

Success stories of women and men working for peace



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SOMALI PEACE LINE

Foreword

Somali Peace Line (SPL) was founded by a group of eight influential Somali scholars who were committed to restore a sense of peace in Somalia. With the sponsorship of the international community, neighbouring countries and Somali scholars abroad, we initiated discussions about the possibilities for peace in Somalia after UNOSOM left in 1995. The idea was to create a body that studies, evaluates and monitors the viability of peace activities in Somalia. Our ambition was to consolidate a 'home-grown' peace movement and support Somalia's civil society in achieving peace.

Although the organisational structure and ideas were developed, there was so much to do on the ground. We knew already that peace is multidimensional. The name we chose, at the suggestion of the Somali author and filmmaker Saciid Saalax, was 'Tubta Nabadda' which literally translates as 'the way to peace'. There are indeed many ways to peace, and over the years, we have focused on fostering dialogue between warring parties and their clan leaders. At the same time, we have lobbied to empower the civil society by supporting women's groups, youth and children, and internally displaced people, and bringing them together.

In the beginning, we participated in several workshops and forums and presented our ideas, our activities and the need for peace in Somalia. With the support of our first partner, Oxfam, we opened an office and held our first seminar in 1997 for representatives from different social groups, on 'peace-making mechanisms in Somalia'. There were 25 people, including civil servants, religious leaders, traditional elders, women and youth from different clans. This first seminar certainly shaped our activities, and over the years we have kept these lines of action, as you will read throughout this publication. Our current main projects focus on women's empowerment, protection of internally displaced children and our long-lasting efforts in peacebuilding among warring clans.

We started with five volunteers and organised peace awareness campaigns, conflict prevention activities, and participated in national peace and reconciliation processes, including the famous Arta Conference in 2000 – an important



moment in our lobby for peace. We brought together warring parties and initiated dialogue and negotiations in eight different regions. We made sure that warring groups recognised schools as safe zones by establishing banderols and distinguishable signs around them. Another major success was the destruction of the Green Line that used to divide Mogadishu into two. We lobbied to allow people to reach the other side of the city, for instance in enabling them to attend social ceremonies, such as weddings and funerals. Although these activities seem small, they were in fact necessary steps for peace, because they allowed people to meet, to maintain their different bonds, and strengthen their different relationships.

A major effort by SPL has not only been about connecting people but also bringing different organisations together. Any road to peace has to be a collective effort, so we have been active in creating and consolidating exchange within the civil society. We have played a leading role in bringing community members together, in the media, in umbrella organisations and peace and human rights networks. Our organisation has also provided job opportunities and training to many people from different clans. We are proud that they have become influential scholars, politicians, or active members of the civil society, who we regularly meet and maintain strong relationships with. All these people are another reason SPL is a leading organisation in working to harmonise and consolidate the Somali civil society.

Because conflict is part of life, it also evolves with it. The present day situation is better than what we have known when SPL first started. But today there is a different kind of war. The conflicts in the regions are more localised and involve distinct groups. Then there is the conflict between the federal government and al-Shabab. But unlike before, today the conflict feels more sporadic and less widespread.

We know too that peace is relative and many challenges remain. Security is certainly one of them, and as an NGO we cannot always do what we want the way we want. The limited resources and the lack of state support are other constraints. But today I can say, maybe more than ever, that the opportunities for peace are there, because organisations are still doing an enormous job to stop fighting, provide basic services and fill much of the vacuum left by state institutions. Donors are more committed and regular in supporting peace efforts. And more importantly, people in Somalia want peace.

The latest fighting in Gaalkacyo illustrates well the attitude of local communities to conflict. When the fighting started, people just left. It is not their fight, and they are tired. On top of their own problems, such as poverty, limited access to education and health services, they stayed in their regions, but they can't bear physical fighting or death. They return as soon as they see signs of the absence of violence. Security is something appealing and people do value it. I believe people are ready for peace and eager to go forward.

Today, peace in Somalia is both close and far away. Our work for peace, a sustainable peace, is still necessary, as long as guns are available and used, the political elite are still struggling with clan issues, and people have limited access to education and social institutions.

Our long involvement in peacebuilding in Somalia taught us that Somalis can deal with their conflicts in a peaceful way, and that there is a strong will for peace. In this publication, we invite you to witness with us the opportunities for peace in Somalia. It is a snapshot of our current work through success stories of our partners, women, men, and children who have worked with us for peace – stories that are our motivation to keep striving for sustainable and multidimensional peace in our country.

*Abdullahi Shirwa
Chairman, SPL*

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None of this would have been possible without the commitment of SPL staff volunteers who have proven resourceful and creative in many situations. We would also like to thank our local partners, including the elders, religious leaders and imams, women groups, youth and local authorities for their collective hard work and dedication to peacebuilding and protection services to the vulnerable communities in Somalia. Special thanks goes to everyone who shared their stories with us and their consent to publication.

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Gender equity and women's empowerment

The Women, Peace & Security (WPS) project: In the WPS project we provide skills training opportunities to women in the Bay, Middle Shabelle, Hiiran, and Benadir regions. We work with local women's organisations, such as the Baidoa District Women Organization (BDWO), Benadir Regional Women Organization (BRWO), Somali Center for Women Empowerment (SOCWE) and All Women Concerns (AWC). The WPS activities include awareness campaigns, women consensus building, advocating for women's needs, and working with peace committees. The project is led by SPL in association with Oxfam Novib.

These four stories are those of women who have taken part in the project.

HAWA AND BDWO: Women working for peace

Hawa is the ambitious chairlady of SPL's local partner BDWO. The organisation is active in the promotion of women's rights in Baidoa and surroundings. BDWO has come a long way from lack of recognition and support to being an important women's organisation in the Baidoa district.

"Following the ousting of al-Shabab from the district, we as women in Baidoa met in 2012 to form BDWO, and I was elected chairlady. Our mission is to work with the local administration for the development and the protection of women's rights.

We started working with the district and the regional administration as volunteers in sanitation campaigns and the mobilisation of communities for demonstrations. As we did not have any experience in organisational management, the challenges were many.

Women did not have any representation in the district and regional councils, because it is based on the clan-system. Despite our work, our voices were not heard, either by the District Commissioner, or the Governor. Even after waiting for hours where they were meeting, we were by-passed without even a word after the meetings. It was clear that nobody cared about our problems; yet we were not excluded from insecurity. Two of my colleagues were killed, because they worked with the local administration. Without support from the administration, we had to be resilient.

In 2013, we started working with SPL. Three of our members were trained in organisational management, women's rights, advocacy, and conflict resolution. It was the first training that BDWO had ever received. We also took



job trainings where SPL and WPS staff came to Baidoa every three months to mentor us on the project. We made our first six months' work plan. While implementing these activities, we mobilised and united women from the eight sections of Baidoa district and established a peace committee. Women became very active and improved their skills.

SPL gave us a contract to implement activities to promote projects on WPS. With AWC, another local women NGO, we helped in the formation of the peace committee in the other sections of the Baidoa district and participated in the selection of women trainees for skills development. With the capacity building trainings and financial support from SPL, BDWO is now empowering women and protecting their rights. Today 65 per cent of the members of the peace committees established in the district are women and they are contributing to the town's security.

As a chairlady I started attending civil society meetings for women in Baidoa. I noticed the strained relations between the NGOs and the administration. I started facilitating relations with the administration and advocated to the administration for the reduction of the registration fees of women organisations. We are now recognised and sought by the administration, because they realised they cannot work without us. Local and international NGOs are interested in the work of our organisation. My ambition is now to unite women in the three regions of the South-West Administration and establish good relations with the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development at the federal level."

JIJO'S STORY:

A young woman who gained peace through education and skills training

Jijo lives with her family in Horseed village in the Bay region. As part of the Women, Peace & Security project. Jijo participated in the skills training opportunity instead of engaging in a dangerous journey to the Gulf. She has used the expertise she has acquired to provide for her family and works together with her mother.

"I am a 25 year old unmarried woman. I live with my parents. I did not go to school. On many occasions I wanted to migrate to Yemen and then to Saudi Arabia to find work there, but my mother begged me to stay with her,

because the journey is dangerous. Over time I became desperate and felt hopeless. Our family did not have a regular source of income and my mother was just a local midwife in the village. Very few women giving birth at the time were seeking the help of midwife, because the Mother and Child Health Centres (MCHs) were already set up at every section of the town. Also my mother could not read or write and this was a big disadvantage, because traditional birth attendants like my mother had to bring records of the newborns to the MCHs for official birth registration and vaccination. Because she couldn't do that, she could not receive delivery kits distributed to other traditional birth attendants, nor receive training by the MCHs.

The Chairperson of Horseed Section in Baidoa was informed about a training that would target poor families and displaced persons living in her section. She identified me as one of the trainees to be enrolled in the skills training project. I started by learning to read and write the Somali language for two months before I could be trained on tie & dye skills. I had to travel to the school every day far from my home, but AWC gave us some money for transportation, so that we could be in class at the centre on time. After six months of lessons and successful completion, we received start up kits that would enable us to set up our retail shops. I started off by tying and dying clothes and then moved to designing and staining some to make them more beautiful and unique for my customers. I could also dye old garments, sheets, shirts as well as men's clothing that come out looking brand new.

My mother and I joined forces to work together in providing midwife services to expectant women. I persuaded my mother to continue doing her midwifery work, and I would do the registration of the newborns. Eventually, my mother and I received training on the registration exercise and procedures, as well as the use of delivery kits. We continue to maintain a good relationship with the MCHs. My mother assists women undergoing normal labour conditions, and if she notices any complications, we quickly ask the MCH to send an ambulance to transport the patient to a proper health centre for further treatment and care.

I am thankful for the expertise I have acquired because I have a job with an income now.

I am thankful for the expertise I have acquired because I have a job with an income now. Although I live with my mother, I am no longer waiting for her to feed me. Now I am in a much better position, because I can earn between 210,000 and 400,000 Somali Shillings a week (equivalent to \$11-20). I pay the house rent, electricity and water bills. I also pay a contribution as a member of the community, for example when coming together for weddings. I can also wear clothes like my neighbours who are better off and have both parents alive. I am now independent and self-sufficient.

I have become a popular person in my community. My peers admire and look up to me. They would always ask if I could help them join the skills



training programme to also learn and acquire such useful abilities. I still dye clothes in the village and am planning to enrol in an adult school and then hopefully receive midwifery training. My mother will soon retire and stay at home, but I want her to transfer her skills to me so I can replace her. I no longer think about making the dangerous trip to Yemen and Saudi Arabia. I am glad my mother advised me against it.”

UBAH'S STORY:

A struggle to make a better life for herself and her family

Ubah has participated in the Women, Peace & Security project and was offered the opportunity to undertake skills training. She has creatively applied the expertise she has received to establish a livelihood for her family and transfer her knowledge to her siblings.

“My family and I were displaced from Galgadud in 2011 and settled in an IDP camp in Mogadishu. My father was an old man without qualifications, so he could not get a job. My uncle who lived with us helped me find a job at SOCWE in the Hodan district.

When I started working, there was no public transport to the centre and I could not afford other means to come to work. To be on time for work, I would leave home when it was still dark at five o'clock in the morning and walk five kilometres every day – that's about one hour in the dark, empty streets.

Every single day I would pray for my safety, because I was afraid, especially when I came across armed men who luckily never harmed me. When I arrived around six o'clock, I was expected to clean all the offices, desks and prepare tea for the staff



every morning. My salary was only \$50 a month and I could barely afford to meet my family's needs, let alone buy lunch every day.

I am 30 years old, and I am still not married. I always wanted to get married, but I was concerned that I could not take care of my children, because my work was so time consuming. I also wanted to get more skills, so that I could work at home and take care of my family.

SOCWE used to take up women trainees to learn tailoring skills. I knew about this, so many times I approached the management of the centre to enrol me into the programme, but without success. One day, I met the head of the centre, Ms Safiyo Karani, and asked her to give me a chance to join the training school. To my surprise she agreed and admitted me, on the condition that I continued to do my job well. In the group I started learning dressmaking. The teacher taught us how to make dresses, and I became class monitor. So in my spare time I would help other students in cutting out their clothes and mending sewing machines. I was very attentive.

I completed the training in August 2013 and was very confident that the skills acquired would help me make a better life for myself. This time I received a tailoring start-up kit that would help me set up my own business. It was the happiest day of my life. I had succeeded in attaining my goal. Soon after, I opened a small kiosk in front of our house. When the business picked up, I was able to add on small other household items to the shop, like food-stuffs, women's clothes, soap, shampoos, sweets etc. I am happy and proud to



run my own dressmaking business. I have also transferred these skills to my siblings and they assist me in managing the shop when I am away. They are able to mend clothes and sew, using the sewing machine. My business has become successful, and I am the only female dressmaker near the IDP settlement.

My family is now self-sufficient and I can do other jobs. I have been fortunate enough to be part of a group of workers who sat for an examination by the Ministry of Defence to stitch military uniforms. I was successful in undertaking the test and was offered a contract to work with the military. However, I could not take the offer, because the security of government employees is always at risk, and I feared I would not be safe. I hope I will get another job that is not related to the government. I am also discovering how to do henna decorations at a beauty salon, while my siblings oversee the tailoring shop.”

HABIIBO'S STORY: Successful business after skills trainings

Habiibo fled with her family because of fighting in the Hudur District, Bakool Region, in 2013. Habiibo, her husband and children were destitute and in debt when they arrived in Baidoa camp, where her brother and sister were sheltering. She benefitted from the skills training for poor and IDP women, acquiring the expertise to create and expand a successful business and keep her family self-sufficient.

“In 2013, my family was among the displaced because of fighting in the Hudur District, Bakool Region. We went to Baidoa, where we stayed with my sister, a returnee from Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya. We lived together as three families – my family, my sister’s family and my brother’s family.

My sister was a primary school teacher and earned \$100 a month. All of us depended on her. We had to leave our farm that we depended on for our livelihood, and my husband had been unemployed since we left Hudur. Our family owed about \$200 in debt. Life was becoming difficult and we had nowhere else to go. There were days when we only had one meal and my children were at home because we could not afford to pay school fees.

My sister heard about the skills training for poor and IDP women being offered in her school by AWC and SPL. She encouraged me to join the centre, because she knew I would be interested. The first two months we studied how

to read and write in the Somali language, as well as some basic mathematics. In the following four months I was trained on tie & dye, and after successfully completing the course I received a start-up kit containing white clothes, colour chemicals – yellow, green, blue and pink, three-coloured chemicals – salt and fixer, two basins, two rolls of robes, and a set of gloves. These materials were useful as a base to start my first business. With the security situation improving, more people were coming back to town, which meant I had more customers. I started dying clothes, selling and reinvesting into the business, and this made my venture more diverse and profitable.

The business picked up quickly, and it became almost like a factory producing clothes. I was happy to see other people in the village wearing what I had made. I would even re-colour old clothes to make them look brand new. Within two months I expanded the business by borrowing \$18 from the savings I had made to set up a small butchery within the IDP camp we lived in. I sell one goat a day and have added my stock to include foodstuffs, such as sugar and rice. I also sell charcoal and other cosmetics. The income I am making covers my personal and household needs.

I now live with my family in our own house, and we are no longer dependent on my sister. Her husband is very supportive of the business. The dyes sold in Mogadishu are of better quality, so he arranges with the lorry drivers to purchase





them for me there. He also helps me run my small kiosk. Four of my children are in school and we can afford to pay their fees. We are also able to have at least two good meals a day.

Other than managing my business and supporting my family, I have trained some of my other family members – my younger sister, my older daughter and my son – how to dye, and they help me when they are not in school. It keeps them from being involved with and influenced by armed groups, and instead they go to school and spend their free time learning a new skill. I have become a well-known businesswoman and I network with other business people. In the near future I plan to export the dyed clothes to the Hudur district as the security situation is improving.”

Child protection programme

Since 2003 SPL has been working with UNICEF and Save the Children International on child protection issues in IDP camps. One of the consequences of the military offensive by AMISOM and Somali government troops in the Lower Shabelle region in 2012 has been large internal displacement of people.

Because they went lost during their flight, the number of separated and unaccompanied children in Maslax, Darwish and Sigale IDP settlements has increased. Violence against children are high in general, and children in IDP camps are subject to even more vulnerabilities, including violation of their human rights, forced labour, recruitment as soldiers and forced marriages.

The current project is called 'Protecting and supporting IDP children in Mogadishu', and we have identified and addressed protection concerns of 40 separated and unaccompanied children. Our project aims at the protection of children from violence and neglect. Our strategy is to empower communities. For instance, the family is a basic structure that needs protection. If the family does not have the means, it cannot protect the children who are then left to themselves.

We established child protection structures, such as child welfare committees, Child-to-Child groups, and Child Protection Focal Points in the camps. We provide trainings and capacity-building activities, including prevention of child labour and family tracing. We also organise a 'Child Resilience Programme'. It involves psychosocial support workshops, in which IDP children are introduced to four basic skills, such as self-esteem, problem solving, and engagement in home and social relations.

Here are three stories of IDP children who have worked with us on three programmes.

DEEQA: A 13 year old IDP sustaining her six siblings

After their parents divorced and disappeared, Deeqa is responsible for her six siblings, including one sister who is mentally ill. Deeqa and her siblings are under the care of the local Community Child Welfare Committee and receive food, clothes, medical assistance and basic education.

Since their divorced parents abandoned them in the camp two years ago, Deeqa, who is 13 years old, has been taking care of her five sisters and one brother. They are between 5 and 11 years old, and her sister Nurto suffers from mental illness. Deeqa has been washing the clothes of some families in Mogadishu city in order to support her siblings. They live without any adult support in the Jugweyn IDP settlement, located near one of the offices of the Howlwadaag district authority in Mogadishu. It is home to more than 750 families dis-



placed from the Lower Shabelle and Bay regions in southern Somalia.

As we arrive in the camp, many children are playing in the small spaces in the camp today, enjoying the summer holidays. They gather around us observing us excitedly and slowly disperse when we explain that we came to visit Deeqa's family.

"Living on their own in a small makeshift house in the middle of a crowded IDP camp, they rarely play with other children. They look worried. But when Deeqa's younger brother recognises the SPL child protection team, he runs fast towards us and hugs Naima, SPL's child protection officer. Deeqa and her sisters stay inside. They look happy to see us. They see us as a sign of hope", says Mustafa, SPL's child protection officer.

SPL and Save the Children have identified Deeqa and her siblings eligible to receive food, clothes, and medical support. They were placed under the care of the local Community Child Welfare Committee, Deeqa attends one of the shifts at school where two of her siblings have also been enrolled.

"Save the Children and SPL came to help us, giving us clothes, food, and education. I and other girls also got the dignity kits distributed by Save The Children. It was the best Eid we had in many years", says Deeqa.

"I really don't know why my parents divorced. I only remember two years ago, my father asking our mother to leave. Some people told me that my mother is in the Bay region and Baidoa, a town about 250 kilometres from Mogadishu. It is months since I last heard about her."

"One of my sisters, Nuurto, has mental health problems and many wounds on her body from the beatings she received when entering other people's homes to look for food when I am away. She cries most of the time and does not sleep at night. It is difficult for her to express herself and tell what she needs. The camp is not safe during the night, and I fear and worry



**It was the best Eid
we had in many years**

that thieves or rapists might attack us as we sleep alone. But Nafisa, our neighbour, always watches us and we feel safe with her. I am happy that she is always here for us.”

“These children have been abandoned in the camp, with no parental care and face many problems, including depression and loneliness because of their very complicated situation”, says Nafisa, who is also a member of the Child Welfare Committee. “It is because of this that SPL (who trained me on child protection issues and family tracing), the district authority and the Child Welfare Committee agreed that I look after them, as we live in the same camp. It is in their best interest that these siblings are kept together. I am a mother, and I realise what they are going through. They feel safe with us, because we are always together and share stories. We are trying hard to find their parents and hope that at least one of them will be found soon.”

MADINA'S STORY:

Happy end after four years of child labour

At the age of 14, Madina worked as a domestic servant in an abusive home. Her employer abducted her and forced her to work without payment. After being under the protection of the SPL Child Protection Officer, she was re-united with her father and family after SPL successfully traced them back to their village in Berdale.

Madina is a 17 years old girl born in Berdale. In 2009, when she was 14, her uncle brought her to Mogadishu to work as a domestic servant and help support her family. She was promised a monthly wage of \$30 dollars. Madina worked 12-14 hours a day seven days a week but has never been paid. After a few months her employer moved to another neighbourhood in Mogadishu and changed Madina's telephone number to prevent her family from finding her.

“I did not know anyone else in Mogadishu or where and how to contact my family in Berdale and Mogadishu. My employer, for whom I worked for three years, ignored my demands to speak to my parents. She was a very violent person. She always beat me and abused me verbally and sometimes she even denied me food as punishment. When I could no longer withstand the daily violence and abuse that she inflicted on me for three years, I left her”, says Madina.



Madina shared her problem with a CWC member, Faisa Abdulahi, who lived nearby. Faisa contacted her friend Quresho, at Child Protection Focal Point, to discuss Madina's case. Together they decided to help her escape. Quresho agreed to allow Madina to live at her house until she could return to her family in Berdale.

On 10 July, Madina left for her usual way to the market, but this time she went to meet Faisa. Faisa brought her to Quresho's home in Darwish. SPL purchased new clothes, shoes, and sanitation kits for her, as she had not brought anything with her. Two days later Quresho learned from neighbours that Madina's former employer was looking for her in Darwish and pretended to be concerned for Madina's safety and her own. As the employer was reputed to be violent and a habitual gun-holder, Quresho requested SPL to relocate Madina to a safer location. Madina moved to the SPL child protection officer Naima's

house. She was then re-united with her father after SPL successfully traced her parents with the assistance of an elder living in Berdale.

Madina's parents were very happy to find their daughter alive after she had been missing for four years. Madina and her father both safely travelled back to their home town Berdale in the Bay region.

"Madina is a wonderful nice girl. The ten days we spent together were like we had known her forever", Naima's mother recalls.

"Being a poor family and having been hit hard by a three-year drought, I accepted to send our daughter to work as a domestic servant, because we needed her help. My wife and I both regret that decision. We didn't hear from our daughter for three years. We never thought we would see her again. Her employer sent us \$30 for the first two months and then cut off communication. We thought our daughter was dead. We thank Allah, and then SPL and the people who helped find our daughter", says Madina's father.

AHMED'S STORY:

A child's struggle with the aftermath of a car explosion

Ahmed is 10, and after he survived a car explosion near the IDP settlement where he lives, SPL and Save the Children provided him with psychosocial workshops to reintegrate him into the community.

Ahmed is a 10 year old boy, living with his parents and two sisters in a make-shift house in Darwish IDP settlement in Mogadishu. His mother was away from home most of the time to earn money to support the family by washing clothes in other neighbourhoods of Mogadishu. Every day she would leave the IDP camp early in the morning and return back in the evening. Ahmed did not go to school, and he used to spend much of his time in the streets without adult supervision. Being disabled, he was bullied by other children in the camp.

On 5 July 2014 around noon, a car exploded near Darwish IDP settlement. The target was the Houses of Parliament, which is less than 100 meters from the settlement. Ahmed and six other children were injured.

"I was away when the explosion wounded the children, among them my son and my daughter. I was shocked and ran to the place. There I discovered

that the Howlwadag district authorities and child protection focal points in the Darwish area had already been there. I tried to reach my son but also learned that my daughter was among the wounded. An ambulance took them to Daru-Alshifa hospital. The children were seriously wounded and two of them were unconscious and bleeding heavily. Ahmed suffered from head and shoulder injuries”, recalls Habiiba, Ahmed’s mother.

“After Ahmed was discharged from the hospital, he became silent and totally withdrawn. That worried me. Luckily, SPL started a psychosocial programme and let Ahmed join.”

Fortunately, after attending 16 psychosocial workshops for children and parents for more than four months, Ahmed started playing with other children again and stopped going to the streets. The workshops bring together



parents, children and teachers, and the children are encouraged to express their ideas and needs and learn about their basic rights. These workshops took place in the Child Friendly Space, a place that SPL has negotiated in the over-crowded IDP camps in order to give the children a space where they can play together and interact, with adult supervision. This spot is also used by other NGOs which target children to provide them with food or health services.

Despite his great progress, Ahmed still does not talk as much as other children. His mother was invited to attend the parent workshops intended to improve parents' awareness on child protection and children's rights.

"We could not pay the hospital bills, so SPL and Save the Children supported us. A boy and a girl died in the hospital, but thanks to God both my children recovered after two weeks of hospital treatment and care.

After my son attended the programme, he now interacts with friends and plays at the Child Friendly Space. He has stopped going to the streets. Instead he goes to the Child Friendly Space. I am very happy to see his situation improve. He is not at risk anymore. I feel more comfortable now, because I know he is safe in the Child Friendly Space. I thought that he would never recover. Thanks to Allah for that mercy! I am grateful to SPL, Save the Children, the hospital team and every person who helped my children survive", says Habiiba.

Peacebuilding

SPL has worked for over 20 years in peacebuilding and contributed to achieving a stable and peaceful Somalia. We have had yearly projects with different partner NGOs, such as LPI, MCC, UNDP, Oxfam Novib and Danish Refugee council, AFC, and Cord. We have organised trainings and workshops in community capacity building, negotiation and mediation between parties (clans, communities and organisations), peace advocacy that involves opening roads in Mogadishu, peace awareness campaigns, advocacy to the government.

We worked in advocacy campaigns with elders, religious leaders, women and youth organisations and students. We have provided updated context and conflict analysis, stakeholder mapping, identification of entry points and intervention sites. We have organised a number of inter-clan and intra-clan dialogues and negotiations, both at the local level and in Mogadishu in order to transform centre-periphery conflict dynamics nonviolently.

Since 2013 SPL has been implementing this project in partnership with LPI with support from the European Union and Sida. Our current project is called the community-based bottom-up peacebuilding project. It aims at promoting bottom-up reconciliation processes between Walamoy/Shidle and Maxamed Muse/Abgal sub-clans in Middle Shabelle, and Biimal/Dir and Haber Gidir/ Hawiye in Lower Shabelle 2014. When we started this project, two conflicts in Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle were active.

In Lower Shabelle, negotiations have been difficult because the tensions still remain, and, for security reasons and because of the ongoing conflict, it is difficult to access the local sites. It was difficult to bring the different clans at the negotiation table, because of conflict within the clans themselves. However, we managed to organise successful intra-clan dialogue and were able to conduct inter-clan dialogues in Mogadishu in October 2016, a real break-through in the peacebuilding process in the regions.

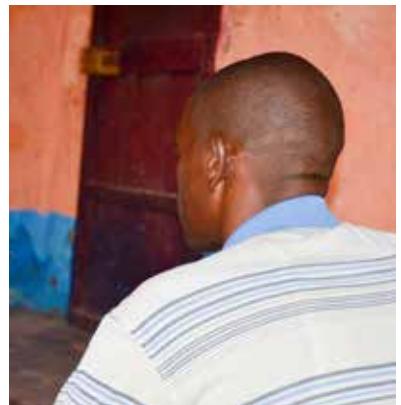
We have reached an agreement, and the elders returned to their regions to communicate the agreement with the communities. And so far it seems promising.

In Middle Shabelle the peace process facilitated by SPL has been successful. Following a series of violent conflicts in 2013 between Walamoy/Shidle and Maxamed Muse/Abgal sub-clans in Middle Shabelle, villages were destroyed, many people displaced and, as the following stories tell, life was difficult. Over three years, we organised dialogues with elders, mainly within the clan, and then brought warring clans together. We also engaged women in the process. The effort for peace and the negotiations between these communities has led to a peace agreement and the slow return of people to their villages.

OMAR'S STORY:

A return to civil life after being a militiaman

Omar, a 35 year old father of eight, was one of the people affected by 2013 clan conflict, when 13 villages in eastern Jowhar were destroyed. He lost everything and fled from Magadley village to settle in an IDP camp at Jowhar airstrip, ten kilometres east of Jowhar. Hopeless and seeking revenge, Omar joined the clan fighters. After being invited to join peacebuilding trainings, he realised that there are other possible means to solve conflicts. He resumed cultivating and became an important figure of his clan.



"In the conflict I lost almost all my properties, including maize, sesame, beans and animals. I fled to Jowhar airstrip with some of my children because of the unexpected fighting. Luckily, other villagers brought my other children safely to the airstrip. In the camp there was no shelter, no food or clothing. It was really a very difficult situation. I bought a gun and joined the clan fighters. All I wanted was revenge. I believed this conflict could only be settled with guns.

One day one of my clan elders invited me to attend peacebuilding training in Jowhar. I attended two trainings on conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Representatives from other clans, including militia leaders, also participated in these trainings. The trainings prepared us to acknowledge, open up

to and accept one other. I came to realise that the problems can be solved through dialogue and negotiations. I decided to sell my gun and restart a normal life. When I was a gunman, people were scared of me, even my family. I was always on the alert. Now I sleep quietly and have integrated into the community.

After I returned to Magadley, I resumed cultivating. Then a conflict between the village committee and villagers emerged. The committee members were accused of mismanagement, injustice and disregarding the elders' advice. I participated in settling the conflict and the villagers made me the head of Magadley village. Currently, my house is the seat of my clan and we gather there to consult on clan affairs."



MOHAMED'S STORY: Peace as the freedom to work

Because of the conflict in east Jowhar in 2013, Mohamed could not keep working as a nurse and provide for his household. Following the community dialogue initiated by SPL and LPI, he recovered the freedom of movement that he needed to carry out his work.

Mohamed lives in Horseed section in Jowhar. He is a father of five children and supports around twelve people in his household. He is a nurse by profession, and as most of the people in Jowhar, he has cultivated a small farm for sustenance. The conflict in Jowhar affected his way of living, because his sub-clan was involved. According to

Mohamed, things have improved since community dialogues facilitated by SPL started between the communities.

"I was in Jowhar when the last cycle of conflict erupted at Gedo Barkan village and surrounding villages in east Jowhar. I work as a nurse at Jowhar General Hospital. Since the conflict started, I could no longer cultivate my farm in the Gedo Barkan. I was very worried and afraid. My sub-clan was involved in the conflict, so it was difficult for me to go to the villages to distribute "plumpinut" for malnourished child-

The most important change was communities' renewed interaction and the free movement that came after the dialogues and discussion between the clans.

ren. I had to send other members of the team, and as a team leader I would review the data and do the reporting in Jowhar. Also, one of my friends who was from the other clan, was killed in the conflict. It still saddens me that I could not attend his funeral, let alone send my condolences to his family, because our two clans were still fighting. The conflict affected Gedo Berkan village a lot – it was burned down.

Some youth group from my clan approached me and told me that an NGO had come to initiate reconciliation between my clan, Mohamed Muse/Abgal, and the other clan, Walamoy/Shidle. Men, women and youth from both clans came together in a room. They participated in mixed group workshops. The youth group invited me to represent my clan in the meetings. I wanted to share my opinion of this conflict with the rest. I wanted peace to prevail, but I thought it was not possible at that time.

After a series of intra-clan dialogues where causes of the conflict were discussed, the participants' attitude gradually started changing. The most important change was communities' renewed interaction and the free movement that came after the dialogues and discussion between the clans. It touched me that people sat together, had conversations and drank tea together. I developed a faith in the possibility of reconciliation and peace.

Eventually, one important change is that I have been able to resume working. I can now distribute medical supplies to Gedo Barkan village and the IDPs settlement at Jowhar airport area – places I was afraid to go to before the peace process started.”

SHEIKH MOHAMOUD'S STORY: **'Without peace, nothing is possible'**

Sheikh Mohamoud is a religious leader and a respected elder of his clan, the Walamoy/Shidle. The peacebuilding project gave him confidence about the role of the elders in the peace process and in initiating dialogue between the communities.

Sheikh Mohamuod is the Imam of the mosque of the village and one of the elites of Walamoy/Shidle clan. Born in 1960 in Jowhar, Sheikh Mohamud has worked as a teacher and established a primary school in his home village Gedo Berkan. The village was burned down when the conflict between Walamoy/



Shidle and Mohamed Muse started in eastern Jowhar. Sheikh Mohamoud was one of the key peace actors responsible for transforming the conflict between the two clans.

"This conflict started three years ago because of a land dispute. It cost the lives of many people, and many people have

been displaced. The current administration and the previous one tried their best to end the conflict. The peace work has been running for quite some time now, and many elders have been involved, but the breakthrough happened when SPL had separate meetings with clan leaders, talked to them about peace and started the negotiations. Clans are now more tolerant and forgiving of each other.

SPL has been trying to support us to solve this conflict for quite some time. It started with the previous regional administration headed by Abdi Jiinow until now with the current one of Ali Gudlawe. SPL worked with both communities and were very resilient. They worked hard with the community and the administration. I can say SPL is the only organisation that tried hard to end this conflict, and they succeeded. Today, elders and MPs from the clans in Middle Shabelle, Lower Shabelle and Hiran have been here to witness this event to announce that the conflict between these two clans is over.

A community exists in peace; without peace nothing is possible. As such, the project brought an end to a conflict in which about 60 people lost their lives, and where there was great insecurity and displacement. The project made it possible for the people to come together again. This is fruitful. The community benefited from a lot of skills in every session. The facilitators were

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people with experience. They gave elders confidence that negotiations were possible, and we gained negotiations skills. They were helpful. I think communities need to draft an agreement between them that would protect our peaceful coexistence. I am calling them to maintain peace and be aware of the people who may disturb it.”

YOUSUF'S STORY:

Working for peace despitess the loss of his property

Yusuf is an 83 years old Walmooy/Shidle elder. He lived together with his two wives, four sons and their children in Gedo Berkan village when the conflict with the Mohamed Muse/Abgal erupted. Although the conflict affected Yousuf dramatically, he worked hard to make peace possible.

“I live in Geedo Berkan village, one of the most affected villages of the conflict. I lost five family members in this conflict – two of my sons and three of my nephews. The losses of the conflict are uncountable. People were killed, the village was burned down, and properties were looted. As I am the father and grandfather, all the food of the family was stored in my house. At least eight sacks of sesame and four barrels of maize were burned down inside my house. We lost it all there!

Usually, I do not go out for farming. So on the day of the fighting, when I heard the sound of the bullets, I went out to talk to our militias to stop the fighting. But on the way, I met people carrying dead bodies from the fighting area. I realised that I could not do anything at that moment. I went back home. It was a Wednesday. In the evening, most of the people moved and crossed the river. I stayed behind. I was there for three days and three nights. Part of my house was burned down when I was sleeping in the house, and the whole house burned after I went to the mosque on Friday. People thought I had been killed.

I was hungry. I wanted to eat a mango that I had found, but then I said to myself, ‘Why should you eat something that does not belong to you?’ I was hungry, but since the risk that I would die was so high, why let something forbidden be my last action? So I left it and did not eat it. But the most surprising thing was when they set the house where I was sleeping on fire! I came



out hurriedly and told them that I was in the house. They told me to leave the village or I would die! I did not consider their words. I went to the mosque to sleep. On that Friday night, there were one goat, one donkey and me in the whole village. On Saturday morning, three young men came to me and took me out of the mosque and out of the village. Until now, I do not know who those three young men were. They were not from my clan, they were not Walamoy/Shidle. They took me to Jowhar airstrip where I was reunited with my family, who also thought I was dead. And it all looked like that!

SPL was looking for Walamoy/Shidle elders, and I am one of the titled clan elders – a 'peace seeker' [Nabadoon]. So they invited me to the project forums. I started joining the programme. SPL gave us trainings and peace awareness, and they facilitated meetings with the other clan members and initiated dialogues. Thanks to them! May God reward them!

The clans are neighbours. One cannot live without the other. The pastoralist has his gun hanging on his shoulder, and so does the farmer. In this situation, clashes are imminent, but we decided to choose peace. Elders were

selected to seek peace after the former governor of Middle Shabelle, Abdi Jiinow, did so. Then SPL came in and started working with the elders. The current administration facilitated the events to call for cessation of hostilities by offering to slaughter a ewe and a ram, as is the custom in our tradition. Although Walamoy/Shidle clan suffered more damage, they are ready to make peace with Mohamed Muse/Abgal clan. The agreement can bring people to live with each other again and go back to their villages. I have returned back to mine, the Gedo Berkaan village. The agreement can be enforced if all sides are honest in the implementation, and collaborate with one another.”

HADJI NOR'S STORY: Peace for the survivors

Hadji Nor is 61 years old. He lives with his three wives in Gedo Barkaan village and sustains nine of his grandchildren who lost their father in the conflict in eastern Jowhar. He is a farmer and a prominent elder in his village. Hadji Nor also lost two sons in the conflict but is hopeful that the peace agreement between Walamoy/Shidle and Mohamed Muse/Abgal will last.

“This conflict started with a dispute on a farmland three years ago. There are personal farmlands and community farmlands. This dispute involved community farmlands. After the clashes, the former governor of the Middle Shabelle region intervened, and an agreement was signed between the clans Walamoy/Shidle and Mohamed Muse/Abgal. As people wanted to resume farming, the conflict relapsed. Within a short period of time, the farmlands became full of armed militias. The elders went there to appease the tensions, but unfortunately the fighting started before they reached the area. It was a Wednesday around 11.00 am. Many people were killed.

The conflict affected me very badly. I lost my two sons, 27 and 18 years old. Their bodies were brought to me. The older one had a wife and nine children. You cannot complain about destiny. I said, ‘We belong to Allah, and to him we



return', and buried my sons. The next day, the fighting spread to our village. I ran away with the new orphans of my son. I crossed the river with some of them on my shoulder, while others were on a small boat. I lost some of them, they went missing for three days. I finally found them in the new IDP camp in Jowhar Airstrip with other people who escaped the fighting.

At first, I was angry, not with SPL, but with my people. They were IDPs in the Airstrip camp. I wanted them to go back to their villages, and restart their lives. They did not listen to me. Instead rumours started that I had a repatriation contract. Others said I received compensation for the death of my sons. Nothing of this was true. The only thing I was angry about was with the conditions of the camp which were very horrible, while in the villages the mangoes were ripe and falling off the trees, but nobody was there to harvest. I wanted them to take the courage to go back. I was among the first to return home.

The project benefited the community in a great way. People used to say, 'It is just an NGO!' but the person who experienced this conflict knew the reality. After the conflict, people from these two clans stopped greeting one another. SPL started going between the clans calling for peace, raising people's awareness, training them and facilitating meetings. People started to greet each other again and they began to dialogue. Now we have an agreement.

This agreement means a lot to me. I have not farmed for four seasons. I am a grandfather of nine children. Their father, my son, was killed in the war. If peace is not obtained, I cannot sustain them. But as long as there is peace, I can cultivate my farm and sustain their lives".

HADJI QAROOFOW'S STORY: **The need for peace to start life again**

Hadji Qaroofow is an elder of the Walamoy/Shidle clan. He participated to the peace process in Jowhar. He stresses the necessity for peace on both sides.

Hadji Qaroofow is 80 years old and has three wives and five children. He is an elder in the Walamoy/Shidle sub-clan. He lives in Jowhar and has residences and farms in Gafaay village in eastern Jowhar. Hadji Qaroofow is blind from natural causes and a man of great character and leadership. The conflict in

eastern Jowhar affected his home village. During the conflict, his home was burned down and he lost everything in it. He was displaced to Jowhar town unlike most of the people from his sub-clan who settled in an IDP camp near Jowhar Airstrip.

“People from SPL contacted me. I do not know how they got my telephone number. They told me they wanted to meet elders from the Walamoy/Shidle clan about the conflict between us and the Mohamed Muse/Abgal sub-clan. I agreed to meet them and called some other elders. They met with us several times, and they also met the other clan separately. These meetings had an impact. During the discussion people realised the goodness and the essence of peace and the plight of violent conflict. Then, SPL brought the two clans together in workshops, and the relationship between them resumed. After that, the regional governor made a ceasefire and an integration ceremony was held where animals were sacrificed.

The fighting occurred twice. The clans in the region and former regional administration negotiated an agreement. But the conflict relapsed. That is when SPL came in to the peace process, and they have been successful. I feel that all parties need peace. The Mohamed Muse/Abgal sub-clan needs peace, and so does the Walamoy/Shidle sub-clan. We, Walamoy/Shidle, need peace. We were displaced and we want to be relocated. We want to start our lives again. I have not farmed for three years and that alone cost me a lot. We know conflict is inevitable between neighbours, but peace must be achieved.

This agreement can be successful, if the elders of both clans are truthful to each other and committed to peace. People are aware of what they can do in times of conflict and what they can achieve with peace. Then elders should restrain their youth, by talking to them to not pick up guns. I call for all people, especially my people of Walamoy/Abgal, that nothing is better than peaceful co-existence, so let us strive for peace”



Nothing is better than peaceful co-existence, so let us strive for peace

FIILO'S STORY:

Resuming community relations

Fiilo is an agro-pastoralist and a businesswoman. She lost her brothers in the conflict, and could no longer farm because of the insecurity. She also participated in the peace process, first by joining a workshop organised by SPL, and views the agreement that has been reached as an important step to start farming again and sustaining her family.

Fiilo is a 42 year old woman with eight children. She lives at Horseed village in Jowhar. She had cattle and four hectares of land at Geeda Berkaan village in east Jowhar. She was also a businesswoman who traded cattle and farm products in Jowhar and other regions.

"In the conflict I have lost two of my brothers – they were young, 15 and 17 years old. We couldn't even collect their bodies. I was very distressed. The conflict affected me badly. I could no longer go to my farm, or raise my cattle. I was stuck in my house because I feared for my personal security. Because of the situation, three other families of my relatives moved in with me.

One day I was called by one of my clan elders. He told me that an organisation called SPL, who works for peace, had invited clan leaders to participate in peacebuilding trainings. I was invited because I used to cook during clan meetings and collected clan contribution from women. I decided to attend the meeting, because I like peace and I wanted to resume working and restart my life.

I attended two trainings on peacebuilding. One of the trainings was especially for my clan, while the other brought representatives from the two conflicting clans together. During these trainings, people started to talk, to participate actively in group work and to express their feelings plainly. I did not think that clans would talk to each other peacefully, given the hostilities between them, but members of the clans started to drink tea together and converse.

I am very happy an agreement has been reached. I am hopeful that the villages will return to normal, and we can farm together again. I want to go back to my farm and restart life."



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Somali Peace Line

Somali Peace Line (SPL) was founded in 1995 following the Second European International Congress of Somali Studies on Culture of Peace for Somalia, held in Paris, France. SPL is a non-profit and non-partisan NGO committed to promoting sustainable peace in Somalia.

SPL's mission is to empower Somali people, providing them with the knowledge and skills to solve their internal problems and enjoy their rights. We are committed to protecting the human rights of vulnerable groups, such as children, women and internally displaced persons (IDPs). With 20 years of experience in Somalia, SPL advocates for responsible public consciousness through culturally sensitive and methodologically appropriate means.

SPL has organised trainings and workshops on conflict resolution, peace consolidation, capacity building and gender empowerment to a wide range of groups, including traditional elders, youth, women, children, and IDPs. We are dedicated to bringing social transformation from the grassroots and have supported a number of successful peace processes, through dialogue and negotiation, between warring groups.

Our different projects are carried out in partnership with local, national and regional stakeholders and NGOs, such as the Life & Peace Institute (LPI), Save the Children and Oxfam Novib, and with support from governmental organisations, such as the European Union, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and international organisations, such as UNICEF. SPL is also active in civil society forums and umbrella organisation and networks.




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