Baidoa

Key Findings from the 2015 DCSA Report

The Observatory for Conflict and Violence Prevention (OCVP), based in Somalia/Somaliland, was established in 2009 as a non-political, non-denominational, and non-governmental organization with the goal of organising and supporting initiatives that promote peacebuilding, security, safety and sustainable development across all regions of Somalia. As a part of its efforts, the OCVP conducts ongoing District Security and Conflict Assessments (DCSAs) in order to obtain feedback at the community level in relation to four thematic areas: security; governance; justice; conflict and violence. The assessments are conducted using a mixed-method approach, including a household survey of district residents along with focus group discussions and key informant interviews with community representatives and key stakeholders in the local provision of governance, security and justice. (To find out more about the DCSAs, visit www.ocvp.org.)

Baidoa (Baydhabo) is the capital of the Bay Region of Somalia and is one of the main economic centres in Southern Somalia. Significant trade is conducted in livestock, cereals (local and imported), and non-food items. Other economic activities in the town include small, medium and large businesses, casual labour, and self-employment. In 2006, Baidoa became the nation’s provisional capital, before being captured by Al Shabaab in 2009. In 2012 the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), heavily backed by the Ethiopian Army, regained control of the city. An advance joint-contingent of Ugandan and Burundian soldiers serving along with the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was deployed to Baidoa in April 2012 and remains stationed in the surrounding area and the Baidoa airstrip. In July 2013, Quick Response Forces (QRF) were established by AMISOM. These forces patrol the town at night and are on standby for reinforcement in the event of an attack. The state of security in the area, particularly the road between Mogadishu and Baidoa has since improved significantly, leading to the opening of a supply route and free movement from people as well as humanitarian aid.

There was widespread awareness of the formal systems of governance, security and justice in Baidoa. However, traditional systems still played in fundamental role in these areas. Elders and religious leaders were especially highly regarded in the areas of justice provision and conflict resolution. Moreover, the structure of the local government was dependent on the traditional system as representatives were appointed based on clan quotas and not elected. However, there was strong belief in the importance of having elected officials on the premise that this would encourage greater participation of the local community and serve to improve transparency. In addition, it was thought that elections would result in more qualified candidates.

While a small majority indicated that they felt safe in the area, several concerns were raised regarding the prevalence of crime and violence, which was largely attributed to the presence of armed groups and militia. This was thought to be exacerbated by the involvement of youth who were propelled into this type of activity due to poor economic conditions and lack of employment opportunities. The police received precedence as the...
legitimate provider of security, but was criticised for being unresponsive at times. They, however received strong support towards stabilising the state of security in the area from entities such as the Somali National Army, the National Intelligence Security Agency and AMISOM as well as local committees and members of the community.

- **Governance**

The presence of the Local Council in Baidoa was widely acknowledged (85%). Among those who acknowledged the council’s presence, the service that was most readily associated with it was security provision (42%), while justice, sanitation, health, infrastructure, and education were each mentioned by a minority (less than 5%). The Mayor pointed out that substantial efforts were being made to improve the area’s security, including contributions towards the police. Sanitation efforts were also supported through a monthly budget, and town beautification, especially of main roads and popular public venues was one of the main areas of concern. However, the majority of those who were aware of the council were unable to identify any of the services that it provides (57%). In contrast, most respondents demonstrated awareness of challenges facing the community. The most pressing community issues were identified as unemployment, poor economy, poor health, lack of infrastructure and poor education – areas which generally fell within the council’s purview. In addition, discussants complained about the burden of taxation, which did not translate into service delivery.

Only 8% of survey respondents reported that they had participated in any government consultations in the past year. Local Councillors were appointed on the basis of power-sharing mechanisms among clans. It was argued that this resulted in many of the bureaucrats lacking the requisite skills and experience to fulfill their roles. In addition, it was suggested that this method of selection minimised opportunities for better qualified persons to participate. In line with this, there was generally a positive opinion regarding the importance of having elected representatives, with 86% of respondents in the household survey agreeing that this was important. Discussants supported this view by pointing out the perceived advantages of an electoral process. Chief among these were the promotion of accountability and transparency through greater participation of the population as well as an increase in the number of qualified persons taking up positions within the Government.

Notably, the level of confidence in the local government was not especially favourable. A minority of approximately one-third of respondents (33%) stated that they had fairly or very high levels of confidence in the Local Council, while a little less than one-half (47%) indicated low levels of confidence and one in five (20%) did not offer an opinion. In addition, approximately one-half these respondents (51%) felt that the council’s performance remained unchanged and 10% perceived that there had been a decline in performance when compared with the previous year. However, approximately one in ten respondents had a positive outlook regarding the Council’s performance, as indicated by 11% who perceived that there had been an improvement in performance over the past year.

- **Security**

Several entities were involved in security provision in the district of Baidoa. These included the police, the Somali National Army (SNA), National Intelligence Security Agency (NISA), and African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). In addition, the local community provided support through committees such as neighbourhood watch groups (madani). Traditional leaders, including clan elders and sheikhs (religious leaders), also proved to be instrumental.
While there had been no major incidents of insecurity in the district in recent times, the security providers, primarily the SNA and AMISOM were engaged in a protracted fight against terrorist groups, such as Al Shabaab, who continued to pose a threat to the region.

The police presence in the district was confirmed by the majority of survey respondents (89%). The police was the entity that was most frequently identified by respondents as their preferred choice for reporting of petty and serious crimes (37% and 49% respectively), whereas traditional elders were mentioned more frequently than the police as the preferred choice for reporting civil matters (36% vs. 31%). Reporting preferences were said to be influenced by the nature of the case as well as perception towards the entity. For example, discussants noted that civil disputes could be solved by the people by way of reporting to the sub-village committee or respective clan. Notably, the police was regarded as the entity with enforcement authority. It was therefore perceived that crimes which required enforcement, such as murder, robbery, and theft were mostly reported to the police on account of this. Overall, when asked to identify their most trusted security provider for responding to crime and violence, the police was the leading choice (44%), followed by traditional elders (21%), religious leaders (15%), the Local Authority (8%), and local security guards (5%). The most frequently cited reason for selection of the police and the local authority was their fast response (as indicated by 45% and 61% of respondents who chose them). Respect was the main reason for choice of traditional elders and religious leaders (33% and 68% respectively), whereas local security guards were mainly chosen due to their accessibility (54%).

While the police was commended for its quick service during the day, the speed of response during the night was less favourable. Discussants accused the police of being more interested in protecting themselves during the nights and charged that this had a negative impact on the state of security as insurgents were aware that potential victims lacked support from security providers at this time. Status and familiarity with the police were also said to influence their rate of response. It was suggested that those who did not have connections feared being labelled as informants or being accused of causing the incident and were therefore unwilling to report to the police at times. Furthermore, it was noted that the police experienced logistical deficiencies, including shortage of vehicles, fuel, and means of communication. Another of the main challenges facing the police and encumbering effective security provision on a whole was declared to be the lack of coordination among entities. The named security providers often had different mandates as well as different lines of communication and authority, and generally operated independently of each other. It was felt that the absence of a central command resulted in disharmony among the various entities and even resulted in clashes among them.

Despite the various challenges, most respondents indicated that they had fairly or very high levels of trust in the police (52%) and approximately one-quarter (26%) perceived that there had been an improvement in the performance of the police when compared with the previous year. However, a sizeable proportion (41%) also indicated low or very low levels of trust in the police, while more than one in ten (13%) felt that the police performance had declined over the past year.

**Justice**

The justice system in Baidoa is comprised of both formal and informal justice providers (elders and religious leaders). A little more than three-quarters of respondents (77%) confirmed the presence of the formal court in the district, with nearly all of these persons (98%) estimating that the closest court was within one hour’s walking distance from their homes. Despite the high level of awareness of the courts, the informal justice providers were
utilised more frequently. Traditional elders had been used by approximately one-quarter of respondents (26%) for matters pertaining to justice in the twelve months preceding the assessment, while 15% stated that they had used religious leaders. The court had been used by 12% of respondents.

Similar issues, including matters pertaining to land and business disputes; household and youth violence; assault; and robbery had been referred to each of these entities. When asked who they trusted most to resolve cases, the religious leaders were the top choice (42%), followed by elders (23%), and the court (20%). Fair judgements was the reason that was most frequently cited for each of these choices. However, informal justice providers were regarded as being less corrupt as well as being experts in Shari’ah law and traditional Somali law. Several criticisms were levied against the court including the length of time to resolve cases, the high costs of bringing matters before the court, and allegations of bribery. The court was regarded as being a weak institution with staff who were considered to unmotivated and unable to resolve cases efficiently. Furthermore, an office had been created for religious leaders to resolve cases that the court failed to reach a verdict on through use of Shari’ah law. An example was cited in which this office managed to resolve a murder case after the courts had failed to reach a verdict for two years.

Overall, the level of confidence in the formal justice system was determined to be low. Only three in ten respondents indicated favourable levels of confidence – 30% stated that they were fairly or very confident. The majority, however, either stated that they were not confident in the formal justice system (50%) or were unable to give a definite response regarding their level of confidence (21%). Furthermore, with respect to the performance of the formal justice system, nearly one-half of the respondents were of the opinion that when compared with the previous year, there had been no change (48%), while similar proportions of 10% and 12% respectively felt that the performance had either improved or declined.

**Conflict and Violence**

Most persons (87%) stated that they were unaware of conflict that had taken place between clans or groups in the twelve months leading up to the assessment. However, approximately one in ten respondents (10%; n = 23) had witnessed such conflict during this period. These conflicts were generally attributed to competition over resources, family disputes, and revenge. Other reasons for the conflicts that were observed included lack of justice, youth violence, power/cultural struggle, rape, business disputes and crime. In addition, the majority those who witnessed conflicted (83%) indicated that they had witnessed conflict which led to violence.

Elders played a key role in conflict resolution in the district, employing the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms and historic precedents when resolving disputes between clans. The Local Authority played a secondary role in this regard, and were often facilitators while elders took the lead in the process. As a
result of their role in conflict resolution, the elders were regarded as a cornerstone of peacebuilding and statebuilding. Elders served not only to resolve conflict, but also to restore trust between the feuding parties, using approaches such as intermarriage between clans.

With respect to crime and violence, a similar proportion of one in ten respondents (10%) stated that they had witnessed at least one incident of crime or violence against someone outside of their homestead during the past year. The presence of armed groups and militia was regarded as a direct trigger of violence. In particular, the radical group, Al Shabaab, was identified as one of the key actors of violence. It was also noted that the poor economic situation in the district fueled their prominence as widespread poverty and unemployment encouraged some of the youth to join in order to obtain revenues. These groups were known to organise frequent roadblocks and illegal checkpoints, murders and other crimes, including armed robberies. These activities also affected the district’s economy, as business opportunities were hindered through restricted mobility. The high cost for transportation of merchandise outside town, resulting from the need to pay bribes at illegal checkpoints, served as an example of this. Government forces were also accused of contributing to the problem by way of partaking in criminal activity such as robberies.

However, in spite of the reported incidence of crime and violence, a majority of the survey respondents (62%) stated that they felt safe in the area. More than one-third of respondents (35%) also felt that safety in the district had improved over the past year. Nonetheless, just less than two in five respondents (38%) stated that they felt unsafe, while 37% felt that there had been no change in the level of safety and another 25% felt that safety had in fact declined.