

PRS processes, participation and statelessness: exploring some dilemmas in Somalia

THEME SECTION

by MOHAMED SAID MOHAMUD FAROOLE

Introduction

Somalia is a collapsed state, has no central government and has 'non accrual' status with the World Bank (WB) and other international creditors (i.e. the International Monetary Fund – IMF).¹ Thus lending is not permitted. For this reason, Somalia does not qualify for a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

However, in the absence of a Somali State, the international community, including the World Bank, has been developing and implementing various poverty reduction and development strategies for Somalia. The World Bank has been collaborating with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other UN agencies in efforts to re-engage a stateless Somalia. Currently the WB is in the process of developing an Interim PRSP (I-PRSP) for Somalia. However, despite the rhetoric of Somalia's international development assistance partners, and claims of inclusive participation and the Somali people's ownership of the processes, this article argues that reality is far from these claims and reveals a

¹ Putting a country in 'non-accrual status' is a standard World Bank policy when payment on loans and credits is overdue by more than six months. When a country is in 'non-accrual status,' all new loans and disbursements of existing loans are suspended. This means that all overdue payments must be cleared before there can be any new loans or credits, or resumption of disbursements on loans and credits already approved.



degree of hypocrisy among the international development partners.

In this article, I will highlight the Somalia case by critically discussing the participatory nature of – what I call – 'internationally owned' Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) for

11 Mohamed Said Mohamud Faroole

THEME SECTION

From cover of
*Mapping Somali Civil
Society* (Novib 2003)



Somalia. I will critically analyse participation processes in Somalia's PRSs, focusing on the experiences of Somali Civil Society Organisations (SCSOs), by looking at the implementation phase based on individual field experiences. I will present empirical evidence revealing how the practice of some international agencies and fora are invariably part of a system that collectively forms **the major barrier** to SCSOs' participation in PRS processes. I will summarise the key pros and cons for SCSOs' participation in these processes; and conclude by suggesting decisive intervention by the donors (WB etc.) and departure from the current international behaviours, attitudes and practices in regard to SCSOs' participation.

Needless to say, this article is a calculated individual risk taken for the love of democracy and devotion to a rights-based approach to development. It is also an attempt to initiate, out of frustration, a positive change to Somali's present and past PRS processes and participation trends. Foremost, it is a dedication to the 'never-told daily experiences' of the unsung national heroines and heroes among the SCSOs volunteers with whom I work. While they struggle with unparalleled attempts towards reducing their 'country's man-made poverty', both internal and external elements take their toll.² Fear of international agencies' repercussions is the greatest of the many context-specific constraints denying the vulnerable SCSOs opportunities to share their rich experiences with wide international audiences. I hope this effort does not make their fears a reality and be to their detriment.

Background

In 1991, the Somalia civil war broke out and ever since the country has been in a state of anarchy and chaos – this is the current *status quo*. The government collapsed and a humanitarian tragedy of unprecedented scale unfolded. However, since October 2002, a Somali Peace and Reconciliation Conference has been taking place in Kenya. After thirteen failed attempts, the latest developments of this conference represent the best hope yet for the rebirth of the Somali nationhood.

The impact of 'state collapse' in Somalia has been massive and profound, involving a huge loss of life, massive internal displacement, migration and flight abroad, the collapse of political institutions, the destruction of social and economic

² I believe poverty in Somalia is not due to lack of, or failure of good governance. Rather, its causes can be practically described as internally maintained, partially by the Somalis' inability to get tribal power struggles off and out of their development processes, political conceptualism and general social reasoning; and partially externally perpetuated by the international communities' persistent lack of will to intervene for the sake of humanity.

infrastructures, and environmental damage. In Somalia, civil war has led to a questioning of the single country sovereignty and challenged the homogeneity of Somali society and culture. One of the most devastating outcomes is the severe 'national brain drain'. Nearly 40-60% of the urban population (approximately 15% of the total Somali population) fled the country. As a result, Somalis constitute the largest African diaspora community in many parts of Europe, North America and Australasia. This has resulted in severe human capacity shortages across all sectors throughout the nation.

On the other hand, one of the favourable political outcomes of the civil war in Somalia has been a greater role for non-governmental forms of association in political and social life. These have spread beyond the all-encompassing clan system. Throughout Somalia, CSOs provide an important platform – independent of political factions – for raising social concerns. Members of the diaspora are investing in a booming private economy sector and are the largest development and economic contributors by transferring billions of dollars to the country through overseas remittances. It seems today, like the nation itself, Somalia's CSOs are in a period of complex political, economical and social transition.

However, in Somalia's recent history, in the realms of development and poverty reduction, the lack of central government and the lack of capable local governance, have resulted in a shift of governance responsibility to donor organisations such as the European Commission (EC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and various United Nations institutions. These organisations are dominating the country's decision-making processes.

Due to a lack of capable, moderate and organised Somali Civil Society Organisations, legitimacy is given to UN agencies and INGO dominance in the implementation of the country's poverty reduction programmes. In the absence of a legal framework and proper country ownership, less concern is given to participatory processes and tools utilised. In general, SCSOs' international relationship is strongest with international NGOs (INGOs), and weakest with UN and donor agencies. In particular, relationships and understanding of donor perspectives are limited. The result is a context that enables international domination, decreased accountability, susceptibility to power abuses and misuses, and widespread lack of transparency.

Poverty reduction strategies in Somalia

Multiple, incoherent and internationally-driven poverty reduction and development strategies have existed in Somalia since its stateless period. The following are the two most recent

From cover of
*Mapping Somali Civil
Society* (Novib 2003)



THEME SECTION

and important strategies:

- European Commission Strategy: Special Aid to Somalia – SAS (2002-2007).³
- World Bank/UNDP joint strategy: Country Re-engagement Note – CRN (2003-2006).⁴

However, from my experience, SCSOs have not been consulted nor given the opportunity to be involved in macro-level participation in these poverty reduction strategies. The justification of this argument lies in my experience with the Somali Aid Coordination Body (SACB), where participation policies and frameworks for the current PRSs were set and processes were practiced as claimed by both the EC and WB-developed PRSs.

PRSs and the SACB mechanism

The Addis Ababa Declaration of 1 December 1993 led to the creation of the Somali Aid Coordination Body (SACB).⁵ Its aim was to facilitate donors to develop a common approach among themselves for the prioritisation and allocation of

³ EC member states clearly state that only the Somali people themselves have the right and also the duty to decide on the future of Somalia. They elaborate the point by stressing that donor countries should stay in the background, providing assistance only.

⁴ The World Bank recognises Somalia as at the extreme of the Low-Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS). Thus it has selected Somalia as one of four African Countries where the LICUS approach is piloted. The strategy is the articulation of a joint operational strategy by the World Bank and UNDP. The premise is that states like Somalia should not be neglected and that other forms of assistance besides PRSP may be possible (UNDP/World Bank, 2003).

⁵ The Addis Ababa Declaration of 1 December 1993 is the final document of the Fourth Coordination Meeting on Humanitarian Assistance for Somalia organised by UNOSOM (United Nations Operation in Somalia).

11 Mohamed Said Mohamud Faroole

THEME SECTION

Box 1: Paragraph 14 of the Addis Ababa Declaration

The Somali people

Participants recognised that the reconstruction and rehabilitation effort in Somalia must be founded on the basic principle of Somali ownership of the process. They agreed that ownership means not only that the Somali people are fully involved in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process, but that they must also bear responsibility for ensuring that the environment is conducive for reconstruction and development.

resources available for Somalia in the absence of a central government (SACB, 2004). The Declaration envisaged a broad participation in SACB, consisting of donors, UN agencies and programmes, and NGOs as well as multilateral and regional institutions and local organisations. In this Declaration, SACB international members recognised that poverty reduction efforts in Somalia must be founded on the basic principles of Somali ownership of the process (see Box 1). They agreed that ownership means that the Somali people are fully involved in the poverty reduction processes.

CSOs and participation in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of PRSs

In contrast to what was agreed to in the Addis Ababa Declaration, SACB membership has become an exclusive international club. Very few SCSO members have access to SACB. Some SACB Sectoral Committees even lack SCSO representation. For instance, the 2003 membership list of the Somali Health Sector Committee of SACB (SHSC) comprised 22 international agencies with no Somali agency representation at all (see www.sacb.info).

Key challenges to CSOs participation

A lack of will, acceptability, support and transparency on the part of the international community.

For instance, I account below an experience that I had with the SACB mechanism based in Nairobi, Kenya (see Box 2). SACB should be 'the participation forum for Somalia' where all the consultation and participation processes for PRSs and processes of Somalia should occur.

Lack of CSOs' capacity

A severe lack of institutional capacity and resources (i.e., organisational, human, financial, and technical resources and networking capacity) impedes CSOs from competitively carrying out implementation, monitoring and evaluation activities

Box 2: Lack of international will, support and transparency: the case of SACB HSC

In March 2004, nearly two months after my organisation's (Kaalo) application for membership of the Somali Health Sector Committee (SHSC) of SACB, I travelled to Nairobi, Kenya, to attend a members' meeting to approve a national Global Fund proposal after an invitation from SHSC as a member.

When I attempted to cast my vote among a dozen of the member agencies, where I was the only non-foreign agency representative, I was denied the vote. I was told that there was no record of my organisation's membership.

I showed the invitation letter as evidence that I was a registered and an invited member of SHSC. Eventually I was allowed to vote as a member, being the 11th member of SHSC in attendance at that meeting.

The next day, I sent SHSC a copy my organisation's original application to consolidate my membership. However, instead of a confirmation, I received a letter from the SACB secretariat advising me that I was not a member in SHSC despite my organisation's application. It stated 'before you qualify for full membership status with voting rights you need to come to the Sectoral Committee's meetings consistently for a period of six months as an observer.'

Albeit, voting in the last meeting should have sealed my membership registration; the above secretariat advice was also contrary of SACB policies and procedures delineated in the handbook. I realised I was permitted to vote in the meeting just to satisfy the quorum requirements (50 percent +1) of the 22-members SHSC voting system. The meeting needed 11 members for legal vote casting, I was representing the 11th organisation and thus legitimised the vote that day for SHSC!

This action of SACB seemed to be a deliberate act of exclusion. My organisation incurred significant costs to attend this meeting, but had no means of protesting, lacking the framework, resources and confidence to contend SACB's decision.

(such as writing proposals, demystifying budgets). A lack of resource capacity commonly constrains the sustainable engagement of national NGOs in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of PRSs.

The presence of internal clan-based conflicts of interest and political hegemonies

The following is just a one-off recent example that shows how internal regional and political hegemonies hinder equitable participation and further complicate the accountability and transparency of the current PRS participation processes – denying the equitable and inclusive participation of SCSOs nationwide (see Box 3).

Box 3: Internal clan-based hegemonies: the Case of Diakonia Sweden⁶

Since the late 1990s, when Diakonia started to recruit national Country Directors, the first for an INGO in Somalia, its programmes have become distanced from the organisation's humanitarian principles and from locals, to some extent, by a lack of transparency, neutrality and inclusiveness.

Clan-based organisational staffing processes as well as projects' approval and participation in implementation, monitoring and evaluation are based on regional preferences favouring the community and the sub-clan of the Country Director's region of origin and have become institutionalised within the Diakonia Country Office in Garowe, Puntland.

In 2003, a comprehensive participatory review and planning for a long-term institutional development initiative for Puntland Community College (PCC)⁷ was conducted by the United States International University (USIU).⁸ This was carried out with the financial assistance of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (as part of a capacity-building programme for national institutes, and in support of a UNDP/WB CRN initiative).

The programme utilised best practice participatory processes to open up spaces for Puntland community's participation in the higher education sector. The USIU consultancy report proposed that PCC was viable to be promoted to university status, by virtue of its comparative advantages, becoming the Puntland State University (PSU) in the process.

The report that I was involved in also recommended that PCC should have its curriculum expanded and imparted with new community priority skills and capacity development courses, including Livestock and Health Sciences courses that the Bank/UNDP wanted to support financially through a joint strategy – CRN (03-06).

The Diakonia Country Director, along with senior national programme officers, rejected the study findings, proposals and recommendations to the sheer disbelief of all the stakeholders. This I consider to have been due to an unveiled regional and clan-based interest that they shared. They illegitimately refused that PCC be promoted to university level and removed the Livestock and Health Sciences courses from the new revised curriculum.

The Director and Senior National Officers of Diakonia all have clan origins and relatives from another region – Mudug in Galkacio. The Galkacio group that planned to establish the PSU was motivated by the release of WB/UNDP's strategy in mid-2003. It was encouraged by its own advantage over PCC (i.e., powerful connections with Diakonia – PCC's funding partner; and the government). Instead of Garowe, in Nugal region (where PCC is located), they wanted, antagonistically, PSU to be established in Galkacio and the new courses to be saved for it. This had the potential advantage of securing the financial support of the WB's CRN for the Livestock and Health Science Courses in Galkacio PSU. Galkacio is yet to have a tertiary institute and conducive political and developmental environment that could fairly compete with Garowe PCC. However, Diakonia national officers convinced their Diakonia colleagues that PCC had no capacity to run as a University and provide these courses. There was a 'conspiracy' to transfer the opportunity to a 'would be' future university in Galkacio. Despite being aware of this, PCC management succumbed to the direct financial threats from these national officers in the name of Diakonia and had to short-change the institutional survival interest instead of protesting against Diakonia officially.

The new PSU foundations were laid by the President of Puntland State in Galkacio in July 2004, at the expense of a truly successful five-year old institute in Garowe (PCC).

Lack of participation framework and strategies

To sum up, PRSs in Somalia have no functional framework and are all internationally-driven. They are developed outside the country, primarily by non-Somalis, written in a foreign language (English) and are characterised by a lack of participatory planning and appropriate information strategies. A lack of information dissemination strategies denies the availability of these strategies to CSOs, let alone the poor.

Key opportunities

Despite the experiences described above, it is important to note that not all interactions with international partners are negative. The SCSOs' experiences with other programmes and organisations (i.e., CARE Somalia, and NOVIB-Somalia) have, to some extent, promising empowerment potential for SCSOs' participation in PRSs. UNDP's current focus on civic participation within their governance programme (2004–06), along with its joint country re-engagement initiative with the WB also entail unprecedented opportunities for change and for establishing a participation framework and space for re-instating country ownership of the processes. However, the biggest opportunity would be a new central government with wider international support.

The lack of central government is perceived, ironically, as an opportunity that potentially increases participation. It gives CSOs a strategic position to bridge the gap and serve the

⁶ Diakonia Sweden is one of the most important INGOs contributing to the poverty reduction and development efforts in Puntland State of Somalia over the past ten years. It is engaged mainly in the education and governance sectors. Its major donor is Sida.

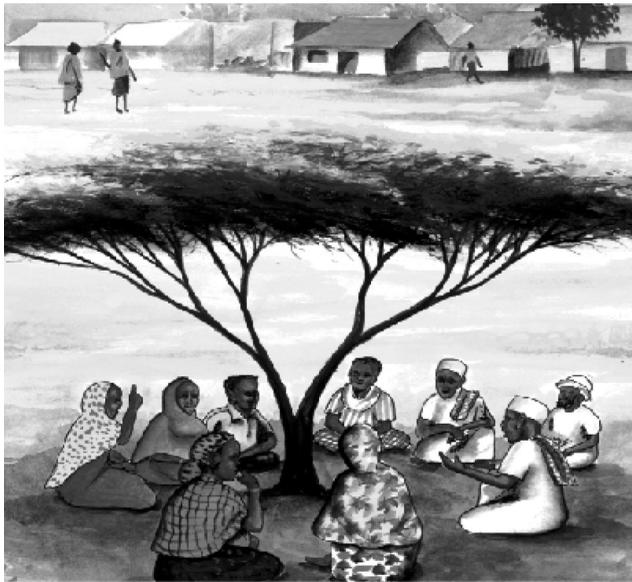
⁷ A successful institute founded and managed by KAALO NGO in Garowe, Puntland with funding support from Diakonia/Sida.

⁸ The USIU study utilised an exhaustive participatory approach and methodologies that engaged the government, civil society, PCC management, staff, students plus the international partners – a holistic participatory approach that reached all the stakeholders.

11 Mohamed Said Mohamud Faroole

THEME SECTION

From cover of *Mapping Somali Civil Society* (Novib 2003)



poor, reducing institutional cumbersomeness and bureaucracy, as well as all the negatives associated with a typical sub-Saharan African country. The absence of central government has also led to increased decentralisation throughout the country. This has the potential to facilitate increased participation for all the stakeholders.

Widely available Internet access and mobile satellite telecommunications must be seen as a technological opportunity that should be capitalised on. A powerful private sector along with historically and culturally important SCS that are experiencing huge modernisation with the back up of the wealth and talent of the diaspora must be seen as a potential for the institutionalisation of wider participation in PRS processes.

Conclusion

When you are a Somali and have long witnessed the international aid community bringing medicines to cure chilblains, and electrically-heated blankets, along with slimming soups and diet drinks to your starving community – it is not hard to see the lack of international partners' will to provide spaces for people's participation in an 'internationally-owned' PRS in Somalia.

My experience in SHSC, in particular, shows that SACB is a system depriving Somali ownership of the processes, and is working towards the deinstitutionalisation of participatory processes in stark contrast to its founding principles – a practice gravely consistent with the earlier international humanitarian experiences in Somalia. The case of PCC/PSU experience with Diakonia national staff is an example of INGOs failing to ensure equity, neutrality and transparency, and, with ignorance, failing to avoid being manipulated by a group of people against the interest of the majority and inclusive participation. It is a common example of INGOs directly becoming fuel for the clan-based Somali crisis – the root cause of this nation's misery.

However, the WB's country re-engagement initiative should be a welcome development along with the progress of the Nairobi Peace Conference. It is therefore crucial for the WB to realise that the biggest hurdle is the failure of the SACB to ensure wider consultation and participation for Somalis. The existing SACB is a misnomer. It is not designed for the interest of SCSO participation. It needs urgent departure from its current 'so-called' participatory processes practices or nationalisation. In short, Somalia provides a unique international case study, demanding re-thinking, on the issues of PRS processes, participation, country ownership and the role of the international community.

CONTACT DETAILS

Mohamed Said Mohamud Faroole
HIV/AIDS Programme Officer &
Head of Health Department
KAALO Relief & Development NGO
PO Box 4355-00200
Nairobi, Kenya.
HQ: Garowe, Capital of Puntland State,
Somalia.
Email: ms.faroole@kaalo.org
Website: www.kaalo.org

REFERENCES

European Commission (2002). European Commission Strategy for the Implementation of Special Aid to Somalia 2002-2007. February 2002, Nairobi, Kenya (pp. 18).
www.delken.cec.eu.int/en/publications/Somalia_country_strategy.pdf
Novib (2003). *Mapping Somali Civil Society*.
www.somali-civilsociety.org/downloads/MappingReport.pdf
SACB Handbook (2004), SACB, Nairobi, Kenya. www.sacb.info/SACB%20Handbook/SACB%20Handbook%202004.pdf

UNDP Somalia/World Bank (2003) UNDP/World Bank Joint Strategy (2003-2006): Country Re-engagement Note (CRN), April 2003. www.so.undp.org/LICUS%20Country%20Reengagement%20Note