



THE TRIPLE NEXUS IN SOMALILAND

Lessons from integrated humanitarian–development–peacebuilding work in El-Afweyn District



Oxfam is committed to working with communities before, during and after crises. In Somaliland, we have been piloting approaches that aim to achieve greater synergy between our humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming and influencing. This innovative 'triple nexus' work recognises that communities' needs and ambitions are not met along the false silos created by aid agencies. It asks the international development and humanitarian sectors to walk the talk on locally led programming to better meet the holistic needs and aspirations of communities. This briefing note clearly shows the impact of programming which simultaneously meets immediate needs and development gaps while also addressing the drivers of crises (such as conflict and climate change) to achieve durable solutions in protracted crises.

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This briefing note was undertaken by Ahmed Nur Musa from Primmo Consulting. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Muktar Hassen, Kalid Ibrahim, Jess Fullwood-Thomas, Ayesha Arif and Annah-Grace Kemunto in its production. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International in November 2024

DOI: 10.21201/2024.000048

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Cover photo: Aisha Mohamed, Chairperson of the Farmers Association in Ainabo, stands inside a greenhouse farm supported by Oxfam and operated by the association. Photo by Ahmed Osman/Oxfam.

1 INTRODUCTION

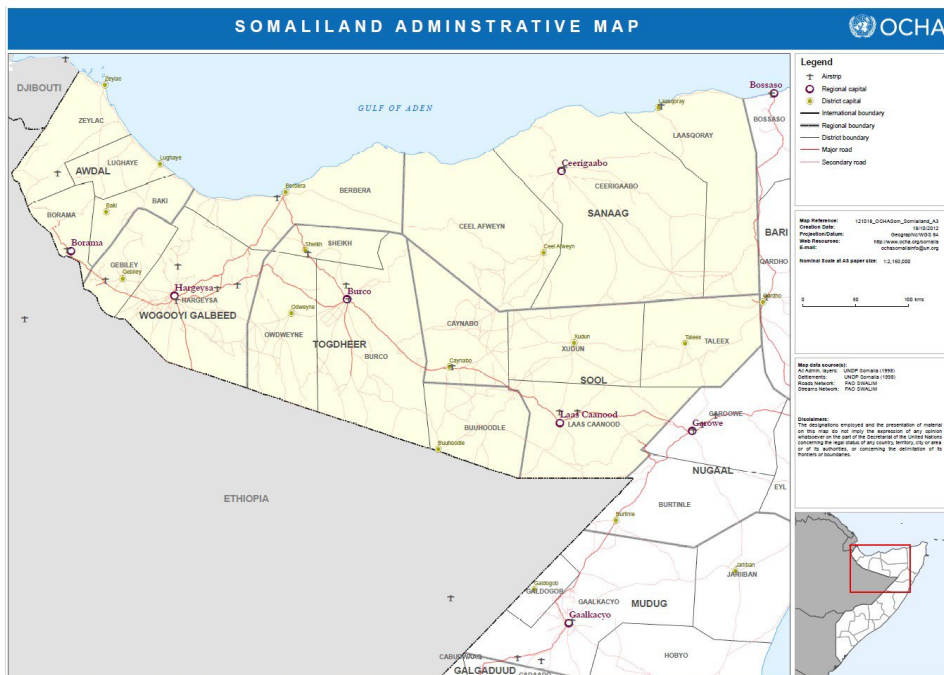


Figure 1: Somaliland Administrative Map, UNOCHA, 2012¹.

Despite much of Somaliland enjoying decades of relative peace, stability and development, Elafweyn District has been the scene of violent clan conflict since 2015. Disputes between local communities have escalated, leading to an increase in armed groups, revenge killings, and population displacement. Compounding the localized instability in El-Afweyn are the broader regional dynamics of the Horn of Africa, where millions of people are affected by widespread drought. These factors have resulted in a complex, protracted crisis.

In El-Afweyn, clan conflict, coupled with frequent drought and a lack of stable livelihoods, has severely disrupted socio-economic activities in the district and its surrounding villages. Humanitarian crises have become more frequent, affecting more people and lasting longer. Furthermore, violence has also prevented international development organizations (INGOs) from addressing pressing humanitarian and development challenges, hindering the development of the district and increasing its marginalization and isolation from the rest of the country.

As an area with humanitarian, development and peacebuilding needs, El-Afweyn District was identified as a highly relevant context for Oxfam to test and innovate emerging sectoral thinking on the humanitarian–development–peace nexus approach. This approach seeks to break down the silos that inhibit comprehensive support and holistically approach the needs and aspirations of people for a greater and more sustainable impact.² Across several connected interventions, Oxfam projects in El-Afweyn District, which focused on resilient livelihoods, and humanitarian, development and peacebuilding approaches, attempted to transform factors contributing to fragility and conflict, while also meeting urgent humanitarian needs.³

This briefing note shows that many Oxfam project team members, government officials and community members view a triple nexus approach as an effective strategy to create synergies and common goals across short-term emergency response and longer-term resilience and development projects. At the heart of this commitment is a strong desire to enhance opportunities for peace and social cohesion so that the communities affected by clan violence in El-Afweyn District can live together amicably. In this sense, the Oxfam area-based triple nexus approach offers an insight into the benefits of integration to enhance local people's capacity to withstand shocks and work towards sustaining local peace and livelihoods.

2 UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

Oxfam recognises that when working in contexts affected by conflict, our work and the work of others has the potential to distort or perpetuate conflict dynamics. It is therefore essential for the relevance of any proposed programme intervention, and for do-no-harm principles, to undertake a conflict analysis. In El-Afweyn, the team conducted a safe programming risk assessment which included a conflict analysis. The data from this enabled Oxfam to work on fortifying fragile social relations in a polarized and clan-based context and helped avoid doing harm to these complex social dynamics.

'We try to integrate our projects, ensuring that our interventions complement each other. We also try not to focus only on humanitarian response activities, but also attempt to combine emergency response with interventions that support development projects like agriculture and water improvements. Our efforts also include activities that contribute to efforts sustaining peace and social interaction. Also, our support towards agriculture creates hope for the members of the community that they don't only need to depend on livestock, but they could farm and produce their livelihoods, fodder and other agricultural activities.'

Mawlid Kalinleh, Oxfam's Programme Manager

Box 1: Conflict-sensitive local leadership

The mayor and deputy mayor of El-Afweyn District are selected from the two major sub-clans in the district. These sub-clans have a long history of hostility and fighting, so the government and community leaders ensure that both tribes are represented in local leadership. As part of adopting a conflict-sensitive approach, Oxfam engages with both sub-clans whenever there is a need to meet the officials. This aims to avoid misunderstandings by ensuring that both groups are equally represented and engaged. This approach has increased accountability and trust between Oxfam and the community and paved the way for successful implementation of the triple nexus approach.

The information gathered via Oxfam's safe programming risk assessment helped project teams to avoid negatively impacting community relations. If a particular village seemed to be divided because of a project, Oxfam supported community leaders to involve everyone in the community and come up with a collective decision. Oxfam aimed to ensure the equitable engagement and participation of communities by:

- conducting regular community engagement activities;
- facilitating transparent discussions;
- establishing direct complaint and feedback mechanisms between communities and Oxfam and/or its partners so communities were able to reach out to Oxfam or its partner directly; and
- taking an impartial, neutral and inclusive approach to programming.

Oxfam's programmes are always delivered conscious of neutrality and impartiality. Oxfam also takes a conflict-sensitivity approach to ensure its interventions do not exacerbate existing tensions or fuel new conflicts. This sometimes may mean interventions have to be reviewed, altered or paused to manage risk.

3 PROGRAMMING ACROSS THE NEXUS

3.1 WATER POINTS

'Basic infrastructure, such as water points for both household needs, livestock and irrigation, desalination and solar energy, enable people to remain in their locality and live together peacefully. When the infrastructure is not there, nomads in this district tend to move and migrate, encountering other tribes who compete over pasture and water.'

Mawlid Kalinleh, Oxfam

Oxfam's water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions in this area focused on:

- improving water quality to meet the WASH needs of the most vulnerable people;
- desalination of turbid and salty water in Sool and Sanaag regions to facilitate access to drinkable water; and
- adopting a public-private partnership approach which was expected to enhance the sustainable availability of water sources in the context of water and pasture stress.

In interviews, community members attached great importance to the basic WASH infrastructure that Oxfam supported. Water points are regarded as an important element in sustaining peace and increasing food security because access to water has been a cause of conflict, particularly revenge killings and fighting between settled and nomadic communities over access to water for livestock.

Providing water points met an immediate need around access to safe water, while also supporting development and peacebuilding objectives around long-term, sustainable water provision. Ensuring the water points were built for solar power helped to ensure longevity, while the inclusion of community empowerment and conflict mitigation/resolution strategies helped to support peaceful water sharing.

Most of Oxfam's support to the people of El-Afweyn District was delivered through collective planning and coordinated operations to further align humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities.

'Water is scarce in this area, and droughts are frequent. There is a lot of migration and displacement due to the lack of water, pasture and recurring droughts. Even with good rains, not all people in the district have wells. So, they all try to get water for their households and livestock. Their efforts to get water are sometimes confronted by other tribes and result in disputes over using a particular water point. Resolving these issues was significant in our area, and anyone who supports efforts to increase and sustain water points is commendable.'

Salah, head of El Midgan Village

The Oxfam team and external third-party monitors believe that the increase in water availability in El Midgan and Kal Sheik, coupled with the provision of seeds and farming demonstrations via the livelihoods interventions, has encouraged community members to adopt farming. The success of Oxfam-supported farms for both personal food production/consumption and increased income has inspired more people as those targeted by the project have increased their income as a result of the integrated project interventions. Greenhouse farming has attracted the attention of people further away who are seeking out opportunities to invest in agriculture as they shift away from livestock and cattle herding. In addition, community members report that their disputes have subsided because farming has kept people busy, diverting them from getting involved in conflicts over livestock and revenge killings.

'In the past, we were not so productive other than herding livestock, and we used to glare at each other. Now, people look at the soil and don't have time to glare at each other. We are busy with cultivating, irrigating and harvesting, so we don't have time to get involved in conflicts. Everyone was eager to join disputes before – even if it was not related to his clan – but now many of us know what we would lose if we don't farm and wander idly or get involved in conflict.'

Abdullahi, a village member of El Midgan

3.2 PEACEBUILDING COMMITTEES

Oxfam has incorporated peacebuilding into all of its projects in El-Afweyn District. This started with enabling grassroots peacebuilding structures by training locally respected elders and women. These committees have gone on to play key roles within their communities and are helping to connect humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming. For instance, to ensure that conflict-sensitive criteria are used, the committees are involved in the selection of recipients of humanitarian assistance and agricultural support. The work of these committees is highly respected and most villagers are aware of their role. Their participation in Village Saving and Loans Associations' (VSLA) activities as well as resilience projects like agriculture/farming (acknowledging that peacebuilding committee members themselves are vulnerable and need livelihood development support) has given rise to diverse grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in the district. These initiatives permeate multiple types of interventions that would previously have been designed and delivered separately.

The peacebuilding committees provide a space where relevant matters are discussed in an inclusive and participatory manner with the aim of supporting amicable conflict resolution and creating sustainable peace. Committees often carry out a wide consultation on the matter at hand, attempting to involve important actors in the community, including religious leaders, women leaders, government officials and elders from all sides of the dispute. Oxfam supports the committees through training and aims to create or strengthen more committees in other communities.

'I enjoyed learning about conflict resolution during our training and now I am enjoying putting that into practice by resolving disputes in my community. I love my work and I know it helps my community live together and focus on their common interests instead of hating each other because of what happened in the past.'

Hawa, a member of the peacebuilding committee in El-Afweyn District

Work on building grassroots peacebuilding capacity has also contributed to shifting social norms, especially around women's roles in public life and positions of authority. Hawa is a member of the peacebuilding committee who received training in Burao (Togdheer region). She is also a member of the VSLA group in El-Midgan Village. Despite the challenges of living in a patriarchal and male-dominated community, Hawa reports that her involvement in Oxfam's projects has empowered her to hold a position of power within her community, such that other community members listen to her and accept her involvement in conflict mediation efforts.

Box 2: Conflict-resolution strategies for a disagreement over water in El Midgan

A long-standing argument between farmers and livestock herders over the use of water from a shallow well in El Midgan threatened the success of the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) project under the Somalia Resilience programme (SomReP) consortium and continued to increase tensions in the village. Pastoralists and farmers could not use water at the same time due to livestock concentration in the area and farmers' increasing need for water for irrigation. Oxfam rehabilitated the well using SDC funds, constructed animal troughs, and expanded irrigation systems to benefit farmers. Initially, farmers and livestock herders thought that they would use water simultaneously, but it was very challenging and led to community confrontations regarding the water-sharing strategy. The renovated well is a multipurpose water structure aimed at fulfilling dual purposes. It provides irrigation for horticultural crops and improves access to water for thousands of livestock, mainly sheep, goats and camels.

The peacebuilding committee intervened and worked with both groups; they convened a meeting with clan elders, the village committee and members from the farmers' association to help them reach common ground. Through this brokered dialogue, they were finally able to resolve the issues by agreeing that farmers would use the water during the night and herders would access the water during the day. From this experience, we learnt that it is critical to consider sites that provide access to all the various sub-clans in the area and support WASH Committees with training on access rights, maintenance and sustainability.

The peacebuilding committees have a proven track record of success in several areas, for example, amplifying women's voices and increasing their representation in leadership roles, and bringing communities together and enabling them to have dialogue about how to share the resources provided. This has been particularly effective when it comes to the amicable sharing of water at water points. Nevertheless, this has been a test-and-learn phase and there are areas to explore for further improvement going forward. One is the make-up of the groups: members are currently nominated by village

leaders which may affect their inclusivity. There are positive signs of leaders sharing power, but this should be looked at further.

'I often consult with my committee members as well as the wise men in the community. I cannot decide without their consultation and full endorsement, otherwise it creates opposition to my leadership.'

Salah, the head of El Midgan village

3.3 VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATIONS

Through its support to village savings and loan associations (VSLAs), Oxfam enhances livelihood capacities and creates opportunities and spaces for community members, particularly women, to participate in peacebuilding and humanitarian emergency response activities led by the community.

Box 3: Village savings and loan associations

A VSLA is a self-managed savings group consisting of individuals who run small businesses within their community. Group members meet and contribute funds which are then used to provide loans to members. These loans act as a community-based safety-net and bolster the economic development of an area by supporting new businesses. Participation in the El Midgan and Kal Sheik VSLAs is bolstered by capacity building, guidance, and additional financial support from Oxfam and other organizations. Evidence suggests that VSLAs improve the financial wellbeing of their members, which subsequently strengthens the wider community. Members reinvest in local services, support job creation and share the humanitarian caseload if members need additional assistance that would have previously fallen to humanitarian actors⁴. This activity thus bridges the gaps between humanitarian needs, economic empowerment and peacebuilding.

Interviews with community members reveal that VSLAs strengthened village social cohesion as well as their economies. With better financial standing, families can send children to school and participate in agricultural activities in the community. This has led to more harmonious relationships within families – as male siblings are less inclined to engage in violence. For example, Hawa Sahal Karshe, a VSLA leader and businesswoman in El Midgan village, said:

'Before we began to collect and save money to support our families, we were just sitting idly, and women used to motivate their boys to be heroes by pushing them to take revenge and get involved in the conflict. However, now we work against anything that could disrupt our lives, economic activities and stability. We can send our children to schools, increase our commercial ability and invest in farming. As you can see, our village now sells cash crops, and many more people are eager to follow the same steps.'

Abdullahi, a farmer with a family member in a VSLA, recognized the positive outcomes of working with women but also spoke about the importance of

directly supporting men in the community:

'We need to keep on supporting women's groups in the community. But also, men, especially farmers, need both financial and technical support. Whatever support they (women) obtain comes to the family and is often used for the welfare of our families, but it is important to invest in farming so that we have something that keeps us away from idleness.'

While peaceful coexistence and conflict mitigation are not the primary aims of VSLA activities, Oxfam's integrated approach in El-Afweyn District has shown that when VSLAs are implemented in a coordinated manner they can help strengthen social cohesion. By addressing the root causes of conflict – such as poverty, exclusion, and a lack of livelihood opportunities – members become actively involved in community-led humanitarian efforts, such as food and cash distributions. This makes VSLAs vital tools for sustaining peace.

4 CONCLUSION

In El-Afweyn District, Oxfam has been operating in a complex and demanding context marked by several overlapping crises. These include volatile clan disputes, COVID-19, climate shocks and food insecurity. In 2017, Oxfam decided to adopt the **triple nexus approach** to deliver integrated support to the most vulnerable communities in this area. At the time, staff believed this would better meet the needs and aspirations of communities by addressing both immediate needs and the underlying causes of conflict and fragility.

Working in conflict settings like El-Afweyn, where reducing humanitarian needs while laying the foundation for sustainable development and promoting peace is both complex and ambitious, requires a **conflict sensitive approach**. Despite the challenges, the last four years of programming shows that not only do community members see a conflict-sensitive, triple nexus approach as beneficial for meeting their diverse needs, but project staff, including senior leadership, also see this approach as essential for Oxfam to achieve its goals in Somaliland.

Key ingredients for success, as reflected by staff, include:

- A conflict-sensitive approach that allowed projects to target the right people and understand the drivers of instability before implementation.
- The triple nexus approach, which enabled Oxfam to adopt a more agile system of programming, continuously learning how to navigate the complexity of clan dynamics and tribal politics in this district.

Reflections and recommendations from community members include:

- Recognizing the multi-faceted benefits of combined activities, such as water point infrastructure investment alongside effective conflict-mitigation governance and management processes.
- emphasizing the impact of VSLAs; community members would like to see these expanded, believing that more investment could help divert young people from engaging in violence and conflict by increasing their involvement in productive business and economic activities.
- Supporting greater investment in agriculture and water resources, which is particularly pertinent given the escalating drought situation.

'In this district, there is a long-standing history of hostility and fighting. The conflict-sensitivity approach has enabled us to closely work with all sides, engaging in open and fruitful discussions on what could happen if a particular project was implemented in this community. Communities became willing to collaborate and share resources, which I believe in turn enhanced their relations and co-existence.'

Mawlid Kalinleh, Oxfam

In conclusion, Oxfam's experience with the **triple-nexus approach** in in El-Afweyn District has provided valuable lessons for working in conflict-

affected settings. It has demonstrated the importance of conflict analysis and conflict sensitive programming, as well as the significance of integrating projects to sustain peace and improve wellbeing. The approach has highlighted the benefits of harmonizing project implementation to streamline and integrate support in a targeted area. One key takeaway is the significant benefit of linking peacebuilding committees, farmers' associations, and VSLAs, so that they work together in resolving conflict(s) that impede sustainable development.

Communities have clearly articulated that combining work on livelihoods, conflict resolution, and water, sanitation and health responses – alongside humanitarian assistance such as food and cash distributions – has helped lay the groundwork for sustained peace in El Midgan and Kal Sheikh. Integrating all of Oxfam's activities in these communities has increased self-awareness and given community members more space to have a say in how their communities are run, and what in shaping the future for their children.

Looking ahead, the evidence from this review reinforces the applicability of the Humanitarian, Development, Peace (triple) nexus in the context of Somaliland/Somalia. Further investment in, and expansion of, this approach is recommended to address the complex, inter-connected challenges facing communities in Somaliland/Somalia. These lessons and recommendations will be integrated into the Oxfam Country Strategy 2021–2030 where the triple nexus is mainstreamed as a key approach across the entire portfolio.

NOTES

All links last accessed 6 November 2022 unless otherwise specified.

¹ OCHA. (2012). *Somalia Reference Map – North West Zone (18 Oct 2012)*.
<https://www.unocha.org/publications/map/somalia/somalia-reference-map-north-west-zone-18-oct-2012>

² E. Fanning and J. Fullwood-Thomas. (2019). *The Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus: What does it mean for multi-mandated organizations?* Oxfam. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/the-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-what-does-it-mean-for-multi-mandated-o-620820/>

³ IFRC. (n.d.). *Strategy 2030 /IFRC*. www.ifrc.org. <https://www.ifrc.org/who-we-are/about-ifrc/strategy-2030>

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