

Grass-Roots Dialogue in Hirshabelle State

Recommendations for Locally-Informed Federalism in Somalia

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Project Report

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Executive Summary

This project report with recommendations has been informed by a project that the Berghof Foundation carried out in 2015-2016 in Hirshabelle State in Somalia entitled “Building Federalism through Local Government Dialogue”. One component of this project entailed the implementation of six separate Somali dialogue assemblies – *Shirarka* – all taking place over six days with approximately 60 participants. This report is a brief summary of the pertinent issues that were discussed at these six assemblies in relation to the federalization process, the role of local government in a federal system, and the urgent need for conflict resolution and reconciliation in Hirshabelle State. The report begins with a brief explanation of the current status of and concerns about the ongoing federalization process in the country and then lays out five specific recommendations for national and international policy makers, based on the opinions and views of the citizens of Hirshabelle State that were collected during the *Shirarka*. These recommendations are 1) to support an inclusive and participatory system of federalism in the country, 2) to limit the top-down nature of the federalization process, 3) to encourage more Somali ownership, 4) to ensure the fair distribution of wealth, and 5) to address the need for reconciliation among the people of Somalia.

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About the Author

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1 Introduction

In August 2012 the Somali Parliament adopted the Provisional Constitution¹, which mandated a federal system of government in Somalia. Although the Constitution and the interim government which approved it was supported and recognized by the international community, the process of agreeing to the Provisional Constitution (PC) and electing the new parliament – the so-called 2012 Road Map process – was highly contested, in particular due to the questionable authenticity of clan elders and delegates active in the process.² Furthermore, the very nature of the federal government was bound to be problematic for certain segments of society, as the debate on whether to implement a system of a central unitary state or a federal state for the country of Somalia has been ongoing since the beginning of the civil war. Over the years, the opposing positions have been supported by certain clans within the country, as well as by certain regional and neighboring countries. This difference in opinion on systems of governance has led to significant regional rivalries and the competition of political visions. It has been argued that this “unresolved problem over the nature of statehood” is what lies at the very heart of the Somali crisis.³

Complicating matters further are the “internal contradictions, omissions and ambiguities” that characterize the Provisional Constitution⁴. Various essential elements of a federal system of governance are not defined clearly in the Constitution, including the division of governance powers and revenue; mechanisms of resource sharing between the federal government and the federal member states; the particular electoral model and process of elections; and the role of traditional and customary arrangements.⁵ At the time of writing the constitutional review process was very much in limbo, as the process had been delayed significantly and the decision on changes to the constitution was not acted upon by the legislature in a timely manner, but was rather deferred in August 2016 to the second term of the Somali Federal Parliament, which began its work in fall 2016 with the establishment of the upper house of the bicameral parliament. There is therefore much confusion about the legal way forward, as failing to adhere to the timeline for the constitutional review process in the PC does have some legal implications.⁶

Moreover, the understanding of the concept of federalism was – and to a certain extent continues to be – quite limited throughout the country, and misconceptions about what a federal system means for the country are abundant. The fact that there is no word in the Somali language for ‘federalism’ makes things even more complex. Specifically in the Middle Shabelle region, an assessment team from the Berghof Foundation found in summer 2015 that there was so much taboo surrounding the word ‘federalism’, that their discussions with citizens on the topic were more productive when they avoided the term all together.⁷ Since the Provisional Constitution was approved, there has been little public participation in the federalization process and little effort on the part of the government to explain to Somali citizens what the concept of federalism entails and how this system of government may ultimately look within the Somali context.

¹ Available here: <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf>

² Bryden, Matt 2013. *Somalia Redux? Assessing the New Somali Federal Government*. A Report of the CSIS Africa Program. Lanham: Center for Strategic and International Studies, p. 6.

³ Bradbury, Mark and Sally Healy 2010. “Introduction”, in Mark Bradbury and Sally Healy (eds.) *Whose peace is it anyway? connecting Somali and international peacemaking*. Accord, Issue 21. Conciliation Resources. p. 9.

⁴ Bryden 2013, op.cit., p. 19 [see footnote 2].

⁵ Stanley, Aaron, Paul Simkin, and Kirsti Samuels 2013. *Building from the Bottom: Political accommodation in Somalia at the regional and local levels*. Conflict Dynamics International, pp. 6, 8, 12.

⁶ Schmidt, Jan Amilcar 2017. “The Somali Constitutional Review Process. Taking Stock” in Constitutional Net. Available here: <http://www.constitutionnet.org/news/somali-constitutional-review-process-taking-stock>. See here also for more information about the delay in the constitutional review process, the recommendations that the mandated bodies suggested to the government, and the state of legal limbo that the constitutional review process is currently in.

⁷ Mohamed, Abdi Noor 2015. *Building Federalism through Local Government Dialogue*. Unpublished assessment report. Berghof Foundation, p. 5. Available at: http://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/Berghof_MS_Assessment_Report_Final.pdf

In this context, the Berghof Foundation carried out six *Shirarka* dialogue assemblies in the former regions of Middle Shabelle and Hiiraan (in October 2016 these regions merged to form Hirshabelle State) in the framework of the project “Building Federalism through Local Government Dialogue”. These *Shirarka* were facilitated by colleagues of the Berghof Foundation and local partners and encompassed six days of presentations and discussion which focused primarily on the three focal areas of the project, namely 1) federalism and the federalization process in Somalia, 2) the role of local government as the basis for federal institutions, and 3) the challenges of and opportunities for conflict resolution and reconciliation in the regions. 60 individuals were invited to each assembly, at which all clans and sub-clans of the regions were represented, as well as important stakeholder groups such as elders, women, youth, religious leaders, business professionals, and artists/poets. Each *Shir* was held in the typical Somali fashion accompanied and framed by poets and singers who incorporated the themes into the event through Somali poetry and music.

Our project partners on the ground included lecturers from Puntland State University in Garowe, SIMAD University in Mogadishu, and the University of Southern Somalia in Baidoa, who had expertise in the specific themes of the project and were able to answer the questions and concerns of the participants

*“You have your opinion
I also have my opinion
Shall we unite ourselves on federalism?
Shall we abandon theft, lies and tribalism?”*
(Participant at Shir in Jowhar, July 2016)

and to facilitate an open discussion. The events were jointly organized by our trustworthy partners in the regional governments and always attended by several of the district commissioners in the regions and/or the deputy governors. Somali poets were invited to recite original poems which summarized certain aspects of the event or were related to the topics discussed during the *Shir*.

Because each assembly took place over a period of six days, it gave the participants ample time to express themselves and freely discuss their views, visions and fears about the project themes. The project team expressed their pleasure at the energetic and competent contribution of the participants at each of the *Shirarka*. Furthermore, the participants of the assembly were motivated to discuss these important topics and information upon their return to their local communities in the region, creating a tangible multiplier effect which enabled the topics and discussion to reverberate more largely within society as they reached more people.

Throughout the six *Shirarka*, an attempt was made by the Berghof team to address any misconceptions about the concept of federalism itself, in order to provide the participants with substantial knowledge and information about the system of governance that is currently being implemented in their country. It is essential for citizens to have this knowledge and awareness in order to enable people of the regions to make best use of the system of federalism, to understand how local government should function in a federal system, and to hold their government accountable. Discussing such issues of governance will also raise people’s own awareness about their responsibilities towards the state and will bring attention to the role that people can play in the (re)building of local administrations and ultimately in the peacebuilding process. The *Shirarka* assemblies contributed greatly towards facilitating a bottom-up approach to statebuilding and peacebuilding based on dialogue and respect for other opinions. The following sections of this report outline the most important themes that were addressed by Somali citizens at the *Shirarka* in Hirshabelle State, and may be seen as a type of guidance for the further implementation of federalism in the Federal Republic of Somalia.

2 Supporting an inclusive and participatory system of federalism

The citizens of Hirshabelle State expressed many different opinions at the *Shirarka* about the concept of federalism and what such a system of government entails. Many of the ideas about federalism that were voiced were thoroughly positive. For instance, federalism was referred to as a system of government that “enables the coexistence of communities”⁸ and allows people of different religions, cultures, and clans to live together peacefully. It is a system that unites people on common interests and can lead to peace and development, as well as reconciliation and integration. Nonetheless, there were other, more pessimistic opinions about what federalism could mean for the country, including concerns about how a federal system may “cause the destruction of national unity” and lead to the “breaking away of regions”, which would divide the country even further and lead to war. There was apprehension that such a system could potentially divide the country into fiefdoms. Some voices were also raised about the growing potential of conflict due to the creation of new borders between states.

Yet most participants at the *Shirarka* were willing to see federalism as a positive step forward for their country. Importantly, however, this acceptance was highly dependent on the assumption that a federal system would lead to a more inclusive and participatory system of governance. This was seen simultaneously as one of the reasons that the government adopted the system in the first place (“to promote bottom-up decision making” and “bring government closer to the people”) as well as a prerequisite for having a successful federal government. Specific and relevant suggestions for how to achieve more political participation and inclusivity in governance were given at each of the *Shirarka* and included broad elements, such as ensuring that the public agrees on a united federalization process and involving more women and youth in decision making, but also very specific measures, such as ending the 4.5 representation formula⁹, carrying out a census and holding fair elections so that Somalis can freely elect their own leaders. There was also a very clear appeal for more knowledge and training on the concept of federalism, not just for government representatives and civil servants, but also for the general public. There was concern among the participants at the *Shirarka* that a general lack of understanding about the concept of federalism was leading to misconceptions which could prove to be dangerous to the implementation of federalism, as well as to peace itself in the country. Thus adequate training on federalism and a heightened public awareness of the Somali federal system, potentially achieved through various events and meetings organized in districts throughout the country, would be highly beneficial for increasing both that knowledge base as well as the perception of inclusivity in the federalization process.

The *Shirarka* participants also expressed their thoughts on the advantages that a federal system could bring to participatory governance in the country, including the potential opportunity to be more involved in political processes and an increased capacity to hold government more accountable, and then linked these advantages directly to desired changes in their systems of local government. Many participants spoke of how relations between the people and their local governments are characterized by mistrust and how they felt as if they had no power or ability to hold their government to account, which leads to a perceptible gap between the government and the people. Yet it was also clear from the *Shirarka* that

⁸ Throughout this report, all statements that are in quotes and are lacking a reference indicate that the statement came directly from one of the participants at one of the six *Shirarka*.

⁹ The 4.5 formula is a system of fixed proportional representation of Somali clans. An equal number of places is allotted to each of the four major Somali clan-families, and a half place to minorities and to women. This formula has been used to determine the representation in the various peace conferences that have taken place over the years as well as for transitional governments, and it is still in use today. There remains a reliance on the 4.5 formula for political power sharing at various levels of government despite widespread objections to the formula in society.

people are genuinely interested in how local government systems should be developed and run within a federal system, and they had many good ideas for improving the relationship between citizens and their government. Specifically they felt that in order to create more trust between the citizens and governmental officials, the citizens must be consulted with more often concerning their needs and allowed to elect their local government officials directly. One participant in particular called for the building of a “federalist culture” in Somalia based on “mutual understanding, cooperation between different levels, and tolerance and respect for other people’s interests and opinions”.

3 Limiting the top-down nature of the federalization process

One of the questions that was continuously proposed near the beginning of each of the *Shirarka* was how the implementation of federalism came to be in Somalia and specifically why federalism had been adopted as a governmental system by their leaders. Many of the participants criticized the ambition of the country’s leaders for power and questioned how a federal system could possibly be successful in the precarious environment of corruption, power struggles and clannism. The intensifying clan rivalry as well as conflict between federal member states were both cited as examples of how challenging it will be to successfully implement a system of federalism. Specifically, federalism is being instrumentalized by the detrimental forces of clannism, as certain clans have claimed ownership over the new federal states. Furthermore, there is ongoing and growing conflict between the individual federal member states and the Federal Government of Somalia, notably power struggles due to the fact that the official federal structure and mechanisms have not yet been agreed upon or anchored in a revised Somali constitution which is meant to be approved in a public referendum.¹⁰

Many of these concerns and conflicts could potentially be alleviated if the federalization process was carried out in a less top-down manner than is currently the case. For instance, the current governmental system on the regional and district levels is certainly not characteristic of a working federal system: district commissioners and other local authorities are appointed by the central government, rather than elected by the people in their constituencies. This leads to the perception that they are more accountable to the government than they are to the people and more interested in appeasing the government, rather than providing and working for the citizens. With the notable exception of the Wadajir Framework¹¹ there has been little to no community involvement in the federalization process. In fact, many Somali community members in Hirshabelle State expressed wonderment when the Berghof project team began to ask for their opinions and perceptions on the topics of federalism and local government.

Moreover, the official creation of federal member states through the merging of regions is also perceived as having been carried out in a top-down fashion. Specifically, Article 49 of the Provisional Constitution states not only that the “number and boundaries of the Federal Member States shall be determined by

¹⁰ See the Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia, Article 136(2).

¹¹ The Wadajir Framework is a comprehensive program led by the Federal Government of Somalia and the Ministry of Interior and Federal Affairs and implemented by the governments of the federal member states. The overarching goal of the program is to establish functioning local government administrations through a community-owned and led process. The program has five different components: 1) fostering renewed trust, social cohesion and reconciliation; 2) building the capacity of local actors; 3) ensuring all communities participate in forming their new governing structures through civic dialogues; 4) building the capacity of local councils and administrations; and 5) inspiring a momentum for dialogue, hope and possibility. For more information about the implementation and processes of the program, see *Wadajir National Framework for Local Governance*. 2015. Federal Government of Somalia.

the House of the People of the Federal Parliament”¹² but also that “[b]ased on a voluntary decision, two or more regions may merge to form a Federal Member State”.¹³ While framing the merger of regions to be a voluntary process, the federal government essentially forced chosen regions to join together as states. Such imposed top-down pressure to comply with federalist structures flouts the very spirit of federalism, and there are concerns that imposing federalist structures without having the communities, districts and regions of Somalia be involved in the process could lead to new conflicts between formerly peaceful regions and groups of people.

“Federalism is like building your own house, because the ownership of the house, the size of the land that the house is built on, the wealth of the house owner, the architectural design of the house and the number of family members living in the house are all different.”

(Participant at Shir in Jowhar, February 2016)

4 Encouraging more Somali ownership

As mentioned above, the argument over whether Somalia should have a central unitary state or a federal state as a system of governance has been ongoing for decades in Somalia. Critically, the country of Ethiopia supports a system of federalism, while the Arab states are more supportive of a unitary state. This has only added to the overwhelming perception in the country of foreign meddling in Somalia’s internal affairs, which has also been generated through other factors, most specifically the various external military interventions in the country. Thus within the discussion at the *Shirarka* of why federalism had been adopted as a governance system in their county, the role of external actors was continuously referenced. The influence of foreign actors was by some participants perceived as relatively benign (“federalism is the latest model in post-conflict countries” and “because our neighboring countries [Kenya and Ethiopia] have embraced federalism”) yet was portrayed by other participants as much more hostile (“foreign powers want to destabilize the country” and “to divide Somalia into enclaves so that it is no longer a threat to its neighbors”). Yet in spite of the differing opinions on the malice of foreign meddling, there was much consensus on the fact that the decision to adopt federalism was indeed due to the influence of foreign powers (“foreign nations had forced Somalia to accept federalism” and “federalism is a notion from the West – they have their own agenda in Somalia and don’t care about the people”).

Thus Somali ownership over the federalization process, as well as the development of a Somali form of federalism based on both Islam and the Somali culture, was considered by the participants of the *Shirarka* as essential for the successful implementation of federalism in the country. In particular it was mentioned that Somalis should use their own resources and financing for the federalization process, rather than accepting money from foreign donors. While it is unclear how Somalia, which is experiencing armed conflict and a struggling economy, would be able to realistically afford the independent financing of the process, the message was clear that there would be “no results unless Somalis use their own resources”. The underlying assumption here is that foreign nations who donate money to the process will be able to unduly influence the process and use their financial leverage to dictate to the Somali government what

¹² Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia, Article 49(1).

¹³ Ibid., Article 49(6).

should be done. Such influence is especially dangerous in an already thorny environment in which the citizens of Somalia feel that foreign intervention has been highly detrimental to their country, specifically in terms of neighboring countries that they feel do not want to see a strong Somali state.

Many participants of the *Shirarka* referenced the cases of Puntland and Somaliland as examples of federal states in which international involvement has been limited. In both of these cases there has indeed been remarkably little external intervention, and both Puntland and Somaliland have decently well run governance systems and little conflict. In Somaliland, an extensive reconciliation process in the 1990s was characterized by a “remarkable degree of local and national ownership, legitimacy and inclusion” which was then transferred to the successful statebuilding process.¹⁴ Puntland State was established in 1998 after the merger of five regions and was at once envisioned as a federal entity within a future Federal Somalia State.¹⁵ Since then it has had a functioning federal structure and system. This was accomplished without the extensive involvement of external actors. For many of the Somali citizens taking part in the *Shirarka* in Hirshabelle State, the cases of Somaliland and Puntland were excellent examples of what can be accomplished when Somalis take charge of and can define their own future without the potentially harmful interference of foreign countries.

5 Ensuring the fair distribution of wealth

One of the conclusions that was reached from the discussions during the six *Shirarka* was that not only are the mechanisms for sharing resources a key interest for the people of Hirshabelle State, but also developing a way forward that allows this sharing to happen in an equal and fair way is a key need to be met. This need stems from the various challenges and concerns that Somalis have about sharing resources, both within individual regions and in the country as a whole. The former region of Middle Shabelle is rich in resources, as the Shabelle River provides a reliable source of water for irrigation canals which allow for the cultivation of various types of crops. The region accounts for a large percentage of the livestock rearing in the country and also has a long coastline which allows for fishing.¹⁶ With this in mind, the people of Middle Shabelle were particularly interested in learning about how the distribution of wealth functions in a federal system, in particular between regions that have disparately different levels of income and resources. The Provisional Constitution unfortunately does not give a clear explanation of how wealth is to be shared among the federal member states and between the states and the federal government. Article 122 simply states that the “principles of public finances will be discussed between the Federal Government and Federal Member State in accordance with the Constitution.”¹⁷

In general, there was an understanding of the needs and the benefits of sharing resources with other regions (for an “increase in productivity”, for “social cohesion and unity”, to “build alliances which will be helpful in times of crisis or disaster mitigation”, to “share responsibilities” and to “balance power”) and

¹⁴ Ibrahim, Mohammed Hassan and Ulf Terlinden 2010. “Somaliland: ‘home grown’ peacemaking and political reconstruction” in Mark Bradbury and Sally Healy (eds.) *Whose peace is it anyway? Connecting Somali and international peacemaking*. Accord, Issue 21. Conciliation Resources. p. 76.

¹⁵ Ahmed, Ahmed Abbas and Ruben Zamora 2010. “Puntland constitutional review process” in Mark Bradbury and Sally Healy (eds.) *Whose peace is it anyway? Connecting Somali and international peacemaking*. Accord, Issue 21. Conciliation Resources. p. 91.

¹⁶ Ministry of Interior and Federal Affairs 2015. *Report on Middle Shabelle Wadajir Outreach Program*. MOIFA, Federal Republic of Somalia, p. 15.

¹⁷ Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia, Article 122.

many participants felt that implementing a system of fiscal federalism was a unique opportunity to share resources fairly and allocate resources according to the needs of individual districts and regions. However, at the same time many people were skeptical that a fair system can ever be successfully implemented in a resource-sharing environment that is currently dominated by certain clans according to the 4.5 system and which many of the participants characterized as unjust and based on power and wealth. Furthermore, the lack of responsible institutions and financial management systems, as well as staff who lack the capacity and financial skills to implement and manage federal financial systems will continue to be a challenge to fiscal accountability. At each of the *Shirarka*, the topics addressed during the discussions included both the types of tax that are collected and what types of expenditures should be carried out by the different levels of government, as well as frank discussions about the possible mechanisms for ensuring the accountability of government in terms of fiscal federalism, which included potential watchdog agencies such as an anti-corruption commission, but also the approval and implementation of relevant regulatory laws by parliament and the need to have the procedures for sharing wealth enshrined in the constitution.

Since one objective of a federal governance system should be to enhance the fair distribution of wealth and prosperity in the country, it is essential that this distribution is guaranteed in order to have a successful federal system. Beyond that, however, it is critical that Somali citizens both understand and support the distribution system that is implemented, particularly because the topic of resource sharing between regions is politically complex in Somalia and linked to long-standing grievances between clans. Implementing a federal wealth distribution scheme that is perceived as unjust by certain societal groups brings significant risks, including potentially violent conflict. The best way to ensure societal buy-in of the federal distribution scheme is to decide on this scheme in a participatory manner in which citizens are allowed to voice their opinions and concerns openly. Imposing a fiscal structure without consulting important stakeholders in each district and state would violate the essence of federalism and would lead to dissatisfaction with the system. Citizens must be able to see the justice and equality in the system; participatory decision-making will allow for more societal support of the system. Furthermore, there must be utmost clarity on resource sharing and wealth distribution, ideally enshrined in the federal member states' constitutions, when appropriate.

6 Addressing the need for reconciliation

The various opinions voiced by the Somali participants at the *Shirarka* concerning the connection between federalism and reconciliation were often inherently contradictory. On the one hand, many people felt that a federal system of government offered an excellent opportunity to resolve much of the long-standing conflict in the country. Federalism provided a possible way forward as a solution to the mistrust, suspicion and (violent) conflict that exists between communities and should therefore be embraced and supported. Yet on the other hand, many people voiced the opinion that the successful implementation of a federal system is utterly impossible without first resolving the long-standing conflicts between communities and clans. Reconciliation (preferably “reconciliation from the grass-roots”) must be achieved before a federal system can properly function, as “no government can work in the middle of deeply rooted conflicts”, and ongoing conflict, clannism, distrust, and division will all continue to challenge the newly-implemented federal system and its structures. Furthermore, many participants stated that this reconciliation is only possible with the abolishment of the 4.5 system.

Interestingly, what these two conflicting points of view with regard to the implementation of federalism have in common is the understanding that there is indeed a serious lack of deep and effective reconciliation in the country. Whether one believes that there is a need to achieve peace and reconciliation before successful federalization or whether federalism can lead to successful reconciliation doesn’t change the fact that there has been little reconciliation in Somalia at all. Yet many of the ‘peace conferences’ that have been held in Somalia over the years have been advertised as leading to reconciliation. And while many agreements may have come out of these conferences, none of them have “sufficiently addressed the real grievances that exist among Somali individuals and clans.”¹⁸ This conflation of a “revival of a central government with successful reconciliation” has been the “single biggest mistake by external mediators”¹⁹ over the years of war in Somalia. As one of the *Shirarka* participants so sensibly expressed, “small groups meeting in hotels is not reconciliation”.

Adding to the complexity of the connection between federalism and reconciliation, there were also many voices raised at the *Shirarka* that blamed federalism and the federalization process for new or recurring conflict in the country. The federalization process has indeed been a source of political and social unrest and has led to disagreements and conflict around issues such as borders and boundaries as well as the sharing of resources. These voices argued that in this sense federalism has a serious potential to destabilize the relations of neighboring regions, clans, and communities and thus lead to (violent) conflict. Adding even more instability to the situation is the stance of the Federal Government of Somalia, which is often perceived as intimidating and threatening in the framework of the federalization process.

In light of these new or revived conflicts due to federalism, the urgent need for reconciliation becomes even more critical. In spite of the seemingly overwhelming needs in terms of resolving conflict and building peace among the communities in Somalia, the participants at the *Shirarka* were hopeful about achieving reconciliation, albeit under certain conditions. First and foremost, they felt that it was essential that more opportunities for open discussion and debate – such as the *Shirarka* – be made available to them. Such forums could be utilized to bring conflicting actors together and allow them to share their grievances and

¹⁸ Saalax, Warsan Cismann and Abdulaziz Ali Ibrahim ‘Xildhiban’ 2010. “Somali peace agreements: fueling factionalism” in Mark Bradbury and Sally Healy (eds.) *Whose peace is it anyway? Connecting Somali and international peacemaking*. Accord, Issue 21. Conciliation Resources. p. 32.

¹⁹ Menkhaus, Ken 2010. “Diplomacy in a failed state: international mediation in Somalia”, in Mark Bradbury and Sally Healy (eds.) *Whose peace is it anyway? Connecting Somali and international peacemaking*. Accord, Issue 21. Conciliation Resources. p. 18.

come to an understanding with each other. Yet such encounters must be given time to develop, and successful reconciliation cannot be expected after one meeting, nor can it be expected when political elites come to an agreement as representatives of their clans. Such reconciliation must instead be addressed at the level at which the conflict has occurred. Such encounters must also be as inclusive as possible, involving all conflict stakeholders who will be affected by either the successful reconciliation or ongoing conflict, including Somali elders, religious leaders, women and youth. Supporting an inclusive reconciliation process can also ensure that public awareness is raised about the need for reconciliation and a momentum is created for – in the words of one of the *Shirarka* participants – a “critical mass for peace”.

*“In war a person is lost,
but in peace a person is
born.”*

(Participant at Shir in
Bulla Burte, October 2016)

7 Conclusion

The ongoing federalization process in Somalia has been met with numerous obstacles over the last five years, including significant delays in implementation, disagreements and tensions between regions and states, and a skeptical public. The process is perceived by many participants of the *Shirarka* in Hirshabelle State as being forced and orchestrated by both the political elite in Mogadishu as well as international actors, rather than according to the wishes and demands for decentralization on the lower levels of government and society. What is needed is a more balanced approach that seeks to reconcile the underlying tensions and to respond to the interests and needs of the Somali people as a whole. The fact that federalism was a generally foreign term that many citizens did not understand has complicated the process even further. Nevertheless, the process has achieved some significant successes, including the eventual peaceful merger of all of the regions in the country into federal member states, the establishment of the upper house of the bicameral parliament and, thanks to extensive training and capacity building, the increasing understanding of politicians and bureaucrats of the fundamentals of a federal system. That being said, there are significant measures that could be taken to ensure that the process achieves its aims and ensures the spirit of federalism. The six *Shirarka* that took place in Hirshabelle State during 2016 offered a unique opportunity to speak with and listen to the common citizens of the state, specifically their concerns about the federalization process and suggestions for its implementation in the future. These concerns and suggestions have been thus transformed into the following recommendations for policy makers.

8 Recommendations for international and national policy makers

- ≡ **The system of federalism currently being implemented in Somalia must be more inclusive and participatory.** Increased public awareness about federalism as well as training, when appropriate, is essential in order for citizens to become knowledgeable about their system of governance. This will then allow them the opportunity to become more involved in political processes, with an increased capacity to hold government more accountable. On a local and district level, wherever security permits, local communities should be able to vote for their own representatives, rather than have them appointed by the central government.
- ≡ **The perceived top-down nature of the process of federalization should be acknowledged and rectified.** Orchestrating any type of devolution or decentralization process from the top level of government disregards the principles and values of these processes. Lower levels of government should and must have more say in the federal structures within which they work. It is essential that the division of governance powers between the federal government and the federal member states is enshrined in a revised constitution as soon as possible, and that district and local administrations take on their responsibilities in a federal system in a competent fashion.
- ≡ **Somali ownership over the federalization process must be encouraged and supported.** This can certainly be difficult if more Somali ownership means missed deadlines in the process and/or decreased international influence over Somali political affairs. Yet the international community must be more mindful of the prevalent and negative perception in Somali society of the meddling of foreign nations. Allowing Somalis to guide the process more could allow for more societal buy-in of the process. This could be done through a different sort of engagement and funding that builds the capacity of state, district and local leaders, rather than focusing on retaining influence and/or control over the federal government, and through the active support and financing of civil society actors, who can potentially act as a bridge between political leaders and Somalis on the ground.
- ≡ **The fair and equitable distribution of wealth must be decided through a participatory process.** Because resource sharing is a politically complex topic and linked to long-standing grievances between clans, citizens must support the ultimate wealth distribution scheme that is decided upon. Participatory decision-making in the process will allow for societal support of the system. This can be done through information sessions and/or awareness-raising campaigns which allow citizens to voice their concerns and recommendations for resource sharing. There must also be clarity on wealth distribution, whether through clear policies or written into the (revised) federal and state constitutions in order to avoid any misunderstandings and tensions in the future.
- ≡ **The urgent need for reconciliation among Somalia's clans must be addressed.** This is essential to ensure a successful federalization process and to limit the new conflicts that have arisen out of the process itself. Time, effort and resources must be dedicated to allowing Somali citizens the opportunity to meet and discuss with their former adversaries on regional, district, and community levels, and expectations for a quick solution to the conflicts must be tempered. Reconciliation must be pursued gradually and organically, without the temptation for elite agreements that only address the conflict(s) superficially.