Interrelations Between Education and Peace in Somaliland: Perceptions from University Students

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ABSTRACT

Wars and violent conflicts inevitably affect institutions providing social services the most, including but not limited to, education and educational facilities of any country and the community within. The war and conflict with Somalia's ruthless military regime from 1980–1991 in Somaliland affected both the facilities and their enrollment rate. The military deliberately shelled the urban centers and rural areas and all educational facilities across the country were in rubble and ruins. However, Somaliland citizens never gave up and have succeeded in their efforts to recover and rebuild their social, economic, and political infrastructures. In the mid-1990s, there were just a few primary schools. Since then, education has expanded rapidly with the number of primary and secondary schools rising quantitatively. Similarly, the prevalence of peace and stability has served as a vehicle of transformation and development, resulting in rising enrollment thereafter. This increase catalyzed the emergence of higher education institutions across the country. In line with this, defining and exploring the perception of the students towards the fragile, hard-earned peace and stability, and the role of the state is the central objective of this study. The study has utilized and analyzed both primary and secondary data. The conclusion suggests the need for re-visiting and re-conceptualizing of the curriculum in Somaliland to overcome the lackluster sense of nationalism apparent in its citizens. The outcome of this policy is entirely dependent on the integrated and collective approach of stakeholders to advance the nation's education system, thereby sustaining the hard-won peace and stability in the state long-term.

INTRODUCTION

After the civil war, the collapse of the Somali state and the subsequent separation of Somaliland from the rest of Somalia, many sectors like the health, education, and the security of the country collapsed and had to be built from scratch. Infrastructure had been destroyed; few skilled staff and professionals such as teachers and weak capacity of the established government structures were among the major challenges facing the country.[1] Schools and children going to school signifies a sense of stability for communities and brings normalcy to the rather tense atmosphere of apprehension. Hence, many schools and Quranic studies resumed their programs. However, many in the community had to teach and learn in environments that were tainted by the past; where the schools and buildings showed signs of the civil war with bullet walls, buildings in rubble.[2]

Seeing education as a holistic learning process that includes formal, non-formal, and informal learning, peacebuilding efforts were being extended to schools, neighborhoods, tea shops, and

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[1] Jhazbhay, Iqbal (2010). Somaliland's post-war reconstruction: Rubble to rebuilding, *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-Inter-and Transdisciplinary*, no. 3: 1, 59–93.

[2] Eubank, Nicholas (2010). *"Peace-Building without External Assistance: Lessons from Somaliland"*. CGD Working Paper 198. Washington, D.C: Center for Global Development.

household levels.[3] Moreover, Somaliland's formal education came a long way with the establishment of the mandated Ministry of Education and there have been efforts made to promote the education sector. Both primary and secondary schools have experienced a quantitative increase.[4] This increase was the precursor of the emergence of higher education institutions. In this regard, the first University – Amoud University in the Awdal region – was founded in 1998 having the first in-house graduates within the country in 2003.[5] Today, Somaliland has over 30 registered universities located in all regions, according to the Ministry of Education.

Regardless of an increase in the number of educational facilities at all levels across the country, there are serious challenges and obstacles still facing the education system in Somaliland. These include the commercialization of education aimed at profiting off of school fees, population growth surpassing the capacity of the education sector, inadequate skilled and professional teachers, and low payment for the teachers among others.[6] This has wounded the quality of education and compromise the future of the next generation. The government continues to attempt to address the challenges and gaps that exist within the Somaliland education system, policies, and approaches. Understandably, the quality of education discussed in this study is inseparable from state policies and commitment from the decision-making circles. Therefore, quality education needs a constituency both within the government and among the members of the broader public who are willing and able to demand as much and assert that this must be made an integral part of Somaliland's educational system and facilities. This lays the foundation to catapult students towards a better future and help make them competent and qualified elites who can serve their nation.

This study focuses on University students and the scope is limited to Hargeisa city from a peacebuilding perspective. For a society to move towards a positive future and succeed at its peacebuilding efforts, the government, citizens, organizations, systems, and structures should all be working towards the same goal. With a focus on only Hargeisa city, the question which the study attempts to explore is: what are the capacity needs of university students in terms of skills, knowledge, and understanding to promote peace initiatives in Somaliland? Furthermore and very important, it considers another set of questions: What type of knowledge, skills, and understanding are needed to promote and sustain peace in Somaliland? What are the challenges facing the promotion of peace? And lastly, what are the opportunities associated with this?

EDUCATION AND PEACE IN PERSPECTIVES

Transformation in the aftermath of any conflict isn't an easy task. It deserves highlighting that the experience and culture of the people are distinct from one society to another while their approaches in seeking peace and building stability may also be varied from one culture to another.[7] However,

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[3] In Somaliland, poetry and songs played a crucial role in resolving the differences between the society and state building process.

[4] Education Statistics of Year Book 2013/2014 published by Somaliland Ministry of Education.

[5] Nasir M. Ali (2014). Building State Capacity in a Post-Conflict Situation: the Case of Somaliland, *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (January, 2014), pp. 157–170.

[6] Ibid., 5.

[7] Galtung, John & Webel, Charles (2007). Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies (eds). New York: Routledge Ltd.

the challenge for peace practitioners is to find ways in which communities can resolve their internal differences without physical violence, while the goal of peacemakers is to develop more effective ways of resolving disputes without violent conflict, to identify and transform the conditions that cause war.[8]

Education from a wider perspective contributes to peacebuilding and understanding the roots and contributors of any conflicts and violence.[9] As argued by Diana and Kenneth (2000) in their research "*The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*" along with the deaths, migration, poverty, etc. that conflicts bring along, there are also opportunities of transformative change that is possible through these conflicts and crises. Time and again the world has seen through the examples of Rwanda as a recent case that transformative change for the better is possible.[10]

The Colombian Conflict has been one of the longest-running conflicts in the world since the 1960s. The consequences and costs one of the oldest civil war in America and the world amounts to millions of innocent people who lost their lives displaced millions (internally and externally) and devastated unimaginable amount of properties from both sides. In 2016, there was a peace accord between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which also merited the President of Colombia a Nobel Prize in December 2016. Within these few months of peace, the country has seen notable changes – people going back to schools and more interestingly a baby boom as covered by Al Jazeera English News.[11]

Similar to many pastoral and agro-pastoral societies in the world, the Somali society in the Horn of Africa has a long history of conflicts over natural resource scarcity, for instance, the pasture and water specifically during the dry and drought season.[12] Political and clan rivalry added another dimension to the Somali contemporary conflicts.[13] The current conflicts in the Somali regions led many Somali citizens to live in an abject situation and increased the level of poverty and unemployment. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World

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[8] Cortright, David (2008). Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas. London, New York: Cambridge University Press.

[9] Gumut, Veronic (2006). *"Peace Education and Peer Mediation".* In Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa (ed). Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books Limited.

[10] Habyarimana, Jean Bosco (2012). "*Educating for the Twenty-First Century: Peace Education for the Postgenocide Rwanda".* In Weaving Peace: Essays on Peace, Governance and Conflict Transformation in the Great Lakes Region of Africa (eds). USA: Trafford Publishing.

[11] Al Jazeera (2016). *'Colombia: Baby boom follows FARC peace deal'.* Available at http://www.aljazeera.com/video/news/2017/03/colombia-baby-boom-farc-peace-deal-170308085014489.html. Accessed on May, 2017.

[12] Nasir M. Ali (2015). *"The Viability of Pastoral Society in Post-Conflict Settings: Evidence from Somaliland".* In the Intricate Road to Development: Government Development Strategies in the Pastoral Areas of the Horn of Africa (eds). Addis Ababa: Institute for Peace and Security Studies.

[13] Hussein A. Bulhan (2013). *Losing the Art of Survival and Dignity: From Self-reliance and Self-esteem to Dependence and Dhame.* Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International Publishing

Bank rated Somalia's level of poverty and unemployment at 73% and 67% respectively. This ranks Somalia as low as 165 in the ranking.[14]

Like many African societies, the Somalis are an oral society. Many of the traditions, history, and stories are being transmitted through poems, stories, and sayings narrated orally from generation to generation. As a pastoral society, much of the history involves conflicts among neighboring clans mostly over already scarce resources.[15] Bravery[16] in terms of being strong, fighting conflicts, and controlling assets are portrayed in high esteem.[17] This informal education (day-to-day information) that is being brought up with the children instills a keen interest in fighting and possession of weaponry, among other habits and behaviors.

At the dawn of a new generation, the advance of science and technology, extreme and aggressive video games, violent content on media platforms (WWE wrestling, movies, etc.) have increased the destructive ideologies. The argument advanced here is that the world education system is not within the same basket because there are some societies where children are exposed to militarization at an early age.18 This kind of practice corresponds to the Somali society's common traditions during Eid festivals. During the Eid celebrations, the gifts and clothes that some parents bring to their children are military uniforms and plastic guns that are widely available in the market for selling. This shows how even children admire artificial military tools.[19]

In Somaliland, peace is only seen as the absence of war and violence. As a state, Somaliland has managed to control the armed conflicts through continued negotiations, disarmament, and the building of the rule of law mechanisms, such as the police, courts, military, and other state institutions. This doesn't mean that Somaliland has managed to overcome all the challenges and weaknesses that exist within the state institutions[20], which require commitment and a particular quality of leadership. Without a doubt, Somaliland now faces different forms of structural violence that can lead the country in the long run to relapse into violence and armed conflict if the state fails in addressing structural factors that are generating negative peace. Johan Galtung in his research "*Violence, Peace and Peace Research*" described peace as positive and negative.[21] The latter is observable in the Somaliland context.

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[14] UNDP (2010). Somaliland Millennium Development Goals report. Available http://www.undp.org/content/dam/somalia/docs/MDGs/Somaliland%20MDG%20Report%20First%20draft%20(2).pdf. Accessed on May, 2017.

[15] Ibid., 12.

[16] El-Bushra, Judy & Gardner, Judith (2016). *The impact of war on Somali men and its effects on the family, women and children*. Rift Valley Institute, Briefing Paper, February, 2016, pp. 1–9.

[17] El Bushra, Judy & Gardner, Judith (2004). *Somalia: The Untold Story the War through the Eyes of Somali Women*. London: Pluto Press.

[18] D. Bush, Kenneth & Saltarelli, Diana (2000). *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*. Siena, Italy: Arti Grafiche Ticci.

[19] In most Somali-speaking region in the Horn of Africa, the parents always gift guns and military uniforms to their children during the Eid festivals and celebrations.

[20] Nasir M. Ali (2014). Somaliland Security at the Crossroads: Pitfalls and Potentials, *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 4, No. 7, (July, 2014), pp. 98–108.

[21] Galtung, Johan (1969). Violence, Peace and Peace Research, Journal of Peace Research, Sage Publications, pp. 167–191.

Providing social services to the public at large, such as health, education, water, and sanitation, among others, is poor and almost non-existing in many rural areas as well.[22] The presence of weak institutional frameworks and policies and the huge gap existing in institutions providing social services within the regions as well as the population at the peripheries is a clear sign of how this leads to structural violence within the country. The population growth is also another critical factor that exacerbates the already deteriorating situation of the citizens who are desperate about receiving equitable social services in their communities. In this sense, Somaliland has one of the highest rates in child and maternal mortality, the lowest rate of accessibility of basic services, such as access to clean water, health, and sanitation plus education which is universal.[23]

Furthermore, with the growth of the country very good resource distribution policies, especially for the natural resources, deserve highlighting and implementation as its absence could bring challenges to the country. In connection with this point, the land is one of the major drivers of conflicts within the cities and in the pastoral and farming areas.[24] The lack of land reform policy within Somaliland is a sign of frustrations and increasing violence within the community. This could be linked to the skyrocketing prices of the land aggravated by the government's inaction and reservation to intervene and regulate the price and the market.

Though Somaliland succeeded in building peace, it moves from peace and stability to latent conflict which most of the citizens and state leaders aren't aware of. Therefore, Somaliland should move to build strong state institutions to work towards an equal society to remain in a peaceful situation and sustainable progress and prosperity. Social justice as Fraser[25] discussed in his work *"Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation"*, should be at the core of the Somaliland agenda towards a feeling of peace and a sustainable country, where all citizens flourish and social justice should prevail in Somaliland as a whole.

DRIVERS AND DYNAMICS OF PEACE: PERCEPTIONS FROM UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Most of the university level students, if not all, have a good understanding of the concept of peace. Though they didn't spell out the theories, their explanation articulated the research of Johan Galtung on Negative and Positive Peace. Students had a general understanding of peace and linked some of the challenges facing the students as a threat to peace, for example, youth unemployment, and poverty among others.[26] However, the lecturers are able to discuss in-depth the role of university students in building sustainable peace in Somaliland.[27] It is important to note that one key aspect stated by the majority was the role of different stakeholders in peace, including communities, government, courts, and individuals. One lecturer in one of the universities in

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[22] Ibid., 12.
[23] Ibid., 14.
[24] Kedir Jemal & Nasir M. Ali (2017). *Mitigating Natural Disasters in Somaliland Policy Options and Strategies.* Hargeisa: Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies.
[25] Fraser, Nancy (1996). *Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation.* USA: Stanford University.
[26] Interview with a student at the University of Hargeisa, Somaliland.
[27] Interview with a lecturer at the University of Hargeisa, Somaliland.

Hargeisa stated that peace comes from the joint understanding and actions of the government and the community and that both parties must understand the rule of law.[28]

One of the very important components missing from Somaliland's education system, from Kindergarten to University, is civic education. This subject is where a sense of nationalism of citizens is carved outside of the home. In this regard, incorporating civic education in the country's education system, both for the University students and other levels of the educational system is crucial in bringing about a sense of ownership and responsibility. However, schools in Somaliland don't teach civic education at any level. Besides, young people are not given the skills and information in a structured way through schools. They are not taught about their rights and responsibilities as citizens and how they can positively contribute to their country. To overcome this challenge, suggestions have been made to draft a comprehensive curriculum that includes civic education throughout the education system including universities.[29]

However, even with the absence of civic education in the Somaliland education system, students play an important role in peacebuilding. Most of the people approached by the study stated that students do and need to work with the systems and structures of the state to ensure peace and stability prevail. Moreover, one of the students interviewed underlined that students should work with the police to secure communities, respect the rights of the other citizens and the constitution, and guard the fragile peace against threats. However, the majority of the interviewees highlighted the negative impact of rising unemployment levels on state security. Therefore, the rise of violence caused by university students and graduates is inevitable if the established institutions fail to address those grievances from the grassroots. Regarding the emphasis on this point, Naima, one of the university students, articulates the link between jobs and peace. She stressed that if the students don't find jobs and have to fight for their positions then that would cause insecurity and instability in the state.

Social justice is another dimension of peacebuilding, preservation of security, and maintenance of stability. This means that the importance of the presence and availability of public service provision to all communities in the country had been another major issue raised by the students. The equal distribution of state economy, access to universal education and justice system (courts), improved basic living standards, fair distribution of job opportunities, and widespread services have been mentioned as key to sustaining the fragile peace that Somaliland exists in. As a result of the lack of social justice in Somaliland, the country is seeing the rise of illegal migration of youth (including university students) and it will keep rising. This would not only bring about the tragedies of death but also drain the country's educated population. University students need to be able to envision hope and a bright future ahead of them to become a productive part of society and to promote peacekeeping endeavors.

IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES AND THE WAYS FORWARD

Various factors challenge the students including unemployment, poor access to services, clan cult and loyalty, and low employment opportunities. Poverty is a potential threat to the peace and

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[28] Discussions with one of the University of Hargeisa lecturers, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
[29] Discussions with the universities students and lecturers in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

stability of the country. Education has been mentioned, especially in rural areas that are lagging.[30] Much of the quality education and universities are concentrated in the capital and a few other cities in Somaliland. Therefore, ensuring peace and stability across the country is dependent on how these issues are addressed. However, the government is responsible to tackle all those issues and should have the capacity to provide services to its people. It is the responsibility of the state to know how to foresee and manage conflicts and provide social justice and equality as well as fair distribution of resources and services to all citizens.

Another major challenge is the capacity gaps of students in terms of skills and knowledge. The students learn in universities, mostly to obtain a certificate. However, it's a grade-oriented learning rather than a knowledge-oriented scheme. This brings a major gap between theory taught in academic institutions and practices in the real world. In this case, overcoming the challenges facing the youth at the universities and secondary schools isn't an easy task. However, it is the responsibility of those running the state to come up with solutions that can tackle the problems that face the youth in general. One of the major interventions that can at least build the morale of the youth is to invest to benefit the youth through skills and knowledge sharing platforms and programs, thus creating jobs and income sources for the students and their families. The investment could have different formats and types. Basic skills like negotiation, problem-solving, reflection, and critical thinking are core to promoting peace among all. University students should be able to learn and research on past challenges, other countries' experiences and proactively bring about solutions for their community. Furthermore and very important, university students should be the brain hub where analysis and discussions are made and solutions pertaining to societal problems are incubated. This kind of thinking seems to be absent from all universities in Somaliland.

Unemployment and underemployment are the major challenges facing youth in contemporary Somaliland. This has led many youth graduates to leave the country seeking better living conditions. Therefore, creating jobs and distributing them equitably and fairly is another important strategy that could help the youth. To realize this, the government, business people, and other influential bodies need to prioritize in bringing about changes to the society in terms of service and opportunity provided for the youth. University students and graduates require job opportunities, an enabling environment to thrive, and become promoters of peace in their country. A vision of hope about the future is vital for the survival of this great nation.[31]

To make Somaliland's peace and stability survive, the youth (including university students) should play an important role in this nation-building process. As they are the leaders of tomorrow, their needs and realities should be a priority within the state policies and strategies. According to UNFPA *"The Somali Youth in Figure Report"*, youth between the ages of 18–35 make up 38% of the Somalia and Somaliland populations combined, making up more than one-third of the whole population of the two states.[32] Investing in the youth would lead to the sustainable path envisioned.

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[30] Ibid, 12.
[31] Discussions with youth and civil society employees, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
[32] UNFPA (2015). *The Somali Youth in Figure Report. Available at*
https://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Somalia_2015_COAR.pdfUNFPA "The Somali Youth in Figure report". Accessed on May, 2017.

One of the major interventions which can help the youth graduates and encourage others is volunteering. Therefore, university students should be given opportunities to volunteer and change the theory into practice. In this sense, universities should have established, as part of their curriculum, community service, and practical skill sharing platforms such as internships. This supports the youth to get real-life practical experience and the communities' to benefit from the skills and knowledge of students. This is important and beneficial both to the student and society. For instance, Agriculture faculty students' could support farmers on the field while students can join a healthcare campaign throughout the country as part of their education.[33]

The curriculum of any country designs the future of their country and the next generation as well. Since its separation from the rest of Somalia in 1991, the civic education was never incorporated into the country's educational system. Most of the citizens' desertion from the country could be linked with the absence of civic education in the national curriculum. Without hesitation, Somaliland should revise its national curriculum by looking to international professional guidelines and standards for curriculum centers,[34] and this is what the Two Faces of Education Research (2000) authored by Diana and Kenneth underlines. As a state, the education curriculum must spell out the priorities of the country. Citizens' rights and responsibilities should be included in the curriculum to strengthen efforts to improve the country's conditions.

One of the very important mechanisms that can transform a conflict or sustain peace is holding a public gathering in which a renowned figure or a respected person within the community addresses the public. Indeed, different agents of socialization transform the citizens[35], such as schools, mosques, universities, and other public halls and religious congregations. Therefore, holding national public awareness events on most key challenges facing Somaliland and jeopardizing its peace and stability is necessary. For instance, clan cult which deeply dominated the hearts and minds of the society is one of the key issues.[36] The clan utilization within the community for political and economic gaining brings about segregation and conflict within the community in Somaliland as the current situation attests. In this regard, there is a need for a joint campaign to overcome and tackle the inappropriate portrayal of the country's history and use of language among others through the local media.[37]

To avoid the sensitivity of language and change the violent behavior of the citizens, the introduction of university courses mainly dealing with conflict prevention and sustaining peace and stability is necessary as well. The course should link formal education with a sense of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Given the emphasis on this point, university students and faculties should integrate this module on how education – formal or informal and language – affects peace positively or negatively.[38] The inclusion of this course into the curriculum will help in the understanding of a broader concept of issues of social justice, language use, to name but a few, and be used in different disciplines of study and practice.

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[33] Interview with Ali a University teacher, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
[34] Discussions with youth and civil society employees, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
[35] A. S. Chauhan (2007). *Society and Environment*. New Delhi, India: Shri Sunil Kumar Jain.
[36] Interview with a teacher in Hargeisa, Somaliland.
[37] Discussions with youth groups in Hargeisa, Somaliland.
[38] Interview with a student studying Human Resource Management at University in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

CONCLUSION

Somaliland has adopted a bottom-up approach in which grassroots movements involved in finding solutions, where the traditional elders took the lead and the engagement of international actors were minimized or in reality absent. This has made Somaliland's homegrown institutions endure. The philosophy behind this state of isolation was the realization that Somaliland elites and intellectuals were aware of the priorities and solutions that should be based on the context and culture of the Somali people thus producing sustainable institutions fitting to the culture and tradition of the people.

In addition to the institutional development, the peace in Somaliland has been going through different stages in different timelines – from civil wars, disarmament, building security institutions such as the police force and government buildings and structures, to name but a few. Now the government should focus on building the pride and the image of the country for the future through quality education with a particular emphasis on civic education. As a state, the focus should be on how to build strong structures and systems that work for the citizens of the country and build sustained peace and development.

In Somaliland, though education has been on a rapid increase with an active and affirmative impact on the overall community development, peacebuilding processes, and democratization of the state, it was not without challenges. These challenges need to be addressed through capacity building programs to promote its effectiveness that could balance the interests of the citizens and the public simultaneously.

Therefore, building the capacity of the educational institutions should be a long-term key priority focusing on capacity, which requires more attention in a post-state-building endeavor not only from those who have concerns about the education sector. Rather, the main responsibility rests on the government shoulders to sketch ways forward and bring forth groundbreaking strategies to overcome the very institutional weaknesses of the educational institutions that remained in Somaliland since the 1990s.