

The Somali Conflict



Prospects for Peace

Mark Bradbury



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An Oxfam Working Paper

First published by Oxfam UK and Ireland in 1994

Reprinted by Oxfam GB in 1999

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ISBN 0 85598 271 3

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

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For the rest of the world, contact Oxfam Publishing, 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ, UK.

tel + 44 (0)1865 311311; fax + 44 (0)1865 313925; email publish@oxfam.org.uk

Published by Oxfam GB

274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ, UK

(registered as a charity, no. 202918)

Designed and typeset in 11 pt. New Century Schoolbook by Oxfam Design Department

Printed by Oxfam Print Unit

Oxfam GB is a member of Oxfam International.

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ACRONYMS USED IN THIS REPORT

CMOC	Civilian and Military Operations Centre
DHA	Department of Humanitarian Affairs
DHRR	Division for Humanitarian Relief and Development
ELCAS	Ecumenical Liaison Committee for Assistance to Somalia
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IMC	International Medical Corps
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières
NGO-C	International NGO Consortium
ORH	Operation Restore Hope
SAMO	Somali African Mukti Organisation
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SDA	Somali Democratic Alliance
SDM	Somali Democratic Movement
SDRA	Somali Development and Relief Association
SNDU	Somali National Democratic Union
SNF	Somali National Front
SNM	Somali National Movement
SNA	Somali National Alliance
SNU	Somali National Union
SPM	Somali People's Movement
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary General
SSDF	Somali Salvation Democratic Front
SSNM	Southern Somali National Movement
TNC	Transitional National Council
UNITAF	United Nations International Task Force
UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia
USC	United Somali Congress
USF	United Somali Front
USP	United Somali Party
WFP	World Food Programme

PREFACE

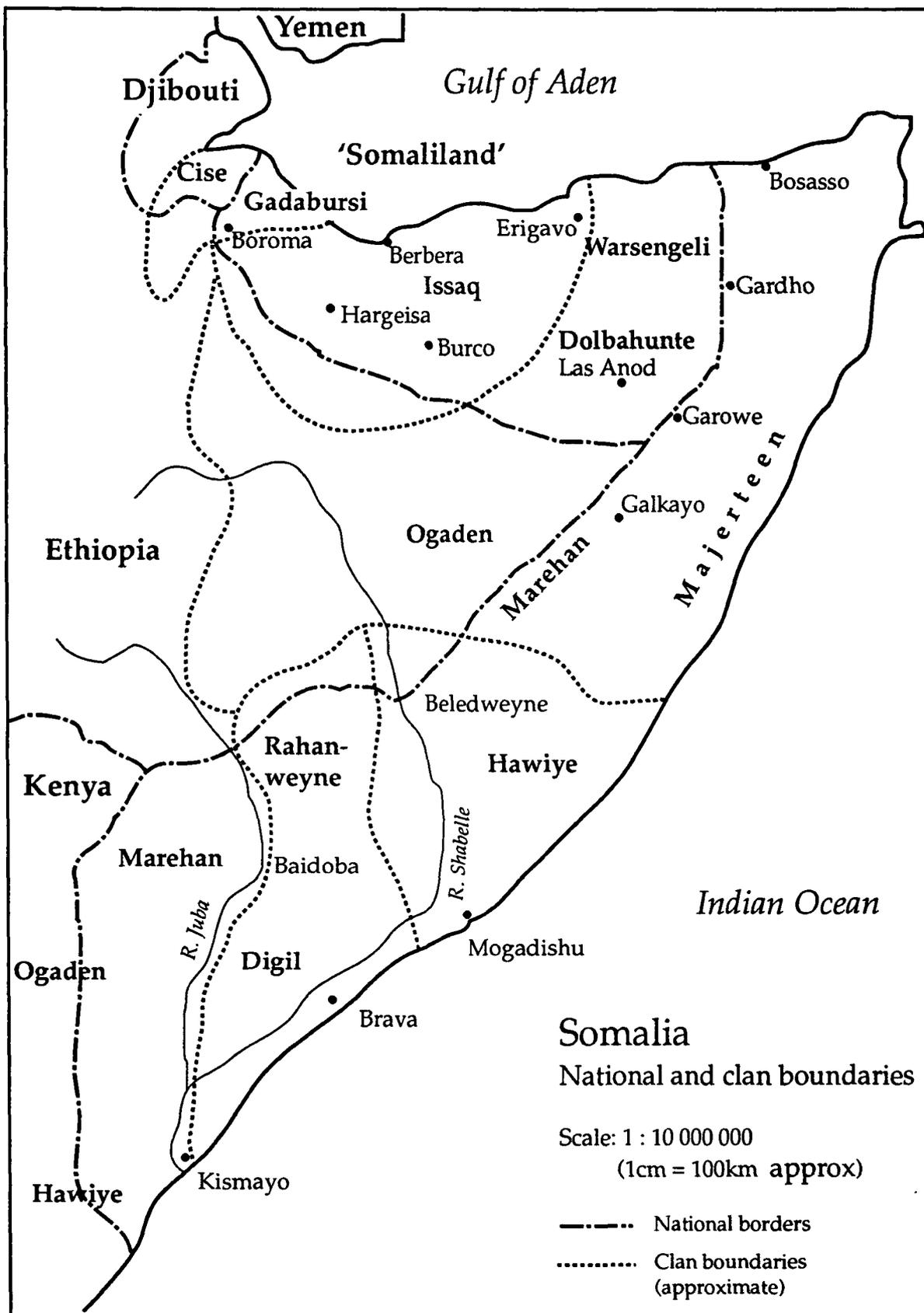
This paper was commissioned from Mark Bradbury by Oxfam (UK and Ireland), with the main aim of identifying practical ways in which the international group of Oxfams might contribute to the peace-making process in Somalia and Somaliland. When the paper was subsequently edited for publication, the recommendations which were originally specific to Oxfam, were generalised to make them relevant to all non-governmental organisations concerned with the situation in Somalia and Somaliland.

Some of the information presented in Part II and Part V is reproduced from a study written by Mark Bradbury in April 1993 for Responding to Conflict and the British NGO ActionAid. This study will be published in 1994 by Responding to Conflict, Woodbrooke College, Selly Oak, Birmingham, under the title *Development in Conflict: Experiences of ActionAid in Somalia*.

Roger Naumann
Regional Manager, Horn of Africa
Oxfam (UK and Ireland)
February 1994

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Bradbury worked in Sudan, Somalia, and Somaliland from 1983 to 1993 on a variety of relief and development projects. In 1991/92 he was employed as the Coordinator of the Inter-NGO Committee for Somalia.



PART I: INTRODUCTION

1 BACKGROUND TO REPORT

The killing of 24 Pakistani peace-keeping troops of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) in Mogadishu on 5 June 1993, and the outbreak of conflict between UNOSOM and General Mohamed Farah Aideed, started a new cycle of violence in the long-running conflict in Somalia. It brought to a halt any progress achieved in the reconciliation process in Somalia initiated by the intervention of US-led UNITAF forces in December 1992, and the Addis Ababa Agreement on National Reconciliation of March 1993.

On 17 June 1993 Community Aid Abroad (CAA) proposed to Oxfam (UK and Ireland) that the time might be right for an NGO-sponsored Peace Conference for Somalia, using the Boroma Reconciliation Conference in Somaliland as a possible model. CAA had provided support for the Boroma conference, through the Somali NGO SORRA.

A high level of interest was expressed in Oxfam (UK/I) for the idea, and in Oxfam internationally — Oxfam Hong Kong, Oxfam New Zealand, Oxfam America, and Oxfam Canada — and it was proposed that they might mount a joint peace initiative in Somalia. Preliminary research suggested that a low-key approach, supporting local, regional, or district peace initiatives, rather than a high-profile peace conference, might be a more appropriate intervention for Oxfam.

In July 1993, I was commissioned by Oxfam (UK/I) to undertake some research on the possibilities for supporting peace-making in Somalia and Somaliland. Specifically, I was commissioned to:

1. 'Strengthen Oxfam's institutional knowledge and analysis of the situation in Somalia and Somaliland, to place the agency in a relatively informed position to facilitate local initiatives for peace and to assist the emerging dynamic of different levels of peace-making.'
2. 'Identify options for the Oxfam family to consider with regard to how best Oxfam can assist the peace-making process.'

1.1 The Research

This report is the culmination of three months of research from July to October 1993, involving discussions with a range of people and organisations:

- International and Somali NGOs working in Somalia/Somaliland, based in the UK, the USA, and Somalia, to elicit whether there were common perceptions and approaches to peace-making in Somalia and Somaliland.
- Peace institutions involved in Somalia/Somaliland, to gain an understanding of what is already being done in this field, and what resources are available for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to draw upon.

- Individuals working for the UN in Somalia/Somaliland, to gain an understanding of the dynamics of the operation.
- Somalis, men and women, both outside and inside the country, intellectuals, politicians, elders, and NGO workers, with a range of personal and professional perspectives on the causes of the conflict and solutions to it.

In order that my understanding was based, as much as possible, on the opinions and perceptions of people in Somalia/Somaliland and Oxfam, workshops on the theme of conflict and peace were held in Hargeisa, Somaliland, and in Oxfam House (Oxford, UK). Unfortunately, it was not possible to do this in Mogadishu. The minutes of the Hargeisa workshop are attached as an additional report.

On the assumption that readers will pick and choose information which interests them most, I have tried to incorporate in this report as much of the information gained as possible, in the hope that some of it will be of interest to people with concerns wider than Somalia and Somaliland.

A note of caution here. The situation in Somalia is 'complex'. Such a description is often used as an excuse by people who do not want to understand. Unfortunately, it is a feature of the current situation in Somalia that there are many foreigners with influence who do not want to improve their understanding of Somalia. I am conscious that the more I learn about the Somali people, the more there is to understand, and the more there is a need to understand. It is also true that, like Somali kinship genealogies, historical events are open to interpretation. Amnesia is an important part of remembering. Although the information presented in this report is drawn from other people, it suffers from my own interpretation.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Armed conflict is back on the agenda of humanitarian agencies as a major contributor to world poverty. Armed conflict is nothing new to Oxfam (UK/I), which was itself formed in 1942 in response to a particular conflict (Agerbak, 1991). In this post-Cold War, 'new world order' of things, Oxfam and other humanitarian agencies are spending large sums of money in dealing with the impact of these conflicts.

The conflict in Somalia occurred at a time when the new world order was bloodying itself in the Gulf in only the second multi-lateral war, after Vietnam, since World War II. As such, Somalia has become a theatre in which many ideas pertinent to a possible future world order are being tested out. It has become a testing ground for the UN and the USA. It has also been a testing ground for many humanitarian organisations and their future roles in responding to situations of conflict. It therefore presents some fundamental policy issues for NGOs.

If armed conflict is part of the present and probable future experience of many of the countries where relief and development agencies work, there is a need perhaps to develop a greater understanding of 'conflict'. In its widest sense, conflict is a 'universal part of the way that humans organise and mediate individual and group relations, and is therefore part of our everyday experience' (Bradbury, 1993). It is something that, through its normal development and relief programmes, Oxfam deals with all the time.

In Somalia we are concerned with a particularly destructive form of violent armed conflict. The question is how an agency such as Oxfam responds to it. Are our normal relief and development programmes sufficient and appropriate? Are they able to provide an answer, or solution? This report, as requested, is an attempt to explore some of the options open to Oxfam, and to similar NGOs, in response to some of these questions.

2.1 Peace-making is a Long-Term Process

The present conflict in Somalia and Somaliland has been going on for five years. The conflict is protracted and has gone through numerous cycles of violence. What started as a 'localised conflict' in May 1988, when the Somali National Movement attacked government garrisons in the northern cities of Burco and Hargeisa, has become an international conflict, with the UN, under US leadership, in conflict with local factions (notably General Aideed), and with Somali refugees dispersed throughout the world, particularly the Horn of Africa. The situation in Somalia has thus become one of an increasing number of situations in the world described as a 'complex emergency'.

A central feature of these types of emergencies is that they are protracted over a long term. The Somali conflict arises from a variety of political, economic, social, and ecological circumstances. Part II of this report provides a brief historical narrative on the Somali war and provides one interpretation of the causes of the conflict.

The failure of the UN to bring about reconciliation in southern Somalia attests to the failure of any 'quick fix' solutions. The Boroma National Reconciliation Conference in Somaliland, in 1993, lasted four months and was productive only because other flash points were dealt with along the way. To transform the situation into a peaceful one will take a long time.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

i If agencies are to become involved in peace-making in Somalia or Somaliland, they will need to make a long-term commitment of people and resources. Agencies need to think in terms of a ten-year perspective and probably not expect to see substantial results from their efforts in anything less than two years.

ii An understanding of both the causes and impact of the Somali conflict, the responses and possible solutions to it, is a pre-requisite for any involvement in peace-making. Agencies should consider sponsoring research on a number of different areas that will provide a dynamic analysis of the current situation in Somalia and Somaliland. The emphasis should be on commissioning Somali researchers.

2.2 Peace Cannot be Enforced

A feature of 'complex emergencies' is that they are fundamentally political in nature. In this situation, the response of NGOs, whose mandates are restricted to 'peaceful' 'humanitarian' measures, is insufficient to provide a solution, and the UN is called upon to intervene. Political problems require political solutions. Perhaps NGOs should recognise the need to become involved at a political level.

Where peaceful means fail to restore peace and security, the UN has within its mandate, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the authority to enforce peace. In response to the killings of the Pakistani peace-keepers, the UN operation in Somalia invoked that right to use coercive measures to restore security. Somalia is the first place where the UN has made use of this mandate. UNOSOM's policies are dominated by political concerns that have more to do with political agendas within the UN and USA than with the concerns of the Somali people. Somalia has become a testing ground for other international political concerns. By invoking Chapter VII, the UN changed its goals in Somalia, and in the process came into conflict with those of local protagonists.

Two theories dominate debate about how reconciliation can be promoted in Somalia. One proposes that a political settlement has to involve the warlords who are the *de facto* political leaders in the south, and one must find a way of working with them. The UN/USA initially did much to legitimise the warlords through the internationally-brokered peace conferences.

The alternative theory suggests that reconciliation can be built only from a base of localised, indigenous, and democratic peace-making processes. In this way the warlords will be marginalised. As implemented by the UN through the District Council programme, this approach is also failing. UNOSOM is a bureaucratic, centralist body. Constituted by governments, its mandate is to establish centralised governmental structures, albeit with some emphasis on decentralised regional structures. Centralised government is the very thing that many Somalis have been fighting against. As implemented by the UN, both approaches to peace-making in Somalia reveal the dangers of trying to impose an outside solution to the Somali conflict.

Reconciliation and resolution can work only when conflicting parties want it to happen. The Boroma conference in Somaliland succeeded to the extent that it did because the participants presumably had common goals. The UN intervention to date has failed because it was an 'intervention' and not a Somali initiative. The report therefore concludes that in Somalia 'peace-enforcement' will not work.

Part III of this report examines the origins of the conflict between the UN and General Aideed in Mogadishu. It explores the politics of the UN in Somalia, the conflicting agendas at play there, and the likely success of the peace-enforcement policy to resolve the Somali conflict. This section also comments on the UN attempts at promoting 'bottom-up' reconciliation through the District Council programme, and on the relationship between the NGOs and UNOSOM.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

i Agencies should use their international standing to advocate a return to diplomacy, and the principles of pro-active peace-making, rather than 'peace-enforcement' by the UN in Somalia.

ii Agencies should call for a commission of enquiry into alleged human rights abuses by the UN and the warlords, and consider promoting a human rights monitoring office in Somalia.

iii Agencies should consider sponsoring a series of consultations between various

groups in Somalia, with the aim of promoting greater involvement in political reconciliation and of creating a 'peace constituency'.

iv Agencies should consider commissioning an independent review of the District Council programme, with a view to providing recommendations on how the programme may be improved.

v Agencies should consider increasing their support to the Inter-NGO Consortium on Somalia (INCS), to strengthen its role of lobbying and advocacy throughout Somalia.

2.3 Peace-making must be Holistic and Integrative

In August 1993 a peace agreement was signed in Kismayo by parties inhabiting the southern regions of 'Jubaland', thus bringing an end to fierce armed conflict in a region that had been fought over since 1989. It is a region where Oxfam (UK/I) has a substantial agricultural programme.

The Jubaland Peace Agreement was heralded by UNOSOM as a breakthrough in the reconciliation process in Somalia, and an example of how the UNOSOM peace-keeping operation was working. To some extent the efforts of UNOSOM in Kismayo have been successful. However, the situation remains very fragile. Many of the underlying causes of the conflict have not been addressed. In particular, there is a question of land issues.

'Peace' cannot be said to exist in an environment where there is conflict. Any peace initiative will require an understanding of the factors that create conflict, and efforts should be directed towards the creation of an environment without tensions, in which peace and a return to civil society can emerge. Peace-making needs to work at a number of different levels at the same time.

Part IV of the report describes the conflict in Kismayo and the Lower Juba region. It examines the complex range of forces, including political, economic, and ecological, that lie behind the conflict, and that constrain efforts at peace-making there. It concludes that, despite some blunders, UNOSOM has been partially successful in promoting reconciliation there. The peace remains fragile and there is an urgent need to strengthen it. NGOs need to identify levels at which they can contribute.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

i Agencies in this region should consider ways of assisting with the resettlement and integration of refugees, whose return will place pressure on damaged infrastructure.

ii Agencies should consider commissioning research into the issue of land ownership and use, which is one of the main causes of conflict.

iii Agencies in the Juba Valley and Kismayo should consider training their teams in the principles of conflict-resolution and mediation, as they may be called upon to mediate, or support local mediation or peace meetings.

2.4 Peace-making and Development are Similar Processes

From an anthropological understanding, Somali society works on a system of balanced oppositions between groups, orchestrated through, and institutionalised in, a segmentary kinship system and traditional laws and procedures laid down in a 'social contract' (*xeer*). This system is inherently unstable and therefore potentially dangerous. If peace is thought to exist where there is an equitable balance, anything which upsets the balance will continue the conflict. The danger inherent in any 'intervention', be it in the form of foreign military force or humanitarian aid, or externally initiated peace conferences, is that they can upset that balance.

The spectrum of peace-making is wide, and can range from physical to social rehabilitation. Relief work, if it helps to promote a return to a stable environment, can be considered part of a peace-making process. If relief becomes a source of conflict, then it is not contributing to peace-making. It is unlikely that 'peace', in the sense of a total absence of conflict, can exist in Somalia or Somaliland, or for that matter other societies. How then does one define 'peace' and 'peace-making'? If society is always prone to conflict, perhaps all peace-making can aim to do is to turn embittered, destructive relationships into more peaceful, constructive relationships.

While Somali society may be said to be prone to conflicts, mechanisms exist within Somali society to mitigate and resolve them. Dialogue, the mediation of elders, religious sanctions, compensation, and indeed military strength are all traditional means for resolving conflicts.

The people who understand those mechanisms best are Somalis. Indeed, Somalis are as experienced at peace-making and conflict-resolution as they are at making war. Foreign intervention in peace-making should, therefore, perhaps be perceived as a process that restores or empowers the indigenous forms of peace-making and conflict-resolution to restore that balance in society.

Reconciliation will be achieved only through a process which is 'bottom-up': that is, one initiated and controlled by the participants. The aim of NGOs should therefore be to support or promote local initiatives. The term 'peace-making' itself could be construed as interventionist, and a preferable term might be 'peace-building'.

Part V of this report describes the current situation in Somaliland, and examines some of the reasons why it has been possible to make and rebuild peace in that part of the region. It suggests ways in which agencies might assist in strengthening peace in Somaliland through support for demobilisation. It examines the current debates on the relationship between central and local government. It also examines local peace-making initiatives.

It draws together some general conclusions about the role of NGOs in supporting peace-making and provides some recommendations for future consideration and action.

It concludes that conflict-resolution and peace-making should be approached in the same way that development is best undertaken: in a 'bottom-up', 'participatory' style, over a long period of time, with participants controlling the process. In this sense,

agencies could usefully evaluate all their work in Somalia and Somaliland in terms of the extent to which they are helping to promote a peaceful environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

i Agencies should make a substantial commitment to supporting the demobilisation process in Somaliland.

ii The political, economic and military situation in Somaliland is different from that in Somalia. Somalia and Somaliland should be treated separately, and agencies should consider new work or strengthening existing programmes in Somaliland.

iii One advantage of UN peace-making efforts over indigenous ones is that they receive international support. Agencies should work towards international acceptance of the legitimacy of indigenous peace processes.

iv Agencies should consider supporting further 'peace workshops' in Somaliland, specifically for Somali staff of international NGOs and Somali NGOs as a means of strengthening the capacity of these NGOs and promoting dialogue and an exchange of ideas throughout Somaliland.

v Agencies should consider supporting a workshop for Somali women, from Somalia and Somaliland. This might best be done as a workshop for Women of the Horn of Africa, and might aim to identify broad issues affecting women throughout the Horn. Widening its scope to 'Women of the Horn' might help it to deflect some internal conflict. It might form part of the consultation process suggested for Somalia.

vi Agencies should consider holding a Peace Workshop on Somalia, at which current research and experiences could be presented, with the aim of helping to develop a framework and rationale for NGO peace work in Somalia and Somaliland, and to promote a more positive image of Somalia. As much work has been done by Somalis, both practical and academic, the workshop should concentrate on their work. One could usefully consider bringing people from other conflict situations.

v Agencies should consider supporting and promoting Somali cultural activities, in particular peace poetry, songs and music. This should be done both within Somalia and Somaliland and outside, as a high-profile media initiative, through the radio and television.