

# Community dialogue in Somalia

Lessons learned from implementing  
peacebuilding dialogues in Mogadishu

**November 2017**



## About CISP

The International Committee for the Development of Peoples (Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli, CISP) is a non-governmental organisation established in Rome in 1983 to engage against the impact of poverty and denied rights worldwide. The organisation's core objectives include: eradicating poverty; creating the conditions necessary for development; building paths for reconstruction; and providing support in emergency situations. CISP has been active in over 30 countries worldwide: in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Its Head Office is located in Rome, with regional offices throughout Italy and its countries of operation. For more information please visit: [www.cisp-ngo.org](http://www.cisp-ngo.org)

## About International Alert

International Alert works with people directly affected by conflict to build lasting peace. Together, we believe peace is within our power. We focus on solving the root causes of conflict, bringing together people from across divides. From the grassroots to policy level, we come together to build everyday peace. For more information, please visit: [www.international-alert.org](http://www.international-alert.org)

## Acknowledgements

*This background paper was developed by the International Alert/CISP Dialogue Working Group through a process of action learning. The Dialogue Working Group members are: Adan Sharrif, Abdisalam Ibrahim, Moses Juma, Ali Abdi, Salah Kheir Abdille, Salad Ghedi Ali, Ali Mohamed Hussein, Khadija Abdullahi Jimaale and Zeinab Hussein.*

*It was written by Vesna Matovic with support from Ndeye Sow and George Grayson – and translated into Somali by Fatuma Aden Ahmed and Salman Said Mohamed.*

*The project was funded by the UK Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF).*

Cover photo: Mike Goldwater / Alamy Stock Photo

Illustrations: Nick Purser

Layout: D.R. ink

# 1. Introduction

In 2014, International Alert, in partnership with the International Committee for the Development of Peoples (Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli, CISP), started a Community Dialogue Initiative in two districts of Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. The community dialogue was designed to provide communities with the opportunity to freely raise issues of concern without directing the content of their conversation. The initiative is part of a wider project combining service delivery and protection with specific initiatives focusing on the social norms around sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Dialogue was chosen as an approach to allow communities to explore issues together and, if proven useful, to use the approach to address the issues raised. The main assumption was that a transformative dialogue approach could empower different actors from communities to participate in decision making. In this way, dialogue functions as a forum and a process for communities that can be used not only for existing issues related to project themes, but also for any underlying tensions within or affecting the community.

Using an action learning methodology, staff and facilitators worked with the objective of incorporating the lessons learnt into practice and of supporting the sustainability of community dialogue in Mogadishu. This guide is a result of the collective learning gained from the Community Dialogue Initiative. The guide is structured according to two objectives: to outline the lessons learnt from the project in Somalia; and to provide a practical guide to designing and implementing similar initiatives. It is intended to serve as a reference resource for current and future participants in community dialogue. Part 1 of the guide outlines the current context in Somalia and background to the project. Part 2 of the guide details the theoretical concepts that have underpinned the project methodology. Part 3 expands on this to outline the approaches and structures that have informed the methodology. Part 4 highlights some of the main challenges faced by International Alert and the team in implementing this initiative, while Part 5 outlines what impact the pilot has had. Finally, a 'how-to' guide is provided as a resource for those who have participated in the project and for new stakeholders wishing to use this methodology in their projects.

## 2. Context

While the conflict in Somalia was precipitated by the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, a number of drivers and dividing issues have resulted in a protracted conflict that continues to the present day. These issues include inter- and intra-clan tensions, failures of governance, poor economic performance, disputes over natural resources, ongoing militarisation, and conflicts between different regions and groups. The recent elections, peaceful handover of authority and ongoing process to establish a series of federal member states within Somalia represent a positive trajectory in terms of political reconciliation and state-building. However, the protracted nature of the Somali crisis has deepened divisions and there are still high levels of mistrust and entrenched grievance.

Historically, Somali society is both traditional and patriarchal, with fewer rights, privileges, opportunities and protection for women compared with men. Within the clan structure, decision making is generally reserved exclusively for men, as they are the ones chosen as leaders and legitimate clan spokespersons. Women are often excluded from clan-based decision making, and because governance is still largely structured around the clan system, this means that women have been excluded from appointments at senior level in government. Furthermore, these social norms can promote SGBV, such as early forced marriage or female genital mutilation (FGM).

Security in Mogadishu improved following withdrawal of al Shabaab in 2011, although the city still faces regular attacks, including improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and targeted assassinations. At the community level, there are many security concerns and people are often afraid to talk about the issues affecting them. Furthermore, the protracted conflict resulted in a complex picture for internally displaced persons (IDPs), who are fleeing conflict and natural disasters. IDPs live in both camps and host communities in urban areas. In Mogadishu, they form a significant proportion of the population. There are around 30,000 IDPs in Mogadishu, with the largest groups coming from Lower Shabelle, Bay and Middle Shabelle.<sup>1</sup> Considerable tensions exist between host and IDP communities.

### 2.1 Dialogue and mediation

Over the course of the conflict, there have been numerous dialogue and mediation initiatives in Somalia. At the national or political level, mediation efforts between different warring factions were often held outside the country, led by international or regional third parties. Many of these macro-level interventions failed due to multiple factors – such as a partial or complete lack of understanding of the Somali context and of the critical need for these peace processes to be Somali owned. Mediation teams had limited capacity and neutrality and there was often a lack of confidence and trust from the Somali community, particularly in terms of the venues chosen for mediation. These are important lessons to consider.

At the local level, efforts were made to reconcile communities in conflict through the traditional mechanisms, including the customary Xeer system.<sup>2</sup> These efforts were promoted by local religious leaders and elders as well as local authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However, international organisations brought their own methodologies and approaches to promoting dialogue at the community level, often with the specific focus on raising awareness and sharing information. Many of these initiatives specifically addressed gender-based violence (GBV) and social norms.

---

1 Joint IDP Profiling Service et al, Internal displacement profiling in Mogadishu, April 2016, [http://www.jips.org/system/cms/attachments/1120/original\\_Mogadishu\\_Profiling\\_Report\\_2016.pdf](http://www.jips.org/system/cms/attachments/1120/original_Mogadishu_Profiling_Report_2016.pdf)

2 Xeer is a customary dispute resolution system used in Somalia between clans and sub-clans. Under this system, elders known as the xeer begti serve as mediators/judges and help to settle cases, taking precedent and custom into account.

---

Despite good intentions, many prevention efforts focused on awareness raising without supporting community members through the stages of behaviour change. While some organisations recognised the problems of limiting programming to awareness raising, they did not necessarily have the time, resources or technical capacity to devote to developing strategies that support communities through the phases of changing social norms.

To date in Somalia, many civil society organisations have been supported to increase awareness raising and carry out community discussions or share information on issues related to women's empowerment, SGBV and FGM, with commendable success in reaching large numbers. In the absence of a structured approach, they face the risk of burnout or backlash in a context where awareness of SGBV has for a long time taken a top-down approach. SGBV issues risk being perceived as little more than an NGO agenda.

## 3. Concepts and approaches

Over the past three years, International Alert has worked in Mogadishu, in partnership with in partnership with CISP, to develop a programme of peacebuilding dialogue among the conflict-affected groups in two districts.

The main aim of the Community Dialogue Initiative was to provide a safe space for communities to come together and talk about issues of concern. The dialogue approach sought to enable these community members to increase mutual understanding and to improve relationships between them, empowering communities to address their issues in constructive and creative ways. The dialogue approach that was used did not seek to solve specific problems, but rather to enable communities to talk openly about any issue or problem they had. It aimed to increase their understanding of those issues and to look at them from a different perspective, or to include more perspectives in considering how those issues affect different groups in the community.

### 3.1 Gender and peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is a dynamic process of engagement and relationship-building between different people or groups within communities or societies. It aims to create peaceful coexistence and understanding between different parties or between individual members of a community. This is often a long-term, bottom-up process that focuses on positively affecting relationships.

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities ascribed by society to men and women, and it is influenced by culture, religion, social and economic factors as well as custom and ethnicity bias. It is important to understand the different experiences of the conflict and its impact on men and women, and boys and girls, including the impact on gender roles during and after conflict.

### 3.2 Dialogue

Dialogue is a concept that is often easier to describe by outlining what it is not rather than what it is. This demonstrates the range of approaches to dialogue and the different purposes for which it can be used. What is easier to agree is that dialogue is different to debate or discussion as it does not seek to win an argument or convince others to accept an opinion on certain issues. Dialogue is not the same as negotiation, although negotiation can start as dialogue for the purposes of preparing the different parties. Dialogue is not the same as capacity building, although it involves learning about oneself, others and how to communicate better. It is not the same as psychotherapy, although it can be part of the broader project that seeks to address psychological wounds or trauma and help people to grow. Dialogue should not be a one-off event, although it can take the shape of a single seminar or meeting with the specific focus of bringing conflict groups together to understand each other's perspectives. These various approaches bear similarities with dialogue and consequently there are multiple approaches to dialogue.

In peacebuilding practice, dialogue refers to “deliberate, arranged conversations across conflict lines with a focus on building bridges between the different parties, by providing safe spaces for direct communication between people from opposing sides”. This process leads to increased understanding, development of relationships and

fostering of local ownership. Dialogue brings together and facilitates communication among people and groups in order to build trust and pro-social interactions. It is a form of communication between people who hold significantly different views on a subject, with the purpose of learning more about the perspectives and 'truth' of the other. Stakeholders involved in a dialogue usually come from different backgrounds (ethnic, religious, gender, age, etc.) and tend to have different assumptions, opinions, perspectives and belief systems, with implications for the conflict at hand.

Dialogue is based on the premise that by bringing together diverse stakeholders to discuss relevant issues, the space is created for stakeholders (citizens) to participate in joint analysis, exploring possible solutions and decisions on issues that affect them. Successful dialogue and inclusive participation can result in the peaceful resolution of conflicts. However, dialogue does not always have, or need to have, the aim of resolving a specific conflict. The aim of dialogue in most cases is to empower communities to use their own capacities to deal with issues – for instance, through trust building, relationship building and increased understanding. Whatever variation of dialogue, the aim is to generate a shared vision that is lasting and that serves as a foundation for change.

International Alert's approach to dialogue in this project is known as 'transformative dialogue'. The main goal of transformative dialogue is to "change the nature of conflict interaction in the selected communities, affecting how individuals understand and react to the situations they find themselves in, and allowing groups to deal with their differences in non-violent ways". The transformative approach to dialogue does not seek resolution of the immediate problem, but rather seeks the empowerment and mutual recognition of the parties involved. Empowerment, according to Bush and Folger,<sup>3</sup> means enabling the parties to define their own issues and to seek solutions on their own. Recognition means enabling the parties to see and understand the other person's point of view, to understand how they define the problem and why they seek the solution they do. (Seeing and understanding, it should be noted, do not constitute agreement with those views.) Often, empowerment and recognition pave the way for a mutually agreeable settlement, but that is only a secondary effect. The primary goal of transformative dialogue is to foster the parties' empowerment and recognition, thereby enabling them to approach their current problem, as well as later problems, with a stronger but more open view. This approach, according to Bush and Folger, avoids the problem of facilitator directiveness, which so often occurs in problem-solving approaches, whereby responsibility for all outcomes is squarely placed on the participants.

## Transformative dialogue

- Builds on a relational understanding of conflict and on the principles and practices of conflict transformation.
- Allows community members to define the desired outcome of dialogue, or if an outcome is externally imposed, to determine how best to move towards that outcome.
- Leaves decisions about content and structure of the dialogue process to local communities.
- Works through existing institutions and social networks, acknowledging the important role they play in connecting people and increasing the possibility for change in conflict interactions to occur at the community level as well as at the individual level.

**Figure 1: Activities involved in transformative dialogue**



## 4. Project methodology

This section sets out the methodology used by the International Alert and CISP team in Mogadishu.

### 4.1 Basic premises of the approach

The Community Dialogue Initiative was based on the following premises.

- The goal of the dialogue is to support communities to engage in, participate in and contribute to community issues of concern. More specifically, it seeks to:
  - support open and safe interaction between community members;
  - engage different groups from communities to participate in shared analysis; and
  - encourage joint exploration of the different options and possible solutions, ideas and initiatives that the community can take forward.
- In piloting the dialogue, the team sought to explore the possibilities, motivation and commitment of communities to use dialogue as a platform for coming together and dealing with community issues.
- The dialogue approach is conflict and gender sensitive and has peacebuilding as its overall aim.
- The dialogue takes place within the communities, responds to their needs, and provides an open and safe space for communities to have a conversation on any issues of their choice.
- Dialogue is facilitated by a team of facilitators from the community.
  - Facilitators support and encourage open conversation and facilitate the process; however, they do not influence the content of the discussion. Topics for discussion or the list of problems to be resolved are not decided beforehand.
  - Facilitators are trained in conflict, gender and peacebuilding (conflict and gender analysis, and dialogue specifically) and in dialogue facilitation skills.
  - Facilitators help communities in dialogue to raise issues freely, to analyse them and to include different perspectives on issues of their choice.
- Dialogue is a process that needs time, resources and the commitment of all involved.
  - Good preparation is important – establishing relationships with communities and local authorities, assessing the security situation, being prepared for changes, and being flexible and responsive are crucial.
  - Clarity of goals, objectives and roles is essential, and transparency is important as is managing expectations of community members.
  - An integral part of conflict and gender analysis is understanding the context of districts, power structures, gender power dynamics, lines of influences, and cultural and social norms.
  - Dialogue often takes place among highly insecure, divided and stressed communities, where there is significant international NGO presence and where learned behaviour from communities can be expected. It is crucial to plan for risk mitigation early on and to monitor and adapt this process.

## 4.2 Dialogue structure

### Community dialogue groups

Dialogue groups were established in two districts of Mogadishu (four in one district and two in the other). Each group had approximately 12 members from the community. Dialogue participants were selected to represent different groups within communities that were identified in the conflict analysis stage. These groups included women, youth, elders, community leaders, IDP camp wardens, religious leaders, service providers (such as those working in health and education) and local authorities.

The main criteria for selecting participants were based on their motivation and commitment as well as their interest in exploring community issues. Identity, social and cultural belonging, gender and age were considered when selecting the participants and forming the groups. Four of the groups were mixed, comprising both men and women, while the other two groups consisted of all women and all men respectively.

Initially, each group had eight dialogue sessions, which took place from early August to the end of November 2016, on average every second week. Each session lasted for two hours. An additional four sessions were added in early 2017.



### Community dialogue facilitators

A total of 12 dialogue facilitators (six men and six women) were recruited from communities in the two districts. They each worked in pairs with one of the dialogue groups. The facilitators received five-day training on the concepts and tools of conflict, gender, peacebuilding and dialogue, followed by practical exercises and examples.<sup>4</sup> The facilitator training had four main goals, namely to:

- familiarise facilitators with the dialogue project, its goals and processes, and to get their opinions on how to implement it and how to approach community members and local authorities;
- enable facilitators to understand the main peacebuilding concepts, such as conflict, gender, peace and dialogue;

<sup>4</sup> They also received refresher training and continuous mentoring and support throughout the dialogue process.

- equip them with the skills needed to analyse conflict and gender, using different models and tools; and
- enable facilitators to understand dialogue as an approach and as a process, and to have the skills to facilitate dialogue.

The training aimed to support the facilitators to understand conflict issues in their communities, through the lens of gender and conflict sensitivity, and to foster a vision for peace. The underlying assumption was that they could better facilitate the dialogue if they had a broader understanding of the interplay between conflict and gender.

## Trainers/Supervisors

The project had three trainers or supervisors, whose role was to train community facilitators and to support, mentor and supervise them throughout the dialogue process. The trainers/supervisors developed and delivered the training and follow-up training together for the group of community facilitators. Each trainer/supervisor then followed the progress of two of the dialogue groups and supported their community facilitators.

## Monitors

Monitors were part of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) team, who developed the M&E plan and protocol for the project. Monitors observed the dialogue process and collected data from the sessions based on specific indicators, types of behaviours and ways to track these changes.

## Dialogue Working Group (DWG)

The supervisors and monitors (along with other key project staff) formed a working group that played a key role in developing the project and the dialogue process, training the facilitators and liaising with the local authorities. The group was supported by a team of conflict and gender advisors, who supported capacity building of the DWG, organised a series of trainings on conflict and gender sensitivity, dialogue and skills for facilitation, as well as training for trainers. This enabled the DWG to develop training for community facilitators from their understanding of the context and to support them in dialogue facilitation. The DWG also collected feedback from facilitators and the community members who participated in dialogue, and provided their own reflections and learning. This dialogue guide is a result of the DWG's efforts to capture this learning and to share it with communities so they can use, improve and benefit from it.



## 5. Challenges

The following section outlines the main challenges faced by the project during its design and implementation.

### 5.1 Main challenges

#### Changing the rules of the game

There is a large presence of international aid agencies in Mogadishu providing services and humanitarian aid and managing development projects. The majority of these agencies are not working on peacebuilding issues directly, at least not as their main priority. The current way in which aid and development are delivered creates a set of rules, to which communities adapt and respond. It can look like a well-practised game – communities learn how to behave, what to expect from aid agencies, how to ‘participate’ and how to answer the questions when asked.

Establishing an approach that is different from the existing ways of working was a big challenge, requiring considerable learning for the group from the beginning, as well as considerable ‘unlearning’. One of the biggest challenges was putting into practice our own peacebuilding approach, and allowing communities to own the process and to make their own decisions.

In the projects being implemented in the same districts, communities had clear instructions on what they needed to change and how. They were offered schedules and curriculum to follow by development actors. The expectation was that the information and knowledge would come from outside and that communities were on the receiving end. The same expectations were held by project staff, who were accustomed to being on the ‘delivery side’, where they were given manuals, instructions and tasks. They needed to follow the prescribed process and topics with communities.

In this instance, the goal of the project team was to work together and jointly develop a process, without ‘knowing in advance’ what issues the communities wanted to talk about. We went through the process, whereby the dialogue working group developed all the phases of the project together, from providing the training for dialogue facilitators to supervising and monitoring the dialogue process itself. This guide is a result of what we learned from the process.

#### Expecting quick solutions

People expected to obtain quick solutions to their problems and issues. Our understanding was that this expectation was shared among dialogue working group members and among the dialogue facilitators, and that this is why it became a norm. Community members would share their different issues in each dialogue session and then decide which one to focus on during the session. For the particular issue raised, they would generate options and possible solutions. There was a general expectation that they should be able to solve at least one problem in each dialogue session. As this was not happening, we enabled the participants to move from a problem-solving approach to a more transformative approach. We emphasised the importance of building the group – for example, building relationships, trust, giving people the freedom to express themselves, exploring issues together, respecting each other, appreciating each other’s opinions.

This took some time (in some cases around half of the overall process), but eventually the sessions started to look more like 'dialogue' and less like problem-solving workshops. Instead of finding solutions to problems, groups started to develop joint initiatives and a plan to address their issues. They also started to bring their 'insights' and 'learning' into their family life and other forums. Groups began to appreciate the opportunity to explore issues together and emphasised many times how they could now do this differently because they had developed trust. Some members could speak openly for the first time. Having their opinions listened to and appreciated became a moment of recognition, and gave strength to the dialogue members.

However, the high expectations continued after the dialogue process ended, with participants asking how Alert and CISP could help them in other ways, such as providing employment opportunities.

## **Expecting incentives for participation**

Communities expected incentives for their participation in the dialogue sessions, mainly in the form of money. We realised that they had 'learned' to expect it, as many projects operating in the area were using incentives for communities to participate in activities. Instead, we provided light refreshments for community members as a symbolic appreciation of their participation, but also to show understanding of cultural norms relating to hosting meetings.

Facilitators, on the other hand, received a small payment at the end of each month. They had other expectations relating to travel within Mogadishu (which can be costly and time-consuming as well as insecure). Reimbursement of travel costs was offered to facilitators who were living further away. Some participants also complained of the transport restrictions affecting their participation.

Some community members were disappointed by the arrangements regarding incentives and did not want to participate in the dialogue. After a few initial rearrangements and clarification regarding project objectives, those who were motivated stayed.

## **Addressing procurement challenges**

High expectations of the participants also impacted on the project's procurement processes. The project staff followed an agreed procurement policy for all the elements of the project. However, a problem occurred while deciding on the contract for refreshments provision for the dialogue sessions. In a different project taking place in the same district, a group of women had provided the refreshments for the community meetings. There was an expectation that the same group would receive the contract again. When this did not happen, they complained to the local authority, who denied participants access to the dialogue sessions. The dialogue sessions were put on hold while the project staff negotiated with the authorities. The women's group were advised to comply with procurement procedures and assured that their application would be considered the next time. The local authority then allowed the dialogue to continue.

This challenge was not only about the procurement process, but also showed how some decision makers were using the process to exercise control within the districts. It was not easy to navigate through all these issues, and sometimes easier to give up. However, given the communities' motivation to continue with the dialogue, it was decided to accept some of the challenges faced and to try to minimise their negative impacts.

## Working with local authorities

Local authorities, in the case of this project, proved to be quite challenging. It was clear that they were a crucial group to have on board, as they are part of the community and all stakeholders are important. They played a positive role in the dialogue as they supported it, provided the venue, gave advice and shared security information. However, they also tended to get over-involved in trying to influence the selection process, especially in the recruitment of facilitators, and in denying access to the dialogue for some participants. This was a challenging part, and we tried to minimise the control of the local authorities and to develop a relationship where they could be supportive but not controlling. In most cases, we came close to realising that objective. In one case, we decided to 'take some power' from the authorities, by choosing another venue that was not 'owned' by or closely connected to the local authorities. Issues of security played an important part, as in some cases such issues can be used to exercise power or control (for example, denying access to the venue because of security concerns). Different relationships and different issues with local authorities existed in different districts. In one district, the relationship was easy and positive, largely due to an already good working relationship. In another district, it was different. For instance, the local authorities insisted on holding the dialogue sessions at the district headquarters office. People were concerned about being associated with the local authorities, that they would be labelled as government people and that it would put them in danger of the Al Shabaab and other armed opposition groups. Several people dropped out of the dialogue group due to the perceived link with government and the security risk. As people started to give up on the dialogue, it was agreed that the venue needed to be changed so that it was safe and neutral and decided on by the dialogue group themselves.

## Acknowledging security concerns

Security remains a serious concern in Mogadishu and was a big concern for all involved in the project. It had an impact on how the project was designed, as the safety and access of community members involved needed to be ensured, including in obtaining permits from the local authorities. Security was also used to try to exercise control – for example, by denying community members access to dialogue on the basis that they were a security risk. Another example is when community members refused to go to the agreed venue as they were afraid of the security risk. Based on security information, the activities had to be adapted or cancelled, or the location changed, and the whole project needed to be responsive and adaptable to the security context.

## Monitoring the dialogue

Those tasked with monitoring the dialogue process had a difficult job. Although an M&E group was established and trained together with other members of the DWG, other staff were sent to monitor the sessions.<sup>5</sup> This meant that the actual monitors did not have any training to enable them to understand the dialogue project or how to monitor progress.

Since the overall objectives of the dialogue approach were not focused on problem-solving, this also created issues as monitors used the solving of specific problems as a benchmark of success (or counting the number of topics covered) – rather than the quality of the interaction, which was the goal. It took some time, and considerable effort, to reach a shared understanding of what a 'measure' of successful dialogue was. From that point, the focus was more on the interactions within the dialogue groups, the atmosphere, the expression of opinion, the general dynamics (including power dynamics), the quality of the discussion, the depth of exploration of the topic and the participation of all members. From that point, we observed that people started to open up on topics that were quite hard to discuss and that were uncomfortable for some members; they became more emotional and stronger reactions started to surface.

---

<sup>5</sup> Reasons being that they were based close to communities and because of the security risks for others to travel.

## 5.2 Challenges relating to conflict and gender dynamics

### Clan dynamics

In our initial context analysis, it was emphasised that understanding the clan structure and its power dynamics would be highly important. For example, it is important to understand the different clan dynamics within a district – whether they are majority or minority clans and how that influences social, economic and political life. This would affect the recruitment of facilitators and selection of participants.

Here are some of the issues we faced.

- There was a pressure from the local authorities to recruit dialogue facilitators from majority clans, and not to include minority clan members – or to recruit from their own clans, proxies and friends.
- A majority clan had the perception that they were not controlling the process or that they were losing the decision-making power. In response, they indicated that they might block the dialogue project.
- There was a risk that the project could support and strengthen the existing power structures and thus contribute to the marginalisation of minor clans in the communities.
- A higher level of insecurity for the minority clans (in the south of Mogadishu) could make it more difficult for them to attend the dialogue, and thus exclude them from the process.

### Gender

The aim of the wider project was to contribute to improving the response to and prevention of SGBV against women and girls through a multifaceted approach. This approach included capacity building, support to service provision, awareness activities, research and advocacy.

The design of the dialogue project was partly informed by the findings of research focused on understanding the links between the conflict in Somalia and social norms related to SGBV, carried out by the programme in 2015. The research showed that SGBV in Somalia was deeply rooted in unequal gender relations, discriminatory and harmful gender social norms, as well as social exclusion. Almost all study participants indicated that SGBV is equally 'normalised' by host and IDP communities (majority and minority groups). This is partly due to the fact that SGBV has been a common occurrence with essentially no opportunity for redress over decades of civil war in Somalia. Over time, this has meant that host and non-host households have adopted certain behavioural and social norms towards SGBV. Moreover, minority groups have remained silent in order to avoid social exclusion. The practice of normalising SGBV has also resulted from a complete lack of or limited communication and dialogue among Somali communities at the household, societal and national level – not only on SGBV and harmful social norms, but also in relation to peace, reconciliation and anti-violence after the civil war.

One of the immediate challenges was to mainstream gender analysis into the initial conflict analysis to develop a conflict and gender-sensitive project. Another challenge was understanding the interaction between conflict and gender, and the implications of that interaction for the intervention. There was a general sense that women would not be allowed to participate in dialogue together with men. The DWG considered the option of forming same-sex groups, at least in the preparation phase. The other option was to consult with the communities and to ask them for their suggestions. They chose to have mixed groups, although we still had an all-female and all-male group for comparison reasons. In general, there was less resistance, more openness and greater readiness to change and challenge gender norms than we expected. We learned that when communities are making their own decisions, they will take more responsibilities to include different community groups, and will go further in challenging existing social and cultural norms. This was a big motivational factor.

Age was another factor that played a big role culturally. Young people (across all other identities) were less confident and were not encouraged to express their opinion. During the dialogue, they gained confidence and used this space to influence decisions and contribute to discussions. To quote one of the community members: "It was like planting a seed; young women who started to speak out will change their family and those close to them."

## Potential risks

The DWG also identified a number of risks associated with the dialogue process, particularly in relation to its sustainability.

- Dialogue did raise expectations from the communities, and if it does not become sustainable, the impact or possible impact will be lost. It can also create resentment among communities about organisations coming in, working for a short period of time and then leaving.
- This was a pilot project and as a result it did not have a big outreach. However, choosing some communities and not all can raise the question of selection. Participants complained about the disparities in the number of groups in the two districts. Among those communities that were part of the dialogue project, selection of participants and facilitators risked reinforcing existing power structures.
- Dialogue might have empowered some individuals to raise their voices and challenge the current situation. This may disrupt the existing structures and cause some problems for those who are initiating change. An example is the youth and women who managed to discuss issues relevant to them in the presence of community leaders, religious leaders and local authorities, who in turn felt that their power might be shaken and who did not like it.



## 6. Impact

The difficulties involved in measuring and assessing dialogue do not diminish its value as an important tool in peacebuilding. Dialogue remains important because of its purpose, especially the emphasis on mutual clarification of perceptions and relations and improvements in communication.

### 6.1 Three levels of impact

Depending on the articulated goals and context involved, different measures and indicators could be used to determine impact. They can be assessed on three levels:

- impact on the persons involved (changes in attitude, new patterns of behaviour), changes in relationships, understanding and trust among community members;
- output, particularly in terms of ideas, proposals, practical measures, initiatives; and
- long-term impact on the overall conflict.

Data on the dialogue's impact was collected from monitoring, supervision, debriefing with facilitators and feedback from dialogue participants.

#### Impact on participants of dialogue sessions

This level of change can be seen as individual changes among the participants, such as changing their attitudes, behaviour, perspective, or enabling them to gain more knowledge or confidence. Changes in relationships between participants in the group, or between different sub-groups in the dialogue, are also registered as an impact of dialogue on participants. Changes can start as small changes in how participants perceive each other, or in how they communicate or trust each other, but they can also be the start of a really transformative process. During the dialogue sessions, we observed initial small changes among individuals and changes in relationships between dialogue participants.

The following quotes give an example of the impact experienced by dialogue participants.

#### Knowledge

*"I learned from others what is happening in our communities; didn't know much before."*

*"Another benefit is that not all participants were aware of different issues in their communities, so they learned a lot, and understood more. It also became normal to talk about difficult issues, things that were taboo before, such as rape."*

#### Attitudes

*"I did not know how to speak in public, but since I joined the community dialogue, I have gained confidence and ability to express my opinion about the concerns in the community."*

*"I gained a lot from the dialogue process; it was my first time to participate in discussions where I can benefit from the participants' ideas. It opened my mind to the world. I used to feel shy to speak and fear standing in front of people, but after the third week of dialogue, I changed and became brave and shared my opinion."*

*"We learned to value our differences."*

*"I am now less afraid to speak in front of elders, leaders and authorities."*

### **Behaviour**

*"The biggest change I observed was about participation. In the beginning, only few talked, and after a few weeks everybody contributed and felt free to discuss and suggest."*

*"Now, I see myself talking in front of people, sharing my opinion, raising topics of interest, and I was happy to see myself as a brave woman, who can share what she learned in a crowd of people in the community."*

*"I realised that we all share similar issues as we are from the same community. But now, it was possible to discuss them because we decided what we want to talk about."*

### **Relationships**

*"We better communicate and trust each other more."*

*"We have new friendships and networks."*

*"It is easier to think about the problem in the group than alone."*

*"I feel stronger as a member of the group to ask local authorities to take some actions and help in solving our problems."*

*"After a number of sessions, the group realised how important understanding is, not only issues in communities, but understanding each other."*

### **Output – ideas, practical measures, initiatives**

Another level of impact or change due to the dialogue was in relation to outputs – such as ideas, initiatives and practical measures devised by dialogue groups. For instance, we were able to record practical ideas on how to address some of the issues raised by the group, some steps which they agreed to take and a few outreach initiatives. Some of these ideas were put into action and some were not.

The following quotes illustrate the impact experienced at this level.

*"I feel more confident in raising issues of concern with local authorities."*

*"It is important to have safe and free space for community to come together to talk."*

*"I have shared with my neighbours and the people I know in my village the problems we have and how we can talk about them."*

*"I have started sharing all things discussed – first with my family, then relatives, then some of the villagers; they liked what we are doing and asked if they can join us."*

*"When I shared in the community, they welcomed me and said that it is important for the community and that they are ready to support us. We plan to start community dialogue on flooding water."*

*“Other topics we discussed in the community and think we will organise dialogue on are: how to build peace in the community, how to care about street boys, migration and similar issues.”*

## Long-term impact on the overall conflict

Dialogue groups were able to develop a relationship in the group that enabled them to build trust, to allow different people to raise their concerns, to consider people’s opinions, to raise difficult topics for discussion, to find ways forward as a group and to initiate some actions for change. In addition, dialogue groups were able to reach a level of understanding of issues that was quite impressive (considering the time, complexity of the issue and context, and possible risks in challenging the official views). They were able to develop an understanding of issues from different perspectives, including the implications for different groups, and an understanding of motivations and benefits for different actors. They started to include the gender dimension. They managed to raise the issues of social norms that result in harmful practices, and to recognise how government structures and policies keep the status quo.

It is therefore our expectation that dialogue will have a positive impact on conflict, in terms of communities being equipped to deal with complex issues. This Community Dialogue Initiative was a pilot project, and was used to test and check if communities see it as relevant, if they find it useful and if there are commitments to continue with it. Our findings show that communities are motivated to continue the dialogue ‘their own way’ to work on different issues in communities beyond the project. There is a sustainability potential and consequently a possibility for dialogue to have a positive impact on the conflict context.

The example below illustrates how dialogue can have a longer-term impact on conflict.

*“Participants started going back to the community with recommendations from the dialogue sessions. I have seen the impact of our dialogue in one IDP camp in our district, because you can see them in the evening or afternoon after the dialogue session – they come together, gather and talk about issues that they are concerned about.”*

## 6.2 Issues raised in the dialogue sessions

The following section outlines some of the different issues that were raised in the dialogue sessions and how these were addressed and responded to by the participants.

### Roads infrastructure

Several dialogue groups raised the issue of poor road infrastructure. It was not just that the roads were of poor quality, but that people were building kiosks on the road, which then blocked the drainage and road. This is a major cause of conflicts among neighbours in these districts.

During the dialogue session, community members tried to understand how this issue is affecting different groups in their community. They emphasised that it is most harmful to women, causing delays in reaching hospitals (there were cases reported of pregnant women losing their child before reaching the hospital). For some in the groups, the kiosks were a source of income. However, they acknowledged that the kiosks were causing problems that affected the broader community.

The group concluded that they needed to think about general wellbeing and agreed on a few action points – including getting the local authorities to visit and talk to neighbours who had built on the roads. They also decided that neighbours should come together to clear the blocked drainage and raise awareness about the benefits of fostering joint initiatives and actions for the benefit of the broader community.

## Migration by young people to the diaspora

The majority of groups discussed migration as an issue affecting the whole community, and many of them individually. They understood migration as mainly being a consequence of unemployment, which they attributed to corruption and nepotism, whereby high-ranking individuals give jobs to ‘their people’. This is leading to inequality and conflicts. Another cause of migration is insecurity and the general lack of opportunities for young people.

The community members held an emotional discussion around this issue. They viewed migration as a necessity and not a choice, and tried to find some positive aspects of it. People with family members who were migrating had a more positive view, explaining that their children get more education and have a different perspective when they return, which could enable them to contribute to peaceful change. They also emphasised that young people who are part of the diaspora are sending money and supporting their family. It was interesting to note that girls were being sent abroad more frequently than before, when it was exclusively boys who were sent abroad for education or jobs. They viewed girls as being ‘more responsible’ because they sent more money back home than boys. This has encouraged other families to send their girls to migrate.

However, the group were aware of the danger of illegal migration, and several community members had experiences where family members had died or disappeared during the journey. People who did not have family members in the diaspora were more concerned about the negative aspects, including young people losing their culture, becoming ‘westernised’, not praying regularly, and changing their perspectives to adapt to different cultures and ways of life.

People were aware that the problem of migration was too big for them to address, but also felt that they could do a few things to help the youth engage in community life. Suggestions were made to work closely with the local authorities to make it a policy for local youth to be offered employment when the opportunity arises. It was also suggested that community leaders could involve the youth in different groups and help them to participate more in community life.

## Early marriage

The issue of early marriage was raised in most of the groups, often in the middle of the dialogue process once participants knew each other better and felt more comfortable speaking openly. It was one of the topics that generated a lot of emotions, heated discussion and disagreements. It divided the dialogue group between those advocating for zero tolerance on early marriages and others who justified early marriages on the basis of the culture and context.<sup>6</sup> People against early marriages shared their personal stories, either their own experience of being married early or examples of their daughters who were married early and lost to the family. Sharing personal stories and experiences was powerful and enabled the whole group to reach a shared understanding of the risks of early marriages, and how it is a form of violence against girls. This was not automatic and took time, but there was a sense that the participants actually listened to the stories and were able to understand the issue from other people’s perspectives.

---

6 They claimed that it is a part of the culture and tradition, that it gives girls/women a longer time to have more children, that the context is violent and that many children have died, so there is a need to have more children.

The group even devised an action point to start campaigning against early marriages, and a first step was for women to get involved and not to allow their husbands to make decisions by themselves. Men who were in the group agreed that they would take part to set an example and would lobby other family members, neighbours and the broader community.

## **Domestic violence**

Domestic violence emerged as a topic for discussion from the middle of the dialogue process through to the end of the project. There was a sense that communities felt helpless in finding possible ways to tackle domestic violence. This showed that a longer amount of time is needed on this issue, and that more people with different perspectives need be involved in dialogue on this issue. The resistance to this discussion was at times strong, which could be seen through attempts to make jokes and laugh about the issue or to ignore it.

The group understood that domestic violence was partly a matter of cultural attitudes and perceptions (e.g. that women are weak and need to be disciplined, that domestic violence is a sign of love, that men need to show they are dominant and powerful through violence, that a woman's place is in the home, and that it comes from religious or clan traditions). Domestic violence was also understood to be a result of the context and structural issues (e.g. lack of education, limited employment for men, frustration at not having an income, drug abuse).

It was mentioned that men are also victims of domestic violence, usually in cases where women are the breadwinners or are physically stronger. Moreover, in cases where a man has several wives and favours one, it was mentioned that other wives may gang up against the couple – in one case, even burning the couple.

Despite the quite desperate accounts given and the initial resistance to thinking differently, the group put forward some suggestions on how they can initiate change. The first suggestion was made after a sheikh raised the idea that religion is supporting violence against women. The group immediately took the challenge and asked him and other sheikhs to be the voice of the community and to raise awareness against violence – domestic, gender or any other form of violence. It was accepted as a worthwhile initiative for the sheikhs to lead this initiative. Other suggestions included more dialogue in the family between husband and wife, so they understand each other's frustrations. A further initiative involved women forming a group with the aim of getting more involved in community life, getting out of the house and participating more in community decision making. The example of one community leader getting involved in mediating conflicts in the community, especially in families, was raised and highlighted for its potential to involve others, especially women.

## **Internally displaced persons (IDPs)**

There is high tension between host communities and IDPs in Mogadishu. The host community view the IDPs as benefiting from humanitarian aid, while host communities see themselves as vulnerable too. Host communities openly insist that IDPs should 'go back to where they came from'. IDPs see themselves as still in need, and perceive host communities as being wealthier and with income, while IDPs are still dependent on aid. They do not want to 'go back' as they often do not have a place to go to.

This discussion became heated, and often did not progress beyond mutual accusations and complaining. Even the analysis did not seem to progress and people did not know how to deal with the issue, including the facilitators. Because they were part of the host community, the group felt that they could not understand the IDPs' perspectives in the same way. In one case, the discussion went on for the whole session until the group were tired, and after this session the issue was not mentioned again. No suggestions or options were given for thinking further about this issue. The facilitators felt it was a tiring debate.

## Drug addiction

The group felt that drug use was a huge problem for their community. Their analysis was that the issue affects mainly men, with around 70% of men believed to be affected by it. The problem is compounded by the availability of miraa (or khat) and the fact that the government generates revenue from selling it. The groups felt that only a small group use it recreationally, but that the majority of these develop an addiction. The implications are numerous, including:

- loss of income due to spending some or all of it on drugs;
- mental health issues arising from the addiction;
- domestic violence as a result of drug abuse;
- family separation or family conflicts;
- general health problems among abusers; and
- participation in crime activities to fund addiction.

The group established several reasons why people use drugs: for example, peer influence, the lack of opportunities and jobs, using drugs to gain confidence (or just stay awake if working as a guard), because ‘their parents used them so it is in their blood’, or because their fathers used to send them to buy drugs, so it is ‘normalised’.

The group discussed ways to change this situation. They viewed the government as the main obstacle, because it is benefiting from the sale of miraa and khatt and tries to convince people that they are benefiting from it as the government is investing in infrastructure. They also discussed the role of religion and if religion permits drug use or not, but concluded that even if it does not, people will still use drugs. The issue was raised with the local authorities, who responded that it was not in their jurisdiction but was a national issue, and that they could not do much about it as a result.

One suggestion put forward by the group was to ask religious leaders to inform the men and youth about the negative effects of drug use, and for parents to educate their children from an early age. There was a feeling in the group that they wanted to change things, and a few personal stories were shared; however, the effect was not very big – as one of the participants remarked, if 70% of men are using it, then they are in this group too.

## Conclusion

In all the groups, topics were raised, such as security and health or some of the topics listed above. However, there was a general difference between the all-male and all-female groups in terms of topics raised. The main focus of the all-male group was security, health, the role of religious leaders, the role of the family and more general topics. The all-female group discussed more specific topics concerning them as a women’s group, such as child labour, street children, parents neglecting children, early marriage, hygiene and harmful traditional practices. In addition, the women shared more personal stories.

For all the groups, there was a tendency to put all the topics on the table, to acknowledge how much they had to talk about, and then to go through the topics one by one. There was a high level of motivation to go through all of the issues, so in some instances people rushed through the topic and did not allow sufficient time for understanding and exploring the issues.

The motivation from the communities to continue might come from the sense that they have just started and that if a few steps can be made towards change in their community, then the process has relevance and the dialogue will have an impact on the communities’ ability to deal with the problems concerning them.

## 7. How-to guidance

The following section outlines practical steps and tips for developing and implementing a community dialogue project based on our findings.

### 7.1 Top tips

#### Start with analysis

Analysis of the context should ideally include national-level context analysis so that you are aware of the trends that affect communities. More specific district analysis is necessary to understand the actors, dynamics and issues in that particular community. Also included should be analysis of the needs and existing initiatives in the districts, capacities of your partners and your own capacities. The recommended format would be a participatory analysis with integrated conflict and gender-sensitive approaches.

Other important steps at the analysis stage include the following:

- pay additional attention to security considerations;
- develop a monitoring system;
- listen to communities and their concerns;
- understand that there will be different perceptions of security issues;
- have a plan to mitigate security challenges;
- develop several options to respond to security issues; and
- incorporate flexibility into your plan so that you can adapt and respond to the changing situation.

#### Work with communities

Communities need to participate in and contribute to developing a plan. Awareness raising, community meetings, community discussions and focus groups are all ways in which you can share your ideas and listen to communities, so that they can identify their needs and suggest ways to address them. They should own the process. This point is very important as it will lay the ground work for making the process sustainable, as only communities can make it relevant and useful to themselves.

#### Include local authorities

In most contexts, it is good practice to liaise with the local authorities. In our case, this was of utmost importance. Developing relationship with local authorities, but not giving them power to decide, is a fine balance that proved to be very difficult but also extremely important.

#### Build capacity

It is important to build the capacity of the core working group (i.e. the Dialogue Working Group, or DWG) in topics relevant to the project – namely, peacebuilding, conflict, gender and dialogue. Building capacity is never

a short process or one-off event. We started with building the capacity of the DWG early on in the project, and this was done in several phases over the course of two years. That gave us the opportunity to practise skills and implement knowledge in each stage of the project. Most importantly, it enabled the DWG to have ownership of the process throughout all phases of the project.

It is also essential to identify roles for DWG members and to train them in their specific area of work. There were three subgroups in the DWG – trainers/supervisors, the project team, and the monitoring and evaluation team. The whole group went through a series of trainings and training for trainers' events.

## **Build more capacity**

This step involves the recruitment of facilitators and their training, along with the formation of dialogue facilitation teams. There are a few things that we learned from the recruitment of facilitators. Firstly, dialogue facilitators need to be from the communities and not outsiders. They need to work in pairs, as teams, so they can support each other, complement each other's skills and learn from each other. We wanted to have a gender balance in the dialogue facilitation teams, so we formed one all-male team and one all-female team. This reflected the composition of the dialogue groups. Building the capacity of dialogue facilitators was an important part of the process. It provided an opportunity to share the objectives and vision of the dialogue project, to develop a common understanding of why and how dialogue can be used, to develop dialogue facilitation skills, and to encourage understanding of conflict and gender and of peacebuilding approaches.

## **Form dialogue groups**

This step involved inviting communities to participate in dialogue and the selection of participants. Once facilitators were trained, they participated in community mobilisation and selection of participants for the dialogue. Each dialogue facilitation team had one dialogue group.

## **Remember the logistics**

Deciding on the venue, security plan and logistic arrangements are other important considerations. In some contexts, deciding on where to have the dialogue sessions can be crucial. In one case, the venue was offered by local authorities, and they had the power to decide who was allowed to come to the dialogue. This issue was later resolved, but it caused some upset and some people felt insecure.

By this point, you should be ready to start the dialogue and have all your community members in place. Now you need to think about how to facilitate the dialogue, what to say and how to start.

Here are some possible steps and tips on how to start and lay good foundations for the dialogue.



## 7.2 How to facilitate community dialogue sessions

- Start by welcoming participants and expressing your appreciation for their time and commitment to the dialogue process.
- Introduce yourself and your team, facilitators, supervisor and monitor.
- Invite participants to introduce themselves.
- Give a brief description of the project: describe the main idea behind it, the purpose, the process and the approach, as well as the timeframe of the project.
- Check if any clarifications are needed or if there are any questions.
- Describe the dialogue process – the number, frequency and length of the sessions.
- Describe your role and responsibilities in the dialogue process.
- Ask if there are any questions or need for clarification from the group.
- Allow time for the group to outline their expectations.
- Invite them to express their concerns.
- Establish group norms by inviting participants to suggest ways in which they want to work together.
- Explain the confidentiality requirement and ask for the group's agreement.
- Allow some time for members to get to know each other.
- Allow some time for reflection.
- A good start is very important – do not be afraid to spend time on good preparation, clarification and getting to know each other.

## 7.3 Deciding what is in your dialogue 'toolbox'

- Peacebuilding approach: You understand that by using peacebuilding as an overarching approach, you are mindful of the process and the outcome. You encourage community ownership of the dialogue. You believe in the capacity of people to make their own decisions. You understand the transformative dialogue approach and support relational transformation.
- Conflict and gender analysis: You have your conflict and gender analysis tools ready to use to help the group understand the issues they are discussing and to use them to help the group analyse their context.
- Dialogue facilitation skills: Your main facilitation tools are reflecting back, summarising and checking for questions. Ensure that you practise these skills and know how to use them.
- Team support: You have your co-facilitator to support and help you during the sessions. You should also have a debriefing session with your supervisor – to discuss your challenges, explore possible alternatives and learn.

Notwithstanding all these skills, tools and team support, on some occasions you might be in a dilemma about how to react and what to do. The dialogue may not go smoothly all of the time. Remember that you are working as a team and need to support each other, sharing the time and tasks among yourselves.

At the end of the dialogue session, you should have a supervision session where you can raise some of the challenges that you faced. Remember, there are no clear-cut answers, but it is important to explore different options and possibilities.

## 7.4 Useful scenarios

The following scenarios outline some of the challenges faced by our facilitators and the options which they found useful.

### Scenario 1

Several participants arrive late after the dialogue has already begun. What do you do?

Options:

- The objective is to help the late-comers feel included while minimising the interruption. The facilitator might provide a brief summary to help the late-comers to join in.
- Ask the group how they want to deal with this issue.
- Ask the late-comers why they are late.

### Scenario 2

The group seems restless or bored. What do you do?

Options:

- Reflect back what you see – for example, you could say, “It looks to me like you are not very engaged in the session today, almost like you are bored; what seems to be the problem?”
- Ask check-in questions.
- Decide what to do based on group reactions and suggestions.

### Scenario 3

One or a few people dominate the discussion. What do you do?

Options:

- Reflect back and invite others to contribute.
- Summarise their discussion and invite them to move on.

### Scenario 4

The facilitator feels strongly about an issue and has difficulty remaining unbiased. What do you do?

Options:

- Remember that your role is to help the process and not to interfere with the content.
- Raise the issue with your supervisor – remember, being non-directive is very difficult to master.

### Scenario 5

The issues discussed carry an emotional charge for many people. What do you do?

Options:

- You should be aware that nearly all issues have an emotional angle or connotation. This is largely due to the fact that each person has had life experiences that evoke different sensitivities. Remember that all feelings expressed by participants in the discussions are legitimate. Factual information is often open to debate, but emotions are not.
- The role of the facilitator is to recognise feelings as they are expressed and to let speakers know that they have been heard.

There were many other scenarios that arose and we cannot list all of them here. The above scenarios are just for illustration.

It is important to think about your own challenges and the possible ways in which you might respond to them.

**Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli**

**Email** [cisp@cisp-ngo.org](mailto:cisp@cisp-ngo.org)

**www.cisp-ngo.org**


 [/CISP.sviluppodeipopoli](https://www.facebook.com/CISP.sviluppodeipopoli)

 [@CISPorg](https://twitter.com/CISPorg)

**International Alert**

**Email** [info@international-alert.org](mailto:info@international-alert.org)

**www.international-alert.org**

 [/InternationalAlert](https://www.facebook.com/InternationalAlert)

 [@intalert](https://twitter.com/intalert)