

# Peacebuilding in Somalia: Local Realities, Federal Aspirations, and the Shifting Role of External Support

Esther Lum Ndotu N

Ph.D Fellow United Nations University for Peace

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90400462>

Received: 14 April 2024; Accepted: 21 April 2025; Published: 22 May 2025

## ABSTRACT

Somalia has made measured but meaningful progress in its peacebuilding trajectory, despite enduring legacies of protracted conflict, institutional fragility, fragmented governance, and entrenched dependency on external assistance. This article explores the nuanced interplay between local peacebuilding efforts, federalization, and international support, particularly through the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM). Employing a qualitative methodology grounded in thematic content analysis, the study draws on policy documents, official reports, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including government officials, civil society actors, international partners, and local community leaders. The analysis reveals that while significant efforts have been undertaken to promote reconciliation, state-building, and democratic governance, these efforts often remain disjointed and externally driven, limiting their long-term impact. Notably, the research underscores the resilience and agency of Somali communities, whose informal and indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution continue to play a vital—albeit under-recognized—role in sustaining peace at the local level. The article further identifies persistent tensions between federal and regional authorities, challenges in aligning donor priorities with local needs, and the necessity for a more coordinated and context-sensitive international response. It concludes by advocating for a reorientation of peacebuilding frameworks towards a more inclusive, participatory, and locally anchored approach that elevates Somali ownership and leadership in the peace process.

**Key Words:** Peacebuilding, Federalism, UNSOM, Reconciliation, Local Ownership

## INTRODUCTION

Somalia's contemporary peacebuilding landscape is marked by a web of contradictions: significant strides in state reconstruction coexist with enduring fragility; local agency flourishes amid external dependency; and federal aspirations often clash with ground-level realities Ajogwu, I. S. (2019). Since the collapse of the Barr Said government in 1991, Somalia has endured one of the most protracted conflicts in Africa, characterized by cycles of violence, clan-based power struggles, and a fragmented political order. Despite these structural impediments, local communities have continued to employ traditional mechanisms of reconciliation and mediation (Bradbury & Healy, 2010). In 2012 with the formation of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the establishment of federal member states marked a critical turning point in the country's post-conflict recovery efforts. This federal regime, supported by a host of international partners, was intended to devolve power, enhance political inclusivity, and build a more legitimate and accountable state. In contrast, the implementation of federalism has exposed deep-rooted tensions between regional authorities and the central government, complicating the peacebuilding process (Hoehne, 2015). In this context, external actors, particularly the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), have played a central role in mediating political dialogue, supporting institutional development, and coordinating humanitarian and security interventions. Yet, questions remain regarding the sustainability and effectiveness of externally driven peacebuilding frameworks, especially those that inadequately engage with local knowledge systems and community priorities (Donais, 2012).

This article explores the evolving landscape of peacebuilding in Somalia by examining the interactions between local peace efforts, federalization processes, and international engagement. Drawing on qualitative

data from policy documents and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders—including Somali government officials, civil society actors, and international representatives. The article provides a critical reflection on both the progress and limitations of current peacebuilding initiatives. It argues for a recalibration of the peacebuilding paradigm in Somalia towards a more people-centered, inclusive, and locally driven approach that foregrounds Somali agency and contextual realities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Somalia's journey toward sustainable peace has been marked by decades of protracted conflict, institutional collapse, and fragmented governance. Despite the significant efforts of both local actors and international stakeholders, the path to stability remains elusive, hindered by political fragmentation, deep-rooted clan divisions, and the inadequacies of formal state institutions. The issue of federalism, while intended to provide a framework for inclusive governance, has become a source of contention, exacerbating tensions between the central government and Federal Member States (FMS), as well as within local communities. This tension is compounded by the complex relationship between local peacebuilding initiatives, federal governance structures, and international interventions.

The presence of international actors, particularly the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), has provided essential support in areas such as political dialogue, state-building, and security sector reform. However, these external efforts often follow top-down approaches that fail to meaningfully engage with or prioritize the needs and agency of local communities. Consequently, the sustainability and legitimacy of these interventions are called into question, as they risk undermining indigenous peacebuilding mechanisms that have historically been the bedrock of Somali conflict management and reconciliation.

At the heart of Somalia's peacebuilding challenges is the disconnect between local, traditional conflict resolution practices and the externally driven peacebuilding frameworks that dominate the national discourse. While community-led reconciliation efforts, spearheaded by clan elders, religious leaders, and women's networks, have proven effective in conflict transformation at the grassroots level, they remain underfunded, marginalized, and often sidelined in favor of state-centric peacebuilding models. Moreover, the politicization of local peacebuilding mechanisms, the marginalization of minority groups, and the lack of adequate civic engagement in federalism processes further undermine the potential for a cohesive and inclusive national peace strategy.

This article seeks to address these interrelated issues by examining the role of local actors in peacebuilding, the challenges and opportunities associated with federalism, and the shifting dynamics of international support, with a focus on UNSOM's evolving role in Somalia. It highlights the need for a more integrated, people-centred approach to peacebuilding, one that recognizes the importance of local ownership, enhances the legitimacy of peace processes, and aligns international support with Somali-driven aspirations for peace and governance.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do community-led peacebuilding initiatives and traditional governance systems contribute to conflict resolution in Somalia?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities of implementing federalism in Somalia for peacebuilding and national unity?
3. How does international support, particularly through UNSOM, affect locally owned peacebuilding efforts in Somalia?

### **Research Objectives**

1. To evaluate the role of community-led peacebuilding initiatives and traditional governance systems in conflict resolution in Somalia.

2. To explore the challenges and opportunities of federalism in Somalia, focusing on its impact on peacebuilding and national unity.
3. To assess the effectiveness of international support, especially through UNSOM, in enhancing locally owned peacebuilding efforts in Somalia.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology rooted in thematic content analysis. Data were collected from a combination of semi-structured interviews with Somali policymakers, community leaders, peace practitioners, and representatives of international organizations, as well as a review of key policy documents and reports. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and divergent perspectives across three core themes. Interviews were triangulated with documented evidence to ensure credibility and depth.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Historical and Political Context

The trajectory of Somalia's conflict and peacebuilding efforts must be understood within the broader historical context of state collapse, clan dynamics, and foreign intervention. The disintegration of the Somali state in 1991 following the ousting of President Siad Barre plunged the country into anarchy, ushering in decades of civil war, humanitarian crises, and regional instability (Menkhaus, 2006). The collapse not only eroded central authority but also unleashed a complex array of clan-based militias, warlords, and fragmented administrations, which continue to shape the political landscape.

Historically, Somali society has relied on a hybrid system of governance that integrates customary law (*xeer*), Islamic jurisprudence (*sharia*), and elements of modern state structures (Gundel, 2006). While the absence of a central government weakened formal institutions, many communities adapted through informal mechanisms of conflict resolution led by clan elders, religious leaders, and women's networks. These localized peacebuilding practices played a crucial role in maintaining order in areas where state structures were absent or ineffective.

Several internationally backed transitional governments attempted to re-establish central authority between 2000 and 2012, but these efforts were frequently undermined by internal divisions, lack of legitimacy, and persistent insecurity. The formation of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in 2012 marked a turning point in the international community's engagement, as it was seen as the first permanent central government since 1991. The establishment of a federal system aimed to decentralize power, promote local autonomy, and rebuild trust between Somalia's diverse regions and clans (Hagmann & Hoehne, 2009).

Nonetheless, federalism has been fraught with contestation. The emergence of Federal Member States (FMS) has often occurred through elite bargains rather than inclusive consultations, leading to uneven governance structures and renewed competition over resources and authority (ICG, 2018). Moreover, political fragmentation and a lack of clarity in the constitutional division of powers have further complicated efforts to build a cohesive and legitimate state.

The historical and political backdrop reveals that peacebuilding in Somalia cannot be effectively understood or implemented without recognizing the enduring influence of localized governance systems. Moreover, the evolving nature of federalism, and the shifting priorities of both domestic and international actors. As the country continues to navigate its post-conflict recovery, these dynamics remain central to any meaningful and sustainable peace process.

### Federalisation and Its Discontents

The adoption of federalism in Somalia was envisioned as a pragmatic response to the country's longstanding fragmentation, aiming to reconcile regional identities with the imperative of national unity. Enshrined in the 2012 Provisional Constitution, the federal model sought to address historical grievances, decentralize

governance, and create a more inclusive and representative political framework (Federal Republic of Somalia, 2012). However, the implementation of federalism in Somalia has been fraught with contention, ambiguity, and uneven progress.

At its core, federalism in Somalia emerged not through a nationally coordinated process, but rather through a series of elite-driven negotiations that often-excluded grassroots voices. The formation of Federal Member States (FMS) including Puntland, Jubbaland, Southwest, Galmudug, and Hirshabelle—was characterized by a lack of uniform criteria, contested territorial boundaries, and power struggles between regional and federal elites (Hoehne, 2015; Mahmood, 2019). These dynamics have undermined the legitimacy and coherence of the federal project, with many regions prioritizing clan-based loyalties and local interests over national integration.

Tensions between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the FMS have become a persistent feature of Somalia's political environment. Disputes over the allocation of resources, authority over security forces, and the management of international aid have strained centre-periphery relations (ICG, 2021). For instance, FMS leaders have frequently accused the federal government of attempting to centralize power and bypass constitutional arrangements, while the FGS has accused regional actors of obstructing national policy implementation and electoral processes (Williams, 2020).

The lack of a complete constitution further exacerbates these tensions. Key issues such as resource-sharing, fiscal federalism, and the delineation of powers remain unresolved, creating a legal vacuum that allows for overlapping claims and political contestation (Bryden & Bahra, 2020). Moreover, the absence of a functioning Constitutional Court or neutral dispute resolution mechanisms has left the system vulnerable to political manipulation and stalemates.

Critically, the federal experiment has also exposed a deeper structural problem: the disconnect between formal state-building frameworks and the lived realities of governance in Somalia. In many areas, state institutions exist primarily on paper, while actual governance is carried out by traditional elders, religious leaders, or local militias. This hybrid political order challenges the applicability of imported federal models and underscores the need for a more context-sensitive approach that integrates customary authority structures with formal political processes (Menkhaus, 2018).

Thus, while federalism remains a central pillar of Somalia's post-conflict governance architecture, its implementation has at times, exacerbated fragmentation rather than fostering cohesion. Without inclusive dialogue, constitutional clarity, and mechanisms for equitable power-sharing, federalism risks entrenching divisions rather than resolving them.

### **The Role of External Actors**

External actors have played a pivotal role in shaping Somalia's post-conflict recovery, offering financial, technical, and political support to stabilize the country and rebuild its institutions. Among these, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) stands as a central actor tasked with coordinating international efforts, supporting political dialogue, and facilitating security and governance reforms. However, the presence of multiple international stakeholders, including bilateral donors, regional organizations, and humanitarian agencies—has led to a fragmented and often top-down peacebuilding landscape that frequently clashes with local realities.

UNSOM was established in 2013 with a multidimensional mandate encompassing political support, peacebuilding, state-building, and human rights promotion (UNSC, 2013). It was intended to serve as an integrated mission that aligns with Somali national priorities, particularly the Somali-led New Deal Compact and the National Development Plans. UNSOM has played an instrumental role in facilitating federal and state-level dialogues, supporting electoral processes, and promoting transitional justice initiatives (UNSOM, 2021). Nevertheless, its impact has been constrained by the volatile political environment, security threats posed by Al-Shabaab, and mistrust from some Somali political actors.

Beyond UNSOM, bilateral and multilateral donors—such as the European Union, United States, United



Kingdom, Turkey, and the African Union—have committed substantial resources to Somalia's recovery. These actors have supported institutional development, constitutional reform, security sector reform (SSR), and humanitarian aid. Yet, the donor landscape is marked by overlapping mandates, conditionalities, and competing strategic interests, which can undermine coordination and long-term sustainability (Bryden & Bahra, 2020).

A recurring critique of international peacebuilding in Somalia lies in its adherence to the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, which prioritizes formal state institutions, market liberalization, and electoral democracy. While these elements are important, they often ignore the informal, hybrid, and local governance systems that are more relevant to Somali communities (Richmond & Mitchell, 2011). The imposition of externally designed state-building models—often based on Western templates—has sometimes led to policy dissonance, implementation gaps, and a sense of exclusion among local populations.

Moreover, the tendency of international actors to engage predominantly with political elites has reinforced patronage networks, exacerbated centre-periphery tensions, and weakened the legitimacy of peace processes. In some instances, donor funding has inadvertently fueled competition between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Federal Member States (FMS), as each seeks to control access to international resources (ICG, 2021). Additionally, the proliferation of external actors has contributed to a parallel governance structure, where aid agencies and international NGOs perform essential services that should ideally be the responsibility of the Somali state.

Despite these challenges, external actors have also demonstrated flexibility in recent years, showing greater willingness to support locally led initiatives and adapt their frameworks to Somali contexts. Initiatives such as the Reconciliation Stabilization Framework and support to district-level peacebuilding platforms illustrate an emerging shift towards more localized engagement. However, this shift remains tentative and requires deeper institutionalization to make a lasting impact. Ultimately, the effectiveness of external support hinges on its ability to complement—not supplant—Somali-led processes. International peacebuilding efforts must prioritize local ownership, align with community priorities, and foster inclusive partnerships that enhance, rather than overshadow, indigenous capacities for peace.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The qualitative analysis revealed three interrelated themes that define Somalia's peacebuilding landscape: the salience of community-driven reconciliation, the contested dynamics of federalism, and the ambivalent yet essential role of external support. Drawing on interviews with Somali policymakers, community leaders, international stakeholders, and peacebuilding practitioners, the study underscores the need to rethink dominant approaches and foreground local agency in peacebuilding interventions.

### Community-Led Reconciliation

Community-driven reconciliation remains the cornerstone of Somalia's peacebuilding efforts. Across interviews, respondents consistently highlighted the critical role of traditional elders (odayaal), women's associations, youth networks, and religious leaders in mediating disputes and fostering reconciliation. These local mechanisms are perceived as more legitimate, accessible, and effective than formal judicial or political institutions, particularly in rural or semi-autonomous areas. Participants pointed to successful examples in regions such as Puntland and Galmudug, where community-based peacebuilding initiatives have yielded positive outcomes.

As stated by Sheikh, R. A. (2024), in Puntland, 50 community-led peace initiatives supported by international donors have positively impacted over 200,000 people, focusing on inter-clan reconciliation, peace dialogues, and local conflict management. Farkah, Na, and Do Kampala (2021) assert that these initiatives contributed significantly to the stabilization of local governance structures and social cohesion. A key example is in Galmudug, from 2015 to 2016, over 4,000 participants took part in peace dialogues organized by community leaders and supported by international NGOs. These efforts helped demobilize local militias and facilitated joint security arrangements, ultimately leading to the creation of a functioning regional government Keating,

M., & Waldman, M. (Eds.). (2019)

However, community-led peacebuilding efforts face several challenges. These mechanisms are often dependent on clan affiliation, which can marginalize minority groups, youth, and women. A 2019 report by the UNDP found that 50% of community-based peace initiatives in Somalia suffered from limited inclusion of women and youth. This highlights the need for more inclusive approaches to reconciliation. Additionally, these initiatives typically operate without formal support from state institutions or international donors, often functioning in isolation.

### **Women as Peacebuilders**

Women in Somalia have traditionally played pivotal roles in informal reconciliation processes, drawing on their positions within families and communities to mediate disputes, prevent violence, and advocate for non-violent conflict resolution. Their involvement is particularly prominent within women's associations, peace committees, and inter-clan dialogue forums. Recent mapping by UN Women (2023) identified over 45 active women-led peace networks across Somalia, many of which have facilitated intercommunal dialogue, supported the reintegration of displaced persons, and provided psychosocial support to survivors of conflict.

Nevertheless, women's participation in formal peace and political processes remains disproportionately low. Despite the commitment to a 30% gender quota for parliamentary representation, only 21% of seats were secured by women in the 2021–2022 federal elections, illustrating persistent gaps between policy frameworks and practical implementation (UNSOM & UN Women, 2022). This exclusion reflects deeper socio-cultural constraints and institutional inertia that continue to sideline women's voices in decision-making arenas, even as they bear the brunt of conflict and lead reconciliation at the grassroots.

### **Youth as Agents of Transformation**

With approximately 70% of Somalia's population under the age of 30, Somali youth represent both a demographic imperative and a strategic constituency for peacebuilding (UNDP, 2012). Young people have played active roles in local peace initiatives, particularly through civic engagement, community development projects, and countering violent extremism. Organizations such as the Somali Youth Development Network (SYDN) have mobilized more than 10,000 youth in peace dialogues, voluntary service campaigns, and advocacy for inclusive governance (SYDN, 2021).

However, the structural challenges confronting Somali youth—particularly unemployment, limited access to education, and social marginalization—continue to constrain their full participation in peacebuilding. UNDP (2012) reports that youth unemployment remains alarmingly high at over 67% for those aged 14–29, rendering many susceptible to recruitment by armed groups. Despite this vulnerability, youth-led peace initiatives have demonstrated creativity and effectiveness in bridging inter-clan divides, promoting dialogue, and fostering alternative narratives to violence and extremism.

Despite these challenges, the resilience and effectiveness of these grassroots mechanisms suggest that they should be better integrated into Somalia's formal state-building processes. A key finding from a study by Boege et al. (2009) showed that traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, like the *guurti* (clan elder assembly), were integral to maintaining peace in Puntland, where 80% of community members reported trusting the elders' mediation efforts over state-led approaches. The exclusion of women and youth from formal peace and governance frameworks is not merely a question of representational justice; it constitutes a structural impediment to sustainable peace. Their deep-rooted community ties lived experiences of conflict, and unique perspectives position them as indispensable actors in Somalia's peacebuilding architecture. Integrating their roles more deliberately into national peace strategies—through inclusive policymaking, capacity-building, and targeted support—could enhance the legitimacy, adaptability, and effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions across the country.

### **Federalism: Promise or Fragmentation?**

Federalism in Somalia, introduced as a potential framework for inclusive governance, has faced significant

implementation challenges. Respondents pointed to a broad divide between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Federal Member States (FMS), which has led to fragmentation and deepened mistrust. FMS officials voiced concerns about the FGS's attempts to recentralize power, which they saw as undermining their autonomy.

In Jubaland and Puntland, both of which have long-standing grievances with the central government, federalism has been viewed as a tool for central government elites to gain control of resources, including oil revenues and international aid. According to a 2019 civil society survey by the Somalia Civil Society Consortium cited in Ali, A. Y. S., Dahir, A. H., & Hersi, Z. D. (2019), 65% of respondents in these regions expressed the belief that federalism is exploited for this purpose. Furthermore, 70% of rural respondents from the same survey lacked a clear understanding of federalism, reflecting the growing gap between the elite-driven political process and local communities' needs and expectations. This disconnect has resulted in public skepticism toward federalism, with more than 60% of people in conflict-affected areas expressing little faith in the system (UNDP, 2020).

These findings suggest that federalism in Somalia has become a divisive and often misunderstood concept, further compounded by unequal power sharing and resource allocation disputes. A study by Menkhaus (2014) emphasized that Somalia's political elites frequently exploit federalism to solidify local power structures rather than promote national integration, impeding the full potential of federalism as a unifying framework. Over 80% of respondents in the Galmudug region indicated that federalism has been used to control resources, reflecting how the system has been politicized for local gains. Conflict over the allocation of oil revenues alone has been a major contention, with accusations of preferential treatment in the distribution of resources (Menkhaus, 2014).

### **External Support: Necessary but Not Sufficient**

External support has played a vital role in Somalia's peacebuilding efforts, particularly through financial assistance, technical support, and security. However, there are growing concerns about the unintended consequences of prolonged international engagement. Respondents noted that while external actors, such as UNSOM, donor governments, and international NGOs, have been crucial in stabilizing key regions and supporting institution-building, their efforts have often reinforced dependency and sidelined local initiative.

Between 2010 and 2017, international aid to Somalia amounted to over \$2.5 billion, with much of this funding directed toward supporting the Somali National Army and transitional governance structures. However, less than 10% of the aid was directly allocated to local-level peacebuilding initiatives, highlighting a gap in support for grassroots actors. District-level peacebuilding initiatives, funded by international donors, have been more focused in recent years, with over 30 district-level peacebuilding initiatives benefiting approximately 150,000 people across Somalia (UNDP, 2021). These initiatives have empowered local peacebuilders and integrated traditional authorities into decision-making processes, fostering greater local ownership.

Despite these contributions, many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the top-down approach of many international actors. Donor-driven frameworks, such as the New Deal Compact, were critiqued for being overly technocratic and disconnected from Somalia's grassroots realities (Menkhaus, 2014). According to the study, 60% of respondents from a 2018 report by the International Crisis Group felt that international actors tend to focus more on central government elites than on local communities, thereby perpetuating existing power asymmetries. Nevertheless, there has been growing recognition among some international donors of the need to shift towards more localized and participatory models of engagement. 75% of respondents from a recent survey (Somalia Civil Society Forum, 2021) noted that they have seen positive shifts toward more inclusive donor support, particularly in terms of capacity-building for local NGOs and integrating traditional authorities into peacebuilding processes.

One peacebuilding practitioner in Baidoa observed, "Things are changing, donors are listening more—but it's still slow, and we need more space to lead." This sentiment reflects a cautious optimism that with sustained commitment, international support can evolve to better align with Somali-led peacebuilding efforts.

## CONCLUSION

Somalia's path to peace remains fraught with complexity, yet it is also marked by resilience, agency, and cautious optimism. This article has explored the interwoven dynamics of local peacebuilding efforts, the contested federalization process, and the evolving role of international support—particularly through UNSOM and other donor-driven initiatives. The findings emphasize that for Somalia to achieve sustainable peace, peacebuilding must evolve to prioritize local ownership, integrate traditional mechanisms into formal governance structures, and foster greater coordination between external and local actors. While community-led reconciliation remains foundational to Somali society, its full potential can only be realized through integration into broader political processes, such as federalism. Similarly, international support must be reimagined to better respect Somali agency and respond to the specific needs and aspirations of the people. With these shifts, Somalia can build a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable peace.

Local actors—elders, women's groups, youth initiatives, and religious leaders—have consistently proven themselves as vital to reconciliation and conflict transformation. Their contributions often take place beyond the spotlight of international frameworks, drawing on indigenous mechanisms that are contextually rooted and widely accepted by communities. However, these efforts are frequently under-resourced, under-recognized, and overshadowed by the political ambitions of both federal and regional elites.

Federalism, despite its theoretical potential to support inclusive governance and decentralization, remains a source of contestation. In its current form, it has been manipulated as a tool for power consolidation and resource competition, rather than as a means of empowering citizens and fostering unity. The absence of a finalized constitution, the politicization of intergovernmental relations, and the exclusion of communities from meaningful dialogue have compounded public mistrust and reinforced perceptions that federalism is an elite-driven construct.

International actors continue to play a pivotal yet paradoxical role. Their technical assistance, financial support, and security interventions have been crucial in some areas—but they have also perpetuated dependency and occasionally imposed solutions misaligned with Somali realities. While recent shifts towards localization and district-level engagement are promising, the pace of transformation remains slow. External partners must reassess their models of engagement by moving away from template-driven approaches toward more adaptive, participatory, and flexible strategies that genuinely prioritize Somali ownership.

As such, sustainable peace in Somalia cannot be engineered from above or outside. It must emerge from within driven by the aspirations, practices, and institutions of Somali people. This requires not only recalibrated international engagement but also a reimagined political culture that privileges consensus over coercion, inclusion over competition, and local legitimacy over imposed authority. Somalia's peacebuilding journey remains unfinished, but with genuine investment in local agency, transparent governance, and civic participation, a more inclusive and stable future is still within reach.

To chart a more sustainable and inclusive path forward, peacebuilding efforts in Somalia must shift toward a model that prioritizes Somali ownership, contextual relevance, and participatory governance. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

### **Prioritize Local Ownership and Indigenous Mechanisms**

Peacebuilding strategies should build on existing community-led practices by formally recognizing and supporting traditional conflict resolution structures. This includes providing resources and legal frameworks that integrate customary mechanisms into broader peace and governance frameworks, while ensuring safeguards for human rights and inclusion.

### **Strengthen the Federal Framework**

This could be done through Inclusive Dialogue. A comprehensive and inclusive constitutional review process is essential to resolve ambiguities around power-sharing, resource allocation, and the role of the Federal



Member States. This process must go beyond political elites to involve civil society, traditional leaders, youth, and women in shaping the future of Somalia's governance.

### **Recalibrate International Engagement**

Donor interventions should be aligned with locally defined priorities and grounded in meaningful partnerships with Somali institutions and communities. UNSOM and other external actors should serve as facilitators rather than drivers of peace processes, ensuring that support mechanisms enhance rather than replace national capacities.

### **Promote Civic Education and Political Literacy**

A widespread lack of public understanding about federalism and governance frameworks hampers meaningful participation. Civic education campaigns should be launched to build citizen awareness, foster dialogue, and cultivate a shared vision of peace and governance.

### **Invest in Hybrid Governance Models**

Investing in hybrid governance models rather than imposing one-size-fits-all institutions models which do not take into consideration the context. Peacebuilding actors should acknowledge and work within Somalia's hybrid political order, where formal and informal systems coexist. This includes engaging clan elders, religious authorities, and women's networks in policy processes while also investing in accountable, inclusive state institutions.

In sum, Somalia's peacebuilding journey reflects both the challenges of post-conflict recovery and the enduring strength of local resilience. Bridging the divide between external frameworks and local realities requires a paradigmatic shift: from building the state for the people to building peace with the people. Only by embracing this shift can Somalia's aspirations for sustainable peace and federal unity be meaningfully realized.

## **REFERENCE**

1. Ajogwu, I. S. (2019). Exploring the challenges of structural peacebuilding in Sub-Saharan Africa: A case study of peacebuilding in post-civil war Somalia 2013 to 2018 (Master's thesis, University of Pretoria, South Africa).
2. Ali, A. Y. S., Dahir, A. H., & Hersi, Z. D. (2019). Federalism in post-conflict states: Assessing Somalia's challenges and the way forward. *Perspectives on Federalism*, 11(2), 56-63.
3. Boege, V., Brown, A., Clements, K., & Nolan, A. (2009). Building peace and political community in hybrid political orders. *International peacekeeping*, 16(5), 599-615.
4. Bryden, M., & Bahra, P. (2020). The limits of reconciliation: The political economy of federalism in Somalia. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.
5. Campbell, S. (2018). Global governance and local peace: Accountability and performance in international peacebuilding. Cambridge University Press.
6. Donais, T. (2009). Empowerment or imposition? Dilemmas of local ownership in post-conflict peacebuilding processes. *Peace & Change*, 34(1), 3-26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.2009.00531.x>
7. Farkah, Na, and Do Kampala. "UNDP and peace building in Mogadishu-Somalia." (2021).
8. Federal Republic of Somalia. (2012). Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia. Mogadishu.
9. Gundel, J. (2006). The predicament of the Oday: The role of traditional structures in security, rights, law and development in Somalia. Danish Refugee Council & Novib/Oxfam.
10. Hagmann, T., & Hoehne, M. V. (2009). Failures of the state failure debate: Evidence from the Somali territories. *Journal of International Development*, 21(1), 42-57. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1482>
11. Hoehne, M. V. (2015). Between Somaliland and Puntland: Marginalization, militarization and conflicting political visions. Rift Valley Institute.
12. International Crisis Group (ICG). (2018). Somalia and the Gulf crisis (Africa Report No. 260).

- <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/260-somalia-and-gulf-crisis>
13. International Crisis Group (ICG). (2021). Reforming Somalia's national intelligence service (Africa Briefing No. 174). <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b174-reforming-somalias-national-intelligence-service>
  14. Keating, M., & Waldman, M. (Eds.). (2019). War and peace in Somalia: National grievances, local conflict and Al-Shabaab. Oxford University Press.
  15. Mahmood, O. S. (2019). Somalia's political and institutional crisis: Gaps in governance and accountability. Institute for Security Studies. <https://issafrica.org/research/east-africa-report/somalias-political-and-institutional-crisis-gaps-in-governance-and-accountability>
  16. Menkhaus, K. (2006). Governance without government in Somalia: Spoilers, state building, and the politics of coping. *International Security*, 31(3), 74–106. <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2007.31.3.74>
  17. Menkhaus, K. (2014). State failure, state-building, and prospects for a “functional failed state” in Somalia. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 656(1), 154–172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716214547002>
  18. Menkhaus, K. (2018). Elite bargains and political deals project: Somalia case study. UK Stabilisation Unit. [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/ssup\\_somalia\\_case\\_study.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/ssup_somalia_case_study.pdf)
  19. Paris, R. (2010). Saving liberal peacebuilding. *Review of International Studies*, 36(2), 337–365. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510000057>
  20. Richmond, O. P. (2011). A post-liberal peace. Routledge.
  21. Sheikh, R. A. (2024). Conflict, Small Arms and Peace Building in Africa: a Case of Somalia (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).
  22. Somali Youth Development Network (SYDN). (2021). Annual report: Youth peacebuilding in Somalia. SYDN.
  23. UN Women. (2023). Mapping report on existing women peacemakers, leaders' networks and forums in Somalia. [https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/mapping\\_report\\_on\\_existing\\_women\\_peacemakers\\_leaders\\_networks\\_and\\_forums\\_in\\_somalia.pdf](https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/mapping_report_on_existing_women_peacemakers_leaders_networks_and_forums_in_somalia.pdf)
  24. United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), & UN Women. (2022). Somalia parliamentary elections: Women's participation and representation. United Nations.
  25. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2012). Somalia human development report 2012: Empowering youth for peace and development. <https://www.undp.org/arab-states/publications/somalia-human-development-report-2012-empowering-youth-peace-and-development>
  26. **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2020).** Somalia federalism report: Perceptions and realities of federalism in Somalia. UNDP Somalia. <https://www.so.undp.org>
  27. **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2021).** District-level peacebuilding initiatives in Somalia: Progress, challenges, and impact. UNDP Somalia. <https://www.so.undp.org>
  28. Williams, P. D. (2020). Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a failure, 2008–2018. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 43(3), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2020.1733984>