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Community Safety in Somalia

by Rasmus Stuhr Jakobsen [Danish Demining Group]

Somalia may be considered one of the longest standing failed states in the world. Two decades of intermittent but fierce conflict, widespread societal fragmentation, climatic hazards, massive displacement and questionable international interventions have left Somalia in a dire situation. As one of the three poorest countries in the world, Somalia continues to be ravaged by civil war. Through joint interventions and the synchronization of efforts, the Danish Refugee Council and its demining unit, Danish Demining Group, strive to create new ways of working in an unstable and volatile environment. DRC and DDG strongly believe Somalia needs support for local capacities to enhance community safety and strengthen protection and livelihood opportunities in order to stabilize the region and improve the quality of life for Somalis.

Joint Intervention

The DRC/DDG joint strategy in Somalia encompasses and integrates a number of projects implemented in line with overall aims toward paving the way for stabilization and development. The DRC’s Community Driven Recovery and Development project focuses on service-delivery enhancement and bottom-up governance. Secondly, the DRC’s approach encompasses a number of livelihoods and protection activities. Lastly, DDG’s Community Safety project aims to reduce threats to human security through comprehensive community-driven programming.

Community Safety

The Community Safety project goal is to strengthen the communities’ capacity to resist pressures and to prevent and resolve behaviours which contribute to violent conflict. With a mix of quick impact and long-term impact interventions, the Community Safety project comprises interventions at all societal levels. It is aimed at those affected by armed violence, as well as the perpetrators of armed violence, the instruments used to commit violence, and the wider institutional and cultural environment that enables or protects against violence.

This comprehensive approach emphasizes participatory visioning, planning and implementation, as well as focuses at the grassroots level on bringing members of a community together to identify and develop solutions to their problems.

Recovery and Development

Service-delivery enhancement and bottom-up governance are at the heart of the Community Driven Recovery and Development project. The project’s goal is to contribute to the improvement of livelihoods in local Somali communities. Specifically, the project aims to empower communities by enabling them to freely exercise their right to decide on the design, implementation and evaluation of their own development programs. The project further requires meeting community-development needs by providing social and economic infrastructure and services. Overall, interventions are characterized by promoting bottom-up governance development and building local-government capacity to take over the function and responsibility of helping communities help themselves.

Tangible Benefits

A tangible benefit of Somalia’s Community Safety project is the reduction in target-community conflicts, while another important tangible benefit of the Community Driven Recovery and Development project is the visible reconstruction and reconciliation. The increased income, new infrastructures or renewed social services have provided immediate affirmation of the benefits of peace and stability in the Puntland, Somaliland and Southcentral Somalia communities.

The Cost of Armed Violence

The human and economic costs of armed violence are tremendous. In Somalia, the continued armed conflict has led to the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of families, with the social capital eroded and the infrastructure destroyed. Instability is a large extent impeding investment in reconstruction and reconciliation.

Somalia’s situation clearly demonstrates how armed violence undermines development and underdevelopment fuels armed violence. As a result of the past two decades of conflict, Somalia is characterized by significant population displacement, widespread societal fragmentation, extremely high levels of food insecurity, erosion of the rule of law, massive proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and the build-up of armament and ammunition stockpiles.

Displacement

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency data, the number of displaced Somalis is more than 2.1 million. While the vast majority of displacement consists of people fleeing
The direct effects of conflict violence, a growing number of Somalis are also affected by the secondary effects of conflict, which include breakdown of the economy, failure of state services and ultimately reduced state and community-coping mechanisms against hazards or shocks. For example, drought has now become a significant cause of displacement. Those affected suffer from lack of state services, but also limited international services such as food-aid distribution, development aid and physical-security enforcement.

Bleak Outlook

In the Southcentral region of Somalia, there is no sign that conflict will decrease. Instead, with the growth of splinter opposition groups and the stalled peace process, the outlook is bleak. Somalia is at war and it appears that it will be so for the foreseeable future.

Even though the autonomous Northern region of Puntland is less volatile than Southcentral Somalia, Puntland is experiencing a rise in insecurity and political tension. At its roots are poor governance, weapons proliferation and a collapse of the intr-clan cohesion. Also in the north, Somaliland is still vulnerable to armed violence and negative external pressures. Political disputes, clan-based politics and resource conflicts are rising. Furthermore, the continuing violence in Southcentral Somalia has led to an influx of displaced people that the region is ill-equipped to handle.

Rasmus Stihr Jakobsen is Head of Danish Demining Group, the Danish Refugee Council’s mine-action unit. Prior to joining DDG, he worked with the Red Cross and the United Nations primarily in disaster management. He has been posted in Italy, Saraw, South Africa and Uganda.

Land Rights in Conflict-affected Contexts

Land rights in conflict and post-conflict environments is an increasing area of concern within humanitarian and development communities. When conflicts end, land rights may be threatened, especially for women, subsistence farmers and other marginalized populations. Secure land rights are, therefore, a critical issue for humanitarian response, sustainable peace-building and longer-term economic recovery, particularly in countries where agriculture is key to livelihoods. While mine-action activities such as priority-setting, survey and clearance bring mine-action organizations into direct contact with land-rights issues, most tend to avoid these issues. This article looks at how mine-action organizations can better address land issues.

by Jon Ururu [McGill University ], Gabrielle Chazzy [DRC United Nations Mine Action Centre ] and Sharmala Naidoo [GICHD]

In 2010, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining commissioned research to examine land-rights issues in several mine-affected countries, including Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, South Sudan and Yemen, and how mine-action organizations handle these issues. This article describes the findings of GICHD’s research and provides practical guidance on how to “do no harm” and address the land issues they commonly encounter.

This study utilized various methodologies for collecting qualitative data, such as interviewing land-rights and mine-action experts, and studying relevant literature about land-rights issues. As such, it did not collect statistical data and reports no quantitative data. The study’s purpose was instead to determine practical ways to engage in land-rights issues by examining specific cases in the field.

Land Rights in Conflict-affected Contexts

Land and property issues are often a central feature of civil wars. Violence, displacement, property destruction, military capture and loss of territory, pervasive food insecurity and the breakdown of land and property-administration systems set the scene for renewed conflict. When people try to reclaim what they lost, failure to effectively address these problems can set the stage for renewed armed confrontation.

Land Rights and Mine-action Organizations

Landmines and explosive remnants of war leave a distinct imprint on post-war landscapes. Because they deny access to key resources, mines/ERW tend to exacerbate land and property issues. Communities are forced to adapt to new scarci-