From Missed Opportunities to Genuine Partners in Peace and State Building

The UN’s Engagement with Somali Civil Society
The UN and Somali Civil Society

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<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Al-Shabaab</td>
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<td>CSO(s)</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation(s)</td>
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<td>CSPPS</td>
<td>Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding</td>
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<td>DfID</td>
<td>United Kingdom Department for International Development</td>
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<td>DSRSG/RC/HC</td>
<td>Deputy-Special Representative to the Secretary-General/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FGS</td>
<td>Federal Government of Somalia</td>
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<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Persons</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<td>(I)NGO(s)</td>
<td>(International) Non-Governmental Organisation(s)</td>
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<td>NSA</td>
<td>Non-State Actors</td>
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<td>OCHA</td>
<td>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>PUNSAA</td>
<td>Puntland Non-State Actors Association</td>
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<td>RCO</td>
<td>United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office</td>
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<td>ROLSIG</td>
<td>Rule of Law &amp; Security Institutions Group</td>
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<td>SGBV</td>
<td>Sexual Gender-Based Violence</td>
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<td>SOSCENSA</td>
<td>Somalia South-Central Non-State Actors</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
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<td>UN-Habitat</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Rights &amp; Emergency Relief Organization</td>
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<td>UNSOM</td>
<td>United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia</td>
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<td>UNSOM HRO</td>
<td>Human Rights Office of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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Executive Summary

This research attempts to highlight the dynamics between the UN and Somali civil society by exploring existing partnerships and challenges that have been encountered on both sides, as well as missed opportunities and potential future collaboration.

The findings show that core issues evolve around the lack of a strategic engagement from the UN, lack of coordination and organised forums on the side of civil society, and poor transparency of focal points and programming on both sides. Recommendations include using platforms and umbrella organisations as vectors for project tenders, partnering with civil society organisations (CSOs) for primary research, linking up with local key players and networks for implementing in rural areas, reporting and M&E. All of these should form part of a more strategic approach to the UN’s engagement with civil society.

The main crosscutting issue throughout all meetings relates to the perceived preference, on the part of the UN, for an established circle of international NGOs (INGOs) or large CSOs over smaller, local CSOs, including grassroots organisations. Smaller CSOs have managed to operate with resources from mostly the business community, including diaspora investments and funding from non-traditional donors, such as Turkey and the Gulf States. However, local actors noted that larger international NGOs are the contract holders and subcontract the implementation of some or all the activities to smaller local organizations.

As a result, many CSOs believe the New Deal has made the UN choose larger and international NGOs instead of local ones. From their perspective, the New Deal has led to larger programmes, which come with larger budgets, excluding many smaller CSOs who don’t have the capacity to deliver a full project but might have comparative advantage in delivering part of the project. This common issue could be partly solved by contracting via civil society networks and platforms.

2016 will be a challenging and critical year for the relation between civil society, the UN and the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). With key upcoming milestones, such as the design of the National Development plan and the election process, how can the UN ensure that civil society will be involved in an inclusive and sustainable manner? What role can civil society play in restoring the social contract between the political leadership and the Somali people and what would consequentially be the UN’s contribution to this relationship?
**Introduction**

This paper presents an assessment, conducted by the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office (RCO) for Somalia, of the UN’s engagement with Somali civil society, and recommendations on how that engagement can be improved to better inform UN programming. Based on meetings with over one hundred representatives of Somali CSOs, additional discussions with UN entities and partners, the paper attempts to highlight from various perspectives the missed opportunities, and possible ways for future engagement. The findings of this paper should be of interest to UN entities and members of the international community in Somalia that work with Somali civil society or wish to enhance their programming by partnering with it.

Currently, there are many examples of UN entities working together with Somali non-governmental organizations, thus the general perception that the UN is only working with national authorities and neglecting civil society should be critically questioned. However, the fact that such perceptions have reached a broad Somali and international audience demands an analysis on underlying causes and dynamics.

The combined desk review, data gathering from UN partners in Somalia, and in particular the meetings with civil society members and UN entities, allowed for an analysis that approximates the complexity and dynamics this relationship. The desk review elaborates on the role and definition of Somali civil society and the unusual roles and positions of civil societies in fragile states writ large, including their characteristically difficult relations with government.

With that in mind, the field research explores concrete issues of UN-civil society relations and ideas by CSOs on how to seize opportunities and establish a sustainable partnership for peace and state building with the UN. Finally, these ideas are complemented by comparative studies of how CSOs in other fragile states have taken advantage of the New Deal framework to develop and inform UN programming.

Despite the limitations that were experienced while conducting this research, including security threats to the meeting venue and lack of access to more local CSOs, findings were verified by crosschecking with a range of sources.

**Objective and Purpose**

This research was motivated by various discussions and analyses emphasising the importance of Somali civil society in peace and state building\(^1\), and in particular the perceptions that the UN’s engagement with civil society in Somalia has been insufficient and insufficiently transparent. However, these arguments were not truly reflecting the operational record of UN agencies, which reveals that there is in fact a significant amount of work delivered in partnership with CSOs. But then how could such misperceptions spread so widely? This was the starting point. The purpose of the

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\(^1\) For example a Saferworld & World Vision paper that examines how the Somali Compact should be implemented bottom-up, with strong leadership and action by civil society and support by the UN, to successfully deliver the New Deal. Additionally, discussions within forums of the UNCT and with donors and international partners have further emphasised the need for this research.
research is not necessarily to come up with a fool-proof roadmap on how to transform relations between the UN and Somali civil society, but rather to realistically and critically reflect on dynamics between the UN and Somali civil society organizations that have led to missed opportunities for effective peace and state building interventions, and to identify steps on how to change the narrative which may then support incentives and actions for change.

The primary questions and objectives thus are to find out: **What is the meaning of Somali civil society for programming and how can the UN advance its engagement with it?**

This however implies further research on the following questions:

- **What is the Somali civil society and what role does it play?**
- **What does civil society mean in the context of a fragile state?**
- **How has the UN engaged with Somali civil society so far and what were the roles civil society has taken over in UN partnerships? Is the nature of Somalia’s civil society the problem that lies at the heart of unused potentials or is it the way the UN engages with civil society?**
- **What are the opportunities of such an engagement? How can civil society be better incorporated into peace and state building while informing programming?**

These secondary questions are particularly important in light of the context in which civil society has been operating over the past decades, under fragmented and very weak state structures and in a highly instable political and security environment.

As we enter the last year of the Somali New Deal and work is under way to develop a new framework for engagement in Somalia, 2016 offers an opportunity to reflect on the past years and start looking ahead with ‘a fresh pair of eyes’. This research will hopefully challenge the UN to do so.

**Methodology**

As a first step, a desk review, complemented with information from meetings with UN partners that are strongly engaging with Somali civil society, examined what Somali civil society is, its role and the specific roles of civil societies in fragile states. Due to lack of data on Somali civil society, the complementary meetings served as an additional way of data collection. The desk review included papers on Somali civil society by the International Community, reports from civil society conferences, as well as comparative studies on civil society in fragile states.

The RCO met with over a hundred CSO representatives from in and around Mogadishu, Puntland State of Somalia and Somaliland in late November and early December 2015. The meetings were held in Mogadishu, respectively Hargeisa, except
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for Garowe, Puntland, where the meetings had to be conducted via Video Teleconference².

The environment and circumstances under which civil society operates differ across regions, and although one could make the same argument for the various districts within the regions, laying out the research according to administrative regions as analytical unit was best fitting for the desk review and field work and is in accordance with other research papers on Somali civil society.

Using the categorisation of CSOs by UNSOM Human Rights Office (HRO), which is a central connection point for civil society and is a leading example on civil society engagement, the CSOs were divided in six thematic clusters, based on their core mandate:

- Humanitarian and development work
- People with disabilities
- Women and children
- Youth
- Human rights
- Media and freedom of expression

In order to minimise the number of meetings for efficiency and also for security reasons, the six clusters were consolidated into three groups (cluster 1 and 2, cluster 3 and 4, cluster 5 and 6), thus three larger meetings were held in each location instead of six smaller ones³. Except for Mogadishu, where the meeting groups had to be altered, the meetings in Garowe and Hargeisa followed the above-mentioned structure⁴.

In each of the nine meetings, a standard set of questions was posed to the CSOs, followed by more specific follow up questions that varied based on the discussions. The basic questions evolved around the CSOs work, whether they have engaged with the UN before, how they perceived that engagement and what ideas they had on how they could inform UN programming.

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² Puntland local authorities were planning to close the airstrip during the scheduled meetings for up to a year for renovations, to avoid that risk, the meetings were conducted via VTC.

³ The first meeting in Mogadishu was held with only one cluster, the Human Rights Cluster. Due to a security incident on that day, the meeting had to be evacuated and postponed. After that, the decision was made to consolidate the meetings to minimise exposure and to save time.

⁴ Due to conflicting events, the meetings for Mogadishu had to be structured differently: Category 1 and 5 were in the first meeting, category 3 and 4 in the second, and category 2 and 6 in the third.
What is Somali Civil Society?

Definition of Civil Society and CSO

Definitions of civil society vary from country to country, as the understanding of what civil society is (or who it is) is subject to various factors, such as cultural and demographic specifics, political agendas and socio-economic circumstances and systems. Hence it often remains unclear where the ‘general society’ ends and civil society begins, and where civil society ends and the state begins.

The European Union (EU) for example, considers “a great variety of organised actors, ranging from informal community based groups to the organisations based on formal structures (NGOs) and to the platforms and networks composed by groups of organisations” (EU Somalia Unit & DfID 2012, p. 29).

Oxfam goes a step further and includes under civil society “everything between the citizen and the state, from community self-help groups to trade unions and business groups, from women’s movements to development and humanitarian organisations, faith-based groups, human rights activists, peace campaigners and more” (Oxfam 2013, p. 2). Although Oxfam’s broad definition fits the purpose of defining civil society in Somalia better, business groups will be excluded, as this leads towards private sector activity.

For CSO, this paper uses the ‘compromised’ definition that the EU has used for its report on civil society engagement in Somalia (EU Somalia Unit & DfID 2012, p. 30), which includes “collective actors (thus groups, not individuals), created voluntarily, with a membership that participate freely to the association, that are relatively independent from other institutions and that find their legitimacy in the fact they act and mobilise themselves to achieve a goal and to represent general or specific – but not private – interests.” Thus this analysis will not consider elders, other traditional governance institutions and religious leaders to be included in this definition. Furthermore, international organisations and organisations that are Somali-led but exist outside Somalia will not be included in this definition. The exclusion of international organisations allows us to focus on the engagement with local and national organisations, which are often seen as being marginalised in favour of international organisations by donors and the UN.

The meetings with NGOs and NGO forums confirmed that a broad definition for Somali civil society and CSO should be used, although with attention to carefully separate politically involved individuals who often head organisations active within civil society.

Civil Society in Fragile States

Despite their growing importance, civil society organizations in the developing world remain only partially understood. Even basic descriptive information about these institutions – their number, size, area of activity, sources of revenue and the policy framework within which they operate – is not available in any systematic way. This raises questions about the roles of civil society in developing or even fragile states.
What are the Roles and Functions of Civil Society in Fragile States?

The term ‘fragile states’ can be a controversial and politically highly sensitive term, and there is no universally agreed definition on it. The common terminology falls within the lines of Oxfam’s definition, which the OECD and World Bank use as well\(^5\) (Oxfam 2011, p. 3): “[…] states that fail, through lack of capacity or lack of will, to provide public goods to their citizens – including safety and security, economic well-being, and essential social services.”

Thus, in fragile state environment, such as Somalia, the roles and responsibilities of civil society and its organisations fall within a wide scope. In the absence of a functioning state structure, CSOs have stepped in to fill the vacuum by providing services such as health and education, taking over roles traditionally preserved for the state (Saferworld, Entebbe Civil Society Meeting 2008, p: 10). In fragile states, civil society becomes even more vital and its functions cover a wide range of activities (Oxfam 2013, p. 3):

- Provide services, including humanitarian assistance, health and educational services, to complement the state;
- Advocacy on behalf of marginalised groups, with the goal to make the state more accountable (‘watchdog’ of the state’s actions);
- Support the building of infrastructure, such as schools, roads and hospitals
- Provide or support systems of legal reconciliation, such as community councils.

The Somali Context

The role of civil society in the Somali context confirms the roles of civil society in fragile states noted above. In fact, the Somali context presents a maximalist version of what roles civil society can take over (to the point of replacing the state).

Summarised from papers, reports on civil society conferences, such as the civil society meeting in Entebbe in 2008 (p. 6) and meetings with civil society, the roles and responsibilities Somali civil society plays out are:

- Among political and religious leaders: identifying individuals from all sides with whom they can strengthen relationships, shuttle mediation;
- Between citizens and peacekeepers: awareness raising of positive contribution of peacekeepers for community, strengthen links;
- Between politicians and community: meeting with politicians, forming lobby groups to engage all sides, engage media in positive coverage, fire fighting through support for traditional conflict resolution mechanism;
- Among communities in conflict: social service delivery, sensitisation and mobilisation on need for and benefits of peaceful coexistence, promote human rights;

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– Role of diaspora community: mediator, support to address concerns of external actors.

Between the international and the national: Civil Society Relations with the State

Dowst (2009, p. 9) notes that CSOs working in fragile states will frequently experience an environment of societal mistrust. In societies that have been fragmented by conflicts and insecurity, people’s trust and tolerance levels tend to be lower and their suspicion levels higher. As a result, reduced willingness to cooperate across different groups will increase the challenges and barriers for civil society activities.

In Somalia, the UN is the largest and oldest international aid entity. With such a long-standing presence, the UN has taken over mandates not only to provide services and aid to the Somali people, but also to support the state building process and enforce peace. The UN, currently through its special political mission – UNSOM, has been the main international organization providing political support to the Somali federal and regional governments.

The decades of unrest, civil war and failed peace efforts have led to a break down of the social contract within Somali society, putting the State and civil society at odds with each other. Civil society engagement in the transition reflects a number of tensions and trade-offs, pursuing advocacy on behalf of the people on the one hand and trying to build partnerships with authorities and the government on the other hand. Therefore, it is important to note that as much as the UN discovers opportunities by working with CSOs, it can easily become a negative version of a ‘middleman’, caught between conflicting entities, which is why the UN’s engagement with civil society must be construed and constructed with an eye on the nature and health of the relationship between Somali civil society and the state.

How does the UN engage with Somali civil society?

In order to answer this question, information was gathered from meetings with Somali CSO and UN entities. For the sake of compactness and coherence, only examples that highlight the nature and state of the relations between the UN and Somali CSO will be used, not the full spectrum of activities where UN entities engage with civil society.

As previously mentioned, based on the categorisation of CSOs by UNSOM HRO, the CSOs were divided in six thematic clusters, based on their core mandate:

• Humanitarian and development work
• People with disabilities
• Women and children
• Youth
• Human rights
• Media and freedom of expression
Mogadishu, Banadir

The highly complex and instable environment in Mogadishu and surrounding regions creates by far the most challenging and limiting conditions for civil society and UN operations within Somalia. But despite mobility and accessibility restrictions, there are many examples of how the UN has successfully engaged with civil society at various levels, and how civil society has managed to develop partnerships with the UN to deliver on its mandates and responsibilities.

The UNSOM HRO launched its civil society monthly forum in 2013, which has significantly changed the partnership between UNSOM and civil society. An example of its success was the Universal Periodic Review 2015, a report that was drafted by 64 Somali CSOs and submitted to the Human Rights Council. Each of the six clusters, with consultations offered by UNHCR, UNICEF and UNSOM, received USD 1,000 for the process of drafting their reports, which were consolidated into one final report.

The office has established a very good relation with CSOs, which was confirmed in the meetings with CSOs, and regularly gives opportunities to the clusters to organise events under their responsibility, such as the celebrations for the International Human Rights Day on 10 December. While trying to provide CSOs with more capacities to also coordinate activities, UNSOM HRO also encourages CSOs to be more proactive and leading, especially with regards to networking and coordination among CSOs and collaboration with the government, attributes that most CSOs are still developing. In Kismayo for example, a project helped to develop local CSOs as partners: CSOs based in Kismayo monitor the human rights situation and report back to the UNSOM HRO and train local police on torture awareness.

UNSONM HRO also emphasised that it often takes over the role of the mediator between civil society and government authorities, and for example enabled the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development to attend a workshop organized by civil society, which was the beginning of a sustainable relationship between the ministry and CSOs. In order to further bridge the connection gap, the office is planning a joint training between the government and civil society representatives in order to tackle concrete trust issues.

Additionally, with the support from UNDP, the Aid Coordination Unit, a UNDP-funded government unit, and the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC), will organise a civil society engagement workshop in Mogadishu in March 2016. The workshop will serve Somali CSOs to discuss how to create an enabling environment for civil society engagement in the national development process. Complementary to this, and within the process of the National Development Plan, UNICEF is currently planning together with the MOPIC to engage youth civil society and the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS), an indigenous think-tank, to assess the best way to identify social needs and community participation. The outcome of the assessment is expected to facilitate the work of MOPIC to design a basic social services programme aligned with the priorities of the Somali people.
Besides various programmes that engage with and support civil society, UNDP is currently supporting CSOs to develop an action plan on how to mobilise civil society for the New Deal, which will be finalized within February 2016. The action plan was initiated by UNDP HQ at an international conference on civil society and the New Deal in Helsinki, Finland, in June 2015. UNDP is also working on a draft policy on how it should engage with civil society. This comes after UNDP HQ released a new regulation on engagement with NGOs in UNDP programmes (UNDP 2015). Among other policy guidelines, the regulation states that all UNDP offices have to create a roster with local NGOs. This constitutes a pre-selection measure for NGOs to be considered as eligible partners for future programmes. UNDP Somalia is planning to finalise the set up of the roster in the first quarter of 2016.

Another example of a systematic engagement of civil society is the National Gender Policy, which was drafted by UNWOMEN, UNFPA, UNDP and UNICEF, where CSOs have been fully involved in the consultation and drafting process. The engagement with civil society is in fact incorporated into the policy’s methodology and action plan.

Direct trainings were provided by the UN Risk Management Unit (RMU) on risk management to NGOs, one in Hargeisa and one in Mogadishu. Further trainings are planned in Dollow and Galkayo. The RMU has furthermore issued tailored products for NGOs on various themes around risk management, including products in Somali.

Besides these specific examples on systematic engagements, numerous agencies regularly work with and for civil society on service provision: From UN-Habitat’s efforts to establish youth resource centres, ILO’s livelihood programmes for young beneficiaries, IOM’s diaspora knowledge transfer programmes to skills trainings and entrepreneurship support by UNHCR for IDPs – to name a few examples from 2015.

**Meetings with CSOs**

Around sixty per cent of the CSOs in the meetings held in Mogadishu had previously worked with UN agencies or UNSOM or are still working with them. The vast majority of those experienced the partnership with the UN positively, explaining that once they were granted access to UN programmes, the partnerships were mostly successful. However, the partnerships are conducted on a project-by-project approach rather than as a result of sustained engagement.

Other CSOs who have not had any cooperation with the UN agreed that the threshold to be eligible for UN contracts is very high, mostly unreachable for smaller CSOs.

This brings us to a crosscutting issue that has been raised across all meetings: the preference of an established circle of INGOs or big CSOs over local CSOs, including grassroots organisations. Smaller CSOs have managed to operate with resources from mostly the business community, including diaspora investments and funding from non-traditional donors, such as Turkey and the Gulf States. However, the bigger organisations, the CSOs noted, are rarely implementing programmes directly. In most cases, the larger organizations are the contract holders and they subcontract the implementation of some or all the activities to smaller local CSOs.
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The aforementioned roster of local CSOs being established by UNDP Somalia is one measure to circumvent this. Another way to improve delivery by local CSOs is via the UNSOM HRO clusters. If the clusters show the ability to work together and coordinate projects, as they have done it with the Universal Periodic Review, then their chances of collectively being contracted for a project that the cluster would coordinate increase significantly. However, currently, there is no monitoring mechanism or coordination strategy within the clusters, which is something that the UNSOM HRO is trying to encourage.

An alternative mechanism could be SOSCENSA, the platform for Non-State Actors in South-Central Somalia. SOSCENSA has been active for many years and creates opportunities for information sharing and pooling resources. However, many participants in the civil society meetings noted that SOSCENSA has become fairly exclusive and is rarely accepting any new members.

All the representatives that participated in the meeting were eager and motivated to get involved in the planning and drafting of a programme or projects. There is a strong desire to prove that they have enough capacity to begin with.

**Garowe, Puntland**

The work environment for CSOs in Puntland is slightly different from that in the areas in and around Mogadishu. Puntland in general, including Garowe, has experienced more security and stability, but a volatile environment remains, which poses significant challenges for local civil society and the International Community.

A key feature of the UN’s engagement with civil society is the civil society forum that was established and is being coordinated by UNSOM. It is held on a monthly basis and provides a platform for members of civil society to talk about various themes such as Human Rights, the New Deal, political participation and community policing. The forum always includes a consultation on media, lead by the local UN Public Information Office. As the themes vary, different civil society members come to the meetings every month. Participants who have met via the forum in the past have become strong lobbying groups, e.g. for a Human Rights defender for Puntland and during the last presidential elections. UNSOM’s field office is also very active in communicating with and to civil society, which seems to have a good effect on the UN’s image, as they have been receiving positive feedback in the past when engaging with civil society members.

Many UN entities and UN partners, such as UNSOM, the Rule of Law and Security Institutions Group (ROLSIG, under UNSOM), UNDP, the EU, Interpeace and Saferworld have worked together with the Puntland Development Research Centre, which has established itself as a strong partner for data gathering, analysis and research and as contact point for civil society in Puntland.

The National Consultation Forums that are being co-organised by various UN agencies and the regional governments for the elections in 2016 were last held in Garowe during the third week of January 2016. The forum includes civil society from Puntland.
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and has been receiving highly positive feedback during the meetings with CSOs for this research.

The regional RCOs in both Puntland and Somaliland have become an informal focal point for civil society in the respective regions.

Meetings with CSOs

Similar to the CSOs in and around Mogadishu, around two-third of the attending CSOs have worked with the UN in the past or are still engaged in programmes. The CSOs were all engaged as implementing partners.

Overall, participants suggested that the UN’s programmatic work should be better informed by civil society. Thus, during the programme design phase, consultations with relevant CSOs should take place that will take into consideration the priorities that the CSOs believe should be tackled first. Otherwise, as many participants stated, the programmes of agencies end up having a biased prioritisation and neglect the need for services that should take precedence. However, the CSOs also recognised the fact that UN agencies are not fully in control over their funding and programmatic priorities, which can sometimes lead to a distorted image of demand and supply. CSOs explained that they could help bridge that shift by providing on-the-ground data to inform the programmes or engage in emergency response.

The main concern is to improve the capacity and skills level of the civil society in Puntland. The participants expressed the wish to work on skills in fundraising and management, in order to become more independent and sustainable. Some CSOs conduct capacity development initiatives themselves, such as the Centre for Social Development, which has trained a number of local organisations and councils, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and UNDP. Another example of a CSO that provides capacity building in the form of vocational trainings and youth rehabilitation is the Puntland Development Organisation, which regularly partners with ILO, UNDP, UNHCR and WFP.

Respondents also emphasised the need to link up better with local organisations, which is in line with comments collected during the meetings in both Mogadishu and Hargeisa. There are already many umbrella organisations of CSOs in Puntland, for example the We Are Women Activists (WAWA) or the Puntland Non-State Actors Association (PUNSA), which is the main docking point for civil society networks in Puntland. PUNSA currently has 73 members and serves as a coordination and advocacy body. It is unclear why, despite the existence of various umbrella organisations, CSOs still struggle to link up with them, but various reasons are possible, such as entry barriers, internal politics between CSOs, inactivity or remote stations of CSOs.

Despite the perceived lack of transparency in the tender process by UN agencies, Puntland’s CSOs were active in exploring how they can inform programming in the future:

– The UN could help facilitate meetings with regional (East Africa) CSOs and civil society networks, which would improve capacity and expertise of local CSOs
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through trainings and exchange of lessons learned, thus better equipping CSOs to inform programming
- The CSOs could report on various issues, such as human rights violations, freedom of press, women’s rights, etc.
- The UN could include CSOs in the first stages of drafting a programme for support on assessments, e.g. via the civil society platforms and networks
- The UN could outsource M&E tasks to CSOs
- The UN should contract small scale projects that are up to a certain funding level to local CSOs

**Hargeisa, Somaliland**

The civil society sphere in Somaliland is different, which is the result of a longer period of relative stability and slow but steady development of society and the economy. In such an environment, CSOs have had much more time to develop and gain experience. At the same time Somaliland has generally received less attention than Puntland and the interim regional administrations in the South due to that relative stability, which at times translates into a perception that smaller funding pots are being allocated to Somaliland, in particular funds for humanitarian response.

In addition, the majority of the participating CSOs believe that the Somaliland Development Fund poses a threat to Somaliland CSOs, as it takes focus away from many thematic areas the CSOs are working in (e.g. children and women, youth, health) and centralises it on infrastructure projects. The participants were also worried that the ministries would not conduct the tender process in a competitive manner. This underlines the strained relations between civil society and the political leadership, but also shows the changing dynamics of government entities starting to take over traditional roles in fragile states and thus pushing civil society into a more ‘traditional’ role.

**Meetings with CSOs**

Despite the lower presence of UN agencies in Somaliland, almost all CSOs had at some point engaged in a partnership with the UN. Most of those partnerships were on a project-basis though, and CSOs confirmed that they are experiencing difficulties in developing a strategic partnership with the UN.

One group of CSOs expressed strong concerns about the UN’s engagement as barely any CSO of that group had ever engaged with a UN agency. All the CSOs in that group work with people with disabilities, and some of the representatives that were present live with disabilities themselves. A possible explanation might be that there is no UN agency whose mandate focuses particularly on disabilities. However, agencies tackle disabilities within the range of their mandate, e.g. UNICEF for children with disabilities, UNWOMEN and UNFPA for women with disabilities, UNHCR and IOM for

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6 This is being discussed within the NGO Act for Puntland, which is currently in the regional Cabinet for approval. The NGO Act would set guidelines for contracting CSOs, which would mean that if the funding level of a project is below a certain amount, the International Community would have to contract the project through a local CSO.
refugees/displaced with disabilities - but there is no crosscutting approach to it, and the CSOs emphasised the need to appoint a focal point for disabilities within the UN Country Team.

In general, the participants have identified the need for more thematic coordination meetings between UN agencies and CSO, which would also help overcome the issue of contracting INGOs instead of local CSOs who have access and experience on the ground. Additionally, each agency should appoint a civil society focal point that would be the key contact for CSOs.

A majority of female participants expressed their frustration over the lack of empowering opportunities for women, such as Trainings of Trainers organised by the International Community or a local research institute, which would include a women quota and equip female members of CSOs with valuable knowledge that they can use in order to train other staff.

Many CSOs also believe that the New Deal has made the UN prefer bigger and international NGOs to local ones. They feel the New Deal has led to larger programmes, which come with larger budgets, excluding many smaller CSOs who don’t have the capacity to deliver a full project but might have comparative advantage in delivering part of the project. Similar to civil society in Puntland and Mogadishu, this common issue could be partly solved by contracting via civil society networks and platforms.

**Partners in Peace and State Building**

**The New Deal: A new opportunity for Civil Societies in Fragile States?**

The New Deal (see Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation 2011) recognises that strengthening state-society relations is “at the heart” of bringing countries out of fragility (International Dialogue on and Statebuilding 2011, p. 1) – but can the structure of the New Deal also be an opportunity for Somali civil society as it has been for civil societies in other fragile states? Can it provide mechanisms for civil society to strengthen its activities and engage more meaningfully with the UN?

**Lessons Learned: Civil Society and the New Deal in Fragile States**

Research on the role of civil society in other fragile states has yielded some interesting findings: The Kroc Institute’s study (Wall & Fairhurst 2014) on civil society and opportunities within the New Deal in fragile states gives examples of how civil society representatives involved in the New Deal see it as an unprecedented opportunity to bring issues of peace building, development, and government accountability to the fore of national and international agendas. It reports that civil society leaders have facilitated broad and in some cases national conversations to raise awareness of the New Deal and promote its implementation – thus not just advocating for their core principles but taking the opportunity to benefit from and work for the implementation of the New Deal. The study was conducted in six New
Deal pilot countries – Afghanistan, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, South Sudan and Sierra Leone – and focuses on how the New Deal contributed to the recognition of civil society. Opportunities on how civil society was able to work for the implementation of the New Deal in the pilot countries were mainly in line with New Deal instruments (International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding 2011, p. 1), such as developing indicators, conducting fragility assessments and developing compacts.

What is interesting (and this mirrors the analysis of the CSO meetings) is that all of those activities are based on qualifications that CSOs naturally own – good connections and contacts with local communities, access to remote areas, established trust with local key players.

Other sources describe how civil societies in fragile states raise awareness of the New Deal and conduct assessments of peace processes in order to support the International Community, thus becoming advocates of the New Deal to their communities (CSPPS 2013, p. 8). Somali civil society on the other hand has been highly sceptical towards the New Deal, which was reflected in the meetings, mostly due to the mistrust between the political leadership and society, which raises more suspicion than hope among civil society members.

The CSPPS report notes that there are three ways in which peace and state building can be fostered via civil society:

- By training civil society to raise further awareness on peace and state building issues;
- By capacitating civil society to effectively organize itself and to secure necessary space to operate;
- By supporting civil society coalitions to effectively engage in a dialogue with other New Deal stakeholders and contribute to the successful implementation of the New Deal.

The CSPPS was also involved in a best practice example in the Somali context: The formation of the Somali Civil Society Coalition (SCS) was initiated by a group of CSO associations scattered around Southern Somalia and Puntland. In March 2012, the Somali CSO forum was held in Entebbe. The aim of the meeting was to unify Somali civil society voices by establishing Somali Civil Society Coalition (SCSC). The structure of SCSC was formed and by-laws were verified and legal representation of CSOs in Somalia was endorsed and accepted. The SCSC came up with a short-term work plan for their respective role in Somalia’s political transition. The intention of the CSOs was to have a bigger stake in the process of the roadmap by participating in the conferences and actively taking part in the constitution making process. The SCSC took part in the formation of the government’s new legal frameworks (e.g. the ratification of the provisional constitution, safeguarding the adoption of women quota in the parliament, observing the presidential election process and advocating for the empowerment of women and youth through key ministerial positions).
While a number of these objectives have been achieved, the SCSC has lost some of its momentum of 2012 and it was not possible to contact a member or focal point of the SCSC for this research.

**Lessons learned: What about Somalia?**

Based on discussions with CSOs, Somali civil society perceives the New Deal as an obstacle rather than an opportunity for development and partnerships with the International Community. Respondents believe that the New Deal is managed centrally, and that not many initiatives and programmes are proposed and implemented from the bottom. This is to some extent logical, as the coordination mechanisms for a war-torn country like Somalia have to be created first at the central level. However, this should then translate into support to and inclusion of civil society in the New Deal, in order to link up the top-down state building process with bottom-up efforts for peace building undertaken largely by civil society.

One way to increase civil society’s engagement in the New Deal resides in the assessment and planning phase of programmes, where it is felt that UN entities insufficiently include Somali civil society for consultations and data gathering. What is interesting is that many programmes do include consultations with civil society, but as part of the implementation of the programme itself. This approach can be altered: greater and earlier engagement can be secured for example by including CSO representatives in the Peace and State Building Working Groups (PSG Working Groups), which work along the five peace and state building goals (see The Somali Compact 2013), or by increasing the relevance of their participation in the Steering Committee of the Somalia Development and Reconstruction Facility (SDRF).

The CSPPS paper (2013, p. 23) also specifically notes that the UN could benefit if Somali civil society would be more involved in the planning, preparations and activities of the High-Level-Partnership-Forum (HLPF). By engaging civil society in this process, the HLPF could profit from a more in-depth view into needs and priorities for Somalia.

As regional administrations are taking up more responsibility and activities, state functions are starting to return to state authorities. This process does not necessarily signify a lesser responsibility for CSOs, but should be rather seen as an opportunity for civil society to reimagine their role, especially with the establishment of the National Development Plan. By taking back ‘typical’ state functions, additional space for civil society opens up in the development field. In this regard, many efforts have already been undertaken to ensure that civil society is included in planning and drafting the National Development Plan: An initiative by UNDP for example will provide a consultant to develop an M&E framework for effective regional engagement in the National Development Plan process, which includes assessments on how to collaborate with local civil society. Other efforts by the ACU, MOPIC and UNICEF, as mentioned earlier, include workshops on bringing together government authorities and Somali civil society to discuss issues related to the plan.
Discussion and Conclusion

The UN and civil society both have the potential to significantly contribute to Somalia’s peace and state building agenda. Nevertheless, opportunities are often being missed to cooperate, to benefit from each other’s strengths and comparative advantages, and to implement respective mandates in a coordinated and effective manner.

To link up the needs on the ground with programmes and initiatives, UN entities have to increase the inclusion of civil society from the early stages of programme development. The nature of Somali civil society’s modus operandi could complement and enhance the quality and relevance of UN planning and programming, for example through data gathering and stronger connections to the community. Even if the New Deal has led to larger programmes, the opportunity to learn from experiences of small CSOs and to partner up with a group of qualified CSOs for joint implementation should be taken seriously. On the other hand, the fact that many CSOs appear and vanish every year, or the failure of umbrella organisations and forums to hold up their existence, also shows that Somali civil society has missed opportunities to create stronger networks in order to collaborate with the International Community.

This research has attempted to highlight some of the underlying causes as to why the UN and Somali civil society have failed to improve their engagement in order to maximise the capacities and opportunities to implement the New Deal. While it seems that, after discussions with CSOs and UN entities and analyses of papers and reports, the UN engages far better with civil society than it is being credited for, there is little evidence of a strategic partnership or a comprehensive approach to it. Interestingly, Somali civil society has experienced the same fate when it comes to functioning civil society forums, platforms, or umbrella organisations. Such collective entities are being established each year and suspended each year, mainly due to volatile funding streams and high staff turnover. Some efforts by UN entities, such as the UNSOM HRO or the UNDP Capacity Development Unit, have managed to set up clusters, respectively forums, which have proved themselves so far as functioning. As the idiom information is power indicates, these information-sharing mechanisms and platforms are a crucial cornerstone and condition for strengthening CSOs.

The need for a strategic approach will be particularly important in 2016: How can the UN ensure that civil society is integrated into key processes to safeguard a society-at-large orientation of important milestones, such as the National Development Plan?

Suggestions and Recommendations

In addition to the establishment of sustainable platforms, the following is an overview of collected ideas and recommendations – gathered from literature on civil society engagement in fragile states, discussions with UN entities and partners, as well as

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7 CSO representatives confirmed that many organisations’ existence depend on a single person or a small number of people, usually the founders of the organisation, who hold key institutional knowledge.
meetings with over one-hundred CSOs working in and around Mogadishu, Garowe and Hargeisa:

**Structural/Process-oriented Recommendations**

- Use of CSO rosters as currently being developed by UNDP;
- Coordination of projects if possible via regional clusters, platforms and forums;
- Inclusion of CSOs in the first stages of drafting a programme for consultations and support on assessments, via the civil society platforms and networks if possible;
- Use of CSOs for data gathering M&E capacity, on-the-ground-reporting, primary research, etc.;
- Appointment of civil society focal point or use of regional RCOs as connector;
- Dedicated UN staff to attend meetings of civil society platforms, forums, etc. that would report back to UN Country Team and UNSOM, e.g. on programme management level.

**Capacity Development**

- Training of civil society to increase their capacity and raise further awareness on peace and state building issues;
- Support to civil society in effectively organising itself and in securing necessary space to operate;
- Support to civil society coalitions in effectively engaging in a dialogue with other New Deal stakeholders and in contributing to the successful implementation of the New Deal;
- Training on mediation and awareness raising: Although the literature claims that civil societies in fragile states are qualified to do this, in the extremely fragile Somali context, mediation and awareness raising among the community and at grassroots level will require some sort of capacity development component, e.g. in the form of Training of Trainers or via experts provided by the International Community;
- Trainings on fundraising and financial management to become more sustainable and independent, which would increase capacity to deliver on projects or to conduct monitoring;
- Facilitation of regional (East Africa) and national Trainings of Trainers with women quota, which would also contribute to lowering staff turnover, as the trained participants would go back and institutionalise training within their organisations and networks.

**Connecting/Mediating**

- Facilitation of meetings with regional (East Africa) CSOs, civil society networks and Somali regional governments;
- Partnership with local organisations to support local mediation efforts through connections and relations with local communities;
- Strengthening of Civil society capacity to represent local interests and report on local issues.
Closing

Discussions with CSOs and international partners strongly indicate a need to change the narrative on the UN’s engagement with Somali civil society on the one hand, and the perception of CSO’s capacity and potential on the other. For decades, CSOs have provided, whether on a small scale or via larger NGOs, a large range of services to populations and proved that even in times of crisis that they are capable of giving critical assistance in the absence of functioning state structures and rule of law. However, and despite references to civil societies’ roles in implementing the New Deal in Somalia as in other fragile states, Somali civil society has so far played a rather small role in the New Deal Somali Compact, compared to the potential observed in other fragile states.

The UN is the largest and most enduring organisation present in Somalia and is therefore also one of the largest ‘contractors’, with a high level of pooled funds from the International Community. As such, the UN at times perceived as a contributing factor to increasing tensions between civil society and government authorities. There is a fear that, if the UN funds directly civil society to implement projects, there will be funding gaps in the respective governmental authorities – and vice versa. This ‘zero-sum-game’ thinking only fuels the mistrust between society, civil society and the political leadership – a trend that has been aggravating during decades of socio-economic and political instability. Thus the UN has to constantly master the fine act of balancing its support between the state leadership and civil society.

Additionally, the absence of a legal framework and accountability mechanism for CSOs makes it difficult for the UN and donors to directly fund local CSOs.

However, there are also examples how the UN can act as a mediator and bridge the mistrust: Various workshops organised by UN entities have brought together both civil society representatives and government officials, and sometimes this has been the start of a sustainable partnership, as we have seen in the case of the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development in Mogadishu.

In this context, the newly established FGS-NGO platform, under the DPM’s leadership with DSRSG/RC/HC and UN Country Team support, provides a real opportunity to alter old dynamics. The platform, which first convened in December 2015, aims to improve relations between NGOs and the government, enhance NGO involvement in the New Deal, the National Development Plan and the drafting of the NGO bill, and to support discussions on operational issues such as taxation. Sustained support for this FGS-NGO platform is critical in achieving this fine balance between advocating for civil society while supporting the state building process. Furthermore, overcoming this mistrust through such a mechanism is an essential condition for a successful delivery of the Somali Compact.

Somali civil society can carry out many functions to support and implement the New Deal, but not without any further support. The successful delivery of the New Deal is not characterised by a one-way commitment: Efforts have to come from both sides to create a strategic partnership that is sustainable: it is not only a relation between a client and a contractor, but one between two partners in peace and state building.
The UN and Somali Civil Society

Sources


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