict. Private sector activities protected by armed groups cut across all clans as they were mutually beneficial.

Prior to the commencement of the Somali Civil war in the year 1991, the country was rated as one of the poorest countries in the world and highly dependent on foreign aid. The Gross National Product (GNP) in that period was about 170 US dollars with a life expectancy of 47 years (Menkhaus, 1997). Following Somali's strategic significance, the country received much foreign help in alternate manner from the US and the Soviet Union. This was a key pillar strength which enabled Siad Barre to build up military founded in bureaucracy which had no muscles to be sustained after the climax of cold war. This hastened the fall of the State of Somali in 1991. The aftermath which followed was the collapse leading to increase plundering economy and the rise of warlords who struggled for resources and power control.

The Somali conflict is exacerbated by different economic struggles. Rival factions have continued to struggle to control resources, land and trade which are the key sources of revenue. The Siad-Barre regime collapsed in 1991 prior to which it had used a socialist-legislation style, relief assistance and international military as well as political nepotism towards the efforts to secure the country's main economic resources and centralize economic power.

After 1991, the factions which were regarded victorious competed to take authority and control rural and urban assets which had been enriched the upholders of the earlier regime. Different military groups took over main

ports and airstrips and brought about tributary regimes over different productive districts. It was suggested that cases involving seizure of assets by military and clan groups, had to be reviewed; those that belonged to Government to be surrendered and distributed to the devolved units appropriately.

Respondents observed that the centre of commercial arteries like seaports and key roads controlled by warlords, business groups and clans was a source of conflict. A main source of huge revenue in Somalia was the control of main ports or commercial arteries. Those in control levied duties and struggled to control the seaports. This had led to repetitive conflicts among warlords and armed groups. The revenue thus collected was also used to buy arms and further escalate the conflict. The conflict in Somalia has had a negative impact on the native modes of production such as Agriculture, mainly livestock farming which was the mainstay of a pastoral economy. The economy of Somalia had remained fragile which had been sparked by draught and environmental degradation creating poverty on large scale. Remittances from Somalis in the diaspora played a significant role in propping up the Somali economy. A bigger portion of remittances was utilized in supporting relatives. However, while these remittances played an important role in sustaining a large population, remittances were other times used in sponsoring violent conflicts and promotion of warlords and more specifically whenever the clan was under attack or threat (CRD, 2004)

In addition, the consumption of Khat, a stimulant hallucinating plant, was heightened after the outburst of civil war largely due to militia combatants resorting to its usage to reduce battle fatigue and fear, while non-combatants chew the twigs in order to keep calm in the face of uncertainty and violent conflict. Over time it became a widespread addictive habit. Warlords have had incentives which they used to keep the population addicted to Khat because it presented a huge source of income to them. In estimation, the flights which supplied Khat to Mogadishu generated monthly revenues in excess of US\$ 170,000 which was shared among owners, airstrip authorities and warlords (World Bank, 2003).

The emergence of conflict entrepreneurs engaged in the illegal trade of small arms and light weapons as well as smuggling of goods into bordering countries which was also a significant cause of the Somali conflict and its protracted nature. Furthermore, companies in foreign countries were known to benefit from a lack of functional central government since they got an easy and uncontrolled access to the Resources in Somalia without payment of any taxes. The companies funded regional administrations and in return, their illegal businesses were rubber-stamped.

The study found that Somali women had suffered more than men during the war. The same women played a big role in promoting peace and reconciliation in the conflict. The role of women was limited when it came to bringing unity beyond the clan lines. Education would empower women in leadership role in peace-making in Somalia. Cross-clan

marriages reduced conflict in Somali society. Women had been regarded to have been influential to the elders and other actors in intervening in conflict through the mobilization of resources for financing meetings of peace construction and demobilization of support. On the other end, men typically concentrated on attaining political settlement with supposition that peace can be attained. The vision of women in regard to peace superseded this and entailed sustainable education, livelihoods, reconciliation and truth. The fall of the Somali State made women to lose their legal status and the share of equal rights which they were afforded before. Despite that, women were engaged in activities of peace. The gendered nature of the Somali-based clan politics meant that women were to be typically excluded from the full participation in peace talks.

The respondents agreed that there were fundamental differences between Islam and Political Islam. Further, they agreed that Somalis training in foreign religious institutions brought social transformation regarding Islam and Political Islam. It was agreed that Islamic courts were useful in bringing some peace and order in Somalia during their time. Additionally, categorization of political Islamic extremism was unnecessarily distorting the true nature of Islam. Finally, various armed groups in Somalia had turned religion into a tool for propagating power by urging Jihad.

Religion was a significant contributor to the Somali conflict. Religion had an important role in the Somali society. Islam was the religion practiced by all. The existence of Islamic religious groups with different auto-competing ideologies was however a reason which contributed to Somali conflict today as testified by different religious group leaders in an interview. The different radical groups had attempted to impose their radical ideologies on the society. The main religious ideology in Somali conflict had been emphasized by Al-Shabaab. The Al-Shabaab which had been regarded as the Al-Qaeda affiliate, sought to enforce a brand of foreign Islam, take control and rule Somalia. Following the lack of guiding principles for societal building and values due to conflict in Somalia, religious fundamentalism grew deeper in the country. Such ideologies were linked with foreign actors from Middle Eastern countries.

The respondents agreed that almost all struggles in Somalia today erupt along clan lines which was through the manipulation of the clan identities. The leaders used the prefix of clans to take control of resources while annexing power for themselves. Thus, the clan identity could be used destructively or constructively as mediators in conflicts. Cross-clan partnerships through Civil Society Organization and local initiatives could lead to development and trusted peace building.

According to Mbugua (2013), the anarchy that ensued in the wake of the Somali civil war resulted in clan warlords fighting over the control of key positions that were likely to be strategic in minting revenue to them as well as ensuring their access to the virgin and unexploited resources in Somalia such as cities and towns like Mogadishu, Kismayo

and Baidoa. The epitome of resource conflict had been exacerbated by the war between the Darood and the Hawiye over Shabelle and Juba river valleys.

The system of governance that the Somalis had adopted and the management of the ever divisive group identities had been a major challenge for peace-builders. Clannism seemingly overrode everything else. It was above ideologies, religion and political parties. Somalis were divided along families, sub-clans and clans that were based on patrilineal segmentary lineage (Lewis, 1961). The identity of a clan was significant since it functioned as a system of insurance and a fulfilment of emotional and psychological belongingness. The clan identity in the Somali civil war acted as an instrument of mobilization, one which affected the efforts of realizing long-lasting peace.

The Somali people consider clan identity as the cornerstone of their relationships. It is the central characteristic by which people recognize one another. All Somalis being Islamic, they strongly hold on to clan beliefs as the identity which defines an individual in society. The Holy Koran proclaims, "We made you into nations and tribes so you can recognize each other (Surah 49:11)". Identity is a human need (Burton, 1990). Among the Somalis, clan is the most important identity to associate with, as its equivalent to a life insurance. The clan members congregate during difficult and good times. When one of their members is getting married, they provide assistance. Similarly, when one of them is killed or injured or dies from a natural cause, members of their clan come together and support each other. They collaborate when watering large numbers of livestock, in supporting a poor member, or when a group needs to dig a well. Most problems are addressed within the clan organization.

The clan therefore continues to play a formal and informal role in governance. The governance structure must therefore be a hybrid form, a combination of clan system and the conventional Government structures.

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that the collapse of Somalia State, and the subsequent civil war and anarchical state resulted into incessant struggles for control of the state as a means for political power and subsequently harness economic power. Formerly, the repressive governance and autocratic leadership of Siad Barre was the main trigger of decades long conflict. The fall of the Somali State as well as the resultant anarchy created non-securitized spaces for terrorists. The fight for resources by rival factions as different militias controlled key ports and airstrips, further fuelled conflict in Somalia. Religion and clannism were also significant contributors to conflict in Somalia as they had been manipulated by religious and clan groups with competing ideologies.

The multiple setbacks suffered in the past political reconciliation efforts in Somalia which was focused on restoring authority through the Government, necessitated

the need for change of tact by initiating peace processes emanating from the grassroots as a means to sustain the peace building efforts. As such, the ownership of the peace process by Somalis is critical. Such a peace process should concentrate in Somali processes of reconciliation and more particularly the practices of bringing onboard negotiators to extensively vet positions of their constituencies. At the national level, the reconciliation process in Somalia should combine the most effective traditional mechanism, conventional conflict resolution processes and contemporary peace initiatives. It is worth noting that representation of parties to the conflict in a negotiation table will always be deeply contested. As such, the most practically possible representation system must be adopted.

Somalis appreciate good governance but too much Government at the grassroots level will be vehemently resisted. A hybrid system of governance is most ideal with the central Government not going below district level. Below that the clan dynamics must be supported prudently and allowed to govern.

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