Measuring Peacebuilding and Statebuilding in Somaliland and Somalia

Abdullahi Odowa

The Observatory of Conflict and Violence prevention (OCVP, www.ocvp.org) is an independent non-governmental and not for profit that tracks peacebuilding and state building progress in Somalia and Somaliland from its headquartered in Hargeisa as well as more recently opened satellite offices in Garowe and Mogadishu.

Introduction

The recent history of Somalia provides an important point of reference in the examination of well-established academic discourses on the formation, building and governance of sovereign nation states. Following the collapse of the central government in 1991 the country entered a period of such widespread and intense conflict and instability that it soon became the archetype of a ‘failed state’; a status only relinquished when in 2014 the Fragile States Index Report ranked South Sudan as the world’s most fragile country (FP, 2014).

Following the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2011 and in the environment of the ‘War on Terror’ that followed many political commentators and security analysts pointed to the ability of terrorist organizations to exploit ‘state failure’, in this particular case the ability of al-Qaeda to establish a safe base of operations in Afghanistan, as a serious threat to global security and order (Peter, 2008).

In Somalia the threat posed by the collapse of the state and its institutions to the region and wider international community - one need only consider the two issues of terrorism and piracy - as well as the devastating humanitarian consequences for its citizens have prompted neighboring countries, foreign powers and international institutions attempt to implement strategies to rebuild them as a means to finally bring peace and security to the country.

The Somali State: Failed State or Abortive Project?

However, while much of the international focus and support has focused heavily on the revival of the Somali state and its institutions important questions regarding whether or not the country has in fact ever enjoyed a fully functioning government and the historic resistance of the Somali people to the creation of a unitary and modern state have remained unanswered.

Indeed, a close examination of history Somali history, particularly the 1969-1991 era of Siad Barre led ‘Somali Democratic Republic’, demonstrates not only the persistent signs of fragility that existed long before the country’s collapse in 1991 but also that the country has never experienced a stable and fully functional democratic national government (Happer, 2012). At the heart of many of the persistent political and social crises that have plagued Somalia can been traced to incompetent and corrupt leadership that has been fuelled by divisive clan politics that has effectively undermined attempts to build a unified and cohesive national identity (Odowa, 2013).
In their book, *African state: reconsideration*, Samatar and Samatar (2002) identify five forms of African states, namely: the integral state\(^1\), the developmental state\(^2\), the prebendal state\(^3\), the predatory state\(^4\), and cadaverous state\(^5\). A close study of the historic experience of state-building in Somalia would suggest that while Somali is yet to implement an integral state, however, all other forms of state formation described by Samatar and Samatar (20002) have been experienced at different times at both the national and sub-national level.

Of course the perpetuation of flawed and dysfunctional nature of state institutions has historically served the interests of narrow sighted Somali politicians who have exploited these in order to advance their own interests as well as those of their clans; something that has not only served to undermine the legitimacy of the state and its institutions but also their ability to deliver services to ordinary citizens.

This historic misuse of political power and state resources by those holding official office within government and state-run institutions has resulted in a general mistrust towards these among ordinary Somalis. The modern state and its institutions are therefore perceived not as being responsible for delivering good governance, justice, security and other services but rather a means to promote and protect both individual and group (family, sub-clan and clan) interests. It is this understanding that has unfortunately created a negative relationship, both historically and contemporarily, between disaffected citizens who see themselves as owing a greater loyalty to their clans and sub-clans than the modern state which is perceived as a major source of injustice, conflict and social disintegration.

**Measuring peacebuilding and governance in Somalia**

Since its establishment in 2009 the Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention (OCVP) has worked with local and international stakeholders from its headquarters in Hargeisa, Somaliland and more recently from newly opened offices on Garowe and Mogadishu to measure and evaluate progress in peacebuilding and state-building across all regions of Somalia. However, given not only the distrust and hostility held by many Somali’s towards state institutions and their representatives but the fact that most peacebuilding and state building projects are designed and implemented by foreign actors this type of monitoring is essential to measure their relevance, progress and effectiveness.

Nevertheless, by employing a mixed method approach that includes both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews) means to collect the data the OCVP is able to gather public perceptions of the effectiveness of these efforts by local, regional and national level actors on issues related to the delivery of good governance, justice, security and peace.; these include not only ‘official’ state agencies but also key non-state actors, such as elders/traditional leaders, religious leaders, business communities and members of the Somali diaspora. This then allows the OCVP to collect data that can be utilized by local and international stakeholders to develop, adapt and strengthen their policies and programmes supporting peacebuilding and state-building in Somalia.

---

\(^1\) A fully functioning state which delivers public goods and generate ‘moral and intellectual bonding’ with its populace

\(^2\) A state focusing developmental agenda and economic wellbeing of its people even at the ‘cost of civil liberty

\(^3\) A state which is preoccupied with the creation and maintenance of personal interest of those in power

\(^4\) A state where order and law break down and public services are openly abused

\(^5\) A state where the remaining skeleton of the state structures are demolished and the state is either on its deathbed or already in the coffin
Challenges to measuring peacebuilding and governance in failed state

One of the notable challenges in attempting to measure the perception and effectiveness of initiatives designed to promote and support peacebuilding and state-building in Somalia is that of security. With many districts and major population centers such as Las Anod, Galkayo, Baidao, Kismao and Mogadishu remaining unsafe for field researchers to conduct full scale research activities. This in turn creates further problems as the representative nature of the data collected may itself be compromised.

As researchers attempt to navigate the fragile, complex and frequently dangerous nature of post-conflict environments in Somalia there is also the added problem that those collecting data may be perceived as agents or supporters of particular figures and entities – both government and non-government. This means that the OCVP, as with other similar organizations, must always carefully plan and balance its actions in what is often a volatile political and security environment.

Lessons learned from measuring peacebuilding and governance in Somalia

There are of course a number of lessons to be drawn from the experience of the OCVP working in Somalia under these conditions.

First is the significance of local ownership in the design, implementation and dissemination of research and its findings. This is important as it empowers Somalis to investigate their social problems and generate options to build a better future for their communities, regions and country.

Second, in a deeply divided society where distrust and suspicion of outsiders are often the rule organizations such as the OCVP must develop and apply a high-level of sensitivity to the history and nature of local conflicts while also demonstrating their neutrality. The employment of local researchers and/or fixers from research target areas can play an important role in minimizing misunderstandings and other unintended negative outcomes.

Lastly, through no fault of their own many Somali citizens have never seen a functioning state delivering public services at either the national or sub-national level and therefore have difficulty imagining what this may look like. This experience may negatively affect the perception of research participants and result in them providing superficial and poor responses to questions related to the delivery of governance and justice in their communities. It is therefore necessary that the OCVP seek-out in-depth background information from research participants in order to ensure that any quantitative and qualitative data collected is both reliable and valid.

Conclusion

An examination of the modern history of Somalia suggests that since its inception the Somali state has appeared unable and even unwilling to deliver the type and level of public goods and services necessary to build legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens. This has in turn led many local and international academics and observers to argue that the Somali state may have been ‘failed’ before it was even born. Even the self-declared independent region of Somaliland which has enjoyed relative peace and stability since the 1993 Borama Conference successful efforts at peacebuilding have not prevented newly-built state institutions being threatened by the same problems that plagued those of the pre-1991 national government.
This has left Somali’s deeply distrustful of the modern state due to their experiences of corruption and injustice at the hands of politicians and other state agents such as the military and police. Seeing the state as a threat to their lives and livelihoods many prefer to give their loyalty to informal non-state actors including clan leaders, warlords, pirates and Islamist militias. It is therefore essential to carefully analyze and learn from this past and the conditions that caused the fragility and ultimate collapse of the Somali state rather than invest in the restructuring of flawed, dysfunctional and perhaps even illegitimate institutions if we are to contribute to a genuine rebuilding of the county.

Reference


