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## Community Safety in Somalia

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# Community Safety in Somalia

Danish Demining Group is introducing new ways of working with conflict-affected populations in fragile parts of Somalia to pave the way for stabilization by enhancing community safety and improving livelihoods. Through a joint effort with the Danish Refugee Council, DDG strives to increase development and stability in violence-prone regions of Somalia using a community-driven, grassroots approach. This approach allows communities to work together on reconstruction projects as well as intervention strategies aimed at reducing violent behavior.

by Rasmus Stuhr Jakobsen [ Danish Demining Group ]

**S**omalia may be considered one of the longest standing failed states in the world. Two decades of intermittent but fierce conflict, widespread societal fragmentation, climactic hazards, massive displacement and questionable international interventions have left Somalis 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 behaviors which contribute to violent conflict. With a mix of quick impact and long-term impact interventions, the Community Safety project comprises interventions at all



Preparing for the demolition of ERW in Somalia. Community safety is a priority for the Danish Demining Group. All photos courtesy of Peter Müller.

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 communi-



Women on their way to meeting. Involving women in the development of community safety plans is a key priority.

ties 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 and important tangible benefit of the Community Driven Recovery and Development project is the visible reconstruction achieved through community cooperation. 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 to 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.<sup>1</sup> While the vast majority of displacement consists of people fleeing



Developing a community safety plan facilitated by DDG employees.

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 intra-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. ♦

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