The History of Somalia’s CEWERU Establishment

Somalia was a signatory of the CEWARN Protocol but the long-standing civil war and the absence of a strong central government delayed the establishment of the national Conflict Early Warning Unit (CEWERU) until 2010. The USAID-funded PEACE II program, a cross-border conflict mitigation program targeting remote border areas, assisted the establishment of the CEWERU by enabling Somali civil society organisations to collaborate with their counterparts in Ethiopia and Kenya. The national CEWERUs of Kenya and Ethiopia also played instrumental roles in the establishment and operationalisation of the Somalia CEWERU.

In 2009, Djibouti offered to host the first consultative meeting on the establishment of the Somalia CEWERU. The meeting bringing together government and civil society representatives was shifted to Ethiopia at the last minute. It was held in April 2009 and was attended by 37 representatives of government institutions including the police, intelligence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and civil society. I was the Director of the Soma-
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We set up seven local peace committees: four in Gedo and three in Lower Juba regions, areas that share borders with Ethiopia and Kenya. The methodology comprised training researchers who live in the area to make assessments and identify peace actors in these areas. The CEWERUs of Ethiopia and Kenya sent experts to assist in the trainings of researchers and peace workers, who learned about the work of peace committees as well as the work of CEWARN and the national CEWERU. They conducted elections for the committee members and started the work of creating strong linkages across

lia Youth Development Network (SOYDEN), an NGO that was doubling as CEWARN’s National Research Institute (NRI) for Somalia. CEWARN subsequently appointed me to serve as the first national country coordinator for Somalia.

Once we had firm proposals on the modalities of establishment of the CEWERU, we received support from Ambassador Abduselam Hajiliben, who was the Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time. His first hand knowledge of the CEWARN protocol and Somalia’s interest in it as a signatory helped move the process forward. In collaboration with the Peace II program we proceeded to organise a meeting in the border areas so key government officials could gain appreciation of the situation in the border areas. I travelled with the Ambassador to Garissa, where we met with Community Working Groups (CWGs) and other NGOs doing peace work in Somalia.

Their presentations impressed the Ambassador, who said “all these things are happening in the border zone, yet we are not aware of them.” Ambassador Hajiliben offered us full support, leading to the launching of the Somalia CEWERU in Nairobi on June 10, 2010. We also elected the National Steering Committee, which consisted of 17 people representing the Ministries of Interior, Defence and Foreign Affairs, the intelligence service, religious leaders, elders, as and women representatives. The Steering Committee shifted to Mogadishu and continues to work with the Peace II program and peace committees from the border areas.

**Establishment of the Local Peace Committees**

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the border areas. There are now twenty-seven active peace committees mandated to operationalise the early warning—early response system, including the seven border committees established in 2011. In 2012, UNDP supported setting up another 16 district peace committees including those of Mogadishu, Beledweyn, Jowhar, Baidoa and Kismayu. The Mogadishu peace committees mainly focus on community safety and the reduction of armed violence. They are also working with other NGOs to promote job creation for the youth and rehabilitation of former militia in Mogadishu, although their primary responsibility is the early warning work.

All peace committees are linked with the CEWARN mechanism and other institutions within and outside the country in addition to actively engaging with other stakeholders like NGOs and other institutions in their areas. We had to initially lobby and advocate for them to work in partnership with the government institutions especially security institutions of government. Currently, we are happy to have well-recognised, community-owned peace institutions in these 27 localities.

All local peace committees hold regular meetings in their localities and convene annually in Mogadishu to consult with the national steering committee. This helps keep the members of the national steering committee informed about the security dynamics in the border areas and to provide response measures as necessary.

**The Function of the Peace Committees**

The peace committees work through two parallel channels. One is the peace committee structure from the grassroots up to the Somalia national CEWERU, and the other is government security institutions. But in most of these areas the government security institutions are either weak or non-existent. So at times, the peace committees end up acting as proxies on behalf of the government in dealing with peace and security and to represent the community. Based on my experience traveling across Somalia, peace has relatively increased in areas with local peace committees in comparison with the areas where there are no local peace committees, especially in areas with recurring conflicts. The Baidoa peace committee is a good example of the model in terms of effectiveness and impact. Recognition by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) provided a basis for mutual collaboration and now the peace committee is acting as the link between the community, local administration and AMISOM. The communities often use the peace committees to raise issues requiring attention and this has become common in every district.
We ensure local legitimacy of peace committees by facilitating the election of members. After identifying worthy candidates in the districts we share our findings with the local authorities. Then we invite people who are drawn from villages in the district to represent different sectors and groups. Youth and the internally displaced (IDPs), for instance, are examples of the kind of categories requiring inclusion. These representatives then proceed to conduct the committee elections. The process of committee formation can take two weeks including time for assessment and training in addition to the election.

The assessment insures members are elected from people active in peace building and who also have a good image within the community. They undergo three days of training to understand the peace committee Terms of Reference and the basics of conflict management. After the training, we cluster participants into groups. All the women gather together, the elders do the same as do the religious leaders, youth, private sector representatives, and IDPs. The process helps us to elect people that understand that they represent their sector not their village or their clan. The process allows the local authorities to recognise and engage with peace committee as a legitimate, legal entity. This reminds us of the importance of local/traditional institutions in Somalia. Even though the Somalia government collapsed in 1991, there was no vacuum of authority in the society. Somali society has internal structures that continued to function while the elders filled the gap. Most local problems are sorted out through customary law.

Somalia is primarily a pastoralist society operating under two justice systems: a formal one and a traditional one. The communities have always trusted customary law more than the formal courts. Somalis accord a lot of importance to community-based mechanisms that confer strength and legitimacy on the peace committees. For years there was no stable government in Somalia and the clan militia groups were controlling many border towns. On the other side, the Kenyan government was not willing to negotiate with the militia groups in control of areas along the border in Somalia. The peace committees in Kenya and Somalia border areas provided the bridge allowing the two countries to work together to deal with cross-border issues.

This being said, there has been some resistance from local customary leaders to the setting up of peace committees in some areas. Some of the committee members think they can replace this group since they have been through an election process while the local elders have not. This happened in Beledweyn in the central Hiraan region. And the reason it happened was that there was an elder council set up by one of the former governments. Several of the
elders thought that the peace committees would challenge the elder council on the community level.

Towards the end of 2011, two Kenyan teachers crossed the border from Mandera to Beled Hawo. Al Shabaab controlled Beled Hawo at the time; when they crossed the border on their own Al Shabaab arrested them. The next day the leading newspaper in Nairobi published the headline, ‘Al Shabaab Kidnaps two Kenyan teachers’.

As the Kenyan Defence Forces mobilised to respond to the incident, the District Commissioner of Mandera communicated with the local Peace Committee of Mandera to determine what had happened. They contacted the Beled Hawo peace committee, who reported that Al Shabaab arrested the two teachers on suspicion they may be spies. This was communicated to the Mandera peace committee and the local administration.

The District Commissioner of Mandera could not negotiate for their release as the Government of Kenya recognises Al Shabaab as a terrorist group. So the peace committee of Beled Hawo asked the Al Shabaab leader to clarify the issue. The two peace committees were then able to work together on the issue and secured the release of the two teachers.

Observations on the National CEWERU’s Role

The above-mentioned achievements are encouraging. Unfortunately, the collaboration between the CEWERU and its peace committees on the one hand and AMISOM and the Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) is very limited despite our efforts to cultivate a mutually beneficial relationship. We shared a conflict mapping and analysis report on the Central Region with the KDF commanders in Jubaland.

We are keen to engage with AMISOM to ensure sustainable peace and stability in the areas liberated from Al Shabab. There is the need to fill the vacuum with peace structures in areas liberated from Al Shabaab. Liberating areas from Al Shabaab and ensuring security will not succeed without mechanisms for sustaining lasting peace and reconciliation in these areas. This is why AMISOM and other actors’ in Somalia need to be prepared to address the roots of clan-related conflict.

The international community’s focus on political stability at the national level requires active support for the process of peace building and reconciliation at the communal level. CEWARN is well placed in terms of learning from our unique challenges and from some of the unique initiatives undertaken by the national CEWERU. For example, the national CEWERU has
developed materials for healing the trauma and breaking the cycle of violence in post-conflict situations. These Somali language materials are a very useful tool for addressing post-conflict problems and are being translated for use in other countries like South Sudan.

Somalia is a unique situation that differentiates the mandate of our CEWERU from its counterparts in Ethiopia and Kenya. AMISOM is active on the ground, while IGAD is implementing other programs through the IGAD facilitation office but unfortunately there is no coordination in the conflict zones and the parties are not exchanging information. We have submitted requests to CEWARN for budgetary support to enable us to introduce peace structures and capacitate local communities on peace building. We will need that support as up to now the Somalia government has not been able to allocate funds for CEWERU operations.

There is little continuity on the government level and the frequent reshuffles of government officials in Somalia and in the cabinet is part of the problem. Improvement of direct communication and collaboration with AMISOM is a high priority. We hope to receive CEWARN’s support in establishing this given the complementary function of early warning for AMISOM’s mission. IGAD is supporting the formation of regional states in Somalia. That is an area where we feel the need for a conflict prevention and mitigation dimension and therefore CEWARN’s close involvement is acute.

We face many practical challenges in participating in CEWARN activities, including the difficulties of traveling outside the country to attend these activities. Sometimes we feel excluded and not taken seriously because we are an inter-governmental agency based in a failed state. Yet there is arguably no other country in the IGAD region where CEWARN can potentially achieve such a significant impact as here in Somalia. This makes the country an ideal test case providing multiple opportunities for CEWARN to test its methodologies and to apply the early warning model to new and existing threats.